

Reformed CELEBRATING GOD'S TRUTH

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Volume 44 Issue No. 1

# PERSPECTIVE

SINCE 1982

***MORE BLESSED  
THAN WE  
KNOW***



# Seeing and feeling rightly

*How we see, is who we be. – a wise pirate*

Most of us can easily share a list of difficulties we have had to deal with. Try it – how many troubles just from today come to mind? How long can you go on listing them without pause? Do you have trouble coming up with specific examples?

Probably not.

Now count your blessings. If you're like most of us, this list doesn't come as readily. And it might feel rehearsed – the same few that you've mentioned countless times before: your spouse, your children, your church, and the sun shining on you from a million miles away. Blessings indeed. But can you think of something new? From just today? Can you create a list just as long, just as easily? And are these items as specific, and as personal?

Probably not.

This either says something about the world around us, or it says something about us. Is the world overflowing with troubles, and only scattered with blessings? Or have we developed a nearsightedness that allows us to spot troubles all around, while blurring the blessings into the background?

The thrust of this issue is that, no matter the troubles, God's people remain incredibly blessed. The Devil doesn't

want us to see any of it. He wants to rob God of the praise that is His due, and rob us of our joy. He knows that if we start counting our blessings, we'll start seeing rightly how God's provision is ongoing and abundant. And we'll trust and enjoy God more – we will become joyful, just as God has commanded us to be.

**Counting our blessings here at RP includes gratitude for:**

- about 200 of you who distribute this magazine in your churches - a big job!
- about 95 of you who stepped up with new or increased monthly donations, hitting our target of \$4,166 in new monthly support (\$50,000/year);
- and well over 800 who made a donation to RP in 2024 year (a record!).

Through your generosity we have not only been able to continue with the expanded free circulation, we can also introduce the magazine to many more churches that may be interested. Plus, our board was able to make some ambitious goals for our next three years, to improve and expand our efforts. Thank you so much! And praise be to God for His gracious providence.

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**For advertising, print magazine requests,  
or to change your address, contact:**

*Joanne DeRuiter - Reformed Perspective Administration,  
admin@reformedperspective.ca  
PO Box 3609  
Smithers, BC, V0J 2N0  
250-643-8114 (Pacific time zone)*

**For Letters to the Editor and submissions:** editor@ReformedPerspective.ca

**Editorial Team:** Mark Penninga (Executive Director); Jon Dykstra (Editor); Marty VanDriel (Assistant Editor); Jan Broersma (Copy Editor)

**Board of Directors:** Bruce DeBoer (Chairman); Marty VanDriel; Mark Penninga (Executive Director); David Visser; Aubrey Vandergaag; Sharon de Boer; Lucas Holtvlüwer; Rebecca Van Middelkoop

**Art Direction, Design and Layout:** Annelies Veurink

**Template Design (2013):** Compass Creative Studio Inc. compasscreative.ca

**Contact Address for Australia:**

Pro Ecclesia Publishers, PO Box 189, Kelmscott, W. Australia 6111

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by Mark Penninga

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# READERS' RESPONSE



## DEAR EDITOR:

Although I am years away from having a family on my own, Sharon Bratcher's article "What's the Purpose of Family Devotions" (July/August 2024) was great to reflect on how my parents did family devotions growing up and how it has changed. I thought I would reflect on what the article said while also adding some of my own suggestions based on what my parents did.

I remember growing up that we would have to repeat the last word from the Bible passage. I think this is a great way to ensure that young children are paying attention to the reading.

As we got older, my parents included us in the reading and praying. As young teens we would each have a Bible and take turns reading a couple verses each. This allowed us to improve our reading and helped us pay attention.

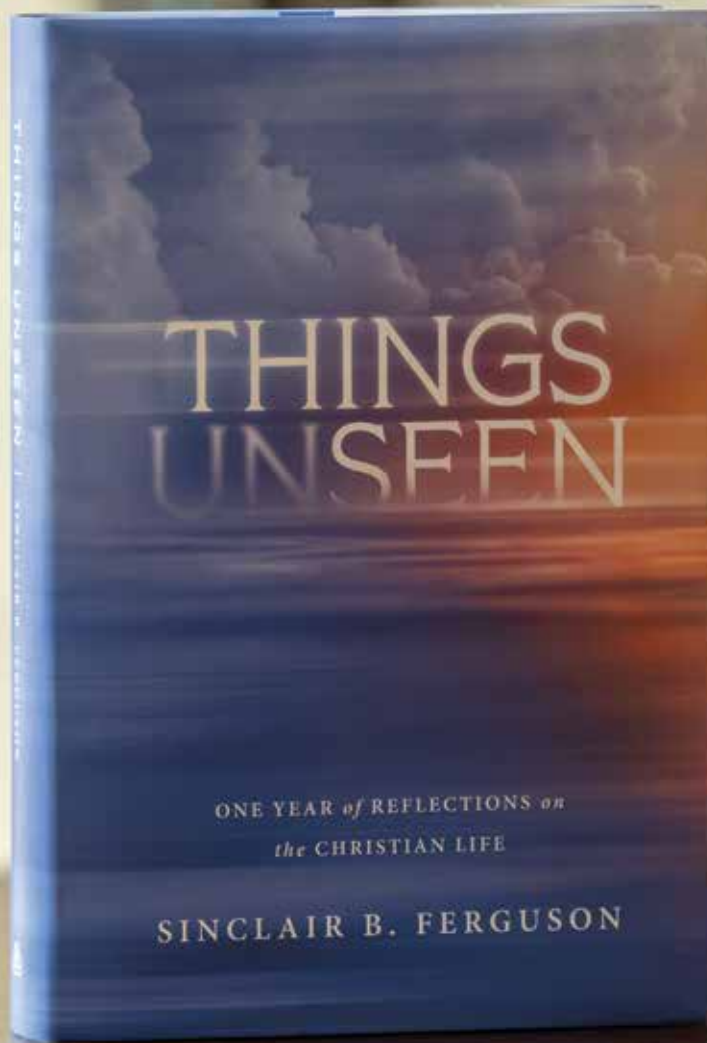
Today, our family devotions are different. We are going through a daily family devotional, *New Morning Mercies for Teens* by Paul David Tripp. I love going through it because there is always a reflection at the end. Since we are all in our teens, this reflection will sometimes cause a discussion, where our faith is challenged and grows.

One part of this article that I loved was the section on varying our prayers. Growing up we would all recite the same prayer after our parents prayed. This was good as young children, but quickly became monotonous. Today we take turns doing a closing prayer. My parents encourage varying in our prayers by suggesting that we have to include something that was mentioned in the devotional/reading or something that is happening in our lives.

HADASSAH BROERSMA  
ALMA, ONTARIO

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NEW

## LOOKING TO CHRIST DAY BY DAY

Looking out at the world today, Christians can easily lose heart. The Apostle Paul evidently felt the same way. His remedy was to teach us to focus not on the things that are seen but on the “things that are unseen” (2 Cor. 4:18). Every day, we must reorient our thoughts around the unchanging truth of Christ: who He is and who we are in Him. In *Things Unseen*, based on his popular podcast, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson brings his signature warmth and wisdom to daily meditations on the Christian life. Take up this new yearlong devotional, with each week’s reflections following a theme to help you look to the Lord and live by faith. **Available now.**



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# HOW TO BE Happier

*Keep long lists, and short accounts*

by Jon Dykstra

As I pad down the hallway to my home office, sometimes I'll look down and remember that the laminate planking I'm walking on was laid down with the help of friends. I'm not the best with a hammer or saw, so while I did some of the sweating, my friends brought the skill. I was so very thankful at the time, and now whenever I remember it's a warm feeling still.

As of late I've been remembering these friends more often because of a curious book. It's about a guy who set out to personally thank every person involved in getting him his morning brew. There's the barista, of course, but a farmer had to grow the beans, and then there's all the people in between – it turns out there are an astonishing number of people involved in a simple cup of coffee. Who picks the blend? How many are involved in the actual roasting? Someone had to design the lid (there's quite some engineering to it), and then there's the coffee cup sleeve – there wasn't always a sleeve – and when we remember that coffee is about 1 percent beans and 99 percent water, then there's a whole municipal water department to thank too. And who makes the pipes that carry the water? We haven't even gotten into the boats and trucks involved and all the crews who man and make them.

## A LONG LIST TO BE THANKFUL FOR

This guy wanted to personally thank everyone involved but quickly realized that might amount to *millions*. So he narrowed it down to the one thousand most directly involved.

G.K. Chesterton said that, "When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude," and this book was an eye-opener for just how many blessings I've been taking for granted. If thousands – millions – are involved in making a cup of coffee, how many could I thank for everything I find even on my short journey from bed to shower each morning? How many designers, engineers, miners, and factory workers were involved in making the Kindle that wakes us up each morning? And what about our bedding, the bedroom carpet, bathroom tiles and that long-shower necessity, our tankless water heater? I normally clomp past it all, but I could choose to start each day just looking around in amazement. As Chesterton reminds us, "gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder."

The author of this book is a sometimes-blasphemous atheist (which is why I'm not sharing his name - I don't want to promote him) but even as an atheist he recognizes that his disposition to grumpy ingratitude isn't good... for him.

"...gratitude is the single-best predictor of well-being and good relationships, beating out twenty-four other impressive traits such as hope, love, and creativity. As the Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast says, 'Happiness does not lead to gratitude. Gratitude leads to happiness.'"

But *why* is thankfulness next to joyfulness? He doesn't seem to know, but we do. God created us to glorify Him and then gave us innumerable reasons to do just that. And because He loves us, He so fashioned mankind that when we do what we were made to do, *it is good for us*. And He's so gracious that even when we do a half measure, thanking the people around us, but forgetting the God Who made us, it is good for us still.

Sometimes we need a Jordan Peterson or Elon Musk – someone outside the Church – to remind us of what we have, and what unbelievers don't. I was struck by that here, when this author shared,

"...I'll occasionally start a meal by thanking a handful of people who helped get our food to the plate. I'll say, 'Thank you to the farmer who grew the carrots, to the truck driver who hauled them, to the cashier at Gristedes grocery store who rang me up.'"

This fellow is “praying” to people he knows will never hear him because he feels such a need to express gratitude. To quote Chesterton again, “The worst moment for an atheist is when he is really thankful and has no one to thank.” When I look around the dinner table at the food that’s there once again, and the family gathered around, and when I really stop to think of all I’ve been given here, my heart can’t help but swell, but now there’s another blessing I can bring to my giving, loving Father – I can thank God that I can thank God!

### KEEPING SHORT ACCOUNTS

But if Christians have so much to be thankful for, why aren’t we more joyful? Why am I too often grumpy, sullen, and short to the people God has gifted me?

Part of it is that we take so much for granted. We easily forget what we have, so there’s something to keeping a thankful journal. Around Thanksgiving each year my wife gets some notecards and encourages us each day to draw something we’re grateful for, and then we put the cards up on the hallway wall. It’s quite the display by month’s end.

But even more of it is taking for granted the biggest gift we’ve been given: forgiveness.

In his booklet *How to Maintain Joy in Your Life*, Jim Wilson shares how, upon his conversion, he experienced joy liked he’d never had chasing after the world’s substitutes. But as this Navy midshipman set out on his Christian journey, he found that joy diminishing.

And it continued diminishing for the next three years. Sitting in the stateroom of an American destroyer stationed in the Sea of Japan, he was struck that for the 3 years since his conversion he hadn’t really been confessing his sins. Oh, sure, he’d confessed *some* sins, but there were many he hadn’t taken to God for all sorts of reasons. When he confessed his sins, God forgave him, and once again he started feeling that same joy.

Guilt *is* a weight. But, thanks to Jesus, it’s one we don’t have to carry. Guilt is also God’s way of getting our attention. As it says in Hebrews 12:11:

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Jim Wilson was trained by that discipline, but like the rest of us, he was a slow learner.

“I would again disobey, get disciplined, and lose my joy. This time, instead of not confessing, I would confess after a while... ten hours, a week, 2 weeks.”

Eventually he realized that he didn’t have to wait to confess his sins – he could “keep short accounts.” Then, instead of a series of ups when he was forgiven, and downs when he wouldn’t go to God (or at least not yet), he started to experience ongoing joy.


“Sometimes I went for a while before confessing, but generally I would confess right away or within a couple of hours. I’m not saying I have not sinned in those years. ... But I have a low tolerance for discipline. I do not like it. As long as I am unrepentant, the discipline stays on me, the hand of the Lord is heavy. I can remove the discipline of the Lord by repenting *now*.”

For those of us who’d prefer to stay miserable, he concludes his booklet with a list of what you can do *instead* of confessing your sin. You can justify, excuse, or hide it. You can blame someone else, procrastinate, or stand on pride. A favorite for many is “generalization,” where you readily admit “mistakes were made” without really getting into the dirt of what you did. But tricking yourself doesn’t trick God, and you can’t enjoy Him if you are hiding from Him.

### CONCLUSION

If you want to be happier, it is simpler than we sometimes make it.

Open your eyes wide, and see the world as it really is. There *are* troubles, but then there is God, and He continues to bless us beyond any measuring. And the biggest of those blessings is that we can know for certain – we can count on Him – that when we come to our Father with our sins, He will always and forever forgive.

That’s got me a little verklempt... but I can assure you, they are happy tears. 



# NEWS IN *Perspective*

## TRUMP SAYS WHAT FEW DARE ABOUT TRANSGENDERISM MADNESS

BY JON DYKSTRA



Donald Trump campaign video made

almost a year ago resurfaced after he secured his second term as American president. In Canada, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith has spoken against transgender “surgeries” on children, and south of the border, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis denounced them more pointedly, labeling them “mutilation.” But neither was anywhere close to as plainspoken as President Trump in this 4-minute presentation. It is remarkable enough to warrant printing in full:

“The left-wing gender insanity being pushed on our children is an act of child abuse, very simple. Here’s my plan to stop the chemical, physical, and emotional mutilation of our youth. On day one I will revoke Joe



Biden’s cruel policies on so-called ‘gender affirming care’ – ridiculous – a process that includes giving kids puberty blockers, mutating their physical appearance, and ultimately performing surgery on minor children. Can you believe this? I will sign a new executive order instructing every federal agency to cease all programs that promote the concept of sex- and gender-transition at any age. I will then ask Congress to permanently stop federal taxpayer dollars from being used to promote or pay for these procedures, and

pass a law prohibiting child sexual mutilation in all 50 states. It’ll go very quickly. I will declare that any hospital or health care provider that participates in the chemical or physical mutilation of minor youth will no longer meet federal health and safety standards for Medicaid and Medicare, and will be terminated from the program immediately.

“Furthermore, I will support the creation of a private right of action for victims to sue doctors who have unforgivably performed these procedures on minor children. The Department of Justice will investigate Big Pharma and the Big Hospital networks to determine whether they have deliberately covered up horrific long-term side effects of sex transitions in order to get rich at the expense of vulnerable patients – in this case very vulnerable. We will also investigate whether Big Pharma or others have illegally marketed hormones and puberty blockers, which are in no way licensed or approved for this use. My Department of Education will inform states and school districts that if any teacher or school official suggests to a child that they could be trapped in the wrong body, they will be faced with severe consequences, including potential civil rights violations for sex discrimination, and the elimination of federal funding. As part of our new credentialing body for teachers we will promote positive education about the nuclear family, the roles of mothers and fathers, and celebrating rather than erasing the things that make men and women different and unique.

“I will ask Congress to pass a bill establishing that the only genders recognized by the United States government are male and female and they are assigned at birth. The bill will also make clear the Title IX prohibits men from participating in women’s sports and we will protect the rights of parents from being forced to allow their minor child to assume a gender which is new, and an identity without



the parents' consent. The identity will not be new, and it will not be without parental consent. No serious country should be telling its children that they were born with the wrong gender, a concept that was never heard of in all of human history – nobody's ever heard of this, what's happening today. It was all when the radical left invented it just a few years ago. Under my leadership this madness will end. Thank you very much."

As thankful as we can be for the President's courage – can you believe he actually said this? And imagine if he follows through! – Christians mustn't overlook what he *didn't* say, because someone still needs to.

Trump has guts, no doubt, but he took this stand more as a matter of smarts – he understood this is still what most of

his country believes. But we know from history that this sort of common-sense conservatism is shifting sand. Traditional marriage was once common sense, and only about a decade back everyone knew that killing our elderly was murder, not medicine. That sense isn't so common now. In Canada, we have Pierre Poilievre and other conservative leaders heading our own "common sense revolution," and it too has appeal. But what it doesn't have is staying power: the conservative common-sense of today is merely the liberal's position of 10 years back. We're sliding, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but always in the same downward direction.

The only way to turn it around is to set our feet on something solid, and we know the only unshakeable foundation is God and His Truth. It's up to the Church, then, to tell a very confused world where

they can find traction. Will they join us atop the Rock? We can't know what the Holy Spirit will do with the Truth we share, but we can be certain that we'll honor God in the sharing of it.

So, let's share what no one else dares to: that God made us male and female, and that only He decides our gender. And let's explain that when we ignore reality as He has made it, then craziness results, like men playing women's sports, and people cutting off their genitals. Let's say what even our most courageous, common-sense politicians are scared to: that it isn't just crazy when it is done to children; it is abuse too when mentally ill adults are maimed for some doctor's profit.

We know God's Truth; our neighbors need to hear it. May God grant us the courage to speak.

## WALMART ROLLS BACK THE WOKE

BY MARK PENNINGA



Walmart is rolling back more than prices. In late November, Walmart's CEO John Furner shared that the company is pulling back from some of its "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) efforts.

Walmart is the latest and largest example from a growing list of companies – John Deere, Ford, Target, and Lowes, to name a few – who have been walking away from DEI policies this year. Walmart's decision made headlines because the company is the largest retailer and private employer in the USA, and the largest company in the world by revenue.

DEI is a central plank of critical theory, an ideology that separates the world into categories of "oppressed" groups and "oppressors." The ideology is now the guiding force in Canadian public universities and drives the agenda of "progressive" activist organizations and political parties, including most of Canada's political leaders. Sadly, Christian

families, churches, and schools are also ingesting this ideology, as it masquerades under the banner of opposing racism and hate.

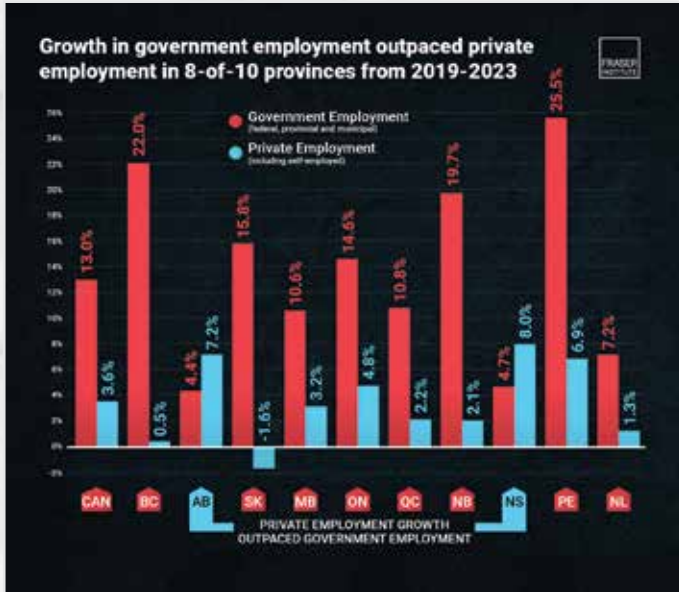
But we can see what it's really about in what Walmart is now removing. Specific changes include plans to remove sexualized and transgender products that were targeted towards children. Walmart funds have previously been linked to groups that do drag queen story hours, but the company is promising to now ensure the community events that it supports are appropriate for children. It is also ending its participation in the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index, which rates American companies based on their policies for LGBTQ employees.

"This is the biggest win yet for our movement to end wokeness in corpo-



rate America," noted Robby Starbuck, an activist who has been very effective in calling out the woke activities of major corporations on social media. Starbuck had warned Walmart's executives that he would be highlighting their woke agenda. This resulted in "conversations" and Walmart's announcement followed soon after. The company clarified that it had been working on changes well before the Presidential election or discussions with Starbuck.

For an excellent discussion on critical theory and DEI, be sure to listen to the recent Real Talk interview with apologist Neil Shenvi at [www.RealTalkPodcast.ca](http://www.RealTalkPodcast.ca).



## IS IT JOB CREATION IF GOVERNMENT IS DOING MOST OF THE HIRING?

BY MARK PENNINGA

**C** OVID brought with it huge government expenditures, and the end of the crisis didn't end the growth of government. Over the four years of 2019-2023 there was a steep increase in new government jobs, contrasted with relatively little growth in the private sector. Data compiled by the Fraser Institute reveals that new jobs created by the country's federal and provincial governments increased by 13 percent, more than three times greater than the 3.6 percent increase in private sector jobs.

But it is the contrast between the provinces that is the most striking. Alberta and Nova Scotia, run by conservative governments, both had a greater percentage of growth in the private sector. Compare this with BC, where under the NDP, government jobs grew by 22% compared to just 0.5% for the private sector.

In their report, "Economic Recovery in Canada before and after COVID," the Fraser Institute compared the data with five previous recessions and slowdowns and found that "none of those recoveries were nearly as reliant on job creation in the government sector."

Governments have always been interested in growing – 3,000 years ago the Lord warned Israel that the king they were demanding would want all sorts of servants (1 Sam. 8:11-18) – and times of hardship are often used to justify larger government reach. Checks and balances, including elections, are a crucial part of restraining a government. Unfortunately, in recent elections, the public has been rewarding parties who pledge to increase government debt rather than rein it in.

## ALBERTA TO BAN MEN FROM WOMEN'S SPORTS

BY MARTY VANDRIEL

**T** he Alberta provincial government has proposed legislation to prohibit male athletes who claim to be females from competing in girls' and women's sports. Their "Fairness and Safety in Sport Act" (Bill 29) would apply to most amateur competitive sports organizations in the province, including public and private school leagues, as well as college and university athletics.

While about half of all U.S. states have similar laws, this would be the first time that a Canadian province would issue a clear delineation against such unfair and potentially dangerous competition.

God made men and women vastly different from each other, and part of this difference is that men are typically bigger, stronger and faster than women of the same age. When males compete against girls and women, the competition is often one-sided, with predictable results. Average male athletes become champions and record-setters when they stop competing with boys and instead race, box and wrestle against girls.

In addition to the lack of fairness, such competitions can be dangerous, especially in sports that encourage physical contact between participants, or where a ball or puck is involved. In one high profile case in North Carolina, high school volleyball player Payton McNabb was badly injured when a male opponent spiked the ball at her head, resulting in a concussion and neck injury, and long-term memory problems and headaches. McNabb has become an outspoken advocate to keep women's sports for female participants only.

Anyone who has witnessed male swimmers dressed as women competing against females can attest to how unfair the competition is, and how clear it is that these men have an enormous physical advantage. Sports leagues for youth are often divided by age categories: we would not expect a 17-year-old to compete against 12-year-olds! Common sense dictates that males should not be permitted to perpetuate the fantasy that they are females, by acting in a way contrary to how the Lord made them. And that's made all the more obvious when their act hurts not just themselves, but others too.

In Romans 1, Paul reminds us that those who rejected the Lord "became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools." Citizens of Alberta may be thankful that some of this foolish thinking may be discouraged by this legislation.



## MARRIED = LESS LIKELY TO BE DEPRESSED

BY HARMA-MAE SMIT

**W**ant to reduce your chances of being depressed? Get married!

Well, maybe not so fast, but a recent study in *Nature Human Behaviour* did find that married and cohabitating couples are less likely to be depressed. They looked at more than 100,000 participants across the USA, the UK, Mexico, Ireland, Korea, China, and Indonesia, and found that those who did not live with a partner had a higher chance of depression, a finding that researchers suggest might be due to more social support, more access to economic resources, and the positive influence of spouses on each other.

As marriage is declining in our society, this study offers a clue into why depression rates have simultaneously been climbing. It's not surprising that healthy relationships are beneficial for mental health, but the number of Canadians in these close relationships is declining. Data from Cardus's Canadian Marriage Map shows a steady decrease in the percentage of married couples from 1981-2021.



While the percentage of common-law relationships has grown during the same period, the overall percentage of people in either married or common-law relationships has declined slightly as well. In particular, the data shows a steady rise in Canadians aged 20-34 who are not married or common-law, demonstrating younger Canadians are less likely to be experiencing the benefits of these close relationships.

As Christians we might be uncomfortable that the *Nature Human Behaviour* study lumped cohabitating couples in with married couples, but we can still see here that even “mar-

riage-like” relationships demonstrate the great blessings that God built into the institution of marriage. These relationships still point to why God created marriage as a good thing. Just as Adam knew that being alone in the garden was not quite right, many people also experience that doing life alone is difficult. Unfortunately, so many nowadays are hesitant to enter into this commitment, often as a result of the troubled relationships they see around them. Here Christians can take a role in inviting others to witness the radical vulnerability and respect that a God-directed marriage can demonstrate.

## KNITTING NEEDLES CLICK-CLACKING AGAIN FOR THE PREBORN

BY MARK PENNINGA

**E**ight years ago, the We Need a Law campaign challenged the pro-life community to come together to knit 1,000 pairs of baby booties. Knitters would send a pair to their Member of Parliament with a note, reminding the MP of the 100,000 lives lost to abortion every year in the country.

They had no idea of just how successful the challenge would be! Knitting needles started clacking, resulting in over 7,000 pairs made and then displayed on Parliament Hill. These were given to MPs and most were then donated to pregnancy care centers.

Now they are doing it again, but with a twist. We Need a Law has a new challenge for knitters and crocheters called Hats of Hope. “Use your creative talent for knitting or crocheting to remind your MP of the humanity of pre-born children,” they ask on a special web page – [WeNeedALaw.ca/hats-of-hope](http://WeNeedALaw.ca/hats-of-hope) – that explains the campaign. The page includes a free baby hat crochet pattern and a printable note that can be sent with the hat to the knitter’s MP, informing them that the hat was made “in honor of a child lost to abortion in Canada” and asking them to donate it to a local hospital or pregnancy care center.



# HOW CAN EVERYONE BE WRONG ABOUT THE WORLD?

"Every group of people I ask thinks the world is more frightening, more violent, and more hopeless – in short, more dramatic – than it really is."



## Hans Rosling discovered that whether it's world leaders or everyone else, we all share a tendency to overdramatize the state of the planet

by Mark Penninga and Jon Dykstra

**H**ow well do you know what is going on in the world? Let's put it to a test. Without consulting the internet or someone else, give these questions your best shot:

- 1) *How did the number of deaths per year from natural disasters change over the last hundred years?*
  - a. More than doubled
  - b. Remained about the same
  - c. Decreased to less than half
- 2) *In the last 20 years, the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has...*
  - a. Almost doubled
  - b. Remained more or less the same
  - c. Almost halved
- 3) *Worldwide, 30-year-old men have spent 10 years in school, on average. How many years have women of the same age spent in school?*
  - a. 3 years
  - b. 6 years
  - c. 9 years
- 4) *In 1996, tigers, giant pandas, and black rhinos were all listed as endangered. How many of these three species are more critically endangered today?*
  - a. Two of them
  - b. One of them
  - c. None of them
- 5) *How many of the world's 1-year-old children today have been vaccinated against some disease?*
  - a. 20 percent
  - b. 50 percent
  - c. 80 percent

## WORSE THAN CHIMPS

The right answers are all C. How many did you get correct? If you didn't get a great score, you are in good company. These questions come from Hans Rosling, the author of the fascinating book *Factfulness*. He made a quiz with 13 questions total, about different aspects of the state of the world – how we are doing as a planet. He asked about things like access to electricity, world population, and where people live in the world.

Then he gave the quiz to nearly 12,000 people in 14 countries. On average they got just 2 of the 13 right. That's remarkable when you consider if people filled in answers at random, they would have done better, getting a third of the three-answer questions right (averaging between 3 and 4 right). More remarkably, out of the 12,000 quizzed *nobody* got them all right. And just one person got 11 out of 12 right.

Why?

Is the problem that people aren't educated enough? Rosling first thought this may be the case, but then he tested the most educated among us – medical students, teachers, scientists, journalists, business leaders, among others – and discovered that the majority still got most answers wrong and some did worse than the general public.

Then Rosling realized that not only are people wrong about their understanding of the world, they are systematically wrong – they do worse than if they had no knowledge at all. As Rosling explained, if he went to the zoo to give the same quiz to chimpanzees, “the chimps, by picking randomly, would do consistently better than the well-educated but deluded human beings who take my tests.”

Not only is the public consistently wrong, but their errors skewed in one direction – participants consistently underestimated the true state of the world:

“Every group of people I ask thinks the world is more frightening, more violent, and more hopeless – in short, more dramatic – than it really is.”

## WHY DO WE UNDERESTIMATE THE GOOD SO BADLY?

Since the mid 1990's, Rosling devoted much of his time to exploring and explaining why we can be so wrong about rather basic facts about the world.

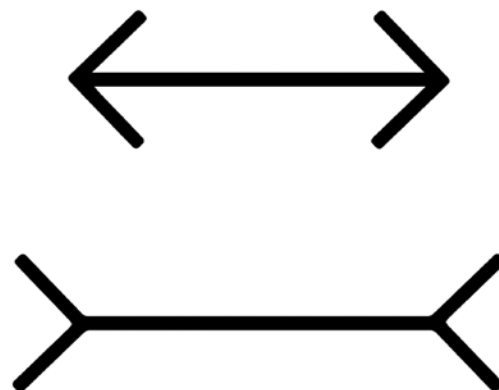
At first, he thought that people's knowledge simply had to be updated and upgraded – they just needed to get educated. So that is what he set out to do – Rosling developed some amazing teaching tools and brought them to TED talks around the world, in addition to board rooms, banks, and even the US State Department. He was excited to show everyone how the world had changed for the good. But it didn't take long and his enthusiasm waned.

“The ignorance we kept on finding was not just an upgrade problem. It couldn't be fixed simply by providing clearer data animations or better teaching tools.”

It was one gathering in particular that convinced him. He was presenting to thousands of the most influential people of the world at the 2015 World Economic Forum (alongside Bill and Melinda Gates). His listeners included heads of state, heads of UN organizations, leaders of multinational companies, and famous journalists. He asked them just three questions – about the true state of poverty, population growth, and vaccination rates in the world. Although 61 percent answered the question about poverty correctly, when it came to population growth and vaccination, the crowd once again did worse than chimps.

That is when things crystalized for Rosling. He saw that the reason people were misperceiving the world was because they had a faulty worldview.

“People constantly and intuitively refer to their worldview when thinking, guessing, or learning about the world. So if your worldview is wrong, then you will systematically make wrong guesses.”



But he was also quick to explain that this isn't the fault of media or fake news. Rather, he believes that it is inbuilt, and comes from how our brains have a tendency to “overdramatize” things.

Look at the two lines on this page. Which is longer? If you've seen this trick before you know that they are the same length. But even with that knowledge, they still look different, don't they? Despite what we know we can still misperceive.

Rosling thinks something similar is going on with how our brains analyze the world – even when we know better, we can still fall for the “more frightening, more violent, and more hopeless – in short, more dramatic” misperception of things.

Rosling proceeded to devote the rest of his life to this curiosity, and his book *Factfulness* flowed from this work.

“Start to practice it, and you will be able to replace your overdramatic worldview with a worldview based on facts. You will be able to get the world right without learning it by heart.”

Through the rest of the book, he trains readers to be aware of the various ways we systematically misperceive the world because of our “gap instinct, negativity instinct, ...fear instinct” and more. Most of us would do well to learn about these instincts, which have us consistently underestimating the good around us.

- **The Gap Instinct:** Rosling calls it “that irresistible temptation we have to divide all kinds of things into two

distinct and often conflicting groups, with an imagined gap – a huge chasm – in between.” For example, many believe that the developing world’s infant mortality rates will always remain much higher than ours. But whereas the global child mortality rate was 27% in 1950 (that’s the percentage of children who didn’t live to reach the end of puberty), now the very worst child mortality rate in the world is about half that, at 15% in Niger. Globally it is down to 4.3 percent (as of 2022). When it came to child mortality there was once a divide between the West and rest, but today that divide persists in people’s minds, and not in reality.

- **The Fear Instinct:** We have an inbuilt focus on the frightening, which makes it hard for us to see how things may be improving. So, when a hurricane hits, we might hear about how climate change is going to cause more and more of these, and what we don’t hear is how many fewer people died than in decades past. As they say, *if it bleeds, it leads*, so we hear lots about what is scary but little of what is reassuring and encouraging.
- **The Negativity Instinct:** Rosling shared that when people in 30 countries were asked, *is the world getting better, staying the same, or getting worse*, more than 50% picked “getting worse” no matter what country they came from (roughly 75% of Canadians said “getting worse”). Yet there are some huge improvements happening, including that the number of people living in extreme poverty – surviving on less than \$2/day – has dropped from 50% of the world in 1966 to just 9% in 2017.

If our decision makers in government and the Church had read this book before making decisions about Covid restrictions, we would all have benefited. Then the fears that emanated from Covid and hospitalization projections would have been put into a much more reasonable context.

But the implications go well beyond pandemics. I don’t think the world is prepared for the future we will face with half as many children being born per woman as just 50 years ago. Most people, including many in the Church, wrongly assume that the straight line of population growth will keep extending upwards. And they see that as a threat, with an ever-expanding population exceeding the planet’s ability to feed them all. But, as mentioned, even as population grows, fewer people are in extreme poverty. And just as a child won’t keep growing at the same rate through life, we’re seeing the birth rate take a sharp decline. The more informed worry is not overpopulation but a coming population collapse.

### WHICH WORLDVIEW?

As helpful as Rosling’s book is, he had his own misperception. He eventually recognized the importance of worldview, but he did so from an evolutionary vantage point. “The human brain is a product of millions of years of evolution,” he wrote, when answering why so many people would be consistently wrong. “We are hard-wired with instincts that helped our ancestors to survive in small groups of hunters and gatherers.”


### THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

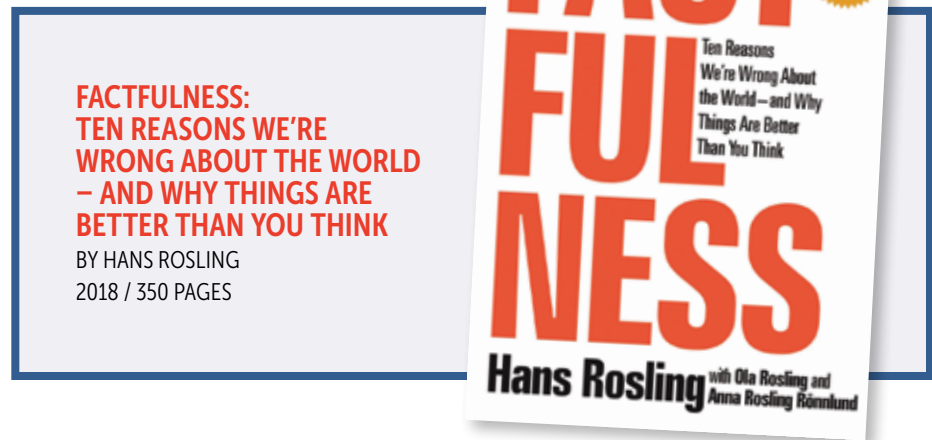
Christians have a better explanation. That people would consistently overlook the many blessings around them and focus instead on troubles, many of them even imagined, is what sinful people do.

A look through the Old Testament shows that God’s people are not immune to this ingratitude. But we are blessed to

also have the answer. To fight negativity, fear, and ingratitude, we need only remember who God is. He isn’t just the God of the universe – He is our loving Father, the One Who knows who we are and has a perfect plan for our lives and for the future of the Church and the world.

When we take this to heart, we can begin to get a glimpse into how this will change how we look at the world. Is it a scary place? Do we have reason to fear the future? Are things going to hell in a handbasket? Not at all. Those conclusions flow from a godless worldview, and perhaps also the worldview from some other major religions (like Islam), where their god is powerful but not a loving father. And they sure aren’t consistent with reality.

By God’s grace, the world has been becoming a safer, healthier, more abundant place to live (contrary to what we would think if we only got our information from the news). But even if we face another war or pandemic, we can take comfort knowing that God “still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand” (Lord’s Day 10, Heidelberg Catechism). 



**FACTFULNESS:  
TEN REASONS WE'RE  
WRONG ABOUT THE WORLD  
– AND WHY THINGS ARE  
BETTER THAN YOU THINK**  
BY HANS ROSLING  
2018 / 350 PAGES



# How to look forward to the future

HOPEFULNESS IS A SKILL  
WE CAN LEARN, BECAUSE... GOD

by Harma-Mae Smit

**Doomerism:** *despair and apathy caused by a disbelief that anything can get better; most often used with regard to global warming, lack of positive social change, and the risk of AI takeover.*  
– as defined by Wiktionary

I am shocked at how much optimism has died just in my own lifetime. I didn't even realize the cultural atmosphere in my childhood was particularly optimistic – it was just “normal” to me. But compared to the current atmosphere, with the oppressive worries of natural disasters, new diseases, social tension,

authoritarian governments, and renewed nuclear threats, the previous decades take on a rosy hue.

Why do so many people, especially young people, feel an impending sense of doom? It's less about our current circumstances, and more about the loss of hope for the future. We might be all right at the moment, the feeling seems to be, but we're just hanging in there. Who knows how long we'll be able to hang in there for?

You might argue that this is worldly thinking. Climate change, authoritarianism, social issues are all things “the

world” is concerned about. But I can relate to feeling like my actions and decisions are pointless, my life is going nowhere, and that the future looks bleak. I have had times in my life where I felt paralyzed, like anything I did would likely lead to doom.

It turns out that being hopeful takes a lot of effort sometimes. And when the world around us persistently sends messages about how bleak everything is, about how young people are worse off than their parents' generation, and how disaster looms on the horizon, it feels even harder to go against the flow.

But as Christians, shouldn't we know how to hope? Yet Christian discussions can also be full of how the world is getting worse. Christians are worried about what will happen to their families and their churches. And so, hopefulness becomes a hard skill for us to learn.

How do you learn to have hope for the future? Here are a few perspectives that have helped me along the way.

### 1. DON'T MISS THE BIG STORY BY OBSESSING ON THE DETAILS

One helpful way I've found to think about the future is to remind myself that I already know the ending, and that ending is a happy one. The day-to-day right now might look like it inevitably leads to doom and gloom, but I *know* that's not the big picture. I just need to zoom out enough to see the whole big story, and see that I'm just in a small part in the middle of it. I'm muddled down in the details, but a detail isn't the whole story. And the best way to remind myself of the big story is to read the Word of God. That's where we hear the end of the story and are reminded about who's writing it.

*Ok, ok, you might be thinking, that's*

*the big picture, but I still feel hopeless about my life. I might know in the end everything will turn out all right, but I still don't feel capable of doing anything right now. I still feel like the current circumstances make whatever I do seem pointless.*

It's true, it can be hard to connect what we believe to how we feel. Sometimes we know something, but we still feel anxious or paralyzed. But this means that it's worthwhile examining what story our feelings are buying into, if we feel that way. We might not realize the degree that we're accepting other people's narratives about our lives.

### 2. NO, THE PESSIMISTS DON'T KNOW IT ALL

You might be sitting at home, doom-scrolling on your phone, and some talking head on TikTok pops up bringing all these facts together: while wages in Canada have increased by 74.3% since 2003, housing prices have increased by 227%. Add to that the information that Canada's population has also increased during this time, and that housing starts have struggled to keep up with the

demand. Your heart sinks. You weren't thinking about when you'd be able to afford a house before that moment, but now you're convinced you never will. What's the point of going to work tomorrow?

And that's just one example. It doesn't take much time online to find theories about why Gen Z, or millennials, or whatever generation is doomed – why they will never get married, or afford a house, or be able to have children, or ever retire. These theories all seem so airtight, based on facts and statistics laid out in a logical fashion, with each piece of data leading to the next.

But life is not so airtight. These theories are not prophecies about *your* life. Perhaps some of the stats and data might be useful for bureaucrats trying to understand social conditions, but when they become reasons for you to give up on life, they've left the realm of usefulness.

We're often skeptical of mainstream media narratives about politics and the environment, but somehow this kind of data can sneak into our brains. Sometimes it starts off being comforting, because it explains why we're not quite where we want to be in life yet. *It's not us, it's just our circumstances.* But an inescapable path of doom unfolding beneath your feet doesn't help you in the long run; it paralyzes you.

What will help?

Stop listening to these voices. No one theory can take into account all the information available – each tends to cherry-pick facts that fit. Online influencers and writers and videos tend to emphasize the negative narratives because that's what gets clicks. And no theory can predict the unexpected event that changes everything and throws all accepted theories into chaos (sometimes known as a black swan event). The world is not predictable, and events that don't fit the theories *do* happen (and disprove the theories). So why base your life on one of those theories?

### 3. LEARN FROM HISTORY AS IT ACTUALLY WAS

When my grandma was a young woman in the Netherlands, World War II





started and all the young men left town to join the army. She didn't think it was likely she would get married. Then she met my grandpa, who was a resistance fighter. After the war, they wanted to get married, but so many houses had been bombed in the Netherlands that there was nowhere for them to live.

We can look back on the past with nostalgia – “in the 1950s you could support a family on one income!” But we don't remember all the times that a future didn't look possible for them back then, all the times when, logistically, there was just no one around to get married to, or statistically there were zero homes for newly married couples to live in, or that the “better life” looked a lot harder than the old life.

Maybe life doesn't give us “optimal conditions.” Sometimes “doing something” really looks like doing the impossible. My grandma just kept taking the next step, even if circumstances didn't look great. After all, nothing is impossible with God.

So don't base your life on disheartening statistics. Instead, why not base your life on the Word of God?

#### 4. TRUST GOD WITH THE FUTURE

God loves you, and He didn't design your life as a kind of trap you can't escape. But He also doesn't reveal our life paths to us before they happen. He calls us to trust in Him as we walk in His ways:

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).

In other words, God hasn't shone a spotlight on your destination, but He does light your feet as you take each step. You are part of a big story, but your part might not include our society's preferred narrative of buying a home to fund your retirement, or finding the one career where you can make a meaningful impact. Or, who knows, maybe that will be part of your story one day. But the fundamental thing to hold onto is that you *are* a part of the story God is telling, and this means your life has meaning.

What does knowing this do for us? It means we don't have to be paralyzed. It also means we don't have to see what will happen to us before it happens, even though we think predicting our future will make us feel better. We don't need to add up all the facts together to predict our future and come to a negative conclusion (“there's more women than men in the average church I attend, therefore the likelihood of me finding a husband is less than...”). God doesn't work according to statistics. God doesn't stop working out His plan because forecasters say most millennials won't be able to afford a house. He will do whatever His will is for your life. The question is, are you open to that?

#### 5. TRUST HIM ONE STEP AT A TIME

Can you keep taking the next step God lays in front of your feet, and the next step, and the next step, without always knowing where it will go? Can you find the courage to try things that are a little scary for you, if He calls you to them? Sometimes moving forward in life feels like plunging into the unknown, into something that could go terribly wrong (because any momentous choice in life could go terribly wrong) but with the willingness to try and see what God will do with your life.

It's easy to say, just do something, but doing something comes with risk. We *can* take actions that make us suffer, we *can* make wrong decisions, we *can* do the wrong thing. That's what scares us, and makes us paralyzed. The reality of risk feeds our paralysis. But to begin to exercise our faith and trust in our God Who is bigger than us, we do have to step out and learn to leave what's out of our control up to Him.

The Bible is full of examples of people stepping out in faith and leaving the future up to God. There is Abraham, who “went out, not knowing where he was going... to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land” (Heb. 11:8-9). People did not live their lives by theories or statistics: “By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised” (Heb. 11:11-12).

And in the face of our fear of the future we can still act:

“In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good” (Eccl. 11:6).

We're urged in the Parable of the Ten Talents, and in Proverbs, to do the work in front of us. But we're also urged to leave the results up to God.


“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for He gives to His beloved sleep” (Ps. 127:1-2).

So let go of what you can't control. God isn't calling you to navigate what's out of your hands. And then do your part. Take steps in what areas you can do something. This is the only place to start.

*God isn't calling you to navigate what's out of your hands.*

#### CONCLUSION

Hopefulness isn't a journey we can travel on our own. We can't always formulate or speak the positive story to ourselves, and others can come alongside us to tell us their own stories of God's work in their lives. If you're feeling hopeless, reach out and talk to someone you trust.

But at the same time, lean into God and His Word. He can contradict and counteract the negative narratives from culture that surround us every day. He can give us hope when the world claims it is dark. And we know His promises to us never fail. 

# Don't Overlook the Blessings of Today

OUR CHILDREN ARE ACTUALLY WEALTHIER THAN THE VERY RICHEST OF 100 YEARS AGO

by Marty VanDriel

**Y**ou stir in your bed as the strains of an orchestra tickle at the edge of your still sleeping consciousness. The volume increases little by little, and you wake up in your warm cozy bed. You stick your toes out of bed onto the floor: even though it's January, it's warm and pleasant inside your bedroom, as the furnace has been programmed by your smart thermostat to warm the house fifteen minutes before you need to get up.

You share the bathroom upstairs with your sister, but she won't be up for another half hour, so you turn on the tap to your preferred setting, and warm water instantly gushes out: you luxuriate in the shower an extra few minutes as you think about the day ahead.

Your mom has put out a delicious breakfast: bacon and eggs on toast, with sliced oranges and a cup of hot tea, just the way you like it. Dad reads the morning devotions, and leads your family in prayer; then you're off to take on the challenges of a day at work. You drive yourself in the car your parents sold you for much less than it was worth: it's been sitting in the garage, not outside in the cold, so you don't even need to scrape frost off the windshield.

You're new at your job, but the work is interesting and challenging, and your co-workers are mostly kind. The office is always kept at the perfect temperature for working, and the company provides snacks and gourmet coffee for your morning and afternoon breaks: they hope to make the work environment as com-

fortable as possible, because paying well is not enough to keep associates engaged in their work; people also need to feel appreciated and well cared for!

When lunch hour arrives, you make your way to the company gym for a work out – after a few hours of mental toil, it feels so good to put your body through some physical tests! After a quick shower, you're back at your desk at 1 pm to continue your tasks through the end of the work day at 5:00. It was a productive day, and you feel good about what you've accomplished.

You make your way home, stopping at the sports store to pick up a hockey stick for tonight's game. At \$250, it's a bit more than you usually spend, but you've been saving up for quite a while and it's time to treat yourself a little bit – and maybe it will help solve your goal scoring drought!

After the game, you relax with your friends in the dressing room, limiting yourself to one beer so you can feel sharp in the morning, but enjoying the camaraderie and fun with your teammates. Home at a decent hour, you chat with your parents before bed time, check the football scores on your iPhone, and head upstairs for a good night's sleep. Then before you know it, the music starts again...

## LIFE IN THE MODERN WORLD

Most of our readers could relate to some of what's written above: a hardly unusual day for a modern citizen of the western world (although this fictional teenager will be adding many responsi-

bilities in the coming years if he or she is blessed with a spouse and family in due time!). But what you have just read, and, very likely, what you experienced today in your own daily routine, would be unimaginable luxury for 99% of the world's population over the past 6,000 years.

Waking up in your own private bedroom and having access to running hot water? That would be a luxury reserved for only the wealthiest in centuries past.

Your usage might be limited to checking the weather and texting your friends, but that phone in your pocket has access to more information than the largest libraries of the ancient world.

What we consider a typical work week of 40 or 45 hours would be laughably brief for our grandparents and their parents. And the way our bosses pamper us? Our ancestors would be stunned...

## 100 YEARS AGO

Many of our readers have family trees with roots in the Netherlands: my own grandparents were born early in the 1900s, and so would have been in their twenties a century ago. Perhaps you only know your family members from this time frame as gloomy faces in faded black and white pictures: but they were of course real people with real struggles, joys and sorrows. If we transport ourselves back in time one hundred years, to the Netherlands of the 1920s, we might be shocked at living conditions.

As in most of the world, the infant mortality rate in Holland was very high:

it was not uncommon for a couple to bury two or three children before they had reached their teenage years. If you look at the genealogies of your family, you might see multiple children with the same name: if baby Geert died, the next male son might also be named Geert, so that the name of one's relatives would live on in the family line.

Between 1900 and 1930, the population of Holland increased from 5 million to 8 million, a 60 percent increase in just 30 years. The Netherlands had stayed out of "The Great War" of 1914 to 1918, which we now know as the First World War, and so the country was spared the devastation that swept over other European countries. During that same time frame, average life expectancy in the nation increased from around fifty to around sixty. It was not at all uncommon for adults to die much earlier than today: with less modern medicine and antibiotics, some diseases that would be relatively minor today would be fatal a hundred years ago.

Despite the Netherlands' status as the sixth wealthiest country in the world in the 1920's, the average working family lived without most of the comforts that we consider commonplace today. In the cities, electricity was starting to become more common as a source of light and power in homes, but indoor plumbing was still hit and miss. In the country and small towns, laborers lived in very humble conditions; sometimes even in sod huts (shelters built of turf, or dug into a hillside), with a fireplace burning dried peat – compressed moss – for heating and cooking.

Of course, not everyone in the 1920s lived in such humble circumstances, but even the middle class made do with far less than we would consider a minimum

They didn't have TVs yet in 1925, but they did have phones, cameras, watches, calendars, record players, and libraries too. They just didn't carry them all in their back pocket.



standard. For clothing, most children would have one set of clothes and shoes for the weekdays, and a special "Sunday" dress or suit, often worn with the same shoes. Absent the assistance of a washing machine and dryer, moms would wash all the household's clothing by hand (or using a manually powered washing machine), and laundry would be hung out to dry on the clothesline. And in inclement weather, it would be strung up across the attic.

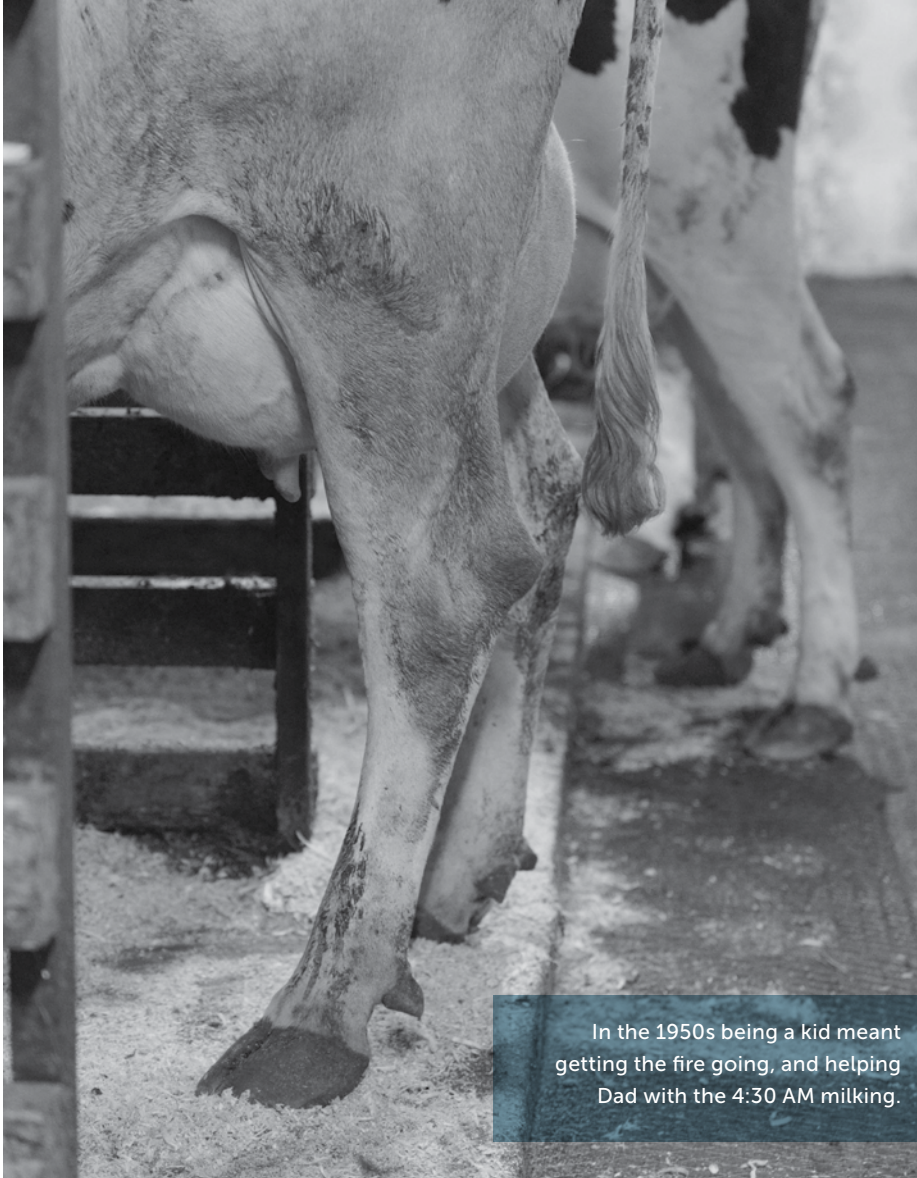
### THE 1950s

Perhaps 100 years ago seems far removed – how about we move forward a generation and make a comparison with the world of your parents and grandparents in the 1950s?

Everything in the world had changed in 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Poland, igniting the Second World War. Unlike the first "Great War," this time the Netherlands could not stay neutral,

as German forces swept through the low countries in the spring of 1940, conquering their neighbor in just a few days. The Nazis treated the Dutch reasonably well at first, but soon began a campaign to eradicate the Jewish population, and to bring food, manpower, and raw material back to Germany for the war machine to continue its fight. The last months of the war, known as the "Hunger Winter," was the pinnacle of suffering for the Dutch population, as the last gasps of the German forces left little food available, and left behind much trauma and despair.

After the war, many Europeans wanted to get out of the Old World, away from the new dangers of Communism, and towards the freedom, opportunity, and prosperity of western countries. The USA, Canada, Australia, and South Africa opened their doors to immigrants, especially those with a background in agriculture who were willing to work in the farms and fields.



In the 1950s being a kid meant getting the fire going, and helping Dad with the 4:30 AM milking.

Perhaps you've heard stories from your parents or grandparents about the difficult early years in their new homeland, learning a new language, and often living in very difficult circumstances.

While every family's story is different, you can imagine your family's own history. You wake up and it's so cold! As usual, your brother has grabbed most of the blankets, and the brick you took out of the fireplace and wrapped in rags to warm your bed last night has now lost its warmth. It's your chore to start the fire this morning, so you flick on the single light switch and get dressed in the cold, teeth chattering. The house only has one bathroom, and it's occupied – you wonder who could be awake before you? Off you head to the kitchen to stoke up the fire, and when you peek inside the wood stove, there are a few embers still glowing. You're able to get the fire going again and soon the room begins to warm up.

Next, you head outside for your morning chores: Dad has been hired as a farm hand for the Canadian farmer who sponsored your family, and this means the whole clan has to pitch in! The first milking is at 4:30 a.m., and Dad is already out there getting the milking pails ready for you and your brother. After a few hours of hard work in the cold, you head back inside for the breakfast that Mom has prepared. Dad reads the Bible, and then you and your siblings head off to the road to wait for a ride from the neighbors who will take you to school. You're all crammed in the old four-door Ford; with no seatbelts required, it doesn't really matter how many are in the back seat!

Dad has already told you that ninth grade will be your last year of schooling: you're going to need to work full time to help the family out! If you want more education than that, you might be able to go to night school, but your parents don't

really think that is necessary. Your older sister is already working at the shoe factory down the road; she gives all her wages to Dad and Mom, and they give her an allowance in return. This will be the way it is until you leave the parental home!

When you get home from school, there is more work around the farm needing to be done. Dad is often working late nights, especially during the harvest, and you are expected to pitch in every afternoon, and often after supper as well.

Sunday is the day of rest, but the cows still need to be milked, and chores have to be done! Your church is a 45-minute drive away, but there's no way your parents are not taking the whole family to both morning and evening services. Sundays are a wonderful time to connect with fellow immigrants, to socialize, to compare notes about work opportunities, to marvel at the blessings the Lord has given to your community. While life is not easy, there is so much more opportunity in Canada than there was for you in Holland, and you are grateful to God for His provision and goodness. Despite the hard conditions, you know the Lord is looking after His people, and that in all circumstances, you may lean on Him for all you need for body and soul.

## REFLECTION

While your grandparents may look back with fondness on their early years in North America, and might even miss some of the struggles they had to go through, there is no doubt that life was more difficult than it is today. In 2025, we enjoy and appreciate Christian schools in most of our communities; we have many post-secondary opportunities for our youth; we have incredible economic and employment options in our free market nations, and we are free to worship our God without persecution.

We are collectively the beneficiaries of the sacrifices made by the previous generations in working hard for their families and for their communities. The Lord has been so good to us! We do not need to feel guilty about these blessings, but we should use them wisely for the good of our neighbors, and to the glory of our great God. <sup>RP</sup>

# A SERIOUS PROBLEM

God's people should be confidently playful

by Jonathan Slomp

As a mental health therapist, I once attended a workshop on developing and maintaining healthy attachments between parents and their children. The presenter's information was given in a PowerPoint, and I found that I could put a Bible text to every one of his slides. At one point the speaker went as far as saying "if you want to read a great example of a healthy attachment, then read the book of Job." Because of this workshop I came to the realization that the more a therapeutic modality is in line with biblical teaching, the more accurate and effective the therapy is.

As I developed more in this field, I noticed how important play is as it relates to one's mental health. That then got me toying with how play must connect with what the Bible teaches us about ourselves. And sure enough, when I started looking, I began seeing evidence of play and humor in the Bible, as well as in the character of God Himself. This further affirmed my initial thoughts on play and mental health and how playfulness is beneficial to Christians.

## PLAY DEFINED

But what do we mean when we talk about "play"? It's volleyball games and soccer, but more than that too. It's an attitude too – we can be playful in how we talk, move, and think. Play can be serious and intense – you can play hard! But it's always about fun – getting to and not having to – and creativity, and just being in the moment. This last point is a big one: play is about the means more

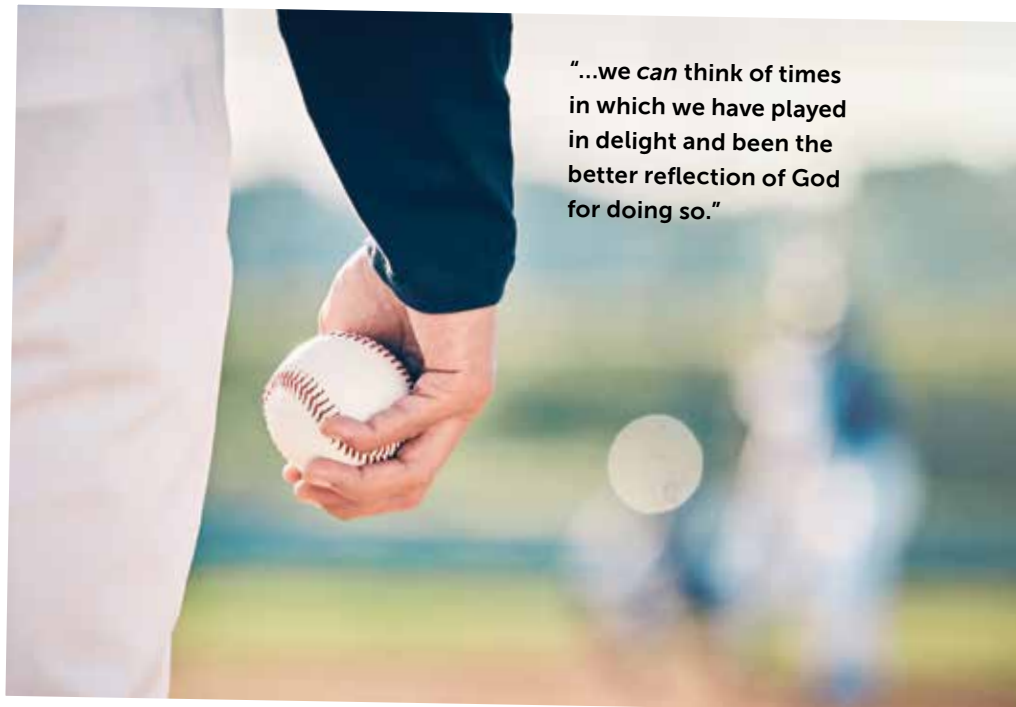
than the end. We play hockey for the joy of playing, and winning is awesome, but secondary. Or it isn't really play anymore.

## PLAY IN THE BIBLE

*"Seriousness is not a virtue. It would be a heresy, but a much more sensible heresy, to say that seriousness is a vice. It is really a natural trend or lapse into taking one's self gravely, because it is the easiest thing to do. It is much easier to write a good Times leading article than a good joke in Punch. For solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a*

*leap. It is easy to be heavy; hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity." – G.K. Chesterton*

I chose the title for this article because it is a play on words. It could be interpreted that there is a problem that needs to be taken seriously, and in our current times there are many things we are told are serious problems. After all, we are only a few years away from climate change killing everything on the planet, or, at least, if World War III doesn't do us in first. Or might four more years of the



**"...we can think of times in which we have played in delight and been the better reflection of God for doing so."**



"When what is being created is done for its own sake, and isn't created for profit or by necessity, that creation is a form of play."



Trump presidency be worse than both these scenarios combined?

Another way of understanding this title is that there is a problem with being too serious. This understanding would suggest that even if the three threats to humanity just listed all somehow simultaneously occurred, that this still wouldn't be too serious a situation to joke about. (I just knew an epic string of disasters like this would happen if I took some time off work!) In truth many a problem isn't so serious, but rather being serious is the problem.

Word plays like this are found

throughout the original language of the Bible. One website suggests that in the Old Testament alone there are over 500 plays on words. The problem is that most of them are literally lost in translation.

One example found in the New Testament is when Jesus tells Peter that "on this rock I will build my church" but even there the parenthetical adage that the name Peter means rock is required for it to make sense to us... otherwise it could be used to justify the concept of a Pope.

It could also be argued that the Feast of Tents is mandated play. Every family was told to build a shelter out of sticks

and branches to live in for 5 days. For me this sounds like so much fun. I can see kids counting down the days until this celebration, dads competing for the biggest or best designed tent, their children scavenging for branches and sticks and that perfect piece to make a door out of. It reminds me of making a mattress fort for my children (if there are any fathers looking to outdo me, my longest mattress fort was 38 feet long).

The creation of music and lyrics is a form of play – that's why when someone strums a guitar, we say they are *playing* the guitar. It's the same with any instrument: we *play* them all.

And when we look at the largest book in the Bible, we find it is dedicated to playing instruments. Also music-related, David was commended for playing when he danced as the ark was brought into Jerusalem and his wife punished for taking it too seriously (2 Sam. 6:14-23).

The best evidence of God and play in the Bible is, in my opinion, seen in the way Jesus often responded to questions from the Pharisees. They would come to him with a very pointed question and, instead of getting a somber concise response that was backed with biblical texts, they got a story. It is also worth noting that when Jesus said, "Unless you repent from your sins and become like one of these you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 18:3), He was talking about humble, playful children and not the stoic, serious Pharisees.

## GOD AND PLAY

*"The true object of all human life is play. Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground."* – G.K. Chesterton

Being created in God's image means that we reflect the emotions and characteristics of our Creator, but because of our fall into sin we have corrupted these features. So, for example, God's jealousy is holy and righteous (Ex. 20:5), whereas it is hard for us to think of a time or scenario where our feelings of jealousy were not sinful.

But we *can* think of times in which we have played in delight and been the better reflection of God for doing so. Now

if we, as the image-bearers of God, show our better nature when we are playful, then isn't it reasonable to conclude that play may be in the Being of God too?

To compound the point, play is found not just in humans but is also witnessed in the animal kingdom, and might that be because God reveals Himself in nature too?

Not only is play seen throughout creation, the act of creating is, in itself, a form of play. Our hobbies often involve creating something or piecing something back together. Woodworking, drawing, painting, knitting, puzzling, writing, quilting . . . all start with a blank canvas and raw material. When what is being created is done for its own sake, and isn't created for profit or by necessity, that creation is a form of play. If enjoyment is the primary reason for the activity and the secondary reason is profit or necessity it is still play. Since we are created in God's image it seems fair to suggest that the feelings we have in creating things reflect Him and His pleasure. This can also be seen in Revelations 4:11: "For You created all things, and they exist because You created what You pleased."

## HUMOR

*"Humor is the great thing, the saving thing after all. The minute it crops up, all our hardnesses yield, all our irritations and resentments flit away, and a sunny spirit takes their place."* – Mark Twain

Another form of play – humor – goes hand in hand with truth. In 1 Kings 18:20-40 we read about how Elijah knew who the living and true God is. He was certain that the altar made to Baal would not catch on fire and he was equally certain that the one made to honor God would. And because he knew these things to be true, he could make fun of the Baal prophets and priests. The religious leaders of Baal were holding on to a lie and seriously thought that if they cut themselves and did every other act of worship that their lie would become true.

We also have the truth with us.

If the point of view you are defending crumbles at a joke, then it is not true. Those that believe a lie often take their

point of view extremely seriously. They talk over people, attack their character, call them names and do anything they can to silence their opposition. We see this in the Bible when the Lord's prophets were killed, and when Jesus was crucified.

The Bible tells us that "male and female, He created them" (Gen. 1:27). The many who believe otherwise can't defend their point of view, so they try to shut down debate with name-calling, labeling as *transphobic* any who challenge them. When the satiric website *Babylon Bee* jokingly gave their "Man of the Year" award to the guy-in-a dress Joe

Biden appointed as Assistant Secretary for Health, Twitter kicked *the Bee* off of their platform – they couldn't deal with the joke. But like Elijah, Christians can embrace the truth and can in confidence make fun of the lies.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

*"Common sense and a sense of humor are the same thing, moving at different speeds. A sense of humor is just common sense, dancing."* – Clive James

*"Humor can get in under the door while seriousness is still fumbling at the handle."* – G.K. Chesterton



One great benefit of play is how it can relieve anxiety, by pulling us fully into the present. So, it probably shouldn't surprise us, there are a number of Bible texts that encourage us to be fully in the moment:

- “Be still and know that I am God.” Ps. 46:10
- “So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.” Matt. 6:34
- “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or your body, what you will wear.” Matt. 6:24
- “Give us each day the food we need.” Luke 11:3

There are many activities that we can do and be fully in the moment, but most of them also allow for focus on the past or future. Grief is an example of this – you can grieve the loss of a loved one while being fully in the moment; but you can also grieve that loss while thinking about things you could have done while they were still alive, or while thinking about how this loss will impact your family in the future. (It is not wrong to have these thoughts while grieving; I am just pointing out how grieving can be done while thinking of the past or future). Psalm 137 illustrates this in verses 1 and 2 where it says:

“Beside the rivers of Babylon,  
we sat and wept  
as we thought of Jerusalem.  
We put away our harps,  
hanging them on the branches of  
poplar trees.”

This focus on the past prevented them from playing the harp.

The reason anxiety focuses on the past, and on the future, is our desire for control. We want to look back, to supposedly ensure we don't make any of our alleged mistakes again. Our focus on the future is to consider all possible outcomes of an upcoming event so we can better prepare for it. But with anxiety, this line of thinking never ends with “and we lived happily ever after” – it ends with the wor-

rier thinking they have cancer, or may become homeless.\*

In contrast, play is the only activity I know of that cannot be done while worrying about the past or future. This is because play is everything anxiety is not. Anxiety is neat and tidy. It partners with perfectionism to create a standard that is rarely achieved and never celebrated. Anxiety is regimented and time oriented, bound by rules, and it takes everything seriously. But play is fluid, and not bound by time. Its rules act more like guidelines and there are exceptions to them. And perfecting a skill is a joyful journey, because play allows things to be “good enough.”

In therapy I often will tell my anxious clients about this concept. Often, I will ask them, when was the last time they felt playful? I'll then ask them, when was the last time that they could recall not being anxious? For most people it will be the same answer to both questions. The reason is, you cannot be anxious and playful at the same time. You will never see an anxious playful person.

Hormones associated with stress are the same ones that trigger the *fight, flight, or freeze* response. In high levels of stress, blood flow is directed away from a part of the brain known as the prefrontal cortex. This is the part of the brain where most of our conscious thoughts are. This is also where most of our decision-making is done. This is a contributing factor to why anxious people have difficulties making a decision – the more anxious someone is the harder it becomes for them to think outside of the box.

In contrast, there is a strong association between play and creativity. Einstein acknowledged this connection when he said *creativity is just intelligence having fun*. His theory of relativity was a result of Einstein playing with the thought of chasing a beam of light around a room.

Some other known benefits of play are improvements in:

- problem-solving skills
- health, resiliency, and feelings of self-worth
- the ability to develop and maintain friendships

- the ability to overcome emotional wounds caused by trauma

## SERIOUS PEOPLE OFTEN HAVE SERIOUS PROBLEMS


*“A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs. It's jolted by every pebble on the road.” – Henry Ward Beecher*

One final point to consider is how, in the Bible we can find serious people whose piety is just a façade. Think of the Pharisees and Sadducees – they prayed long and loud in the synagogue and tithed ten percent of their herb garden (Luke 11: 42), but it was all show and no heart. Pride and covetousness blinded them from being genuinely godly. In their zealous “piety” they dared accuse the Son of God of blasphemy, and then murdered Him.

Today we also have very serious people whose piety turns out to be a façade. I view their façade in the same way I do a transgender person's over-the-top dress, makeup, and mannerisms. In both cases we have an outrageous exaggeration of the real thing.

## CONCLUSION

God created a magnificent world with changing landscapes and terrain, and with vast bodies of water and rivers, which He filled with millions of different creatures. He then gave us playful hearts to explore His creation and to, with childlike wonderment, give Him praise and glory.

God also created us in His image, and as image-bearers, there's good reason to expect our playfulness is a reflection of a playful God. Is it any wonder then, that one of the best thing we can do for our spiritual, physical and mental health is play? So, for your and everyone's sake, go out and play, seriously! 

## ENDNOTE

- \* I'll note I do not subscribe to the belief that all anxiety is sin – there are several different reasons why people are anxious. See my letter to the editor in the Sept/Oct 2023 issue for my thoughts on this.



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# Growth In Independent Schools + Homeschooling

by Levi Minderhoud

*“The public school has become a counter-church. It is a powerful institution for the purpose of squeezing out of our children the worldview of the Bible and saturating them with the worldview of Pelagius, Rousseau, or whoever. The school where the Bible is banned has become a weapon of defense as well as of offense for the spirit that resists God’s Word against the spirit that embraces that Word.”*

Those are the words of Abraham Kuyper over a hundred years ago as he discussed the “schools question” in the Netherlands. His concern over the state of public education was the main catalyst behind his concept of sphere sovereignty. Rather than schools being controlled by the government (or even the church), he envisioned an educational system where schools were truly independent.

While Kuyper’s philosophy of education took hold in the Netherlands, the idea of independent schools – and homeschooling – took far longer to take hold in Canada. But one positive social trend in Canada today is the growth of homeschooling and independent schools over the past fifteen years. The “School Enrollment Growth in Canada from 2007-2023”

graph charts these changes based on data from Statistics Canada for Canada as a whole and the four provinces in which most Reformed Christians in Canada live.

Note the stagnation of the public school system – what Kuyper labeled the counter-church – and the growth of alternative forms of education. Over the last fifteen years, enrollment in the public school system increased by only 6% across Canada. It even declined slightly (-2%) in Ontario. The significant increase in Alberta is mostly due to the rapid growth of Alberta’s school age population.

## THE GROWTH OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Independent schools, on the other hand, experienced four times the growth that public schools did across Canada. British Columbia and Ontario experienced the largest increases at 32%.

The trend toward independent schools is accelerating. Not only are independent schools growing, they are growing faster and faster every year on average. For example, in the first three years of this data (2007-2011), the average annual growth rate of independent schools was only 0.2%. In the last three years of this data (2020-2023) the average annual growth

rate was 1.3%. And altogether that does add up.

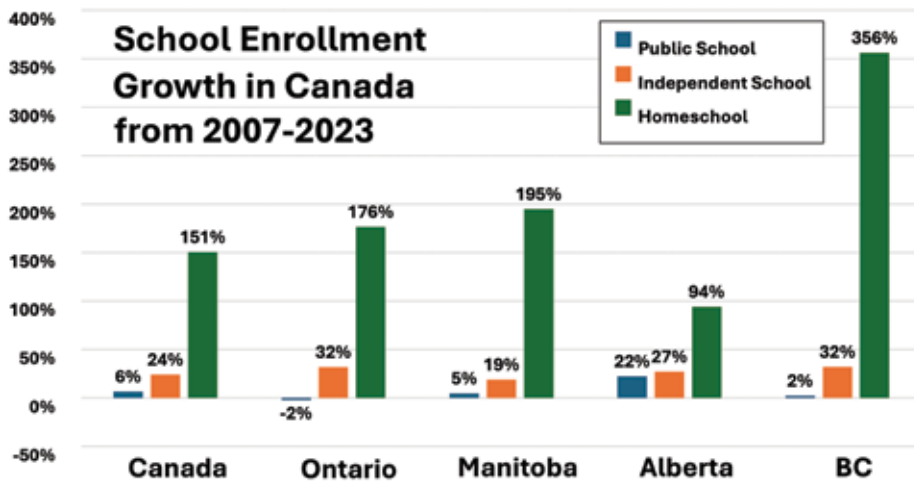
Some of this growth is due to existing independent schools getting bigger. Depending on where you live in Canada, perhaps you can see this growth firsthand in your local Reformed school.

But some of the growth is from brand new Christian schools. One example that has ties to Reformed churches is a new classical Christian school, Compass Community Learning Centre, in Langley and New Westminster, BC. This Christian school opened their doors a few years ago to provide Christian families with a thoroughly Christian education a little closer to home, in a more communal setting, and using a classic teaching pedagogy that focuses on grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

## THE GROWTH OF HOMESCHOOLING

What stands out the most in the graph above is the growth in homeschooling over the past 15 years.

A lot of this growth is due to the impact of COVID, government restrictions on public schools, and the adaptation of independent schools in 2020. Prior to 2020, the number of homeschool students grew by an average of 6.3% per year, which was far more than the growth in indepen-



dent schools (1.5%) and public schools (0.4%). But in the first full school year during COVID, the number of home-schooled students more than doubled, growing 107% in a single year. And while many (35%) of those students eventually returned to public or independent schools, by the end of the 2022-23 school year, many more students continued on the homeschooling track. In the coming years, we will see whether those students stay within the homeschooling track or also choose to go back to a more conventional form of schooling.

### WHY THIS GROWTH IS CAUSE FOR GRATITUDE

This growth in independent and home schools is a win for two reasons.

First, it is a win for the principle of parental involvement in education. Virtually every reference to teaching or raising children in Scripture describes parents – not professional teachers – as the educators of their children. For example, right after the second giving of the law, Moses commands:

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise*” (Deut. 6:6-7).

Now, this doesn't mean that only par-

ents are allowed to teach their children. As humanity developed and specialized and as knowledge expanded and became more complex, parents needed help with their responsibility to educate their children, leading to the creation of schools. There, professional teachers do much of the actual work of educating children. But it shouldn't be that parents hand off the education of their children to others and wash their hands of the matter. That responsibility ultimately remains with parents. (And there is a whole body of evidence that suggests that the more involved a parent is in the education of their child, the better that child will do at school.)

Public schools, however, have increasingly wrested this authority away from parents in all sorts of ways. The centralization of power in a provincial ministry of education limits the authority of local elected school boards. In much of eastern Canada, elected school boards have been eliminated entirely. Some public schools withhold information from parents about their children, such as if they are socially transitioning at school.

On the other hand, most independent schools strive to deeply involve parents in the education of their children. Many independent schools simply wouldn't exist if it weren't for the passion, time, money, and involvement of parents. And, of course, homeschooling is the most direct form of parents taking responsibility for the education of their children.

Every child that is removed from the public school system and attends an independent school or is homeschooled is a win for the idea that parents – not governments or even schools or teachers – are the primary players in education.

Second, the growth in independent schools and homeschooling is a win for Christian education. Public Catholic schools aside, public schools are secular schools. For example, the BC School Act requires that:

“All [public] schools and Provincial schools must be conducted on strictly secular and nonsectarian principles. The highest morality must be inculcated, but no religious dogma or creed is to be taught in a school or Provincial school.”

Teaching a Christian worldview or the Bible as truth simply is not possible in most public schools.

But it is possible to base education around a Christian worldview in independent schools and through homeschooling. Now, not every independent school is a Christian school. Not every homeschooling parent is a Christian parent. While the data on what percentage of independent schools and homeschooling students are Christian isn't easily accessible, a 2016 Fraser Institute report found that 38.5% of all independent schools were Christian schools. They enrolled 37.1% of all independent school children. And yet, the existence of a wide variety of independent schools and homeschooling movements helps give Christian schools and Christian parents the freedom to educate their students and children in the fear of the LORD. The larger, the more diverse, and the more pluralistic the independent education and homeschooling sector is, the safer Christian schools are from the overreach of a post-Christian government.

And so, while there may be many disappointing developments in public schools across the country, one bright spot that we can thank God for is the growth of independent schools and homeschooling across our country. RP



by Mark Penninga

# HAVE A CHILD —

## CHANGE THE WORLD

In his best-selling book *Atomic Habits*, James Clear makes the case for committing to tiny changes in your life, for drastic change. “Here’s how the math works out,” he explains. “If you can get 1 percent better each day for one year, you’ll end up thirty-seven times better by the time you’re done.” The reverse is also true. “If you get 1 percent worse each day for one year, you’ll decline nearly down to zero.” With time, little changes cause exponential shifts.

That is exactly what is happening

beneath the surface when it comes to the world’s fertility.

The challenge, simply put, is a lack of children. The world is aging quickly, with too few children to replenish the work force, let alone care for the seniors. We are on the brink of a population collapse.

Our opportunity is to welcome the gift of children even while the world isn’t.

The contrast between the two directions may hardly be noticeable in one year or even 10. But in 75 years (by the end of this century), it could result in a

world filled with people who know the LORD. But that will only be true if Christians embrace new life, and raise these children with love and in the fear of the LORD. Unfortunately, God’s calling for us to do this is increasingly being shushed, including in Reformed churches.

### THE WORLD IS AGING QUICKLY

From the 1800s to the 1960s the average woman gave birth to 5 or 6 children. In the 6 decades since, the fertility rate has plummeted worldwide – in Canada,

we're down to 1.26 children per woman, and in BC it is even worse, at just 1 child per woman. That is even lower than China. To put this in context, for the world's population to stay stable, the fertility rate must be 2.1.

This demographic challenge is widely recognized, but especially in some countries where fertility rates decreased a little sooner. For example, according to Pronatalist.org,

“at current birth rates, there will be six great-grandchildren for every hundred Koreans. This is equivalent to a disease that wipes out 94% of the population.”

And if we look at Italy, in just 30 years it is projected that 60 percent of Italians will have no brothers, no sisters, no cousins, no aunts, and no uncles.

In just the last year or two, the rest of the world has been waking up to the problem as well, as it's become evident that decreasing fertility rates are far more widespread, and dropping faster, than previously thought. That includes countries like Iran, known for its hardline Muslim population, which has seen its fertility rate drop from 6.5 children per woman in 1982, to 1.68 in 2022. Two-thirds of the world's population now have a fertility rate below replacement. Like Iran, the countries that have had high fertility are decreasing the fastest (1-3 fewer children per woman in just 20 years).

Most people still don't see this as a big issue today because it feels like there's no shortage of people. Indeed, the world's population will likely keep growing for a few more decades as people live longer and we continue to experience the fruit of the higher birth rates that occurred in the 20th century.

But the effects of how the world is increasingly saying no to children will become far more acute soon. The first thing most people will notice is an aging population. The number of seniors in the world is expected to double to over 1.4 billion in just 30 years. Let that sink in. The number of seniors is projected to double in just 30 years!

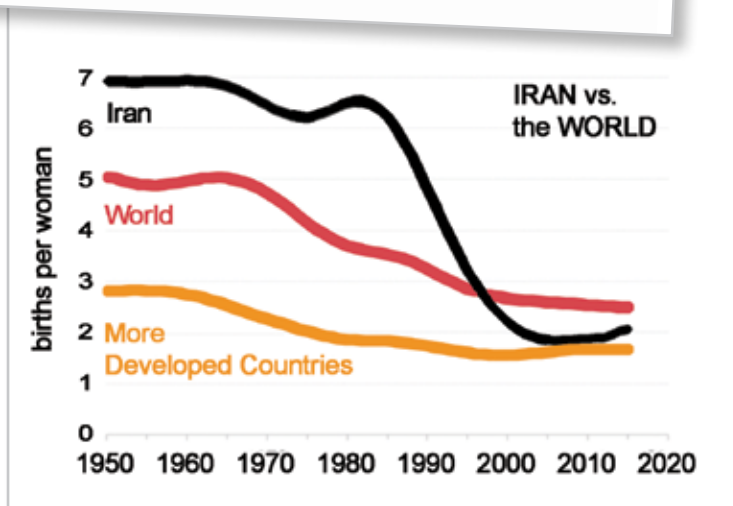
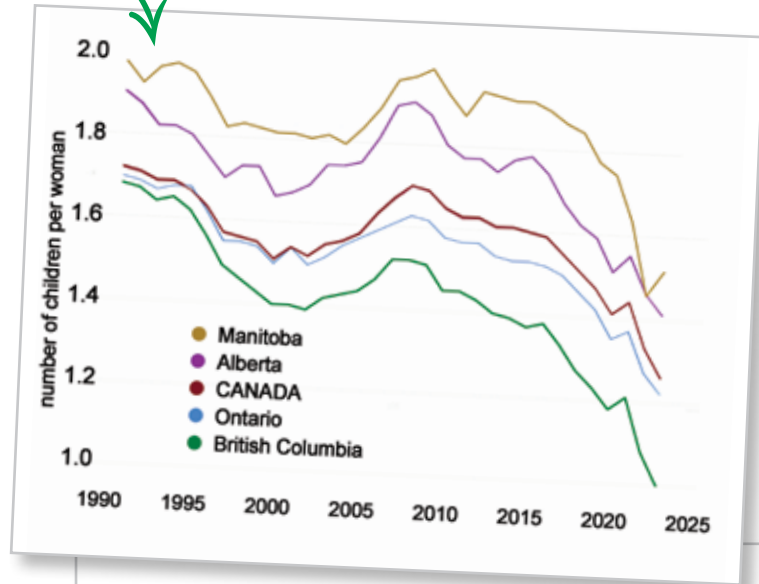
Generally speaking, seniors need more

care. Their health care costs increase substantially even as their employment income plummets. Normally we look to the next generation to step in, both through providing care for their parents and grandparents, and by becoming the new labor force to keep the economy moving. But in places like Korea, if there'll be just 6 great-grandchildren to replace every 100 Koreans, how is that going to work out?

For those for whom fewer children has been a deliberate choice, efforts to change this attitude have so far been futile. According to the *Globe and Mail*, “no country has successfully reversed birth-rate decline.” And if that is true of individual countries, it is hard to be optimistic about the population of the world as a whole.

“Great civilizations are not murdered. They commit suicide.” These words are credited to the famed historian Arnold Toynbee, who wrote about the rise and fall of 26 civilizations. I believe it is fair to conclude that much of the world is committing civilizational suicide. Technology is allowing us to live according to our desires. What we are witnessing in the world today is, for the most part, not the result of sickness, calamity, or oppression. Much of humanity, and western civilization in particular, is *choosing* this.

The difference between the empires of centuries ago and now is that the challenge isn't contained to a relatively small geographical area. Most of the world is succumbing, and the rest of the world is rushing even faster to join in.





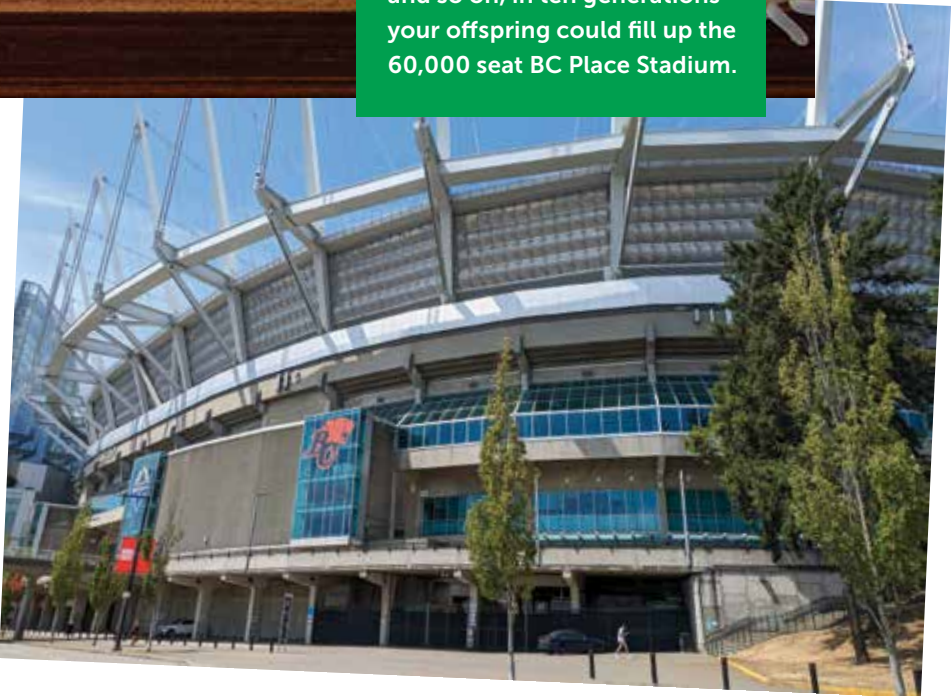
If you have just 3 kids, and your kids all have three kids, and so on, in ten generations your offspring could fill up the 60,000 seat BC Place Stadium.

**THERE IS NO REASON THE CHURCH HAS TO FOLLOW COURSE**

In a world of birth control, having children is, increasingly, an act of faith that our life is a part of something much larger than ourselves. Perhaps this is why God’s first words to humanity were a command to “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.”

One of our readers recently wrote to *Reformed Perspective* expressing concern that we’ve been trumpeting this topic, since fertility can be sensitive and personal. But this call to be fruitful and multiply isn’t just my opinion, or *Reformed Perspective’s* hobby horse. It is God’s commission to the world.

The goal isn’t political dominance, or to outbreed other religions. No, God has made it very clear from Genesis through Revelation that He is a God of the covenant. Already in the Bible’s third chapter we are promised that the seed of the woman – one of her offspring – would crush the head of the serpent. Likewise, most of us are very familiar with the encouraging words that “The promise



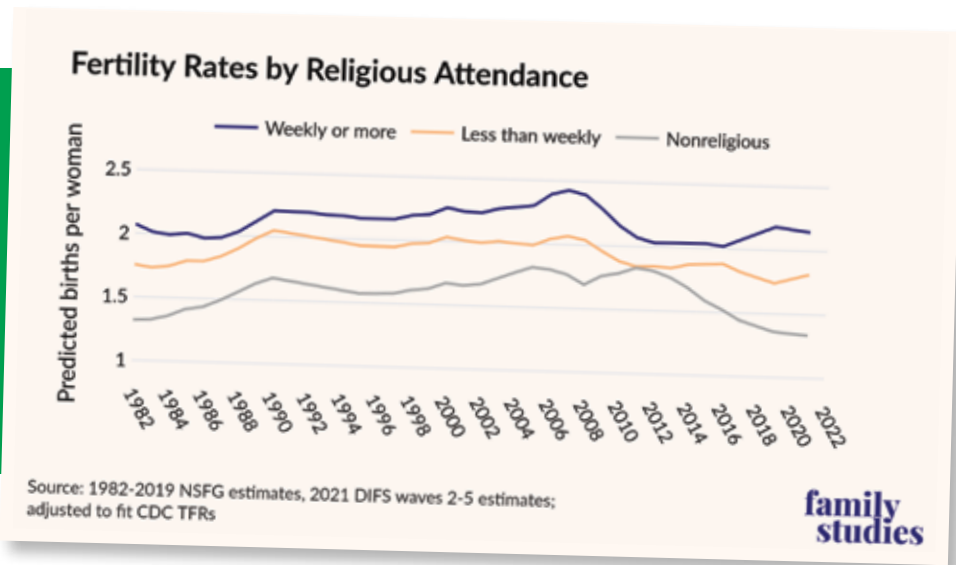
is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Fertility is the means through which God grows His kingdom. That kingdom includes both those who become Christians mid-way through life and the children of believers born into the covenant.

And this calling isn’t the burden the world believes it is – it is a blessing!

Psalm 127 is well known and loved for good reason: Children are a reward. We are blessed if we have many!

*Imagine the impact on the world if Christians embraced God’s gift of children!* Deciding to pursue a spouse, and then get married, and welcoming the children that the LORD gives is exactly what this world needs. It is exactly what the Church needs. Having a child, or another

From 1982 to 2020 the fertility rate for American weekly religious attendees has averaged just over 2 children per woman, while it has averaged just over 1.5 children for the nonreligious, according to information from the Institute for Family Studies (this chart used with their permission).



child, and raising them with love and in the fear of the LORD can be one of the most impactful things you do for God's kingdom.

I got a glimpse of this when I spent time in a couple of American towns, such as Lynden, Washington, and Sioux Center, Iowa this past year. It is probably the closest thing I have experienced to seeing the gift of life welcomed. These places are strikingly different from most Canadian towns and cities, even than my own home town. Families are everywhere. Kids are the norm. Playgrounds are busy places. There is something very special there. And it's no coincidence that these are very "churched" towns.

That the world wants to reject children is no reason for the Church to follow! It only means we can be a massive light to the world by bringing new life into the world. Notice how sad faces brighten when a child walks by. That child is a light! Want to be missional? Bring new life into the world!

### OUR DECISIONS ARE MORE IMPACTFUL THAN WE REALIZE

Not only does God want us to reproduce, He is looking for multiplication.

Here too, in His wisdom, God has designed life in a way where the cultural mandate is very realistic for most people. My parents were married in 1971. Unlike most Canadians, they didn't contribute to the fertility rate decline. They were

blessed with eight children. Now if a couple has 8 children, and this is maintained for just 10 generations, how many descendants will they have in about 200 years?

Over 1 billion! That is almost twice as many people as in North America.

Now, I didn't have 8 children, at least not yet. We have 6. If each generation had 6 children, how many descendants would there be in 10 generations?

Over 60 million! That is one and half times the population of Canada.

What about 3 children? Even with three children per generation, there would still be 59,000 descendants – enough to fill an NHL stadium three times over.

How about two children? Unfortunately, it is very well possible that we never get to 10 generations. The family line will likely disappear.

The point here is that a decision to have another child, multiplied over successive generations, can have a monumental impact on the world.

### WHAT IS HOLDING US BACK?

So, what do the stats tell us about the fertility rate of Christians compared to the world?

Our fertility rate is higher than the "nonreligious," but only a little bit more – just over 2 children per woman in America, and about 2.7 worldwide.

Looking at the Reformed community,

it is evident that the fertility rate has dropped significantly in the past few decades. We still have more children than our neighbors, but we have far fewer than we had not long ago.

And the difference is more apparent in urban areas than rural. When I was doing presentations on this topic to Reformed communities across Canada over the past two years, it struck me how rural areas responded to the message very warmly. In contrast, in the more urban areas, I was clearly walking on sensitive ground.

Yes, fertility is a sensitive topic. There is no way that I can understand the pain and heartache that many women and couples face daily because they aren't able to have children, or because they have lost children. Likewise, there are many singles who would love to be married and have children, but haven't been blessed with a spouse. Or their spouse is no longer with them. To add to this, many people grew up in homes where their parents had many children, but then failed to provide the care that those children really needed – the impact of this neglect can carry on for a lifetime. We live in a very broken world, and the curse of the fall is still being felt daily. There are very good reasons why many people can't have children. Likewise, there are good reasons to not have more children.

The challenge with sensitive topics like

this is that, out of love for the hurting, we might feel a pressure to just stay quiet. But we so easily forget that encouraging God's people to marry and have children isn't just some opinion that we can choose to hold to or not. It is, instead, God's express command to humanity. We are silent to our own peril.

And whatever our situation, all of us can play a role in welcoming the gift of life.

### 1. Considerations for couples with children

If you already have children and wonder if you should have more, I heard one Christian couple recommend that you literally write out each reason you may have for not having another. And then, for each reason, put it in a column. Is this reason an example of faith, trust, love, or fear, or selfishness? Since this is a self-administered test, it'd be easy to skew the results however you might wish. So be careful to use it to evaluate your thinking, not simply to justify it. Remember that one day we will all stand before the Judge of the universe and it is His standard that matters.

If you are open to having more children, first confirm that your spouse is as well. God wants us to be faithful to the marriage and baptism vows that we have made, which means we have to have the physical and emotional capacity to love and care for our spouses and the children He has given us. The goal is not to have as many children as possible.

If, based on your feelings right now, you think there is no way you can have more children, it likely isn't wise to take measures that would prevent you from changing your mind a few years from now. It is amazing how much our situation can change in just a couple of years. We can only see and feel this moment. God may have something very different for us in the future. I have had people pull me aside to tell me how much they regret taking steps to prevent more children. And I'm sure you are aware of many families who thank God almost daily for every child He has given them.

### 2. A thought for couples without children

If you are a couple who has decided that you want to wait with getting married, or wait with having children until you have reached certain milestones that have to do with studies, career, or finances, how does this align with this passage from James 4:13-17:

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them."

The world promises that women can make plans to have it all – they can plot out their career track and after they are established then they can have their children. But as many women have discovered too late, fertility declines sharply in a woman's thirties. We never know what tomorrow might bring us.

### 3. Singles

The number one reason for the declining fertility rate is that more women are childless. This is also evident in the Church. I have been struck time and again by the number of quality girls in Reformed churches who are age 20, then 25, then 30, and guys still haven't snapped them up yet. I see groups of young adults where the guys and girls seem to prefer to hang out as singles rather than to date, get married, and start a family.

Single young men, it is your responsibility to find a girl and start a family. This takes courage and effort. But you can do it! What are you doing to make this a reality? If your fears, career, or your hobbies and sports are keeping you immobilized or too preoccupied, make changes

starting tonight. Ask God to give you eyes to see a godly woman who could be a great wife. And when He shows you one, ask her out on a date!

Young women, are your decisions about career and studies making it harder for solid Christian guys to meet you? Are your standards for guys aligning with God's will or your own?

Both guys and girls, if practical things like the cost of housing is keeping you from getting married, my encouragement would be to prioritize marriage. Trust in the LORD's provision, and be open to changing some of your expectations if need be. As Christ tells us, "seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these will be yours as well." If the cost of housing means you think you can't get married or have children, consider moving to a new community where housing is less expensive, or be content with renting for the time being.

### 4. Everyone else

If God hasn't given you children, or if you won't be having more children, you can still be a massive help simply by looking beyond yourself and loving your neighbors, young and old alike. This can be through your job (we need teachers, nurses, and truck-drivers), and on the side (catechism teachers, baby-sitters, and coaches), and in hundreds of other ways.

## CHANGING THE WORLD, WHILE BEING SANCTIFIED

A lot of people are trying to change the world through activism, political engagement, and missions. These things matter a great deal – in fact, they flow from our identity as prophets, priests, and kings. But we can get so caught up in good things that we neglect our most basic callings.

One lesson that I have learned is that the greatest blessings I have are not the things that I have worked the hardest to make happen. They are the gifts that God freely gives. After high school I studied in university for 7 years and received a diploma, then a degree, then a Master's degree. I then worked for 15 years and



gave that job my blood, sweat, and tears. Around that same time, my wife and I worked very hard to tame a wild piece of land in northern BC to be a place where we could raise our family.

What has come of these things? All of them I have given away or would be willing to. My wife and I sold that land a few years ago because it was too difficult for me to stay on top of it with my other responsibilities. And I left that job about a year later. And if my degrees were taken away from me, it would make almost no difference in my life or to anyone else.

But it is very clear to me that what matters the most is my marriage to Jaclyn, my six wonderful children, the many blessed relationships I have in church and beyond, and most of all, the promises of God.

These things are not a result of my effort. They are a gift from God. But I had to be willing to accept these gifts willingly and to prioritize life accord-

ingly. It takes courage to ask a girl out, to leave a career to prioritize raising a family, to be open to having more children when there are already toddlers around our legs. Like many of you, I was scared about the prospect of having more children and about seven years ago the epicenter of a burnout I experienced was when our sixth child was born. It isn't easy. But I wouldn't trade these gifts for anything.


There is incredible pressure in our culture for women to be something more than a mom. Yet a mom can have a monumental impact on this world for centuries to come. *A career may come with perks like money and recognition, but these things can disappear overnight. Your offspring will change the world and will live into eternity.*


As we get older, we go to more and more funerals. They are always hard, but I also can't help but be convicted every time again when I go to a funeral. I get

such clear perspective on what matters most in life. At a funeral, does it really matter if someone really nailed that hobby, or built up a successful business? Only if these things were a blessing to others. So many of the things they worked so hard for are not even considered at the funeral. What matters most is whether they loved their family and others, and whether they loved the LORD.

I don't think I'm the only one who doesn't know what is best for myself. I need to follow God's Word, even if it clashes with how I feel – my fears, my ambitions, my desires. That is true for all of God's children.

If you made it to the end of this article and still aren't convinced, consider these two questions:

1. To Whom do you (and me) owe our own existence?
2. Shouldn't we trust the One who made us to know what's best for us, and best for the world He's placed us in? 



**“Think about it: A man’s body makes no sense by itself. Nor does a woman’s body. But seen in light of each other sexual difference reveals the unmistakable plan of God that man and woman are meant to be a ‘gift’ to one another in spousal love.”**  
– Christopher West – *Our Bodies Tell God’s Story: Discovering the Divine Plan for Love, Sex, and Gender.*

# The Peculiar Blessings of Covid

God used even this evil for good

by Josh Senneker

In the early spring of 2020, Christian pastors from across Alberta sat in on a telephone townhall with Premier Jason Kenney, Chief Medical Officer Deena Hinshaw. On the call – which had been scheduled to offer Alberta’s religious leaders an opportunity to ask questions about Covid-related regulations – pastors shared opinions, asked for medical advice, and requested clarification on the government’s early pandemic guidelines. Uncertainty about the future of the pandemic and its effect on in-person worship dominated the conversation.

In the months following the townhall, as the pandemic restrictions became more hotly contested and closely enforced, pastors and other church members would be forced to reckon with deep theological questions about the nature of human embodiment, the importance of in-person worship, and the efficacy of the Lord’s Supper.

In addition to such practical theological questions, Canadian Christians – like their non-Christian neighbors – faced a litany of disappointments and devastation over the course of the pandemic

era. These included cancelled weddings, cancelled funerals, the death of loved ones from Covid, the death of loved ones from suicide, frayed family relationships, and crushing financial hardships.


As a result, many Christians – and most non-Christians – now view the pandemic as a long international nightmare which must never be repeated, and which would best be forgotten. This response to the human devastation of the Covid pandemic is natural. And in many ways it might even be healthy: a desire to constantly relitigate past events at the expense of tackling present problems serves no good purpose.

However, underneath the severe difficulties of the Covid-era are surprising proofs of God’s covenant-keeping faithfulness – proofs that should make Christians rejoice in God’s sovereign activity during the Covid pandemic, and should produce hope about God’s activities amid today’s often-grievous cultural developments.

## NOTHING TO DO BUT BE RENEWED

For some, the hated pandemic restrictions became the means through which God saved their soul.

Allison, a young government employee from Alberta, spent much of the pandemic in the United Kingdom, unable to return home. As a result, she stayed at the house of a kind friend who invited her to watch livestreamed worship services. Convicted of her sin and curious about the God proclaimed in the sermons, Allison’s atheist thinking began to fall apart. Renewed by the Spirit, she embraced the gospel. Today, she is



God used people’s isolation to introduce Himself

a member of a local church in Calgary, having rejected the godless ideology of Marxism and instead now embracing the whole counsel of the God who purchased her with His blood.

Jared, a young data scientist from Hong Kong, was unable to find work at the height of the pandemic. Forced to change plans, he moved to Canada to pursue his education and career in a new country, eventually taking a job in Calgary. With no immediate social connections in his new city, Jared started consuming hours of YouTube content and the site's algorithm eventually led him to Christian apologetics. Intrigued by arguments defending Christianity, he was learning as much about the Christian faith as he could, and soon turned to Christ for salvation. He now faithfully serves his local church where he is beginning to teach theology classes to fellow church members.

As Covid spread throughout the world in March of 2020, God carefully laid the foundation for Allison and Jared's conversion. Long before patient zero, God had chosen vessels of mercy to be converted during the pandemic and ordered the decade's darkest circumstances to bring His chosen sons and daughters into the marvelous light of His grace.

## PUBLIC EDUCATION EXPOSED

A second proof of God's covenant-keeping faithfulness during the pandemic is the dramatic expansion of Christian school and homeschool participation in Canada.

As school buildings closed, and mom and dad began to pay closer attention to the public school content that was now being streamed into their homes, parents didn't always like what they were hearing. Some then responded by homeschooling their children, or by placing them in faithful Christian schools. As a result, both homeschooling and Christian school registration rates skyrocketed in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic.

Jeff Park, the Director of the Alberta Parents Union, commented that during the Covid pandemic, parents,

“...saw hostility to their values, and less competence than they had always



assumed. Public trust in public schools took a big hit, especially for people of faith.”

According to Park, “God meant [school closures] for good – to wake up the sleeping giant of Christian parents and save their children from godless indoctrination.”

God is using the previous difficulties of school closures to help Christian parents think more deeply about their children's education. And He is causing many to ask deep questions about the kind of education that will most benefit the souls of their children.

## CONCLUSION

The Lord also grieves the death, division, and persecution of His people. However, He is never surprised by such occurrences. As Christians braced for the unknowns of a viral pandemic in early 2020, God had already prepared for the salvation of men and women who had previously cursed His name. As congregations bitterly disputed about distancing requirements, God applied His pruning to strengthen the unity of His church. As governments made school closure decisions, God established the steps of

Christian families.

In 2020 – despite the fears of many of His people – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not falter in His promises to the Church He'd bought with His own blood. He used a virus to build and strengthen His chosen assembly, against whom the gates of Hell have not prevailed.

And if God's faithfulness did not falter through some of the most dramatic world events of the modern era, should we not also have joyful confidence that He will use every other sin and disaster that besets Canadian society for the good of those who love Him?

None of this lightens the tragedy of death, the pain of unhealed division, or the grievousness of sin. It does, however, offer a small glimpse into the eternal perspective.

As we approach today's news – war in Ukraine, war in Israel, a society in rapid moral decline, skyrocketing inflation – we must not do so as those without hope. Instead, we do so with the expectation of eternal joy and with a lasting confidence in the wisdom of an Almighty King who will one day split the sky and prove forever that what man meant for evil, God meant for good. **RP**



# TOP TEN

## POLITICAL WINS IN RECENT YEARS

by Levi Minderhoud

Reformed Christians spend a lot of time discussing and resisting bad policy developments. We have much to lament when it comes to public policy in Canada in the last few decades.

But we often forget that we've had some wins too. And so, the ARPA Canada staff brainstormed more than two dozen political wins in the last decade or so and voted on which were the best. Each staff member gave 10 points to their top pick, 9 points to their second pick, etc.

Here's the consensus on the top 10 political wins in Canada in recent years.

### #10. MATERNAL, NEWBORN AND CHILD HEALTH INITIATIVE

(18 pts)

In 2010, Canada played a leadership role in the *Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Initiative* (MCHN), a joint project among several developed countries to end the preventable deaths of newborns and children in developing countries across the world. Canada committed \$6.5 billion to this endeavor.

While that program itself is a laudable pro-life policy action, it was a victory in another regard. In almost every possible measure, Canada has succumbed to the sexual revolution, and to the pro-abortion advocates, as evidenced by the fact that we are the only democratic country in the world not to have any laws against abortion whatsoever. There was enormous pressure for the Harper government to include funding for abortion in this program. But they resisted the pressure and excluded funding for abortions in developing countries.

### #9. REVERSAL OF ALBERTA'S GAY-STRAIGHT-ALLIANCE POLICY

(26 pts)

In 2017, Alberta passed *Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay Straight Alliances*, which required all schools to establish a gay-straight alliance club upon the request of any student. The legislation deleted the requirement that parents had to be notified if their children joined the club. It also required schools to "immediately grant permission" to any activities and events initiated by the club and threatened to revoke the funding and accreditation of independent schools who failed to establish these clubs.

Christian schools and Christian parents were rightfully alarmed by this legislation. They fought back. And they won. Just a couple of

years later, a new government deleted the worst of *Bill 24*'s provisions via *Bill 8* (2019).

## #8. NATIONAL STRATEGY TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

(30 pts)

After the landmark *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* was passed in 2014 (see #1a), the Canadian government realized that simply having this good law against prostitution wasn't enough to stop the horrendous crime of human trafficking. Far too many women and girls were being trafficked into sexual slavery in Canada.

And so, in 2019, the government created a *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* that ran from 2019-2024 to provide greater focus on enforcing the existing law and helping trafficked women escape prostitution. The strategy promoted greater cooperation among various federal government departments and even provincial and local police forces.

## #7. REMOVAL OF HATE SPEECH OFFENCES FROM CANADA'S HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

(37 points)

Free speech has long been under attack in Canada. Many of the most egregious violations of free speech in our country happened under the hate speech provision of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

It was relatively easy to bring a successful hate speech complaint. Many of the complaints brought to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled against Christian speech and let non-Christian speech off the hook. For example, musicians were found not guilty of hate speech for a song that repeated "kill the Christian," but Christian ministers and activists were found guilty of hate speech when criticizing homosexuality. Given that this hate speech law broadly violated our society's guarantee of free speech and was often aimed squarely at Christians, we rejoiced when this section was deleted from Canada's law in 2013.

## #6. IMPROVEMENTS TO PROVINCIAL DRUG POLICIES

(39 points)

Tens of thousands of Canadians have died from illicit drug use in the past decade. These tragedies sparked many calls for provinces to change their approach to drug policy. British Columbia went perhaps the furthest, effectively decriminalizing the possession of a wide variety of illicit drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine, handing out "safe supply" of drugs on the street, and even allowing the public consumption of these drugs.

But in recent months British Columbia has begun to realize the errors of this approach to drug policy and has changed direction, recriminalizing the use of illicit drugs in public and promising to require those who are unable to escape their addiction to go into treatment programs. Another province, Alberta, has adopted a robust drug recovery program policy in response to this growing crisis.

## #5. MANITOBA'S CONSCIENCE RIGHTS LEGISLATION

(39 pts)

In 2016, right after the legalization of euthanasia across Canada, Manitoba passed legislation to ensure the conscience rights of health professionals not to participate in euthanasia if the practice violates their conscience. This legis-

lation trumps any policy that a medical regulatory body might try to impose on its members. In many other provinces, medical regulatory bodies have policies that require health care professionals to provide an effective referral for euthanasia even if they don't want to participate in euthanasia themselves. For many Christian doctors and nurses, effective referrals amount to aiding and abetting a suicide so these referrals violate their conscience. Manitoba is the only province that has passed legislation to protect the right of such health care practitioners to follow their conscience in this matter.

## #4. SASKATCHEWAN PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(41 pts)

Last year, Saskatchewan passed a comprehensive parents' bill of rights in education, becoming the first province in Canada to do so. Other provinces have some statements and protections of the rights of parents in legislation, but none go as far as the new Saskatchewan bill of rights. Among other things, this legislation guarantees the right of parents to act as the primary decision-maker for their child's education. This includes requiring that parents be informed on a regular basis of their child's attendance, behaviors and academic achievement in school, be informed of any sexual educa-





There were two big wins in Alberta, both of which offered children some protection against our culture's sexual mores.

tion in the classroom, and give consent before a school uses a student's newly preferred name or pronouns.

### #3. DELAY OF EXPANSION OF MAID TO MENTAL ILLNESS

(82 pts)

Euthanasia was first legalized in Canada in 2016. Over the last eight years, through a combination of court rulings and new legislation, Canada's euthanasia regime has become increasingly permissive. It has often seemed like Canada's euthanasia laws only change in the wrong direction.

Thankfully, it is still illegal to euthanize someone who requests MAiD on the basis of a mental illness *alone*. While the government had planned to legalize this early last year, significant pushback led Parliament to delay this expansion until 2027. That might not seem like a huge policy victory. But this delay does protect Canadians with mental illness from euthanasia for four years longer than the original legislation intended. Furthermore, 2027 is after the next federal election and the party currently leading in the polls (the Conservatives) has vowed to entirely cancel this planned expansion.

### #1B. ALBERTA'S NEW GENDER IDENTITY LAWS

(85 pts)

Next up, we have the suite of laws newly introduced (but not yet passed at the time of writing) in Alberta to combat gender ideology in the province. Three separate bills aim to:

- ban medical transitioning for minors under the age of 16
- require the consent or notification of parents for their children to learn about gender and sexuality in the classroom or change their gender identity at school
- limit women's sports to biological women only

While all three bills could be improved in various ways, they are by far the most ambitious steps taken by any Canadian government to reverse the spread of gender ideology. While New Brunswick and Saskatchewan (see #4) took steps in this regard, Alberta has gone further with its changes to the education system and, if these bills pass, will be the only province in the country to significantly limit medical transitioning for minors.

### #1A. CANADA'S REVISED PROSTITUTION LAW (PCEPA)

(85 pts)

Tied for the top of the list is Canada's new prostitution law, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, commonly known as PCEPA. It was passed in 2014 after the Supreme Court of Canada struck down Canada's existing prostitution laws. The original prostitution laws criminalized almost every part of prostitution except the actual act itself. So, while prostitution itself was legal, it was illegal to advertise the sale of sex, operate a brothel, or profit from someone else's prostitution.

When the Supreme Court struck down these laws, Parliament seized the opportunity to adopt a very different policy model. Canada's old laws treated prostitution as a public nuisance to keep out of public view. But PCEPA treats prostitution as a form of sexual exploitation, which better accounts for the ugly realities of prostitution. This new law criminalized both the sale and the purchase of sex, thus publicly condemning prostitution in every circumstance. However, it gave individual immunity to prostitutes to better enable them to seek the help of police and other community services to escape the abusive system of prostitution.

PCEPA is both a good and durable law. Originally introduced under the Harper government, the legislation has survived several court challenges. The Trudeau government hasn't touched the legislation, despite the Liberal party officially favoring the legalization of prostitution. PCEPA is an important piece of legislation that was intentionally designed to help women escape prostitution, enable law enforcement to crack down on pimps, and discourage men from purchasing sex. **RP**

*Note: this list only includes laws passed by the federal Parliament and provincial legislatures, and policies that the Prime Minister or Premier have the power to enact. A top ten court decisions would be an entirely different list!*

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# A New Atheist loves that *old time religion*



by Jeff Dykstra

In 2007, four now fairly famous atheists – Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Richard Dawkins – met to discuss their views. They filmed the discussion, titled it “The Four Horsemen,” and when it went viral, they became known as the “Four Horsemen of New Atheism.” The name of their group was ironic, since they certainly had no interest in the book of Revelation, in which four horsemen bring God’s judgment on the rebellious world; however, it was also fitting, since the Four Horsemen of Revelation are destructive, as are the New Atheists.

Even they seemed to understand the destructive nature of their godless stance. Daniel Dennett saw *Darwinism’s Dangerous Idea* (the title of his 1995 book) as “a universal acid” that would eat through whatever it came into contact with. The despair of our current culture supports that, though in a way that Dennett did not anticipate.

## CULTURAL CHRISTIAN?

Of these “horsemen” the most famous today is Richard Dawkins, who is best known for his book *The God Delusion*. His prominence is partly because he is one of only two still living; Christopher Hitchens died in 2011, and Daniel Dennett died just this past April.

But Dawkins’ fame is also because he has repeatedly made news for embracing aspects of the very Christianity he’s made his name attacking. And God has allowed Dawkins to live long enough to see some of the impact of his own form of atheistic evangelism, so that the lead horseman could begin to understand the destructiveness of his godless stance.



This past year, in an interview with journalist Rachel Johnson, Dawkins declared that he “was slightly horrified to hear that Ramadan was being promoted instead” of Easter, because:

“[the United Kingdom is] culturally a Christian country. I call myself a cultural Christian. I’m not a believer.”

Dawkins noted that “there is a distinction between being a believing Christian and being a cultural Christian.” But as British evangelist Glen Scrivener noted, Dawkins has maintained his “cultural” Christianity for quite a while now. Dawkins offered to read a chapter of the King James Bible for the Bible Society during the 400-year anniversary of the publication of the KJV back in 2011. Dawkins wasn’t paying tribute to the truth of God’s Word – he was only expressing a “historical interest” in the KJV, equating it to a similar appreciation for Richard Wagner and the Greek gods, since all three give us a better understanding of English literature. He also said that “it is important that religion should not be allowed to hijack this cultural resource.”

Scrivener also noted that in 2018, Dawkins tweeted a picture of himself with the following caption:

“Listening to the lovely bells of Winchester, one of our great mediaeval cathedrals. So much nicer than the aggressive-sounding ‘Allahu Akhbar.’ Or is that just my cultural upbringing speaking?”

Dawkins was more pointed in his 2024 interview with Rachel Johnson. He said:

“I love hymns and Christmas carols. I sort of feel at home in the Christian ethos. I feel that we are a Christian country in that sense.”

And later in the interview he added: “Christianity is a fundamentally decent religion.” Comparing the treatment of women and homosexuals in both religions, Dawkins admitted that Christianity’s treatment of all people, whatever their sex or sin, is fundamentally more de-

cent than that of Islam. But he still cannot, or will not, acknowledge why it is more decent. And that *why* is rooted in Christianity’s working out of the truth of Genesis 1: that all people are created in the image of God.

## THERE IS NO FRUIT WITHOUT THE ROOT

Glenn Scrivener makes a great point about Dawkins’ inconsistent positions: he says that Dawkins is like the birds pecking at the seeds of the gospel in Jesus’ Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-8). You can see such pecking in his Easter conversation with Rachel Johnson. He kept pecking at her own limited faith, asking, repeatedly, whether she herself believed in the virgin birth or the resurrection of Jesus Christ (she could only reply that she’d *like* to believe it).

Scrivener says that Dawkins wants the fruits of Christianity without the root that produces it. He makes a connection to a later parable in the same chapter: the Parable of the Mustard Seed where a giant tree grew out of a small seed (Matt. 13:31-32), and suggests that Dawkins is one of the birds that is allowed to perch in the branches, enjoying the earthly fruits of God’s kingdom, even while he saws at the root of the tree.

## EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW

So what is the good news in Dawkins’ claims of cultural Christianity, even as he continues to deny the objective truth of Christianity? Let’s go back to the first Horseman we looked at: Daniel Dennett, who saw evolution – Darwin’s dangerous idea – as the acid that would transform everything it came into contact with. Dawkins has been admitting the terrible truth of Dennett’s boast. Evolution’s attack on the root of Christianity has left the West vulnerable to false gods, like Allah and trans ideology – two things that horrify Dawkins.

Dawkins’ confused, but stubborn and hostile, attitude toward Christ shows the truth of Galatians 6:7-8:

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows

to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

And some people have, unexpectedly, been brought by the Spirit to begin sowing to the Spirit. For instance, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who first embraced atheism in her rejection of her Muslim upbringing, has seen, like Dawkins, how the New Atheism helped open up the West to destructive gods, and how atheism had nothing to counter them. She has been brought to acknowledge both the fruit *and* the root of Christianity – Christ himself – and in a conversation with Dawkins, opened him up to at least admit that the existence of God is “a dramatic important idea.”

The good news is that the lead Horseman has to acknowledge that what he and his friends have been sowing – the wind – is reaping the whirlwind. Even better, that whirlwind is preparing some to be blown over by the wind of the Spirit that Jesus tells Nicodemus about (John 3:8). In that way, willingly or unwillingly, they already have to fulfill the truth of Philippians 2:10, and bend the knee before the King. RP



# BOOKS

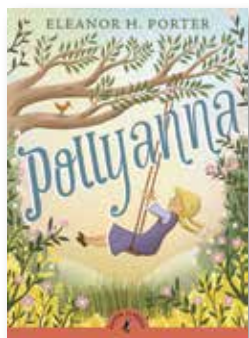
ON JOY, GRATITUDE, AND SEEING RIGHTLY

BY JON DYKSTRA

[ReformedPerspective.ca/books](http://ReformedPerspective.ca/books)

## POLLYANNA

BY ELEANOR H. PORTER  
1913 / 198 PAGES



Pollyanna's father and mother were poor missionaries, and when they died she was sent to her Aunt Polly who is not poor, and not very nice – she's the sort who thinks children shouldn't be seen or heard. So how is Pollyanna going to win over her crusty aunty? With her sunny disposition of course!

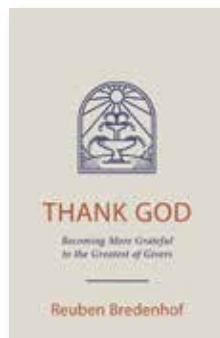
Before he died, Pollyanna's father taught her the "glad game" where the pair would search out the silver lining for their troubles. So when Pollyanna was hoping a doll might come with the latest mission barrel, and all it had was a pair of crutches, she was glad that at least she didn't need them. When Pollyanna brings the glad game to her new town she manages to charm even the grumpiest of residents... including her aunt.

While this is a 100-year-old story, it is still a readable treat. Do buy a copy with a modern cover, to help your daughter want to pick it up. Or read it to your children yourself – you'll benefit as much as them, learning how to see things like Pollyanna does.

There is one shocking/sad moment that could cause young listeners some distress – Pollyanna gets hurt quite badly. I peeked ahead and made sure that the chapter with the accident was the first one I read that night, and then I kept on reading the next couple chapters so we could finish on a happier note. That helped my audience work through this tense section. Recommended for readers in Grade Two and up.

## THANK GOD: BECOMING MORE GRATEFUL TO THE GREATEST GIVER

BY REUBEN BREDENHOF  
2023 / 138 PAGES



While living a life of gratitude is, first and foremost, really just giving God His due, He has created us in such a way that thanking Him is also very, very good for us. How so? When we remember how God has provided for all our needs in the past, we'll also have the confidence to come to Him with our anxieties now.

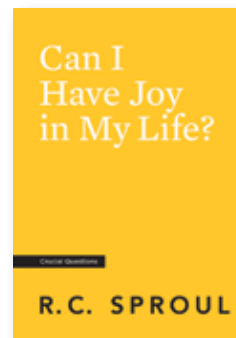
But as Dr. Bredenhof notes, our nature is to take for granted what we have received. Fostering a life of gratitude is about teaching ourselves to remember the past more accurately. Recalling His faithfulness better equips us to entrust Him with our future, assured of both God's power (He is able) and God's love for us (He is willing).

And it is simply about joy – a quip from G.K. Chesterton, shared by Dr. Bredenhof, notes: "The worst moment for an atheist is when he is really thankful, and has no one to thank." Sunrises are glorious, but how pale they would be if you didn't get to praise the Artist!

This is a short, very accessible read, and would be a great one to tackle together as a couple. It could also be a wonderful book for a church to buy in bulk to give away to parishioners en masse.

## CAN I HAVE JOY IN MY LIFE?

BY R.C. SPROUL  
2012 / 51 PAGES



The answer to the title question is an emphatic yes. R.C. Sproul explains that while a degree of happiness can be had from a good glass of port, real, lasting joy can be had only from the Lord.

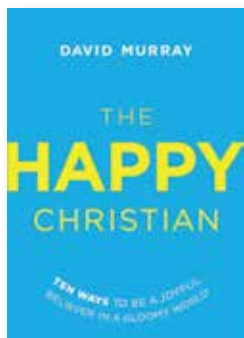
And, curiously, it can still be had, even in the midst of mourning. And if that seems confusing, it might be all the more so to hear that joy is a biblical command. We must be joyful? "Rejoice in the Lord always," the Good Book tells us, so yes indeed. Paul wrote this while in prison, facing the prospect of martyrdom, so he wasn't just putting on a smiley face – Paul says there is joy that Christians can find no matter their circumstances. How do we do it? In the Lord.

Sproul offers practical, biblical approaches on both what it looks like to find joy in the Lord, and how to do it. This might be the tiniest of books, but there's so much packed into it from one line to the next that it is definitely worth a reread, or maybe, better still, a very slow read with highlighter in hand. No matter what calamities we face, so long as we have the Lord, we have everything. And God assures us that He is putting even those calamities to use for our good. When we trust Him that it is so, we can rejoice indeed.

It's short and sweet, and free as an e-book at [Ligonier.org](http://Ligonier.org).

## THE HAPPY CHRISTIAN: TEN WAYS TO BE A JOYFUL BELIEVER IN A GLOOMY WORLD

BY DAVID MURRAY  
2015 / 254 PAGES



We are what we think and believe. If that sounds a bit like psychological mumbo jumbo, I'm sympathetic. Some folks say, so long as we believe something we can make it happen – name it and claim it! And that is bunk.

But what Murray is preaching here is that when we believe lies, we get hurt. When we think the world is a dark place with no good in it and no God above it, then no wonder that we'll be unhappy.

Murray takes us through damaging thought patterns that cause us to underestimate the beauty all around us. We might indulge in "mind reading," acting as if we know what negative thoughts people are having about us. But stop it! You can't mind read, and you need to stop pretending.

Other self-inflicted harms include:

- Generalizing – treating the time you got shot down by one nice girl as the result you'll get whenever you ask out *any* girl.
- Transforming – twisting a good experience into a bad memory of it.

These are devastating ways to think, but, good news, your brain can be retrained to think rightly.

To have labels for some of the silly ways we think will make it easier to spot and stop. Being a happy Christian is, in part, about getting your brain to stop lying to you.

This is part psychology, and part Bible study, and all about our relationship with God. Highly recommended!

## NOTES FROM THE TILT-A-WHIRL: WIDE-EYED WONDER IN GOD'S SPOKEN WORLD

BY N.D. WILSON  
2009 / 224 PAGES

The world is a wild ride, isn't it?

The fun starts already in the title of N.D. Wilson's book. Those of you who have ridden the Tilt-a-Whirl will recognize the analogy to our own spinning planet with an axis that is 23.5 degrees off the vertical.

Of course, the world is not just physically askew; it is off-kilter in just about every way you can think of. The presence of evil in the world is the argument that is typically thrown at Christians whenever we affirm God's claims on all of us. Wilson makes some important points throughout his book that undo (or cut through) this Gordian knot.

First, he asserts that evil is not a "thing," not a noun; rather, it is an adjective describing that which displeases God. Because He is good, whatever displeases Him is evil. Secondly, in response to those who then wonder why the world is still such an unpleasant place, Wilson does not use the oft-quoted answer that this is the best of all possible worlds; rather, he says, this is the best of all possible masterpieces, the best of all possible stories – and we are not, in our egocentricity, the best of all possible critics.

Rather than setting ourselves up as critics of God's story, Wilson insists, we need to learn to be good characters – to approach life with wonder, to laugh at ourselves and our often gloriously ridiculous place in the story – to glorify the Author, rather than to try to rewrite His work.

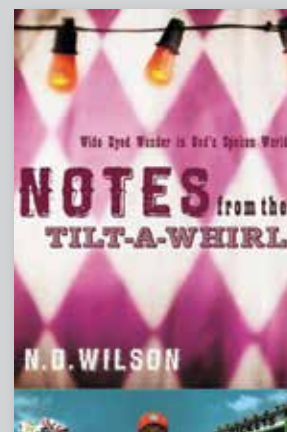
What makes Wilson's work so amusing is that he is willing to follow his own advice. To give just two examples:

- When Wilson's son gets his wish of having a butterfly land on him, but Wilson warns him that "lightning does not strike twice" – that the butterfly will not be coming back, Wilson enjoys how God makes a fool of him by sending the butterfly to land on his son's shoulder a second time.
- Wilson laughs just as much when he trips over the step that he is sure must have moved as he does when a seeming squashed frog inexplicably springs back to life.

In the end, Wilson reminds us that it is the end that we have to cope with – our own earthly end, and the end of all current earthly things when the Author (the same one who became a Word in His own story) returns to wrap up the current chapter with His judgments on His cast of characters.

This is far too brief a look at a book that spends as much time mocking Christian sentimentality as it does attacking atheist defiance of our Author, but if Wilson helps you better understand and cope with our crazy, tilted world, you'll want to check out his documentary of the same name!

– JEFF DYKSTRA





# ON ENCOURAGING COURAGE

Part of God's equipping us to courage also involves  
rightly understanding what real courage is

by Sharon L. Bratcher

**F**ear. We all feel it at times. We might be facing a job interview or something even more serious like a disease, or the loss of a loved one. We wonder, *What's going to happen?* Even though we trust in God's sovereignty, our weak selves cannot help but flail about at times.

So what's the answer to such fear?

Courage, of course. But not simply the sort that depends on the steadiness of our own resolve. God calls us to a different sort of courage, and He equips us to it too.

Part of that equipping is the communion of saints He gives us. I find it intriguing that the word "encouragement" is, well, full of courage. To encourage is, as the dictionary puts it, "to inspire with courage, spirit, or confidence: to stimulate by assistance, approval, etc." Our words and deeds can aid others to feel courageous and tackle or re-tackle whatever situation was frightening them.

We've all experienced it – a person comes along at the right time, and offers the right words to turn discouragement into hope. Or your support may have come from a sermon, a book, a family member, or a brother or sister in Christ. From feeling downcast (the word that Psalms uses), you began to see your way forward. We all need courage, which means we all need the encouragement of others.

## SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTES OF COURAGE

Part of God's equipping us to courage also involves rightly understanding what real courage is.

We all admire the person who'll run into a burning building or jump into a river to save someone's life. This takes courage,

for certain. As the actor John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway." That is so true. But as we look at our daily lives, we can find many less dramatic but important ways that this virtue should also be applied.

Before we look at a few specific ways we may need to "saddle up," let's delve into a few more specific attributes of courage. In a recent presentation at my church entitled "You're Gonna Need That Spine," Dr. Joe Rigney gave the following in-depth definition of courage:

"Courage is a habitual, sober-minded self-possession that overcomes fear through the power of a deeper desire for a greater good."

Along those lines, Rigney exhorted us to consider the following summarization of its attributes:

- 1. Courage involves double vision.** You not only see the danger out there that's frightening you, at the same time you can also foresee the good that would come in overcoming your fear. For example, a child is drowning and though you are afraid of the cold water and waves, you know that your swimming ability may save the child's life. Or perhaps you are afraid of presenting yourself poorly at a job interview, but you go because you foresee the good that will come if you are hired.
- 2. Courage is a habit.** You don't just wake up one morning and have courage – to have it, you need to cultivate and grow into it. This will involve facing difficult situations repeatedly, and successfully overcoming them. For example,

public speaking is a common fear. But if you go ahead with your speech even as your knees and hands are shaking, then repeating the experience will build courage. Living through a difficult situation teaches you that God has given you these abilities, and assures you that you'll be able to manage future such situations, through God's strength.

- 3. Courage manifests in risk-taking and fortitude.** There is a daring or *risk-taking* that is about seeing the good we don't yet have – the girl you'd like to ask out, or the job you'd love to have – and being willing to risk danger, despite the fear we feel. This the courage that's needed to take a hill in battle. Then there is the kind of courage involved in keeping that same hill when the counterattack comes. This *fortitude* or endurance is about holding onto the good that we already have. It resists the impulse to flee or retreat in the face of hardship and difficulty and pain. This is the courage that has us fight for our marriages, even if the going gets tough. Instead of giving up, we courageously address the problems.
- 4. Recklessness is the opposite of courage.** We understand that cowardice is the flipside of courage – cowardice shrinks back from danger, gives in to fear, and retreats in the face of pain, difficulty, or death. But courage is also the opposite of recklessness, which it is sometimes confused with. Reckless is more akin to crazy – thoughtlessly punching the gas pedal on an icy curve. Courage is always guided by reason, wisdom, and what is true. Courage recognizes the difference between necessary and unnecessary risks – some risks are not worth taking, so the reason you'd take a risk matters.

## EVERYONE NEEDS A SPINE

Just as Esther in the Old Testament was told, we have been placed in this world *now*, “for such a time as this.” We live in an unrighteous culture, where Christians are attacked as narrow-minded or haters when we dare to speak God's truth. We need to hear again the words of Joshua 1:9, where God encouraged Joshua:

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

As Rigney said,

“[God] is the source of our strength. There's a reason. He is both the good that you cling to and the power that enables you to cling to it. He enables us to hold on when we want to let go.”

In an article from the C.S. Lewis Institute on courage, Arthur W. Lindsley says:

“How can we be free from this fear and have the courage to live for the truth in our times? Jesus says, ‘If you continue

in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32). Jesus exhorts us to continue obeying His word as the path to knowing the truth (in an experiential way) and to freedom. This is especially true with fear, anxiety, and worry.”

Lindsley goes on to say, “Courage is not the absence of fear but acting despite it.” It is also important to note, as Rigney stated, that “Courage is a human trait, *not* a masculine one. It is required of everyone.” How many ways do we often give in to fear, anxiety, or worry instead of courageously trusting God to take care of us?

If there is an illness that must be remedied by a difficult and frightening procedure, we must step forward in courage. If we are in need of a new job or home, we need courage to take the necessary steps to find one. If we are supposed to provide for a family, it may take courage to go day by day to a job that we really don't love. If we have a rift between us and a brother or sister in the Lord (or anyone, really), we may feel fear about addressing the situation. But Christ says that we must (Matt. 5:24; 18:15), and so we need courage to do so, even within our own households.

If a woman finds it a scary thought, to follow a fallible man in her marriage, she needs courage. 1 Peter 3 describes a sub-




missive attitude and action and a gentle and quiet spirit, and he ends that section by saying that we can take inspiration from “holy women of the past who put their hope in God” – we can be like Sarah “if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.” Rigney states that “Courage is about what happens when things get hard.” He encourages us to face hard situations by Christ’s strength without grumbling and self-pity.

“It’s such hope that firmly believes that hardships, trials, and dangers are instruments in the hands of a good God for our good. This subdues the passion of fear and the anxiety that rides up – *What’s going to happen? I can’t control the future, what about the kids?* One of the key traits of the Proverbs 31 woman is that she laughs at the time to come. She looks at the future with all the possibilities, including the horrific ones, and she says ‘bring it on.’ Sarah is a model of the sober-minded hopeful obedience and submission to her husband. Because of her hope in God, she conquered her fears, maintained that gentle spirit in submission first to God and then to Abram.”

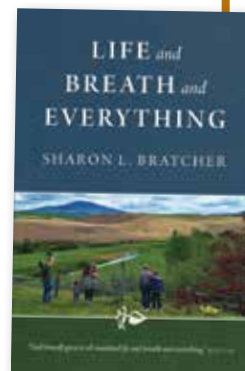
Imagine the absolute trust in God that made David step forward and challenge Goliath. Imagine the courage that enabled Jael to invite her enemy into her tent and conquer him. We may never be in that sort of danger. But we need courage to face the fears that we encounter in our daily lives. As this quotation from Mary Anne Radmacher suggests, “Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says, ‘I’ll try again tomorrow.’” We all have fears that need tackling, and we all need to do what we can to inspire courage in others.

## CONCLUSION

How wonderful that God has established a community life for us in our churches where we are told to stir up one another to good works (Heb. 10:24), to have the older ones teach the younger ones from their experience (Titus 2), and to show compassion and love one another in every way (John 13:34-35). After we have stepped forward courageously, we are in a position to help someone else to do the same.

Whom might you encourage today? 

If you enjoyed this article then you may be interested to know that the author has just published a new book. *Life and Breath and Everything* contains 50+ articles that were published over the last 15 years, that explore what Scripture tells us about what God provides for us, and what He requires of us. Sharon’s goal here was to do as Hebrews 10:24 encourages: “...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” You can purchase it by going to [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [Amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca) and typing “Sharon L. Bratcher” into the search line.



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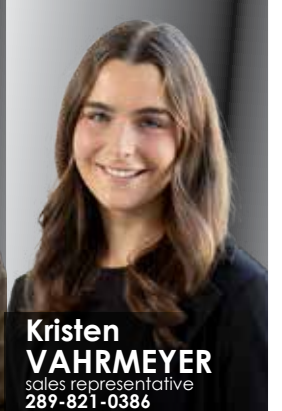
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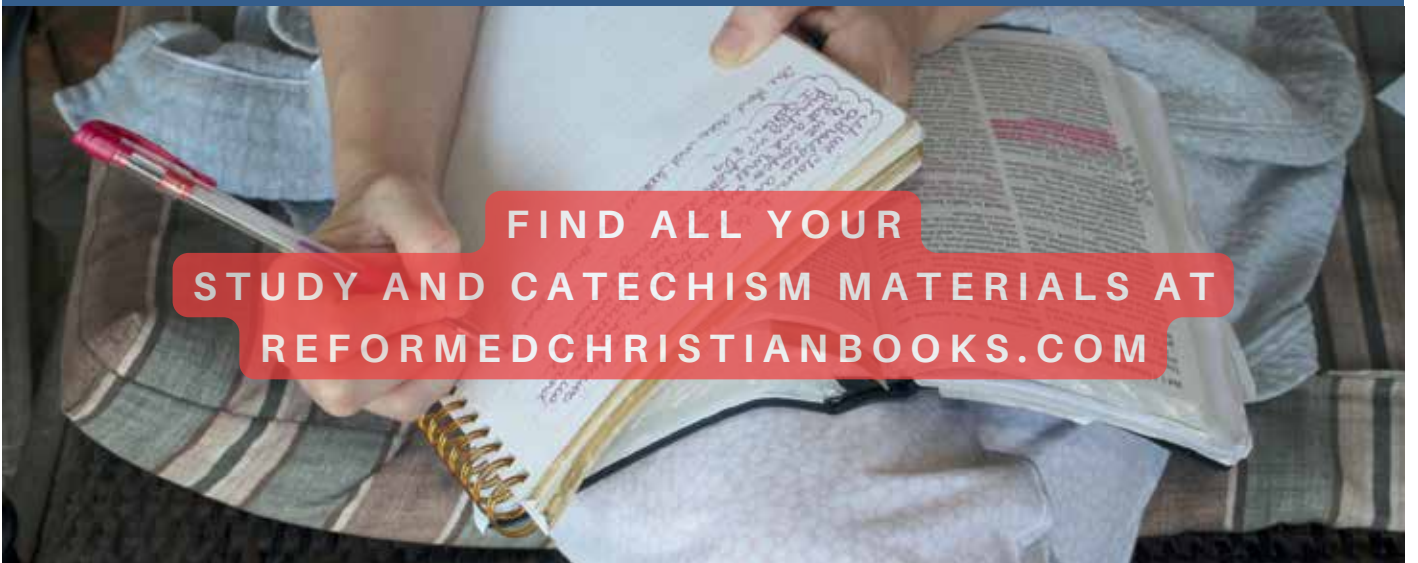
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# HOW DO YOU BUY A HOUSE WHEN YOU ARE 19?

Our son pulled it off with hard work, and more than a little help from his parents

by Rachel Werk

*Our son Seth read this story and gave his permission to share it*

**H**ow do you buy a house when you are 19? The answer in our case is hard work, lots of saving and a whole lot of parental help.

My husband and I have four children of whom Seth is the oldest at 19. I've always enjoyed keeping an eye on the housing market, and after I learned Seth was interested in buying a house, my eyes were glued to the daily real estate listings.

It wasn't long before one came to my attention due to its low, low price. It was a 920-squarefoot, 72-year-old small house on a large lot, right in town, listed for \$315,000. To put the price of this house into perspective, in our town right now there are 16 houses listed between \$385,000 and \$777,000.

We set up an appointment to see the house the very day it was listed and it had already had five views and one offer on it. We looked at it at 5pm and put in an offer a couple hours later that same

evening. As my son says, he went to work without an idea that he would even be looking at a house that day, never mind putting an offer on one that very evening. This was the first house he had looked at.

## HE STARTED AT 13

Seth started working at McDonald's at 13. We live in a town where if your family is trying to limit screen time and your kids aren't really interested in sports, there isn't a lot to do. So, that meant there was lots of time to work Saturdays and a couple hours for a couple days a week after school.

The rule we made for our kids when they started working was that 10% of what they made went to church, 10% to spend on what they wanted, and the rest went to savings. These savings could only go towards something big, like a car or a house. As this was something we also did with their allowance when they were younger (although different percentages) it was a natural progression, and did not come as a shock to



the kids. As we provide everything our children need, we didn't want them to have access to huge amounts of spending money – we did not think this was wise, or a fair representation of what life as an adult is like.

## BAGGIE BUDGET

Also, wanting our children to learn more on making wise financial decisions, at age 13 we instituted “baggies.” We take plastic Ziplock baggies and mark them with an amount and a description, and every month we fill them with the amount listed on the baggie. Money in the baggie can only be used for what it says it is for on the baggie.

For example, we have a baggie for clothes that is \$45/month. Every month we fill that baggie with \$45 which the child uses for all his/her clothes needs. The child can decide to shop the sales, save the money for a couple months for





Seth in front of his own house.

*...10% of what they made went to church, 10% to spend on what they wanted, and the rest went to savings.*

a down payment, and having graduated in 2023 he was working full time at a small company. Actually, more than full time: he was picking up an extra half hour each day of overtime, as well as working any Saturdays that he was offered.

A day or two after we put in our offer, we got word back that the seller was willing to work with us. I think the seller picked us over the other offer partly due to the fact that we did not make the offer subject to financing, and because we were willing to consider taking on the renter (a relative of the owner) with the property.

### HELP FROM MOM AND DAD

Probably the biggest factor in being able to buy this property was that we, the parents, were willing to use the equity that we had in our own house to take out a loan to cover the other house. We bought our own house 7 years ago and since then it has almost doubled in value according to our BC assessment. So we actually hold the mortgage that Seth pays for – all three of our names are on the title to our son's house. As soon as Seth is able to take on the mortgage amount himself (as he pays the mortgage down and gains equity in his own house) he will do so, and we will take our names off his title.

Another way we have helped out is that Seth lives at home rent free (he is renting his house out at \$1900/month), with the understanding that the extra money he makes will go towards making extra payments on his house. This arrangement won't be long term, as we will be reassessing in a year and a half. After that he can either move into his house or try to find a smaller, cheaper rental for himself so that he is still making extra by renting out his house. We could allow him to stay, either with or


without rent, but we think it is also good for young people to struggle a bit, not always relying on their parents, because, as the Apostle Paul says (in a different context), suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, which does not put us to shame (Rom. 5:3-5).

The pros to the situation include the obvious: that not only was Seth actually able to purchase a house without a huge down payment, but also that, with our names on the title, it brought his house insurance down as we haven't ever had a claim.

Probably the most concerning con is that lending and borrowing between family members can lead to strain and resentment and family discord (according to Dave Ramsey). Another concern for us is that if Seth ever needed to make an insurance claim it would probably affect our own insurance rates in the future.

### FROM 25 TO 10 YEARS

Right now, Seth pays \$683 bi-weekly with only \$212 of that going towards his principal. His mortgage is 25 years, but he makes as many extra payments on his principal as possible, which will hopefully see him paying off the house within 10 years. It is pretty crazy to see how much interest there is on a 25-year loan and how little your regular payment actually goes towards paying off your debt. On the other hand, it is amazing how putting extra payments on your mortgage can take months and even years off the mortgage payment schedule.

I feel like as parents we have tried to teach our children to be good stewards of their money, tried to open their eyes to different opportunities and tried to show them how to use the gifts that God has given them in ways that glorify His name. 

a larger purchase, buy second-hand or even possibly have to wait for a couple weeks if money is not spent wisely.

Some other baggie examples we have used are for gifts and school supplies. We started out with a lot more categories, but eventually found these to be most useful.

### INVEST LOW

During the spring of 2020 when the stock market crashed, I talked to Seth about investing his savings under my name as he was too young to open an account himself. I used this time to teach him how to look for solid companies, read financial documents, search for past dividend payment history, and explain the difference between owning a part of a good company versus gambling your money away by putting it into meme stocks hoping to get rich quick.

By 2024 Seth had saved up \$30,000 for

As God is restoring His good creation,  
He invites us into the story—  
to live, to learn, and to work together  
with joyful purpose in all of life  
**until all is made new.**



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# His eyes are darker than wine, and his TEETH WHITER THAN MILK.

– GENESIS 49:12

by Christine Farenhorst

There are a number of references in the Bible to teeth. The word “teeth” is used on a number of occasions:

- **to indicate blessing**, as in Genesis 49:12: *...teeth whiter than milk;*
- **to present power**, as in Job 4:10: *...the teeth of the young lions are broken;*
- **to signal vexation and pain**, as in Psalm 112:10: *The wicked man... will gnash his teeth and waste away;*
- **to betoken physical beauty**, as in Song of Solomon 4:2: *Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing;*
- **and to suggest punishment**, as in Jeremiah 31:29-30: *In those days they shall say no more, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.*

Teeth are an important part of our life. When a tooth aches, we often become dysfunctional. C.S. Lewis once said: “If only this toothache would go away, I could write another chapter on the problem of pain.” And the Puritan, Richard Baxter, was quoted as saying: “An aching tooth is better out than in. To lose a rotting member is a gain.”

More dysfunctional still, a 1970s newspaper reported a man taken to court because he had jumped out of the dentist chair in which he was sitting, and bit his dentist in the hand before slashing him with a can opener which he had in his pocket.

There is no doubt that toothache is painful and is an ache common to all of mankind. This is attested to rather vividly by a monument put up in the garden

of a twentieth century Japanese dentist. This particular monument, shaped like a tooth, is dedicated to the 105,000 teeth this man extracted during the course of his rather successful profession in Tokyo and Yokohama. You might say this doctor had influence on his surroundings. That is to say, he had a bit of pull.

A toothache is never to be desired and is a brokenness in one’s body. Anyone who has suffered from a toothache will, no doubt, agree. There is no pain like a toothache, be it a cavity or an abscess.

## ORIGINS OF DENTISTRY

Dentistry was not always a profession. In early times, potions and herbs were concocted for sore mouths. The ancient Chinese recommended a dental powder whose ingredients included the mashed bones of mice. Another remedy for a sore tooth was a powder which had to be snuffed up the left nostril if you were male and up the right nostril if you were female. It would, very likely, not be popular for that reason, today.

An eleventh-century copyist of Arabian medical practices, one Abulcasis, wrote that a throbbing tooth could be rocked loose with a pair of forceps. When the tooth was fairly mobile, the patient would be required to place his head between the doctor’s knees and a stronger forceps would be used for a final yank. (A rather painful form of headship principle!)

## BARBER-SURGEON-DENTISTS?

By the end of the twelfth century, Europe had cultivated a profession called barber-surgeon. Men in this profession could cut hair, shave beards, and pull teeth – all this for a nominal fee. They were often skilled in these particular tasks and if you had a toothache, you could count yourself

fortunate if one of these barber-surgeons was passing through your village. The surgeon aspect of such a man related more to infected limbs. Infected limbs were cut off with knives, and patients, more often than not, bled to death. To this day, the symbol of a barber is a pole striped with red (for blood), and white (for bandages).

Less skillful than barber-surgeons in pulling teeth, were twelfth century tooth-drawers. These men were charlatans who sported pointed caps and wore necklaces made up of black and rotten molars. They boldly advertised on street corners, shamelessly misleading passers-by about how painless the extraction would be.

It is chronicled that one patient, very upset with his barber-surgeon, exclaimed: “That was not the tooth I wanted pulled.” The man unconcernedly replied: “Steady there. I’m coming to it.” Perhaps the patient would have preferred to have been treated during the early fourteenth century during which one John Gaddesden wrote a medical manual with advice for extracting teeth. In it, Gaddesden advocated applying powdered cow’s dung or frog’s fat to the tooth to make it fall out instantly. In this same manual, he advised that teeth could be made to regrow by rubbing gums with a hare’s brains.

If, at this point, the twenty-first-century dentist is not rising in your estimation, read on.

## CAN WE STOP WITH THE BLEEDINGS?

In the sixteenth century, a Belgian, named Andreas Vesalius, studied a sufficient number of corpses dug up in cemeteries to conclude that teeth had nerves.

Although Vesalius was the most celebrated anatomist and physician in Europe, strange things continued to occur in the treatment of teeth for the next one

hundred years. If you were to complain of toothache, your treatment might begin with an “arm-bleeding,” followed by an administration of a laxative. If you somehow still insisted your mouth ached, you were bled in the spine, blisters were raised in the nape of your neck or behind your ears, and plasters applied to your temples. It can be imagined that all this distracted from the pain in the tooth, and that thus, in small measure, an alleviation of sorts was affected.

### LEAD FILLINGS? HMMM...

In the eighteenth century, lead, tin and gold fillings began to be used and in the nineteenth century, artificial teeth were devised, as in:

*“She has an upper plate.”*

*“How do you know that?”*

*“Well, it just came out in the conversation.”*

George Washington, who suffered from bad teeth, had a man by the name of John Greenwood as dentist. This New York practitioner claimed the false teeth he manufactured could not be distinguished from real teeth. President Washington once received this note from him.

“I send you enclosed two sets of teeth, one fixed to the old bars in part and the set you sent back from Philadelphia, which when I received was very black, occasioned by your soaking them in port wine or drinking it. Port being sour, takes off all the polish. I advise you to either take them out after drinks and put them in clean water and put in the other set, or to clean them with a brush and some chalk finely scraped.”

Dentures, in the eighteen hundreds, were also fashioned from natural teeth plundered from cemeteries and battle fields. Everyone seemed to have a new handle on how to make false teeth. Apprentices working for dentists were bound to secrecy. They were forbidden to marry, play cards or dice, and kept from visiting bars or theaters – all of these could lead to loose lips and a selling of information. These apprentices also spent time doing



In Europe many poles are red and white, the red representing the blood-letting and the white representing bandages. But in the US many poles also have blue, so what does that represent? Some theorize it is a patriotic addition, to make it red, white and blue, while others suggest the blue represents the blue veins.

fine work at jewelers and practiced what they had learned on poor clients as early morning duties.

### ANESTHESIA IS A GAME-CHANGER

In the mid-eighteen hundreds, a dentist by the name of William Morton, became one of the first dental surgeons to use anesthesia. He was a successful practitioner, and a man anxious to help his suffering clientele in a painless way.

Giving up part of his large dental practice, he enrolled in the Harvard Medical School, only servicing those with a toothache when he had time. There were students at Harvard in those days who had “ether” parties. They inhaled ether for fun, became very happy and apparently didn’t feel pain during this time. Dr. Morton began to experiment and had a patient, one Ebenezer Frost, inhale ether during an extraction. Ebenezer was amazed, upon awakening, to see a huge molar on the table.

William Morton proved that ether could be used satisfactorily in dentistry. Reading about this in the newspaper a month after Morton’s ether extraction, Boston surgeon Henry Bigelow arranged for a demonstration of ether in an operation at a Massachusetts hospital. At this demonstration, a large tumor was painlessly removed from the neck of a man by the name of Gilbert Abbott.

God has surely blessed us in that He has allowed us to invent tools to alleviate suffering. Let us use them wisely and let us be properly thankful.

And let us philosophize just a bit. Augustus Toplady (1740-1778), Anglican cleric, hymn writer, and major Calvinist opponent of John Wesley, said:

*A man’s free will cannot cure him even of the toothache, or a sore finger; and yet he madly thinks it is in its power to cure his soul.* **RP**

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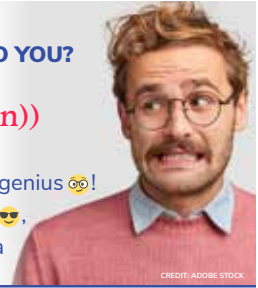
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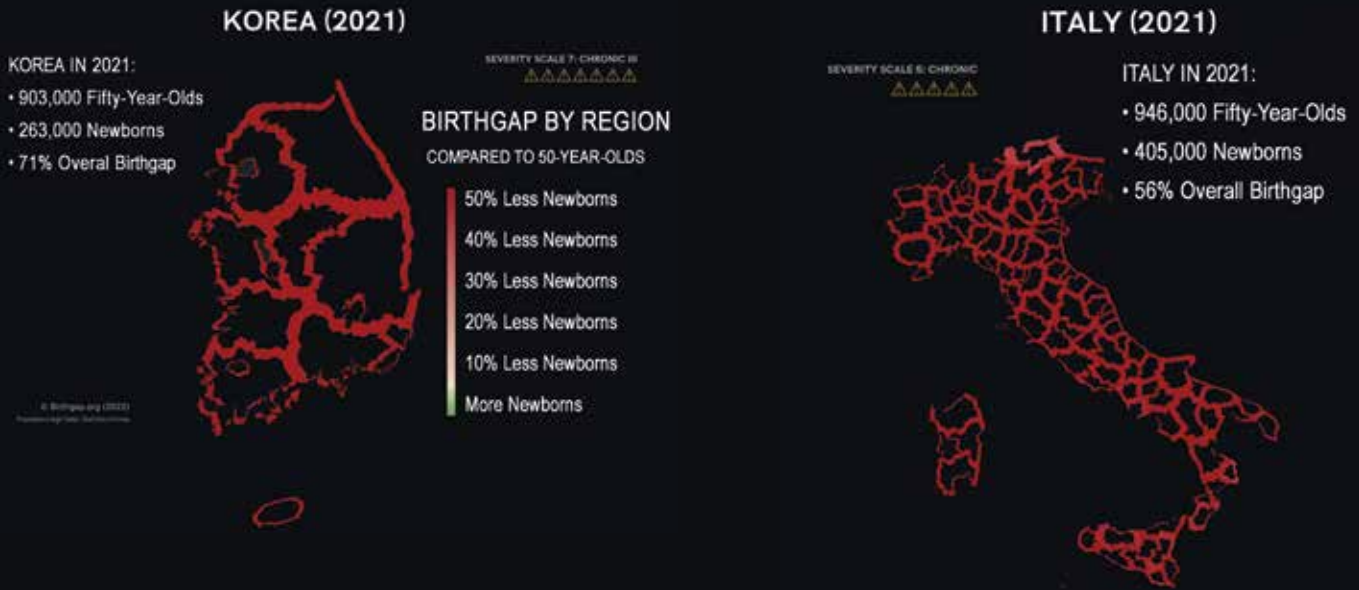
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# BIRTHGAP – Childless World

This free documentary shows that overpopulation isn't a problem  
Ignoring God's command to be fruitful and multiply is

by Jon Dykstra

**B**irthgap dismantles one of the biggest, deadliest lies of our time: the “myth” of overpopulation.

It's a big lie in how many believed it – the whole world! – and big too in how absolutely backward it got everything. The impact was absolutely murderous, justifying abortions by the millions in the name of saving the planet from the burden of having too many mouths to feed.

But overpopulation was a danger that never existed. Christians didn't always, but should always, have known better. We need only contrast what God says about children – how they are a blessing

(Ps. 127:3-5, Prov. 17:6, Deut. 7:13-14, and of course, Gen. 1:28) – with how the overpopulation proponents were presenting them as a curse. We could also have known from the fruit of this movement – when killing babies is the solution, then there must be a problem with the problem.

This is, however, a secular documentary, so the producer is limited to looking at just the data and at history. He begins his story with Dr. Paul Ehrlich, who was and remains the biggest of the overpopulation fearmongers, and whose 1968 book *The Population Bomb* began with

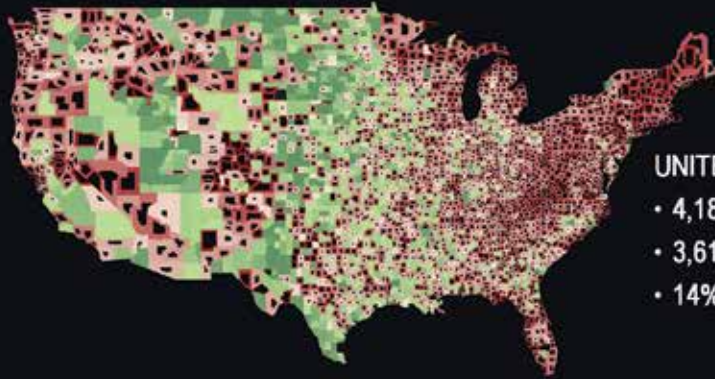
this stark prediction:

“The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate...”

That his short-term predictions didn't happen didn't stop the fear from spreading (and hasn't stopped Ehrlich from remaining a popular “expert” even today). In 1979 China implemented their ruth-

## UNITED STATES (2020)

SEVERITY SCALE 1: ELEVATED 



### UNITED STATES IN 2020:

- 4,183,000 Fifty-Year-Olds
- 3,613,000 Newborns
- 14% Overall Birthgap

### AUSTRALIA IN 2021:

- 352,000 Fifty-Year-Olds
- 284,000 Newborns
- 19% Overall Birthgap



### BIRTHGAP MAPS

Birthgap maps compare the number of newborns to people aged 50. Dark gaps are drawn to scale to represent each region's birthgap. Visit [birthgap.org](http://birthgap.org) to join the conversation.

less One-Child Policy, permitting couples to have just one child. For the next two decades a generation was raised that had no siblings. And the generation that followed had not only no siblings, but no aunts, uncles, or cousins. Here in Canada, where most of us have been blessed with at least some extended family, we know better than the Chinese themselves the magnitude of the joy that was stolen from them. And speaking practically, a Chinese couple could find themselves with two sets of aging parents and perhaps four sets of aging grandparents to care for, with no siblings or cousins to help them. Who will step in? The government?

In the rest of the world, family size has shrunk too, less dramatically, but relentlessly. Dr. Ehrlich and his disciples have people living in fear of the sort of barren, depleted planet the next generation would inherit. Who would want to bring children into a world of certain starvation, wars, and so much death?

### THE REAL DANGER

But as *Birthgap* unpacks, the real danger lies in the other direction. The world has stopped having children and many countries soon won't have enough people in the workforce to be able to sup-

port their aging population. This film is named after a statistic that narrator and producer Stephen J. Shaw identified:

"If we look at Italy... in 2019, there were around one million people aged 50 who will be retiring in around 20 years time. Then, if we look at the number of newborns, who, in around 20 years time will be entering the workforce to support these retirees, there are less than half! Any large gap between the number of newborns and the number of people they will have to support into retirement is significant, socially and economically. Given that these gaps are being caused by long-term low birthrates, I decided to call any shortfall in workers 'birthgaps.'"

This birthgap shortfall – the greater number of 50-year-olds as compared to newborns – exists in almost every country in the world outside of Africa. And the gap is growing. The US has one of the smallest birthgaps of just 14%, with 3.6 million newborns in 2020, compared to 4.1 million who are 50. In contrast, South Korea has among the worst birthgaps, at 71%, with 263,000 babies born in 2021, to replace the 903,000 50-year-olds.

Another way to look at this is by birthrates: how many children are born per woman. To replace the previous generation and keep the population stable (neither growing nor shrinking) we would need each woman to have 2 children – one to replace her, and the other to replace her spouse. But, as Shaw explains, we're nowhere near 2. "Japan, Italy, and Germany, with birthrates around 1.4 children per woman..." will in just two generations see their population "fall by over half, and in three generations, by 70%."

### DOING BETTER THAN THE ONE-EYED MAN


This is a secular film, which means that Shaw, as insightful as he is and eager to figure out *why* this is happening, can't answer his own question. He doesn't understand the spiritual battle that is occurring behind the scenes.

But God has revealed it to us. He commanded that we *be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...* (Gen. 1:28) so, of course, the Devil whispered – and with the help of Dr. Ehrlich, shouted – that children were a curse on the planet, and each baby just one more mouth to feed. But as even this film presents, we are



## AUSTRALIA (2021)

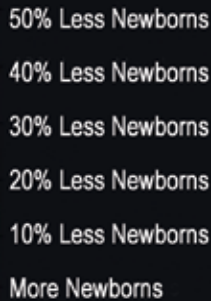
SEVERITY SCALE 1: ELEVATED 

SEVERITY SCALE 2: HIGH 



### BIRTHGAP BY REGION

COMPARED TO 50-YEAR-OLDS



## CANADA (2021)

CANADA IN 2021:

- 492,000 Fifty-Year-Olds
- 358,000 Newborns
- 27% Overall Birthgap



creators too. “Many hands make light work,” isn’t a biblical proverb, but “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor” is (Eccl. 4:9). We can’t create something out of nothing like God, but our brainpower can create resources out of materials that once weren’t resources at all (my favorite example is how farmers turned their excessive supply of manure into bedding for their cows). Many brains did that. What a blessing it would be if we had more of them to solve more such problems!

So why is the population declining so dramatically? Because God said, “have no other gods” (Ex. 20:3) and the world has turned from Him to worship the gods of comfort, career, recreation, travel, and more. A child can bring so much joy, but a boy or girl will also require your time, your sleep, and your money. And in interview after interview, Shaw finds people who are waiting to have things just so before they get down to having a child. But that path leads to them just not having kids at all. That unintended result might be what the Church most has to watch out for. God’s people aren’t going to flat-out reject His call on married couples to be fruitful but it is easy to justify delaying. And one small delay after another


can add up to the same unintended result the world is seeing, with either far fewer kids than we might have thought we were going to have, or no children at all. God doesn’t give us a prescribed family size, so couples will have to consider for themselves what it will mean to obey that command ...but let’s not casually delay our obedience.

Meanwhile, the world doesn’t feel any push to obey God. And so they follow after their other gods... even though the interviewees seem to already understand that these gods won’t ultimately satisfy.

### CONCLUSION

Stephen Shaw plans two sequels to this film where he will continue to seek an answer to his *why* question. But the answer Shaw is after – getting families to multiply once again – doesn’t seem likely, outside of revival. So, this is a great film to make you and whoever you might share it with, aware of an enormous problem the world faces. But only God’s people know the solution. And with that special knowledge comes a special obligation to share it because to whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12:42).

We can point the way out of this whole mess. Repent and believe. Trust what God says about children. Obey His command to multiply. Share both the good news of the Gospel, and share the wisdom of our Heavenly Father Who knows what is best for us when it comes to procreation... and everything else.

Watch the documentary for free at [ReformedPerspective.ca/birthgap](https://ReformedPerspective.ca/birthgap) or by using your phone to scan the QR code. I’d nominate this one as a must-see in our schools and homes. *Birthgap* really deserves an hour of your time! 



**BIRTHGAP**  
DOCUMENTARY  
2021 / 51 MINUTES  
RATING: 9/10





# THE CASE AGAINST MMA, BOXING, COCKFIGHTING, GLADIATORIAL COMBAT, BULLBAITING, AND OTHER BLOOD SPORTS

*Violence might sometimes  
be necessary, but it should  
never be amusing*

by Jonathon Van Maren

Under what circumstances are Christians permitted, in good conscience, to view adults deliberately inflicting violence on one another for the purposes of entertainment?

This may seem like a strange question, but it isn't. On social media, Christians regularly post commentary on the latest UFC match – most recently, several prominent accounts posted minute-by-minute updates on the fight between veteran boxer Mike Tyson and Jake Paul. The sight of two adult men inflicting violence on one another for the entertainment of others was enormously popular, which is why Tyson was paid a staggering \$20 million, and Paul was paid \$40 million.

I've been thinking quite a bit about this



issue recently. Last year, I was invited to participate in a long-form discussion on a range of cultural issues with Catholic podcaster Matt Fradd on his podcast *Pints with Aquinas*. One of the topics that came up was the acceptability for Christians of viewing violence – and combat sports – as entertainment. We both agreed that we found combat sports fascinating, and that we were attracted to them as feats of strength and skill. Yet, we both concluded that watching violence as entertainment should be avoided.

Now, I am aware – after years writing on cultural issues – that nothing attracts a backlash like criticizing someone’s preferred entertainment. Tim Challies has observed the same trend, and I think the

fierceness with which people defend their entertainment is evidence of how central it has become in so many of our lives. But when considered objectively, it is not difficult to conclude that inherently violent combat sports such as Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) are inappropriate *entertainment* for Christians.

### ENTERTAINED BY WHAT WE SHOULDN'T DO?

Biblically, we are forbidden to do violence to others and to harm our own bodies *outside of specifically justified circumstances*, which would include a just war or law enforcement. I want to make clear that I am not making the case against learning or practicing skills such as boxing, mixed martial arts, or other forms of fighting and self-defence. My argument is that violence should not be *entertainment*, which is defined as “the action of providing or being provided with amusement or enjoyment.” I would apply a similar standard to films that glorify violence, which is distinct from *depicting* violence. A film about war or genocide that portrays reality would not, I hope we can agree, be “entertaining” as such.

There is a distinction between learning to inflict violence in the context of a legitimate vocation (like soldier or police officer) or learning how to do so in self-defence, and watching violence to *amuse ourselves*. The early Christians were universal in their condemnation of gladiatorial combat, and the difference between gladiatorial battles and UFC fights is one of degree, not kind. We know what the physical effects of combat sports such as UFC and boxing are, and we cannot pretend that the fighters are not doing permanent damage to themselves and others. Violence is *inherent* to these sports, as the intent is to win by inflicting physical violence on the opponent until he or she is knocked out or submits.

The research into the physical damage that fighters inflict on one another is extensive and conclusive. From that perspective, I suspect that we may one day come to see violence in sport the way we now view bullbaiting or cockfighting. Young men should not be sacrificing their bodies and their cognitive abilities for the entertain-

ment of the masses. While it is true that other sports can also result in physical harm – hockey, basketball – violence is an aberration rather than an intrinsic part of these sports. Those who make this point are making a category error.

For those who think violence as entertainment is acceptable, I would be interested in hearing their answer to this question: How is sport and entertainment a justifiable exception to the general Christian prohibition on violence?

### TWO DEFENCES

In order to claim that combat sports such as UFC are justifiable entertainment for Christians, you must defend this thesis: *Human beings are morally permitted to inflict violence on one another for money and the entertainment of others*. I have yet to see this thesis convincingly defended. In most discussions I have had on this subject, people are remarkably unwilling to apply Christian standards to entertainment combat fighting. Instead, one of two responses is usually offered: “You’re being legalistic” or “I really enjoy watching fights.” The first response is the lazy Christian’s preferred defence of many indefensible things (and misunderstands the term “legalistic” to boot); the second is irrelevant.

Many violent combat sports – especially UFC – bring out profoundly unhealthy and unchristian attitudes in the spectators. The bursts of particularly savage violence are not incidental – they are a key reason many enjoy these sports so much. The sight of two men attacking one another and physically damaging one another sends crowds into a frenzy that in many instances can accurately be described as bloodlust.

### SKILLED YES, BUT BRUTAL STILL

Many fans rightly note that professional fighters display enormous skill, and that fights resemble a game of enormous chess. But surely we can agree that the atmosphere at the fights as well as the attitude towards physical violence being cultivated by the spectator are profoundly unedifying.

In short, I believe UFC is to human relations what pornography is to sex. Some lusts should not be stoked. Some things should not be entertaining. **RP**

by John Stonestreet and Timothy D. Padgett

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# THE POT EXPERIMENT HAS BEEN A DISASTER

If marijuana definitively destroys lives,  
should we be free to smoke?



A few weeks ago, Dave Portnoy of *Barstool Sports* publicly supported a measure that would legalize marijuana in Florida. “As an adult,” Portnoy said, “I should be allowed to smoke weed, watch football, and eat pizza on Sunday regardless if I’m at home in Mass[achusetts] or Florida.”

To which, Matt Walsh replied:

“Can you point to any state or city in the country where life has been, in any way, measurably improved after legalizing marijuana? Where are the legaliza-

tion success stories? Give me just one please.”

After the rushed social experiment by many states to legalize marijuana, we know the answer to this important question. Study after study has demonstrated that legal pot has been even more disastrous than predicted.

The most obvious consequences have been in basic safety concerns. Legalizing pot correlates with a rise in auto crashes, as well as property and violent crimes. Also, despite the fact that this is now a multibillion-dollar industry, legalizing pot has grown rather than reduced the black market. Promises of health benefits have also proven to be more smoke than substance.

Pot’s most devastating impact has been in the arena of mental health, which has declined to epidemic levels in the U.S. This is largely due to the increased potency of pot that is sold today, which is significantly stronger than what was passed around at Woodstock. Analyzing medical data from 6 million people, researchers in Denmark found that up to 30% of schizophrenia cases among young men could be linked to marijuana use. Though advocates and lawmakers have worked to “decrease the public’s perception of its harm,” as the study’s lead author said, they have misrepresented the reality.

Other studies also have shown a clear link between marijuana use and psychosis. For example, according to a report at *CBS News*,

“[P]eople who smoked marijuana on a daily basis were three times more likely to be diagnosed with psychosis compared with people who never used the drug. For those who used high-potency marijuana daily, the risk jumped to nearly five times.”

In other words, pot isn’t a victimless crime and, given its social impact, cannot simply be reduced to a matter of personal freedom. Not only are cannabis users more likely to start using opioids, but the

National Academy of Medicine reports that using pot “is likely to increase the risk of schizophrenia and other psychoses; the higher the use, the greater the risk.” Between 2006 and 2014, emergency room visits for marijuana-induced psychosis tripled to 90,000.

Most troubling of all is the link between pot and teen suicide. According to Colorado state statistics, the drug was found in the system of some 42% of teens who had taken their own lives, a rate nearly twice that of alcohol and four times that of any other substances. Colorado consistently ranks among the worst states in terms of suicide rates.

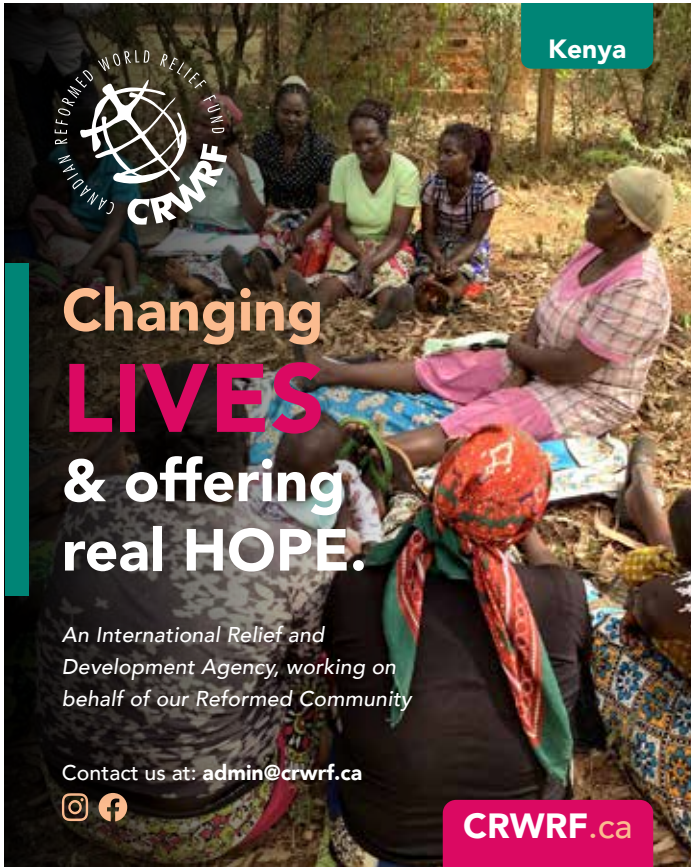
Critics will quickly argue that correlation does not imply causation, but connections like this must be investigated. If nearly half of stroke victims took the same medicine, would we wonder if there was a link worth our consideration? Why the reluctance to connect the dots when it comes to marijuana? Since suicide rates have risen every year that pot has been legal, we’re far past giving the benefit of the doubt.

Of course, if lawmakers took up Matt Walsh’s challenge, they’d have to reconsider and recant their promises of personal liberty, not to mention millions of dollars for education and better roads. The science here is all but settled. Pot is bad for individuals, and it’s bad for society.

The kind of freedom Portnoy is claiming ends in slavery, a slavery to one’s own passion. It is a freedom *from* rules and restraint, not a freedom *for* the good life. True freedom is a necessary means for human flourishing, but as Chuck Colson often noted, there is no true freedom without virtue. A freedom that wrecks the mind, puts families, children, and neighbors at greater risk, and contributes to general social degradation is not freedom. It’s license built on selfishness. **RP**

*For more resources to live like a Christian in this cultural moment, go to [Breakpoint.org](http://Breakpoint.org). This is reprinted with permission from the Colson Center ([ColsonCenter.org](http://ColsonCenter.org)).*







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**Does this sound like you?** For a full description of our Principal Roles and Responsibilities and / or to apply for the position, we invite you to submit the following documents to the email address below:

- Resume and Cover Letter
- Statement of Philosophy of Christian education
- Statement of Faith.

Upon selection, we will require:

- A Pastoral Reference Letter from your church
- Three References (2 professional, 1 personal)
- Vulnerable Sector Screening

#### Educational & Experience Requirements

B.A. / B.Ed. – required

Has held a Vice Principal or Principal role at another school

Has more than 3 years teaching experience

Previously worked in a Christian School where the candidate has demonstrated spiritual leadership

Applications and inquiries can be sent to the Principal Search Committee at [info@beaconhillca.org](mailto:info@beaconhillca.org). Thank you for your consideration!

# IN A NUTSHELL

TIDBITS RELEVANT,  
AND NOT SO,  
TO CHRISTIAN LIFE

BY JON DYKSTRA

## BURKE'S BEST

Most have probably run across Edmund Burke's most famous quote: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Quite the punchy point, but like all wisdom, a man can sidestep it without too much effort: *maybe good men need to get busy, but what can little ol' me do?* Well, Burke had a response to this sort of thinking too: "No one could make a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little."

## 10 TRUTHS FROM A MAN WITH ONE EYE

Vivek Ramaswamy is a part of Donald Trump's incoming government, earning his spot there with his uncommon amount of common sense, and his impressive ability to articulate it.

As an observant Hindu who rejects Jesus as Savior, he is, however, blind to what matters most. Still, a one-eyed man in a kingdom of the blind is going to be able to see far better than most, even if his sight is still impaired. In a discussion with Tucker Carlson he shared that he holds to 10 truths, and he was able to articulate all 10 off the tip of his tongue:

- God is real
- There are 2 genders
- Fossil fuels are a requirement for human prosperity
- Reverse racism is racism
- An open border is not a border
- Parents determine the education of their children
- The nuclear family is the greatest form of governance known to mankind
- Capitalism lifts us up from poverty
- There are three branches of government in the United States, not four
- And the US Constitution is the strongest and greatest guarantor of freedom in human history

God has given us His Word to allow us to see even more clearly, and He charges us in 1 Peter 3:15 to always be ready with an answer for the hope that is in us. So, if we were asked to articulate our own lists of truths, would we be ready? What would our one, two, or ten truths be?

## CALVIN ON BATTLING

"A dog barks and stands at bay if he sees anyone assault his master. I should be indeed remiss, if, seeing the truth of God thus attacked, I should remain dumb, without giving one note of warning."

– John Calvin, "The Letters of John Calvin"

## CULTURAL CHRISTIANS ARE NOTHING NEW

In the last couple of years, unbelievers Elon Musk, Jordan Peterson, and even infamous atheist Richard Dawkins have declared themselves "cultural Christians." Why? Because they understand that civil society requires the civilizing influence of Christianity. Unfortunately, that hasn't (to this point) gotten them to bow a stubborn knee to the God of Christianity.

As intriguing as this phenomenon has been, it's not actually anything new. In an old *Breakpoint* article by Chuck Colson called "The Gospel According to Jesse," Colson shared another remarkable turnaround.

"Guenter Lewy of the University of Massachusetts... is the author of the [1996] book, *Why America Needs Religion*. Interestingly, Lewy is neither a Christian nor a theist. He originally set out to write a book with the opposite thesis: *Why America DOESN'T* need religion. It was to be 'a defense of secular humanism and ethical relativism.' But when Lewy researched the data, he reversed himself 180 degrees. Lewy discovered that Christianity has historically been a strong support for human dignity.... Lewy found that Christians exhibit measurably lower rates of marital conflict, divorce, prejudice, out-of-wedlock births, juvenile delinquency, adult crime, and other 'indicators of moral failure and social ills.' Though remaining a nonbeliever, Lewy concluded that Christianity is vital to creating a healthy, humane society. Lewy's research points to one reason why Christians are motivated to seek reform in the public arena: Objective evidence shows that living by biblical principles makes people happier and healthier."

## MY NEW FAVORITE KNOCK-KNOCK JOKE

*Part 1*

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Cows.  
Cows who?  
No, no, cows don't who, they moooooo!

*Part 2*

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Owls.  
Owls who?  
Indeed they do.

## POST-SECONDARY MISEDUCATION ISN'T NEW

When I hear from nieces and nephews about the woke non-sense being pitched to them in university today, I can offer a strange bit of encouragement: at least it's nothing new.

Two decades back, it wasn't transgenderism, but another ideology that was not to be questioned. At least one of your profs was going to make you ingest Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth* documentary, which had a generation worried about the planet's certain, and imminent demise! It didn't matter if you were tak-



ing English, Engineering, Medicine or Physical Education, you were going to see it!

Three decades ago, R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. had this harsh evaluation, which seems every bit as topical today:

“In college one is exposed to a vast amount of information that is quite untrue, and it is most unjust that one should have to demonstrate one’s mastery of untruths to graduate – one has to go even further to graduate with honors.”

And William F. Buckley Jr. articulated his own indictment of post-secondary education more than seventy years ago:

“I should sooner live in a society governed by the first two thousand names in the Boston telephone directory than in a society governed by the two thousand faculty members of Harvard University. Not, heaven knows, because I hold lightly the brainpower or knowledge or generosity or even the affability of the Harvard faculty: but because I greatly fear intellectual arrogance, and that is a distinguishing characteristic of the university which refuses to accept any common premise. In the deliberations of two thousand citizens of Boston I think one would discern a respect for the laws of God and for the wisdom of our ancestors which does not characterize the thought of Harvard professors – who, to the extent that they believe in God at all, tend to believe He made some terrible mistakes which they would undertake to rectify; and, when they are paying homage to the wisdom of our ancestors, tend to do so with a kind of condescension toward those whose accomplishments we long since surpassed.”

**LYRIC O’ THE MONTH**

Addison Road’s *What do I know of Holy?*

I made You promises a thousand times  
 I tried to hear from Heaven  
 But I talked the whole time  
 I think I made You too small



I never feared You at all, No  
 If You touched my face would I know You?  
 Looked into my eyes could I behold You?

I guess I thought that I had figured You out  
 I knew all the stories and I learned to talk about  
 How You were mighty to save  
 Those were only empty words on a page  
 Then I caught a glimpse of who You might be  
 The slightest hint of You brought me down to my knees

What do I know of You  
 Who spoke me into motion?  
 Where have I even stood  
 But the shore along Your ocean?  
 Are You fire? Are You fury?  
 Are You sacred? Are You beautiful?  
 What do I know? What do I know of Holy?

What do I know of Holy?  
 What do I know of wounds that will heal my shame?  
 And a God who gave life “its” name?

What do I know of Holy?  
 Of the One who the angels praise?  
 All creation knows Your name  
 On earth and heaven above  
 What do I know of this love?

**A ONE-QUESTION TEST ON THE 5TH COMMANDMENT**

“Do you honor your mother and father? I’ll ask you one question to see if you do... Is your room clean? What does it mean to honor them? To obey them, right?”

– Earl Taylor Jr., an American Civics teacher, to a class of students who all seemed to think they honored their parents, but most failed this one-question test.

**SPURGEON ON THE NEED FOR EARNEST PREACHING**

“It is an ill case when the preacher:  
 Leaves his hearers perplex’d –  
 Twixt the two to determine:  
 ‘Watch and pray,’ says the text,  
 ‘Go to sleep,’ says the sermon.”

“You may depend upon it that you may make men understand the truth if you really want to do so; but if you are not in earnest, it is not likely that they will be. If a man were to knock on my door in the middle of the night, and when I put my head out of the window to see what was the matter, he should say, in a very quiet, unconcerned way, ‘There is a fire at the back part of your house,’ I should have very little thought of any fire, and should feel inclined to empty a jug of water over him.”

SOURCES: C.H. Spurgeon’s Lectures to my Students and The Soul Winner

CROSSWORD SOLUTION JAN-FEB

	S	R	M		S	R	A	E		T	A	E	N	
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**Hutten & Co**  
LAND and SHORE

by Jon Dykstra

# 10 COMICS

# ON CARTOONING

If you have a young artist in the house, or if you're looking to inspire someone to try their hand at art, here's a collection to catch their attention. These are "how to cartoon" books that have been done as comics themselves – they both tell and show!

There are plenty of cartooning books available, but most should be avoided. Parents might be under the impression that anything comic-related is just kid stuff, remembering the old *Asterix and Obelix*, or *Donald Duck* comics they used to read. The reality is that the vast majority of comics today are targeted at adults. And that means, when it comes to cartooning books there's often a focus on how to draw impossibly buxom and scantily-clad women. So how-to-draw comic books as a genre aren't safe.

But there are such books that *are* kids' stuff, and the ones I've included are awesome! I'm listing them by the age of their target audience, from youngest to oldest.



## ADVENTURES IN CARTOONING: HOW TO TURN YOUR DOODLES INTO COMICS

BY JAMES STURM, ANDREW ARNOLD,  
AND ALEXIS FREDERICK-FROST  
2009 / 112 PAGES



This series has been called "the first books you should read if you want to cartoon." That's a pretty accurate descriptor. What sets these apart from the ones that follow is that the artwork is the easiest to copy, and the adventures are the goofiest!

In the first story, a princess wants to make a comic but thinks she needs to know how to draw first. Appearing in a dramatic poof of smoke, a "Magic Cartooning Elf" arrives to tell her "THAT'S NOT TRUE!!!" He shows how a few simple lines here and there can create towers, mountains, swords, trees and so much more. Together they start crafting the princess's first comic adventure. It's about a princess who gets abducted by a dragon, and a brave knight (and his not-so-

brave horse Edward) who set off to rescue her.

Kids will get lessons in the importance of panels, perspective, how to show motion, and how dialogue can be used to helpfully tell what something is (when your artwork isn't quite up to showing it clearly enough). They'll learn how to draw the knight, Edward, and the Magic Cartooning Elf too. This is a book any kid will absolutely love!

Cautions would include a few uses of "gosh" and "geez," as well as a "girl power" twist at the end when [SPOILER ALERT] the young adventurous knight turns out to be the princess instead. It's not a huge thing, and I mention it only because we are in a world that is so confused about gender, it may have to be pointed out to kids that women have never been suited to wearing suits of armor. I'll also note that as a wide floppy book, this could get pretty beat up in a school library, but I think it would still be a fantastic purchase. Maybe get two copies right away. There are all sorts of character tropes, and some of these are less admirable than a knight and princess – witches, monsters, superheroes, aliens, robots – but these are all minor elements to the story and I don't think are troublesome here.

Two sequels are every bit as instructive. *Adventures in Cartooning: Characters in Action!* and *Adventures in Cartooning: Create a World* take the knight on further adventures, imparting many more cartooning lessons along the way.

There are also a few smaller spin-offs. I've read three – *Ogres Awake!*, *Gryphons Aren't So Great* and *Sleepless Knight* – and while they all include instructions on the insides of the front and back covers on how to draw some of the key characters, that's the extent of the instruction. These are more comic-book than comic education. I suspect another of these, *Hocus, Focus!*, might be a bit too witch-focused, and not educational-enough to bother with, but haven't been able to track it down.

## MAKER COMICS: DRAW A COMIC

BY J.P. COOVERT  
2019 / 124 PAGES

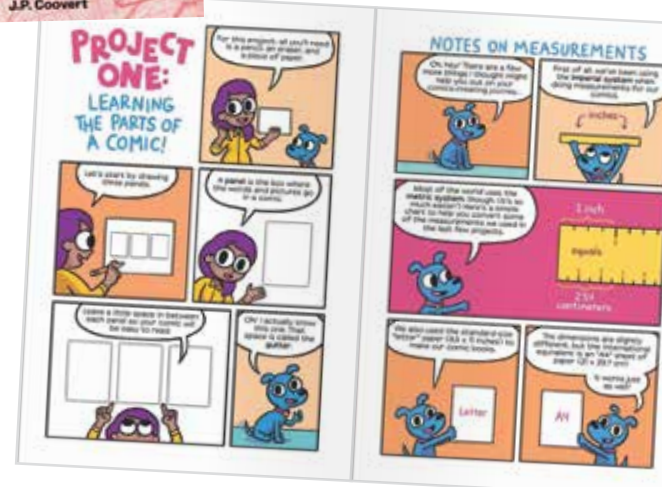
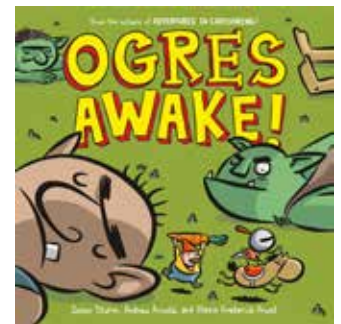
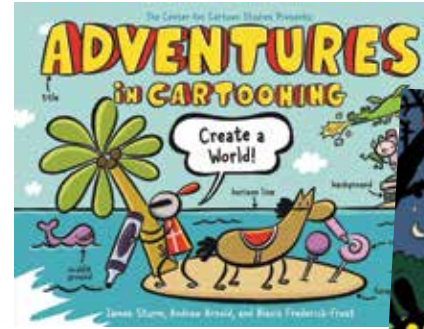
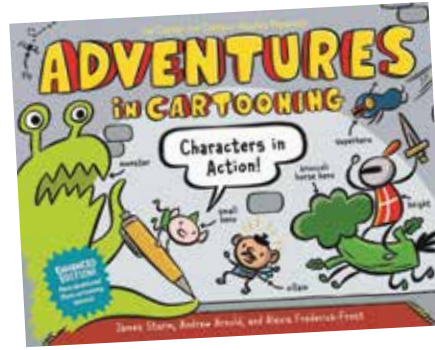


Our guides, Maggie and her dog Rex, are trying to fulfill her grandfather's dream of having a comic library. Maggie must buy the building before a villain turns it into a parking lot, and a discovered treasure map might lead to the money they need.

Alongside their treasure quest, readers are given 6 projects to complete. We move from making a comic strip, to ending up with a one-sheet, 8-page comic book. My daughter loved learning how to fold and cut a single piece of paper to make this small comic booklet.

*Draw a Comic* doesn't really cover much drawing. It's more about giving kids the basic tools – teaching them about panels, pacing, etc. – to produce something pretty impressive, even if they can only make stickmen at this point.

Two cautions: a passing mention is made about dinosaurs living 65 million years ago, which is made all the more passing considering this book is 100+ pages. And I'll also note that some other books in this Maker Comics series (not this one) do push the LGBT agenda.





## THE COMIC BOOK LESSON: A GRAPHIC NOVEL THAT SHOWS YOU HOW TO MAKE COMICS

BY MARK CRILLEY

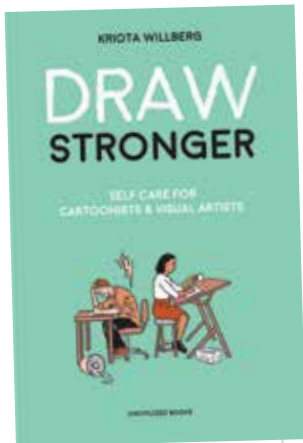
2022 / 156 PAGES

Emily has a story to tell, and has settled on comic books as the way she'll tell it. But how can she begin? We get to follow along as Emily learns the ropes with three different talented ladies who are all willing to teach her. Step by step, instructor by instructor, Emily learns how pacing can increase drama, and the direction of an eyebrow can change a character's whole mood.

I'm going to list two cautions here, the first for sensitive younger readers. Near the end of the story we learn why Emily so badly wanted to make a comic. In it, her hero rescues pets... and in real life, Emily wasn't able to rescue her own dog. Her loss is poignantly told, and made my eight-year-old sad enough that she stopped reading. I suspect though, that she might pick it up again. I think the 12-and-ups this is targeted to will be better able to deal with this bit of drama.

The other caution concerns how *The Comic Book Lesson* briefly "bumps" into some of the weirdness of the comic world. One mentor mentions the "Electric Angel Nurse Mizuki" comic she's authored, and we're shown the cover depicting a nurse with wings. Another mentions she is writing a comic book about assassins for hire. And the 12-or-so-year-old Emily is depicted at a comic store and convention without her parents, which are weirder places than we'd want our 12-year-old to go without us. That's it – nothing too big.

This is another "how-to-decide-what-to-draw" book. It's about learning how to plan out panels and pages like cartoonists do. For the art lessons, turn to this same author's *The Drawing Lesson* which also uses a comic book format to teach, this time about shading, negative space, and more, with the only caution being one use of the word "Jeez."




## DRAW STRONGER: SELF-CARE FOR CARTOONISTS AND VISUAL ARTISTS

BY KRIOTA WILLBERG

2020 / 136 PAGES

A key skill for an artist to learn is how to draw without hurting yourself. And how to recover after you have done yourself an overuse injury. Even kids, if they are really into cartooning, can draw to the point of damaging themselves, whether that's coming from doodling with bad posture hour after hour, or the result of overuse of the tendons in their wrist as they color and shade.

This could be a very important book for some, but it is not one a kid is going to pick up on their own. Young folk all seem to think themselves invulnerable... until they aren't. So this would be something a parent would have to read along with their teen, or read first to make the case for how it could be really helpful. In addition to a diagnostic function – putting a name to the pain – it also features exercises for hands and wrists, neck, chest, shoulders, and back, to help strengthen muscles to hopefully aid healing or prevent injury. This is a book I think many an artistic kid could benefit from, particularly if they keep pursuing their craft.

There are no warnings needed for teens and up, and I can't imagine younger kids wanting to pick it up (it is simple black and white drawings – no bright colors to invite them in). However, for their sakes I will note that there are a couple of comic depictions of artists in pain – a guy holding his own, detached hand, for example – that you might not want to share with your toddler. 



# CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY JEFF DYKSTRA

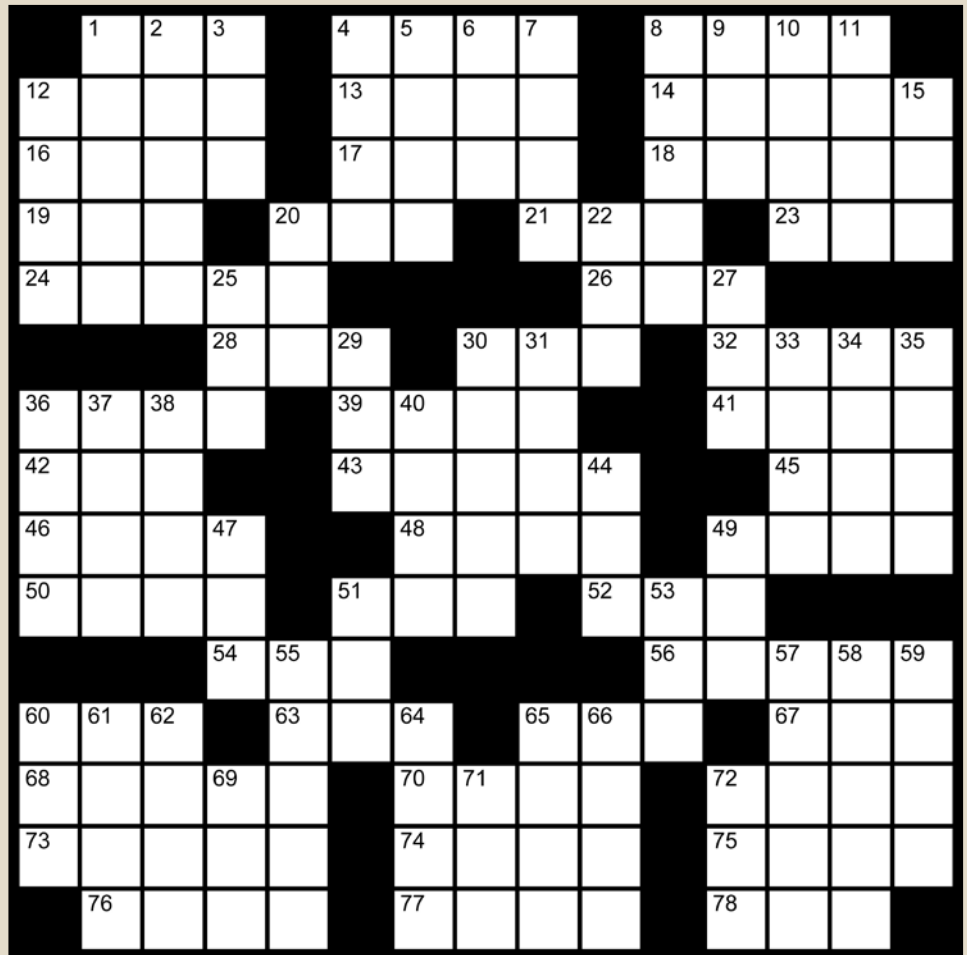
JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2025

## PUZZLE CLUES

Find this issue's solution on page 66

### ACROSS

1. Acronym for how some deaf people communicate
4. Gait not used past the gate at a horse race
8. Abbr. for southwestern U.S. state
12. Captain Hook's boatswain in *Peter Pan*
13. "\_\_\_\_ this, you elders; give ear..." (Joel 1)
14. The Potato State
16. Duke who "had ten thousand men"
17. Paul \_\_\_\_ (hit song: "...One Woman Man)
18. Description of Laodiceans? (Rev. 3)
19. Brazil... or pine...
20. "\_\_\_\_ down here:" (Ruth 4)
21. "Alligator \_\_\_\_" (Dennis Lee poem)
23. Cabin material when logs were scarce
24. What you hope not to do under pressure
26. Where to get the iron
28. Treatment given by a Samaritan (Luke 10)
30. Acronym for computer's core
32. Dads' spouses
36. Emily \_\_\_\_ (newspaper expert on manners)
39. Grieving one's heart problem (Prov. 14)
41. "keep in \_\_\_\_ with the Spirit" (Gal. 5)
42. Feel (partly?) ill
43. Where the wicked gathers fat (Job 15)
45. "I don't need to know!" (texting acronym)
46. Weapon carried in arrest of Jesus (Mark 14)
48. Edmonton Oilers player \_\_\_\_ Draisaitl
49. What God made into boils (Ex. 9)
50. Beginner; novice; rookie (found in Tyrol?)
51. "...for all who are far \_\_\_\_:" (Acts 2)
52. "...touched the \_\_\_\_ of the scepter." (Esther 5)
54. What Ray Kroc thought was beautiful
56. Gift mentioned on the Feast of Epiphany
60. Airline of the Netherlands
63. Follower of alpha?
65. Boot height for fishing in marshy areas
67. Charles \_\_\_\_ - king of England
68. \_\_\_\_ Protocol: 2011 - Canada's withdrawal
70. "A \_\_\_\_ shaken by the wind?" (Luke 7)
72. \_\_\_\_ of Man (or of Wight, or of Arran...)
73. Maker of Kia; partly rhymes with Kia
74. Spooky-sounding Great Lake?
75. Focus of parables in Mark 4
76. Cool! Keen! Nice!
77. Something gleaned by Ruth (Ruth 2)
78. Ruth's new marital status?



### DOWN

1. Love in Quebec
2. Mattress brand
3. Albanian currency
4. Type of food, fashion, films, and fighting
5. Monthly bill for many
6. Getting a tree scrambled A-OK?
7. Caught in getting part backwards?
8. One who gives credit where it's due
9. You can find one on a Grecian urn (Keats).
10. Work of mixed-up pals at the pool?
11. Birth state of Orville Wright
12. Get it together, together
15. Uneven?
20. What to do when you are going downhill
22. "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a..."
25. Sounds like I got caught without a bed?
27. Acronym on many ambulances
29. Ezra's expertise (Ezra 7)
30. \_\_\_\_ priests - opposed the apostles (Acts 9)
31. Mexican currency
33. \_\_\_\_ Frank (Anne Frank's father)
34. Inter-office form of communication
35. Demonstrate contempt (Job 17, 30)
36. Warsaw \_\_\_\_ (Cold War defense treaty)
37. Type of hair or skin
38. Defamation; slander; cheap shot
40. "...killed the fattened \_\_\_\_:" (Luke 15)
44. Explosive compound acronym
47. Type of cat, or your uncle
49. sent to \_\_\_\_ out the land" (Num. 14)
51. "salvation in no \_\_\_\_ else" (Acts 4)
53. Mischievous sprite in German mythology
55. German WWII submarine
57. An early one gets the worm?
58. Aggravates; provokes
59. Hurried; hastened (archaic)
60. Terrorist group in U.S.
61. Second largest city in France
62. "Naomi... said no \_\_\_\_" (Ruth 1)
64. Where Jesus was executed (Acts 5, 10)
65. Isaac, not Eliezer (Gen. 15)
66. Bad time in March for Caesar
69. Reason for a party in Boston?
71. Significant historical period
72. Ideal or individual or intellectual follower?

Come  
+  
make

# a JOYFUL NOISE!

## I SING LIKE A DONKEY.... AND A CHICKEN (this is a true story)

Someone once told me when I was in grade 8 that when I sing I sound like a donkey and bob my head like a chicken. It certainly wasn't a nice thing to say, especially considering that I loved singing very, very much. It became really hard to sing in church, for fear that the people in front of me would be offended by the hee-haw of my voice and the people behind me would be distracted by the clucking motions of my head. So I lowered my voice, as well as my head, and murmured through the notes which I used to sing with joy.

And then one day, a few years later, our Pastor called on us to sing a song of praise. So our congregation stood up and sang, admittedly very poorly, and then sat down. Then our Pastor called on us to sing again. The same song. "Don't you know who it is you are singing to? It is the LORD the Creator of heaven and earth! Now, we're going to sing it again, and I want you to sing it like you're singing to the Lord!" And so, with renewed vigor in our voices and a pretty good Reformed kick in the pants, our tiny congregation stood up and sang the song - this time not to ourselves, not to our song book, and not hiding our voices from those around us - we lifted our voices to the Lord!

Donkey-voice, chicken clucks and all. A pleasing aroma sent to the Lord.





Our singing can **SHARE GOD'S TRUTH** and encourage others. Read Acts 16 - how is it that Paul and Silas could sing while being imprisoned for their faith!

Our singing shows God our **GRATITUDE!** Read Exodus 15. The first thing the people of Israel do after being saved through the parting of the Red Sea is lift their voices in thanksgiving.

## WHY DO WE



## HAVE TO SING?

Our singing can **ENCOURAGE** ourselves. When we go through difficulties, Psalms and Hymns can carry our confessions to the Lord when we find it hard to say the words. Read Psalm 42. Better yet, **SING** Psalm 42. Imagine yourself going through difficult times and feeling lifted up by these words and being reminded about God's truth, love and power.

Our singing **GLORIFIES** God, and that is what we were created to do! It connects us in a very unique and intimate way!

Singing in our church service is part of our **CONVERSATION** with God. This is an essential part of the Reformed liturgy as it is modeled after God's own design of worship! Next church service, pay close attention to the words of the Psalm after the reading of the 10 Commandments.

## DOES GOD CARE THAT I'M A "BAD SINGER"?

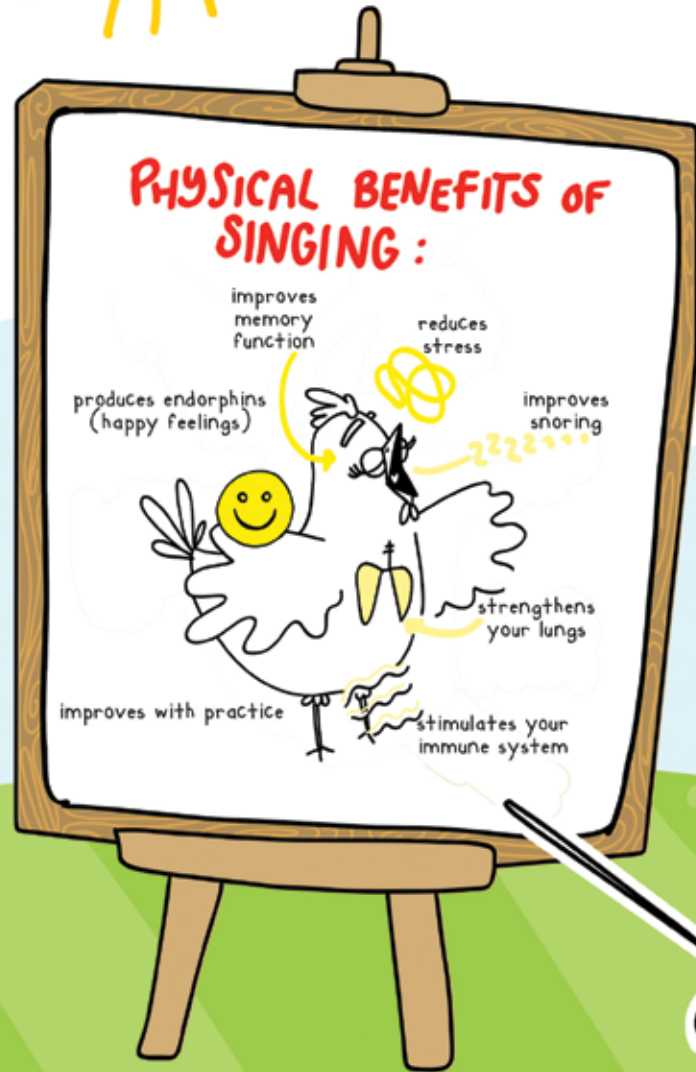
God has given everyone different gifts. Some of us may be more inclined to develop the gift to hold a tune or follow notes. But that should never keep you from singing - God commands us to make a **JOYFUL** noise and it doesn't matter if you are off key or struggling with a tune, because it's not just the words that matter, but deeper than that - it's a matter of your heart, your intent - who are you singing to? A person singing the psalms off key will be making a more precious noise to God than a beautiful singer singing songs that blaspheme his name. A person who can hardly choke back tears and who burbles through Psalm 51 makes a more precious sound than someone who beautifully sings the same psalm with no conviction in his or her heart.

And even, our God **SINGS** and we were made in His image! Zeph 3:17





# TRUE OR FALSE?



1. The Canadian Reformed Churches' Book of Praise was a translated version of the Netherlands Reformed Song Book that our ancestors took when they immigrated.
2. The first official, completed version of the Book of Praise was published in 1972.
3. The first Book of Praise did not include any hymns.
4. The tunes of the Book of Praise are the same as the Genevan tunes from 1562.
5. The first edition of the Book of Praise was still in the Dutch language.
6. Singing in the worship service is part of the liturgy as the congregation's response to God's word.

Check your answers by learning the history of the Book of Praise at [bookofpraise.ca/history](http://bookofpraise.ca/history)



Who knew!?  
... God did!

## F.A.Q

### WHY DO WE SING SO MANY PSALMS?

In an age of so many new contemporary and modern hymns, the beauty of the Psalms often get cast aside or overlooked. But the Psalms are a beautiful treasure in the hands of God's people for they were made from the infallible Scripture of God. The Psalms, though they are thousands of years old, stand the test of time as they represent the full scope of the human heart in a raw and honest way. They are God's words being repeated through imperfect humans, beautiful confessions of the depravity of our souls and our need of a Saviour. That's sometimes a hard thing to find in the modern hymns - not impossible, though.



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

How blest is he who \_\_\_\_\_ the paths of sin. (PS 1)  
 Oh Lord, our Lord, yours be all \_\_\_\_\_. (PS 9)  
 The fool says in his \_\_\_\_\_ "there is no God." (PS 14)  
 The spacious \_\_\_\_\_ declare (PS 19)  
 The Lord's my \_\_\_\_\_ (PS 23)  
 The Lord I will \_\_\_\_\_ (PS 34)  
 As a deer will thirst in \_\_\_\_\_ (PS 42)  
 May God be \_\_\_\_\_ and bless us (PS 67)  
 Oh God, give to the king your \_\_\_\_\_ (PS 72)  
 Sing a \_\_\_\_\_ of joy (PS 81)  
 Sing to the Lord with \_\_\_\_\_ (PS 96)  
 \_\_\_\_\_! Praise the Lord! (PS 150)

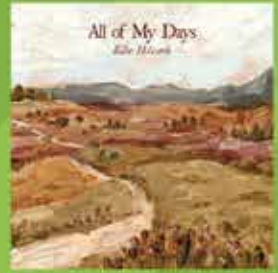
# A WORD FROM John Calvin:



"As for public prayers, there are two kinds: the one consists simply of speech, the other of song.... And indeed, we know from experience that singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men in order that they may call upon God and praise him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. It is to be remembered always that this singing should not be light or frivolous, but that it ought to have weight and majesty, ... Now, what Augustine says is true, namely that no one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from him. Therefore, even after we have carefully searched everywhere, we shall not find better or more appropriate songs to this end than the Psalms of David, inspired by the Holy Spirit. And for this reason, when we sing them, we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth, as if he himself were singing through us to exalt his glory."

- John Calvin, 1543

Scan this QR code for FANTASTIC PSALMS ALBUMS ON SPOTIFY



Do you find some of the tunes tricky?

Check out memory work with JANE OOSTERHOFF



# JASON BOUWMAN

## is finding hope in the desert

### INTERVIEW WITH AN ARTIST

by Harma-Mae Smit

Jason Bouwman is a familiar name to many of us. From his devotionals *Just Thinking* and *Still Thinking* that sit on our shelves, to his coin designs for the Royal Canadian Mint, to this very “Interview with an Artist” column where he’s profiled many other Reformed artists, Jason has had many projects we might have seen. But let’s get to know the man behind the work a bit better, as well as his latest venture, the Arabah project.

Jason Bouwman is an artist whose personal philosophy is to “live artfully.” He’s done that by working in visual communications, through his company Compass Creative, as well as through illustration, graphic design, and landscape painting. And it is the latter being featured in his latest series of desert paintings.

It can be challenging for a creator to decide what their next big focus will be, but Jason knew a project focused on desert landscapes was next after he realized he’d been returning to the southwestern landscape throughout his whole life. From a cross-country road trip with his sister and parents to his honeymoon in California and Arizona, the deserts worked their way into his consciousness and his soul.

“There’s a feeling one gets when staring out at that horizon under an endless sky that I still can’t explain. The desert is a place of jaw-dropping, awe-inspiring, otherworldly beauty. The plants and animals that inhabit this otherwise inhospitable landscape are some of the most inventive and resilient organisms you’ll ever see – as are the people who live there... I have also come to see the desert as a metaphor for certain seasons in my life – those seasons which have been disorienting, confusing, obscure, dry of emotion and seemingly directionless. Those times in life when I’ve been tested, challenged, humbled, brought low, brought to the end of myself so that I might experience more of God and His power and provision.”



“Arabah” is referenced in the Bible. It describes a region of the Negev Desert bordering on present-day Israel, and deserts are a frequent landscape in biblical stories. The Arabah project mirrors the Exodus journey the Israelites took through the desert. The desert can be challenging, but it can also be beautiful, and Jason wants viewers of this project to be able to see both the struggle and the possible blessings found there. After all, as Jason says, not all wandering is a waste of time, and God’s own people were led through the desert, but not without purpose.


This project was also a little different because he has been collaborating with his daughter, Jamie, which Jason finds very rewarding. She brings a very different set of skills as a filmmaker, which gives this project a different dimension. “I’m often more excited about what she’s doing than my own work.”

The goal is to create an art exhibit, a coffee table book, and a short film. Jason and Jamie have already been invited to show a few sneak previews at various events.

A big thing Jason’s been thinking about lately is the role of community, and the role the support of others can have in an artist’s life.

“I’ve been blessed by a community of people and patrons who are willing to take risks along with me in creating something new... They invest time listening to my ideas and concepts, providing feedback about what they think is valuable or not (to themselves and the rest of the community), and commit to purchasing work before they see it completed.”

Both the patron and the artist benefit from this connection, the artist from the support and the patron from being able to participate in the art’s creation. This is something all Christians might be able to relate to, even if we’re not artists – the support and feedback from brothers and sisters around us are so important in doing the work God calls us to do.

Learn more about the Arabah Project and Jason’s other works at: [JasonBouwman.com](http://JasonBouwman.com) and [Instagram.com/jaybouwman](https://www.instagram.com/jaybouwman). 

### **Labyrinth**

**| Oil on gessoed panel 24X24 2024**

As John Wesley Powell said: "You cannot see the Grand Canyon in one view, as if it were a changeless spectacle from which a curtain might be lifted, but to see it, you have to toil from month to month through its labyrinths." Powell's quote rings true for me. I've been to the Grand Canyon multiple times now and the view is always unique. This painting is based on an image I shot back in 2003 on my second visit to the Canyon. I've always loved this view and the lighting that day was spectacular. ▼



### **▲ Prickly**

**| Oil on linen panel 9X12 November 2024**

We can all be a little prickly sometimes. Still beautiful.

### **Antelope Canyon**

**| Oil on birch panel 12X16 May 2024**

Antelope Canyon in Page, AZ, is possibly the most famous and most photographed slot canyon in the west, maybe the world. Surreal and enchanting. The abstract symphony of shapes beckons one deep into the canyon's serpentine walls and across the narrow sandy stage where time-sculpted stone twirls gracefully in delicate light. ▼



### **▲ Evening Drive with Mike**

**| Oil on gessoed panel 10X10 June 2024**

I saw this scene on a road leading west out of Mount Pleasant, Utah early one evening. There was something nostalgic about it. It reminded me of photographs I used to see in *National Geographic*. It reminded me of a road trip our family took out west when I was a boy. It reminded me of Sunday evening drives down country roads with my parents. I shared some of that with workshop instructor Michael Workman and he said, "Paint that!" So I'm calling this "Evening Drive with Mike."



### **▲ Boundaries**

**| Oil on canvas 24X36 2023**

Growing, maturing and healing necessarily involves establishing boundaries. But unlike physical fences, human boundaries need to be communicated and respected to be effective - not least of all by ourselves. "Shaken, pushed around and mishandled but still longing to trust. This is faith too" - Justin McRoberts



### **▲ Airplane Boneyard**

**| Oil on linen panel 12X16 2022**

Many military aircraft, that have completed their service, spend retirement in the hot desert sun south of Tucson, AZ. With this painting I can hear an echo of an old song "Some boast of chariots, some of horses, but we boast in the name of him who rules heaven's forces..."



### **▲ Hello from Hanksville**

**| Oil on birch panel 9X12 May 2024**

About an hour south of Green River, Utah, the State Route swings into the little town of Hanksville where it intersects with route 95 before heading west along the scenic Fremont River toward Capitol Reef. We stopped here early one morning on our way to Muley Point. We pulled over just west of town and I painted this study en plein air.

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Applicants should be members of the Canadian Reformed Churches or of a sister church.

- Applications for teachers should include a resume, statement of faith, philosophy of education and two letters of reference.
- Applicants for Educational Assistants should include a resume, statement of faith, and two letters of reference.

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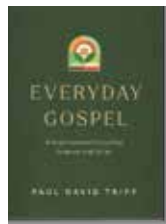
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# Notable Titles for 2025



Everyday Gospel  
Paul David Tripp  
\$27.00

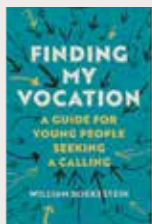


The Power of the Gospel: A Year in Romans  
R.C. Sproul  
\$29.00



Our Great Redeemer: 365 Days with J.C. Ryle  
\$24.00

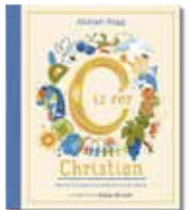
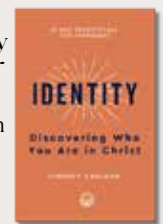
Finding My Vocation  
William Boekestein  
\$21.00



New Morning Mercies for Teens  
Paul David Tripp  
\$18.00



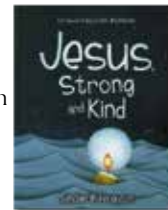
Identity: 31-Day Devotional for Teenagers  
Lindsey Carlson  
\$13.00



C is for Christian  
Alistair Begg  
\$22.00



Darcy is Always First  
Lauren Whitman  
\$14.00



Jesus, Strong and Kind  
Sinclair Ferguson  
\$17.00

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# MORE More Than the Magazine

If you're only reading our print issue, you're missing out.  
Scan the QR codes to take you right to the best of the rest of what we've got online!

## Best of *Saturday Selections*

Every Saturday, we link to a half dozen great pieces from other publications. If they're secular articles, then editor Jon Dykstra will insert a dose of Reformed perspective by way of short introduction. Get these delivered to your email inbox by signing up for our email newsletter at [ReformedPerspective.ca/RoundUp](https://ReformedPerspective.ca/RoundUp). And use your phone to scan the QR codes below to visit some of the highlights from the last couple of months.

### SATURDAY



#### Why do even kids' movies take God's Name in vain?

Otherwise-family-friendly fare will routinely throw out an abuse of God's Name. Nobody blurts out Mohammad or Allah. No one drops an f-bomb. So why God's Name, so often?

#### The two-book fallacy... again

God revealed Himself to us in the Bible, and in a second volume too, which we could call the "book" of creation (Rom. 1:19-20). Some Christians argue this second book is as clear and authoritative as Scripture so they interpret the Bible in light of what evolutionary scientists say they've discovered in creation. Dr. Lisle rebuts this belief and a particular gentleman who holds to it. He writes:

"If Shane disagrees with my conclusion that words are far superior in communicating truth than rocks and fossils are, then I would ask him to reply using only rocks and fossils – no words please."



#### Don't make that first sports bet!

If there was truth in advertising, sports gambling ads would have to promise their customers the chance to get money *at the expense of others*. Or, more likely, the chance to lose your bet, and possibly much more if you get addicted.

#### 3 great illustrations of government's limits

Today's governments presume their citizens largely incompetent, needing the state to manage the economy, the job market, healthcare, education, trash collection, and so much more. But is the government as omniscient as they would need to be, to be able to run... everything? No, as this video ably, and humorously, demonstrates.



#### Repeating pro-aborts' arguments back to them

We don't all have to be brilliant debaters to stand up for the unborn. Because the pro-choice side is wicked, sometimes all you have to do is get them to state their position plainly. And they may well be shocked at the horror of what they hear themselves say.

– JON DYKSTRA





# Best of *Real Talk*

Lucas Holtvluwer and Tyler Vanderwoude have been hosting their podcast for three years now. Find all the episodes at [RealTalkPodcast.ca](https://RealTalkPodcast.ca) or scan the QR code to watch them on YouTube. Recent highlights include:



### #108 – What is my calling?

Lucas is with Rev. William Boekestein talking about the pastor’s new book *Finding Your Vocation: A Guide for Young People Seeking a Calling*. A good conversation for both teens and their parents!

### #107 – Critical Theory & the Christian

Tyler and guest Dr. Neil Shenvi tackle “trigger words” and terms like social binary intersectionality, critical race theory, and social justice. If you want to better understand what it all means, don’t miss this episode.



### #105 – Death and dying



Dr. Ewan Goligher is a Christian clinician in the ICU who faces the reality of death daily. In this episode, he talks with Tyler about a catechism on death and dying he recently wrote together with his pastor Kyle Hackman.



# Daily Devotionals

[ReformedPerspective.ca](https://ReformedPerspective.ca) hosts two daily devotionals, one audio, and the other text.

**Manna** is audio, 7-15 minutes each, and the fruit of a Christian radio program called “Voice of the Church” that ran for four decades up until 2022. Now old episodes have been transformed into this daily podcast available at [MannaPodcast.ca](https://MannaPodcast.ca).

**Nearer to God** is text, with a different Reformed pastor providing a month of devotionals built on a Bible book, or topic, like the Holy Spirit.

Access either on the front page of [ReformedPerspective.ca](https://ReformedPerspective.ca) or through the RP App, downloadable at [ReformedPerspective.ca/App](https://ReformedPerspective.ca/App).





# Connected + Committed

**Our vision:** we aspire to be a strongly connected community of learners, deeply committed to our faith and to continual growth, nurturing individuals to be their best in the service of God and to His glory.

## Primary + Secondary Teachers for 2025 and beyond

Due to growing student numbers and the pursuit of ideal staffing levels, we'd love to discuss our current and future needs with suitably qualified and adventurous teachers or education students.

Our teachers must:

- be a member of the Free Reformed Church of Australia or any of her sister churches.
- overflow with joy at being a child of God and working with covenant children.
- be enthusiastic to share the gospel in word and deed.
- want to work in a collaborative environment that values unique skills and ideas.
- be able to use high impact strategies and cutting-edge resources and technology to enhance teaching and learning.
- be able to be registered to teach in Tasmania and work with vulnerable people.

Competitive salary and benefits recognising your qualifications and dedication are based on the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2020.

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- Find application forms at [www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment](http://www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment)
- Send completed applications to Mrs K Wielstra - Assoc Sec [wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au](mailto:wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au)

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# 25 YEARS

## of speaking loudly for God

by Mark Penninga

**W**e have to be willing to speak out loudly for God and make a spectacle of ourselves in front of our friends even if it means losing those friends. Now that is hard. But if Jesus is God, it's the only sane thing to do.

With these words, a strapping 26-year-old Jon Dykstra concluded his first “real” editorial as editor of this magazine in 1999.

25 years have passed, and Jon is not only still serving faithfully as editor, his conviction about “speaking out loudly for God” hasn’t wavered, even as it has become more refined. From his heart and through his keyboard, thousands of families have been encouraged to not only call

themselves Reformed, but to think as God would have us think and live our lives fully and completely in His service.

Without fail, Jon ensures that the content that *Reformed Perspective* publishes won’t just add noise but will instead advance the issue, while equipping the reader to accomplish our “chief end”: glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. His own writing regularly lands both a smile and a punch.

At *Reformed Perspective*’s annual in-person board meeting in December, we had an opportunity to recognize Jon’s 25 years of service with a small presentation and a gift for him and his family from the board of directors.

Jon reflected that when he started, he was working full-time hours for part-time pay. “I would have been eating lots of ramen noodles except I was able to stay with my parents. It was very much a labor of love, and my parents appreciated that too.”

Back then, Jon relied on fax to proofread the final version before it went to print “so I’m really appreciative of PDFs nowadays.”

He also had to do most of his work alone, and he credits his parents with being there to talk through the ideas and challenges. “For many years, my dad was effectively the assistant editor of the magazine.”

Jon’s parents continue to cheer him on, though in recent years he is now surrounded by a team of professionals, including an assistant editor and copy editor. Even better, God also blessed Jon with a loving wife,



Janice, and three bright, smiling daughters. The experience as a husband and dad equipped Jon in a whole new way to serve this “magazine for the Christian family.”

Psalm 1 speaks about the righteous one who doesn’t walk, stand, or sit with the wicked “but whose delight is in the law of the LORD.” Jon not only confesses God’s law, he delights in it.

And as the Psalm goes on to explain, the person who does this is like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding its fruit in season and having leaves that don’t wither. I don’t know how many more years the LORD will allow Jon to bear fruit in this capacity. But Jon has repeatedly shared with me that his desire is that he doesn’t retire. Instead, he wants to “peter out,” with whatever strength God gives him.

Jon, on behalf of *Reformed Perspective*’s board, staff, and countless readers, we heartily thank you for your unwavering labor of love as editor of this magazine.

RP

If you are among those who have been blessed by Jon’s service, would you consider sending him a little note of your own to say thanks?

You can email him at [editor@reformedperspective.ca](mailto:editor@reformedperspective.ca)





# The **CAN YOU BUILD IT?** Contest

Our Creator made us in His image.  
We too can create and be creative.  
Building with toys like Lego is a wonderful means of fostering creativity.  
So *RP* is challenging our readers to a brick building contest!



## THEME: CREATIVITY

Create something entirely new. It can be functional, fun, or out-of-this-world. Perhaps a machine that you wish existed, or a vehicle from your imagination or....?

## CATEGORIES:

1. Age 0-9
2. Ages 10-13
3. Ages 14-17
4. Ages 18+

**PRIZES:**  
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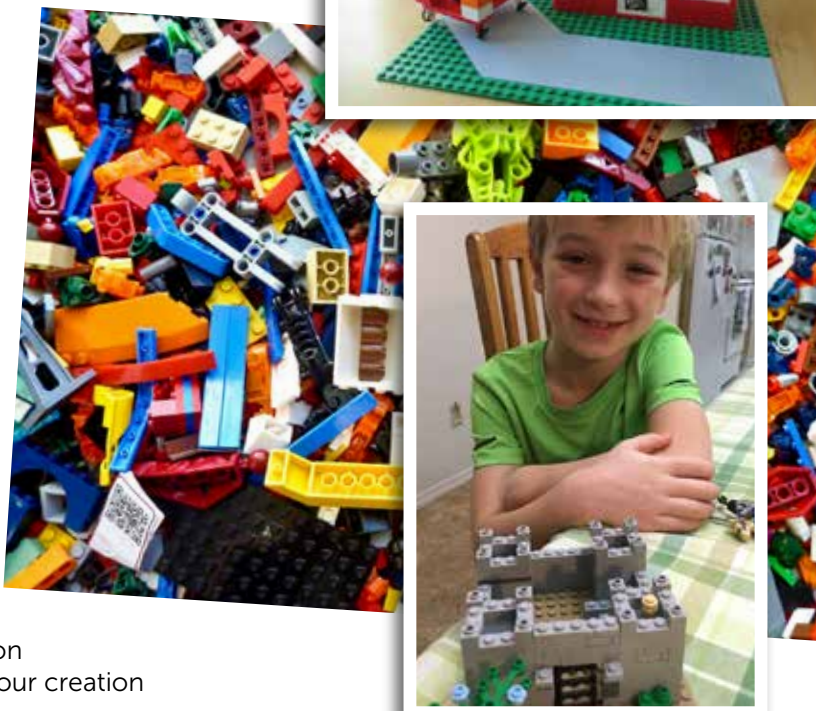
- One entry per person;
- Entries must be 100% original: not from kits or copying examples from books or online
- Entries must be designed and built entirely by the person entering the contest

## HOW TO ENTER:

1. Have someone take a picture of you with your creation
2. Have someone also take a video where you explain your creation
  - a. Say your first name only
  - b. Show us what you built
  - c. No need for editing the video or making it look professional. Just hit record on a phone or tablet.
  - d. Maximum 2-minute video
3. Send your picture and video in to [admin@reformedperspective.ca](mailto:admin@reformedperspective.ca) (or share it via Google Drive or another means of transferring files).
4. Under 18? Have a parent give permission to *RP* to share your video/photo (we will only post first names of youth online).

**Deadline: EXTENDED TO FEBRUARY 7, 2025**

*RP* plans to share some of the entries in our March/April issue, along with links to the videos.



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