Reformed
HELPING YOU THINK, SPEAK, AND ACT *IN* CHRIST
PERSPECTIVE
SINCE 1982
NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2026 Volume 45 Issue No. 6



DID WE LAND ON THE MOON?

9 tips for talking conspiracies like a Christian

Cover-ing conspiracies

We had some fun with our conspiracy theme and our cover this issue, photoshopping a Canadian flag into an iconic shot. The original photo (with a US flag) proves – or so the classic conspiracy theory goes – that the moon landing was faked. How so? The flag is waving in an airless environment! How can there be wind when there isn't even air?

The real explanation? The flag, crinkled from being packed away, is held upright with a crossbar. Does one conspiracy theory debunked mean that all the conspiracy theories are hooey? The answer is more complicated, and more fun, than that, so check out Jonathon Van Maren's and Jonathan Dykstra's conspiracy articles this issue.

A CALL TO SENIORS (ACTUALLY ANYONE OVER 16)

RP has a new challenge, specifically for those blessed with years. Would you be willing to write a letter to your 16-year-old self? What advice, warnings, or encouragements would you share? And would you be willing to share this with us, so that we can share it with our readers? Learn more on pg. 50.

FOR ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS OF ALL AGES

You may have seen *RP*'s merch on a T-shirt near you, or our store website. If you have thought "I would enjoy designing a shirt," here is your opportunity! Check out our contest on page 41. But be sure to get in your design soon, as the contest closes on December 1st!

RP NOW HAS AN ART DIRECTOR!

Pictures and design can speak volumes, and make an article come alive. But in a world of stock photos and AI images, they are increasingly cheap and even deceptive. As such, we are grateful to share that Stephanie Vanderpol, the writer and illustrator behind our Come & Explore section for kids, was willing to say "yes" when we asked her to take on a larger role as Art Director. You will find some of her creations throughout these pages. In an age where AI pumps out designs with a click, we are trying to be all the more intentional about our core values: biblical, real, inspiring, and celebratory.

100 PAGES TO CAP THE YEAR!

This is our final issue for 2026, so we want to say a very big thanks to so many of you who make this work possible. You kindly put the magazine in church mailboxes, or buy ads, write articles, take part in contests, or give a donation to make all of this possible. We are amazed at the LORD's provision through you. Thank you!

Soli Deo Gloria!

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We seek to be:

- ***Biblical**: faithful to God's Word and the Reformed confessions;*
- ***Real**: applying God's Word to the nitty gritty of life;*
- ***Inspiring**: a catalyst for action by connecting to hearts;*
- ***Celebratory**: Christ is LORD and has already won!*

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READERS' RESPONSE

We appreciate readers' responses to our articles, and ask that letters be 400 words or less

DEAR EDITOR:

I'd very much appreciate if you could answer my question. I was reading your article "Ontario's 'Conservative' government opposes bill that would have banned gambling ads" (Sept/Oct 2026) out loud to my son, age 14, and we were both confused by this fact:

> "That amounts to an average of $5000 being bet, and $180 being lost, by every man, woman and child in the province."

The only thing we can make of this is that it also means on average every person is *winning $4820*? My son said, in jest, "we should start gambling!" I figure that wasn't the effect you meant to have, and also it doesn't seem to follow the logic of how gambling works – that the house always wins. I would very much appreciate if you could clarify for us. Thank you!

STEPHANIE ZWART
DELHI, ONTARIO





EDITOR'S RESPONSE:

That's not the impression I wanted to leave, so I'm thankful for the chance to have another go. Imagine that a guy – let's call him Tim – wagered $10 and lost it, and did that a few more times and just kept losing. He'd quickly learn that gambling was a waste of his money.

But if he quits gambling, he'll stop being a revenue stream for the casinos and sports betting sites and the governments behind them. So the gambling industry uses psychology to keep Tim playing – they know that to keep Tim betting, they need to let him win sometimes. Regularly even.

To simplify it, if Tim was betting $10 each time for a chance at doubling his money, then the gambling industry will aim to let Tim win somewhere between 40% and just shy of 49% of the time. They can't let him win more than 50% of the time, or they'd start losing money. But if they have him win even 48% of the time, he'll experience a lot of winning, and keep on betting, and then the gambling site will be able to slowly drain him. Imagine he made 100 x $10 bets, and won 48% of them. He'd have gambled $1,000 in total, and doubled his $10 bet 48 out of those 100 times, for $960 total. He's "won" $960, but that actually represents a $40 loss from where he started.

That's what I meant with $5,000 being bet, and $180 being lost. That represents a lot of betting, and even a lot of winning too, but gambling inevitably results in a net loss to the gambler. The house does always win, but it knows better than to have people lose big right away or they'd learn their lesson and stay away. And the gambling industry – and the governments behind it – don't want that. Gambling is always wrong, but it's all the more evil when the very authorities put in place by God to protect us are the ones preying on us. – *JD*

DEAR EDITOR:

I appreciate that the article "Should Alberta Separate?" (Sept/Oct issue) tries to be balanced and present both sides, but there is more to be said.

The Alberta independence movement first became prominent in 1980, shortly after the infamous National Energy Program (NEP) was implemented. In that case, as a direct result of deliberate federal Liberal policy, large numbers of businesses were forced under, many people lost their homes, and thousands of people lost their jobs. Alberta's economy was devasted – not as a result of a foreign power, not as a result of a natural disaster, but due to deliberate and malicious government policy. You can still find people today who can tell you of their own family's losses from the NEP.

The current Liberal government's policies have also harmed Alberta significantly, although not to the same extent as Pierre Trudeau's government. But the damage is very considerable nonetheless. According to a January 2025 headline on EnergyNow.ca, "An Estimated $670 Billion of Investment Lost in Ditched Resource Projects Since Trudeau Became Prime Minister." Not all of that money would have been invested in Alberta, but much would have been. By prohibiting energy development, the Liberal government is trying to incrementally phase out Alberta's major industry, without the consent of Albertans.

Jeremiah 29:7 says, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Of course, we are not in captivity in Babylon, but I think the principle is still valid. We should seek the welfare of our communities. Since for many years the greatest opponent of Alberta's welfare has been Canada's federal government, many of us believe our community would be better served as an independent country.

Over the last few federal elections, Albertans have sought relief from this peril by voting against the Liberal government. But support for the Liberals is rock-solid in other parts of the country, so Albertans have no hope through this avenue. Thankfully, Canada has a constitutional and legal process for provinces to become independent. This is a peaceful and democratic option that is valid for Christians to support.

Seeking the welfare of our community is not greedy, or selfish, or threatening grievous harm, or the result of bad motives, or inconsiderate of orphans and widows. It's fulfilling a biblical mandate to benefit our fellow citizens. That's what this debate is about.

MICHAEL WAGNER
EDMONTON, AB



DEAR EDITOR:

I'm responding to Harma Mae Smit's "Should Alberta Separate?" (Sept/Oct). I appreciate this topic being addressed in the magazine because it seems to be one churches in general are ignoring. Too political, we've been told.

In her article, Smit focuses mainly on the economic side of independence. Or about being "treated unfairly." Smit spends a lot of time in her article dealing with her husband's comments that the independence movement is about money. But that is a very shallow understanding of the grievances many Christians have.

Granted, Alberta has been stifled economically and has not been treated fairly within Confederation and this has caused a lot of resentment and discontent among Albertans. However, if we are to address this issue as Christians, our focus cannot simply be on fair economics.

As Smit also points out, we are groaning – Christians are groaning under ungodly laws and rules and rulers. Smit then states that it would take great effort to build a new nation. Yes, it would take effort, but God does not call us to an easy and quiet life, but to a faithful life which includes pushing back and speaking out against the evils of this world, doing what we can to honor God, including maybe even a move to an independent Alberta.

Canada as a nation has forgotten and abandoned the Christian ideals it was founded on. Canada is euthanizing its vulnerable citizens. Canada is aborting children freely. Canada is pushing a sexual agenda that is not in line with God's Word. Canada is censoring speech. Canada is propping up lies daily and making annual remembrances of them. Canada loves bureaucracy and steals from its citizens. Canada is becoming Marxist. Is that worth defending and keeping for the sake of the unity of a country that once was?

We personally have about given up on Canada. We no longer want to support what it has become. And we say this knowing our home and country here are not eternal and they should not be treated as such objects of our loyalty that our loyalty becomes blind.

DEANNA DOORNBOS
BARRHEAD, ALBERTA

DEAR EDITOR:

I want to share a tiny blip in time and a single photo that happened because of God working through your publication!

Before going on an end of summer camping trip several hours away from our home town with my family and several of my cousins and their families, we made plans to visit a little Reformed Church not far from where we were camping. We stopped at Costco Saturday night and bought buns and potato salad to share for the in-between service potluck advertised online, as we were concerned about potentially doubling the attendance with our three families. During the coffee and lunch time, my husband, my cousins, and their spouses did an excellent job of mingling, while I lingered on the fringes at the far end of my comfort zone, along with most of our collective kids. Finally, it was time to return to the sanctuary for the second service, and I admit I was quite excited to escape my own social awkwardness.



Mary Koppert with Miriam Bruning, Chilliwack, BC

This is when the blip occurred. At the entrance to the sanctuary was a lovely young lady who had been conversing with my cousins over coffee and potato salad. I do not entirely recall our conversation because I was so blown away by it, but she asked me if I had been a part of the RP "Your Turn contest." I told her that I had, and she exclaimed that she thought she recognized me!

Somehow, off the page of a very incredible publication with an abundance of amazing articles, and from a tiny photo, your Adult Your Turn Audio winner "Little Man" recognized and met your Fan Favorite Your Turn winner "All That I Need"!

It was such an honor to meet Miriam Bruning. She seems to be a truly wonderful young woman and is a gifted church pianist. I am just amazed by this small moment, a blip in time where God orchestrated two completely unconnected lives crossing paths in order to experience a moment as strangers mutually glorifying God and sharing a little bit of His work in each of their lives.

Please keep doing what you are doing, God is working in it!

MARY KOPPERT
CHILLIWACK, BC





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9 TIPS FOR TALKING CONSPIRACIES LIKE A CHRISTIAN

by Jon Dykstra

"Crazy Conspiracy Theory to Be Confirmed as Fact Six Weeks from Now"

– Babylon Bee Jan 10, 2022 headline

The Latin roots to the word *conspire* are "spirare" and "com" which mean "to breathe together." Conspiracies happen any time two or more people secretly plot together to commit something wicked.

And conspiracies do indeed happen. You only have to go to the Bible to find David complaining to God of those scheming and plotting against him, and then find David conspiring himself, with Joab, to kill Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband (2 Samuel 11).

Conspiracy theories exist when trust doesn't. These compete with the official account, seeking to explain not only why it is wrong, but why it is a deliberate lie being pulled on the public. Interestingly, there is a conspiracy theory about the term "conspiracy theory" – that it was invented by the CIA as a way to discredit truth-seekers who weren't buying its lies. But the term has roots that originated long before the CIA began.

So the popularity of conspiracy theories coincides with any drop in the public's trust. The most recent drop can be attributed to COVID, which got a whole bunch of people skeptical. Required to stay indoors for two weeks going on two years. Didn't need to wear masks but then we did. Had to stay 6 feet apart but that was a number pulled out of the air. Couldn't go to church, but might be able to go to a bowling alley. Oh, and it was just a conspiracy theory to think that it might have escaped from a lab … until the CIA listed that as a possibility.

I have a good friend who has now grown so incredulous that he's open to the idea that we might be living on a flat earth. He doesn't insist we are. He just doesn't know that we're not. And the reason he's not sure one way or the other is because he's lost all trust in the authorities.

If that level of distrust strikes you as silly, have you considered the level of craziness your government expects you to swallow? That a guy thinking he is a girl makes him so? That an unborn baby isn't a precious human being through any of those nine months? That it could be compassionate to kill a sick, elderly, or even suicidal person? Those lies have led to one in every twenty deaths of those already born being via euthanasia. And if you haven't been born it's worse still: for every four live births, one child is murdered before they ever got a chance to breathe.

Those are the authorities, put in place by God to restrain evil and promote good, who are instead calling evil good and expecting us to believe that it is so. There's a very good reason our trust is minimal.

But to flat earth levels? That is a problem.

So, how then can Christians avoid naive gullibility but also runaway skepticism? How should we deal with it when a friend shares an account of what might be, but also might not be? Is there a way to sift conspiracy fact from conspiracy theory? And what are the dangers that conspiracy theories pose for Christians?

Here's 9 tips to help Christians deal with conspiracy theories.

1. BE BIBLICAL

If we want to be wise, then there's no better direction to head than to go to God. As Solomon shares in Proverbs 4:7a, "The beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom." Does that sound circular? It means, if you want it, go after it. Don't waste your time watching yet another YouTube short filled with could-be's, and maybe's, and might-have-beens, and instead learn how to be wise by diving into Proverbs and the whole of God's Word.

2. DON'T BE NAÏVE

Some Christians act as if all conspiracy theories are ridiculous. But God doesn't want us dismissing them out of hand, so He's shared accounts of real conspiracies throughout Scripture.

In the New Testament, in Acts 23:21-35, we read of the Jews who conspired to kill Paul, making an oath not to eat or drink until they did it (and bad news for them, Paul got away). Back in the Old Testament we find Joseph's brothers conspiring together to sell him off to slavers (Gen. 37:18-28). And as mentioned, David had to deal with conspirators (2 Sam. 15, Ps. 31:13) and also perpetuated a conspiracy of his own (2 Sam. 11:14-17).

Most notably the Bible tells us about a grand world-wide conspiracy with a very real shadowy figure behind it all – Christians mustn't forget that the Devil is real, that he hates God's people, and that he is out to rob God of the glory that is His due.

Knowing conspiracies do happen, it means we should demand transparency wherever possible – evil hates the light (John 3:20). So, for example, Canada's federal electoral system has historically had scrutineers from each major federal party double-checking every ballot counted. That's allowed us to know for certain that an election was legitimate. No trust needed. Compare that with conspiracy allegations common in US elections in part because their votes are tabulated by electronic counting machines and the electorate is asked to just believe that the result are as the government says they are.



Apollo 11 photo provided by Earth Science and Remote Sensing Unit, NASA Johnson Space Center.

No, they haven't lied to us about the moon landing.

3. BE HUMBLE

One of the signatures of any good conspiracy theory is that it will fit with the facts as they are known.

But what about those other facts, the missing ones you might not know you are missing? And then there are those other missing facts, the ones you don't even know you don't know. As Donald Rumsfeld once put it:

> "…there are known knowns: there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns: that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know."

My wife works at our school in Educational Support doing one-on-one time with students across the grades. During one period just before lunch, she was heading to a classroom to help a boy, only to discover that the teacher had arranged for a visit by a snake expert. So when my wife looked through the doorway, she saw all the fascinated kids looking at an enormous snake. She caught the eye of the teacher, who nodded – the boy my wife was going to help was having a great time holding the snake, and it would have been a shame to pull him out right then. So, instead, my wife headed home. She only worked part-time, and this was the last student she was going to help that day, so she got into her car and drove away.

But that's not what her student thought. What he saw was my wife peeking in, seeing an enormous snake, then leaving quickly, never to be seen again that entire day. He came to the very logical conclusion that my wife must be terrified of snakes! It seemed true – it fit with all the facts he had on hand. But it wasn't true. It turned out there were other facts, facts that he didn't know about. And that he didn't even know he didn't know.

So yes, a conspiracy theory might seem to sync up well with what you know, but there might be a lot you don't know. A Christian needs to humbly remember that only God knows the whole picture.

4. DON'T BE A SLANDERER

Conspiracies happen – the Bible tells us so. But that's not all God has to say on the matter. He also doesn't want us spreading "false reports" (Ex. 23:1). And He warns Isaiah not to be like erring Israel (Is. 8:12):

> "Do not call conspiracy
> everything this people calls a conspiracy:
> do not fear what they fear,
> and do not dread it.
> The LORD Almighty is the one you should regard as holy,
> He is the one you are to fear,
> He is the one you are to dread."

Conspiracies do happen, but people talking nonsense happens even more. God hates gossip (Prov. 17:4, 1 Tim. 5:13) and lies, so we need to steer clear.

5. BE BIBLICAL (INSTEAD OF BOUNCING)

As noted, there's a good reason for a healthy dose of skepticism when considering the authorities' official account. But skepticism unrestrained will leave a person with their feet planted firmly in mid-air. When you can't trust anyone, what can you really know? And when the skeptic eventually lands – he'll have to, because you can't live out your day-to-day doubting everything – his position will be determined, not by discernment, but more likely by what he bounced off last. He concludes the moon landing was fake because he can't be sure to trust those who said it was real. Or he thinks Candace Owens is right about Charlie Kirk's assassination being an inside job because he doesn't trust the authorities who were slow with releasing the details. Or he knows that the World Trade Center's Building 7 was taken down by secretly-placed demolitions because what other explanation could there be?

The problem is, those conclusions are based on questions, not evidence. Even deceptive authorities can't be counted on to lie with consistency, so you can't get to the truth by simply presuming the opposite of whatever they've said. You can't get to the truth by bouncing off lies because while there's only one truth, there's an absolutely unlimited number of falsehoods, errors, and mistakes. It's easy to bounce off one lie right into the next.

So, to seek truth, you need to start by firmly grounding your feet on the only firm foundation there is: God's Word.

Practically speaking, that'd mean Christians shouldn't believe that the earth is flat, because we have the word of many more than two credible witnesses (a principle found in Deut. 17:6, 19:15, Matthew 18:16) – God-loving, Christian brothers who have gone up into space and come back down to testify to the roundness they've seen.

6. DON'T TARNISH YOUR WITNESS

We worship a God who became human and then as a man died and rose again. That's quite the amazing story. And if we're going to speak as credible witnesses to that incredible tale, we shouldn't get caught talking nonsense about all sorts of conspiracies that may or may not be. The Devil would love us to come off all crazy to our next-door neighbor. He'd love it if we got all caught up in the mysterious circumstances of Jeffrey Epstein's death and came up with our own theories and explanations. He wants us wasting our time and undermining our own credibility.

7. BE PRECISE

Misguided conspiracy theories are all about generalizing, lacking the specificity that could let them be pinned down and either verified or rebutted. So, if you don't want to sound like just a conspiracist then you need to talk with precision. Don't talk about "the Jews" – talk about the Israeli-American lobby's influence in Washington. Or was it the Israeli government you meant? Then say so.

8. DON'T HAVE A (PUBLIC) OPINION ABOUT EVERYTHING

We can all have our own thoughts, but that doesn't mean we need to share them all. There is no shortage of verses in Proverbs that speak to how the wise restrain their lips (Prov. 10:19) but that fools just love letting everyone know what they've got to say (Prov. 18:2).

9. BE BIBLICAL (AND UNDERSTAND THE REAL BATTLE)

It does sometimes seem like there are forces who are working together to undermine whatever is true and good and lovely. Just think of Bill C-4, that threatens pastors with up to 5 years of jail time for counseling someone out of homosexuality, but doesn't have penalties of any kind for counseling someone out of heterosexuality. Why do ideologies and organizations that seem to have little in common – global warming catastrophists, sexual hedonists, the public school system, overpopulation proponents, evolutionists, Big Tech and Big Government – all seem united against us?

The truth is, they are united in their rebellion against God. As the psalmist says:

> Why are the nations restless
> And the peoples plotting in vain?
> The kings of the earth take their stand
> And the rulers conspire together
> Against the Lord and against His
> Anointed, saying,
> "Let's tear their shackles apart
> And throw their ropes away from us!"
> Ps. 2:1-3

This is the most vital point for Christians to understand. We are involved in a *spiritual* battle, and we cannot play our part in it – the part God has called on us to play – by obsessing about the lies all around. There is no end to the lies, and you could waste lifetimes trying to expose them all.

But there is one truth. Only one Truth. And our part, as God's privileged people, is to proclaim that one and only Truth to a world that so desperately needs to hear all about Him. RP



Yes, they have lied to us
in denying this is a precious human baby.

NEWS IN Perspective

MPS HEAR STORIES OF COVID-19 VACCINE INJURIES

BY MARK PENNINGA



Few issues have divided Christians as decisively in recent years as the Covid-19 vaccines. Were the vaccines ethically made? Were they effective? Should they have been mandated? And did they, or will they, have side-effects that are being covered up? The controversies surrounding the vaccines, and the way it was handled by governments, divided churches and families, leaving a trail of hurt that is still felt today. That may explain in part why there have been very few public investigations and reviews by government agencies or professional bodies in the years following.

In an effort to change this, the Allison Inquiry was formed and held hearings from September 8-11 in a Parliamentary committee room in Ottawa. The Allison Inquiry isn't an official parliamentary committee. It was privately organized, but chaired by MP Dean Allison, who represents the federal riding of Niagara West, home to many Reformed Christians. He wanted to give an opportunity for Canadians to have a "neutral forum" to share their stories of injury or death resulting from Covid-19 vaccines.

Over 28 million Canadians received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, though that number doesn't include data from Alberta. Over 1,400 people applied to come to the inquiry. Of these, the *Toronto Sun* reported that 50 witnesses shared their testimonies.

MP Arnold Viersen, who was present at the inquiry, also shared a public tribute to a friend of his, Scott Gorry. Scott worked on Parliament Hill, took the Covid vaccine, and then suffered a heart attack, resulting in permanent damage to his heart. His injury was recognized by the Vaccine Impact Assistance Program from the federal government. But as Viersen noted in his tribute, Scott died this summer and "no amount of money could compensate...the tragic loss to his family."

Most of the mainstream media ignored the Inquiry, even though it was held in the same building where the press gallery has offices, and within a couple hundred meters of the *CBC* offices. When this was pointed out by Joe Warmington from the *Toronto Sun*, journalist Andrew Coyne said there were two possibilities: "Possibility 1. This is a serious and significant inquiry and every single reporter in Ottawa is conspiring to cover it up. Possibility 2. This is obvious horse---t." In many ways, the coverage of the inquiry reflects the coverage of Covid-19 more generally: fear, name-calling, mud-slinging, and ignoring.

Although Christians too would love to move on from this dark chapter, it is important that we seek and love the truth. This includes listening to witnesses, when possible. But it also includes being careful to avoid slander and being a false witness, or spreading information without verifying it, simply because it aligns with our opinions.

"USELESS" ORGAN TURNS OUT TO BE USEFUL

BY JON DYKSTRA

A female organ you've never heard of went viral this past September. Why? Because the story of how it got forgotten for a century is being circulated on Instagram and other social media as evidence of sexism.

The *rete ovarii* is a small network of tubules and cords attached to women's ovaries, and it was first discovered back in 1870. It initially made it into the anatomy textbooks, but, as Dr. Dilara Anbarci explains in her 2024 Duke University paper "Rediscovering the Rete Ovarii,"

> "it has disappeared from recent textbooks, and often is dismissed as a 'functionless vestige' of the adult ovary."

Sure enough, a 1901 copy of *Gray's Anatomy* has it, but when I paged through the 2014 edition I couldn't find it. Its erasure from the textbook is seen by some as evidence of sexism because a corresponding structure in men, the *rete testi*, didn't get the same erasure and, consequently, has been studied. Meanwhile the *rete ovarii* has only just been discovered to have some sort of function. While more study is needed, it turns out to be a fluid-excreting organ.

Sexism may have been involved in this organ's erasure, but there was certainly another factor. This is another example of how evolutionary assumptions impede scientific investigation. Christian scientists are going to presume function and genius because we know we're looking into the blueprints of the Greatest Engineer. But evolutionists are investigating what time and chance has happened to come up with, and for them dead ends, or "functionless vestiges" of our earlier evolutionary stages, are expected. So that's what they found... and it stopped anyone from really looking into the *rete ovarii* for a century.

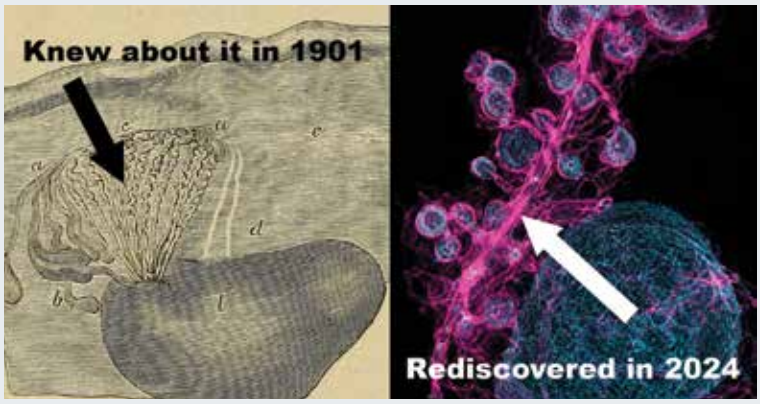


Illustration is from the 1901 edition of "Gray's Anatomy" combined with a ChatGPT sketch up of how the rete ovarii was imaged in 2024.

NEW EDICT HAS MANY WONDERING WHY HAVE MILITARY CHAPLAINS AT ALL IF THEY CAN'T MENTION GOD?

BY MARK PENNINGA AND JON DYKSTRA

On July 29, Canada's Department of National Defense issued a directive for all Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and particularly Canada's military chaplains that whenever they make a public address they:

> "shall uphold the principle of state religious and spiritual neutrality by not using words, actions, or symbols that are specific to a particular SFT [Spiritual or Faith Tradition] on the part of the Government of Canada."

The policy states that "spiritual reflections do not use religious specific language, including references to God." In other words, Christian chaplains have to speak in a manner that could have their audience confusing them for any other religion. *Is he Christian, or Hindu, a humanist, or is he just some self-help guru? Who can tell?*



Explaining their rationale, the policy states that "CAF has a duty of religious neutrality. It cannot favour certain beliefs to the exclusion of others." The policy clarifies that it is meant to apply when members of the CAF are called to deliver a reflection at ceremonies and gatherings such as Remembrance Day. It doesn't apply to voluntary gatherings or funerals. It also clarifies that "indigenous practices" are still allowed, as part of an "ongoing commitment to reconciliation."

There are numerous ironies and contradictions in this decision.

Ordering a Christian chaplain to not mention God because others worship other gods is like ordering a lawyer to not refer to the law because some in the listening audience hold to a different law code. Would that be "neutral" or nonsense? We can't hold to more than one law code, and if we try to, that only leaves us with lawlessness – there is no middle option. That's what we have here too: requiring a Christless Christianity isn't neutral – it's a lukewarm travesty God will spit out (Rev. 3:16). This is what happens when a Christian nation stops being one – a form of worship might linger, but not of a sort that will please God. When godless leaders tell us how to worship, we shouldn't be surprised when they require godless worship.



PIERRE POILIEVRE MAKES THE ANTI-TARIFF CASE TO AMERICANS

BY JON DYKSTRA

Pierre Poilievre marked the 25th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks by heading south and visiting the 9/11 Memorial Museum. While he was in New York, he also made in-studio appearances with *FOX Business's* Larry Kudlow and on *CNBC's* Squawk Box program to make the case against President Trump's tariffs. This was a "Team Canada" tour, done with the knowledge and approval of the Prime Minister's Office, so Poilievre left the partisan politics at home – when prompted to go after Mark Carney, his response was simply, "Look, I'm not going to attack my prime minister on foreign soil."

Instead, he focused his argument on why it is in the *United States' best interest* to eliminate their tariffs.

> "We can save money and jobs for both our people if we can get back to two-way tariff-free free trade that will bring down the cost of living for Americans. It will grow paychecks on both sides of the border."

US tariffs don't just hurt Canada; they also hurt US consumers because Americans will have to pay higher prices on whatever Canadian goods they were using. Donald Trump ignores that impact, pointing to his home-grown producers who will benefit if they don't have to compete with Canadian producers.

The problem with his approach becomes obvious when we expand on that logic. If US producers benefit from Trump's tariffs on Canadian goods, then why doesn't each state government follow through too, and implement tariffs on all out-of-state goods? Trump's logic would say that should benefit their own in-state producers.

- So why doesn't Colorado put a tariff on California's avocados to help their local avocado producers?
- And why doesn't South Dakota put a tariff on Alaskan-caught salmon?

The problems with tariffs are obvious here. We know that the inland state of South Dakota can't catch wild salmon. The same is true in Colorado – it just isn't a place to grow avocados. So tariffs here would just hike up costs for consumers without benefiting local producers because there aren't any. But the point is, while tariffs *sometimes* help local producers, they *always* hurt local consumers – they always raise their costs.

The reality is, just as people have our own individual talents, countries also have their special abilities and advantages. Different countries can make some products better, faster, or cheaper than other countries. As Poilievre shared with Larry Kudlow:

> "Canada is the world's fourth largest producer of aluminum. Think of the best-selling truck for the last 49 years – the F-series.... And what goes around that? Canadian aluminum. ...You get your aluminum from us. If you tariff Canadian aluminum you pay more for your F-150. I want the Ohio electrician or the Texas plumber to pay less for his F-150, and make more money for our aluminum workers back home. We can make your homes more affordable with our softwood lumber tariff-free. We've got the fourth largest supply of oil anywhere on earth.... We sell it to you at a discount; let's get another pipe down to Texas, create more jobs for your refinery workers, lower gas prices for Americans. It's all possible with tariff-free trade."

That's the pitch Poilievre made to America: *drop your tariffs* to help yourselves.

And if we expand that logic, it's also the reason Canada shouldn't implement counter-tariffs no matter what Donald Trump might do. If the US president wants to hurt his own consumers, that's not a good reason for our federal government to inflict the same pain on Canadian consumers. It makes economic sense here to do unto the Americans as we would like the Americans to do unto us (Matt. 7:12). Our government can't control what the maverick American president might do from one day to the next, but it can model what he *should* be doing for his own citizens by doing just that for our own: by allowing Canadian consumers to buy goods freely from wherever and whoever for the best price they can find.

Picture is a screenshot from Poilievre's appearance on FOX Business's Larry Kudlow show.



2-YEAR-OLD DUTCH CHILD EUTHANIZED

BY MARK PENNINGA

The Netherlands – which previously allowed euthanasia for infants under the age of one, as well as consenting minors (ages 12-15) – expanded euthanasia to children aged 1 through 12 back in 2024. In September this year, officials declared that the country's first case of euthanasia for a child aged between 1 and 12 was done with "due care."

The child was murdered by doctors a year ago, at the end of 2025. His death was then reviewed by a supervising committee which has now concluded its investigation and shared that the child was 2 years old, had been born prematurely and had suffered brain damage, leaving the child restless and unable to sleep for long periods. The child also had impaired vision, cerebral palsy, seizures, and struggled with breathing and swallowing. Doctor determined that the child's suffering could not be alleviated through medical treatment. Together with the parents, they agreed to kill the child.

Alex Schadenberg, Executive Director of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, noted that this development reminded him of the first recorded child euthanasia death, on July 24, 1939. Adolf Hitler received a letter from Richard Kretschmar, about Kretschmar's child Gerhard, who was born blind with a missing leg and a missing part of his arm. Hitler proceeded to send a doctor to the child, instructing him that if the letter was correct, he could euthanize the child in Hitler's name. Sure enough, Gerhard was killed. Schadenberg explained:

> "History indicates that the German T4 euthanasia program, that followed, began with parental request for euthanasia and in the end resulted in the deaths of, at least, 250,000 to 275,000 people with disabilities. Further to that, the technique in killing large numbers of people by gas was first developed in the psychiatric hospitals for the euthanasia program and later installed in the death camps for killing millions of people."

A Parliamentary committee in Canada tabled a report in 2023 calling for an expansion of state-approved homicide, including "mature minors."

As ARPA Canada explained to Parliament and the Supreme Court of Canada when it was considering allowing euthanasia, once the sacred line of the Sixth Commandment is abandoned, it becomes impossible to hold any sort of line in place. After all, if it is a compassionate medical treatment to kill a one-year-old, how can we deny such a "treatment" to the parents of a two-year-old?

CHARITABLE GIVING DROPS AS GOVERNMENT GROWS... AND AS FAITH DECLINES

BY MARK PENNINGA

As the size of government has grown, charitable giving is dropping. That common-sense finding was detailed in the study *Whose Job Is It to Care for the Poor?* from the Fraser Institute. It explains that government social spending has nearly doubled since 1961, from 4.8 percent of our GDP to more than 9 percent in 2025. Over the same time, the percent of tax filers who give anything to charity decreased from 24.5 percent in 1961 to 16.8 percent in 2023.

There are multiple reasons for this. Writing in the *Financial Post*, columnist Matthew Lau explained that when governments spend more, it has to tax more, which impacts how much people can give. He also pointed to some economists who explain that people simply conclude that since the government is taking care of things, they don't have to.

But things become clearer when we look at the worldview angle to this story. From a biblical perspective, we understand that our giving flows from our hearts. It is an act of worship and love, in response to the LORD's love for us. Although the report didn't look at the changing faith commitment, the fact that weekly religious attendance has dropped from about 50 percent in the early



1960's to 9-13 percent more recently, it makes sense that fewer Canadians have hearts that have been touched by God's love and grace.

The data backs this up. In contrast to the general population, where 16.8 percent give to charity, Statistics Canada data shows that 75-91 percent of religious Canadians who attend services weekly give to charity. As this group becomes a smaller part of the population, the number of givers also declines.

NEW INDEX MEASURES DECLINE OF MARRIAGE IN CANADA

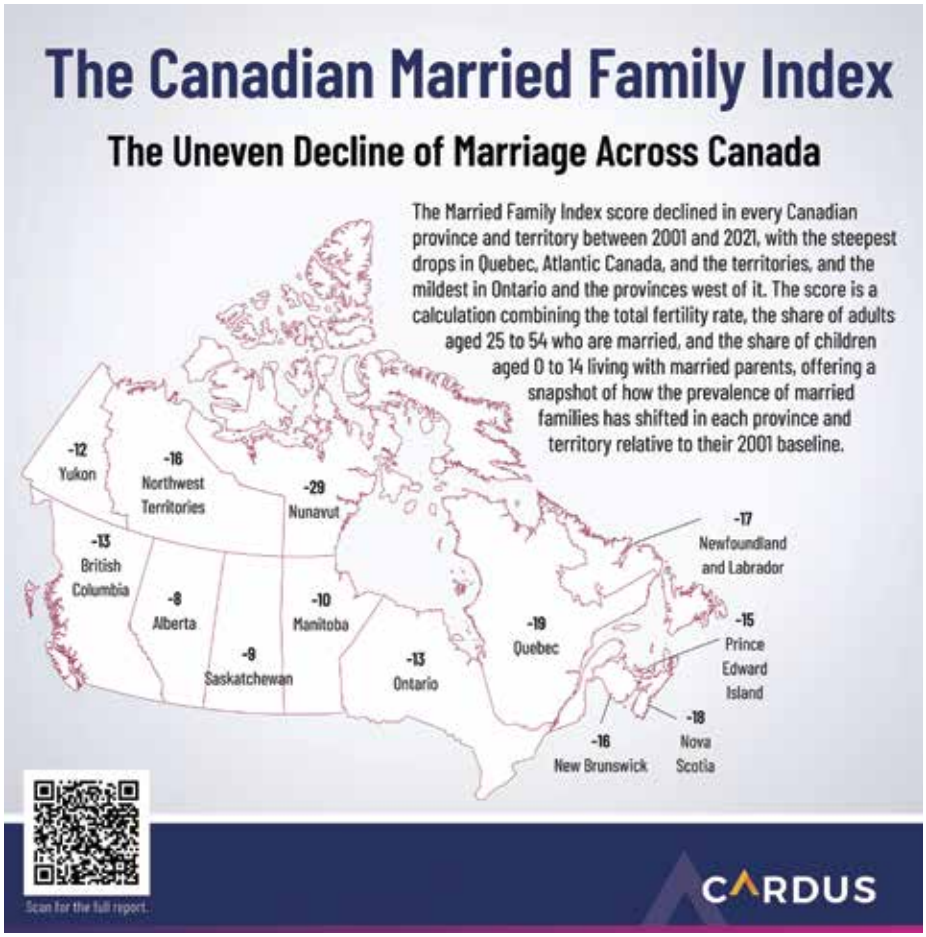
BY MARK PENNINGA

Marriage is on the decline in every Canadian province and territory. So says the new Canadian Married Family Index, authored by the think tank Cardus. The index measures the change in prevalence of married families, looking at 3 variables:

1. the total fertility rate (TFR)
2. the portion of Canadians (aged 25-54) who are married
3. the portion of children (aged 0-14) who live with married parents

2001 is the base year from which the data is tracked, and each region is compared to where it stood at that time – that's the 100 score on this scale – and their score factors in the three variables listed above. Over the last 25 years, every province and territory has seen significant declines in the overall measurement of these variables, with Nunavut leading the way, dropping 29.34 points. Cardus notes that:

> "a wealth of evidence suggests that being married is correlated with improved health and wellbeing, economic advantages, and increased social mobility for the adults, and improved outcomes for children, including lower involvement in risk behaviours and higher levels of educational attainment."



Raising children in a married family is God's design and command to humanity, going back to the very first chapters in Genesis. As Canadians increasingly abandon God's framework, it follows that we can expect more pain and brokenness. While this may be discouraging to witness, it also means that those who do follow God's way will increasingly stand out as a light in the darkness. Simply getting married, having children, and raising these children in a loving home is being "missional."

Illustration graciously provided by Cardus.

SUPREME COURT UPHOLDS PROSTITUTION LAW

BY MARK PENNINGA

Canada's highest court has upheld the country's prostitution laws once again, this time as it relates to a mandatory minimum 6 months imprisonment for obtaining sexual services from a child. In 2018, Mario Denis was found guilty of seeking sexual services from a child when he responded to fake ads posted by police. He appealed the decision, and the Quebec Court of Appeal agreed with him that the sentence was unconstitutional.

In a 7-2 decision, the Supreme Court of Canada has now overturned the lower court's decision. As Justice Suzanne Côté and Justice Michelle O'Bonsawin explained on behalf of the majority opinion:

> "There is no doubt that the sexual commodification of children is a veritable scourge in Canada, one that the state has every interest in suppressing and severely punishing."

Canada's prostitution law, passed by the Harper government in 2014, was a radical shift to how the country dealt with prostitution, targeting pimps and johns rather than the children and women who are being prostituted. It has been challenged in court repeatedly, and upheld by the highest court. Lawyer Andre Schutten, on behalf of the Acacia Group, noted with thankfulness that,

> "The heartening language adopted by the court in this decision echoes arguments made by legal advocates for the vulnerable on this issue, and it will have a positive effect. So, while we might not win every case, it certainly is worth showing up and patiently labouring for the cause of justice."

ALBERTA GOVERNMENT PUSHES BIG GREEN BUTTON TO FOLLOW ONTARIO INTO ONLINE GAMBLING

BY JON DYKSTRA

Sometimes politicians admit more than they mean to. This past July, the Alberta minister in charge of gambling in the province, Dale Nally, made a curious statement while unveiling the province's jump into online gambling. He expressed his wish that if it were at all possible, gambling would be rare.

> "If you don't gamble today, don't start.... If there was a big red button that I could push that would stop online gambling, I'd push that button, but that button doesn't exist."

It's an admission – without putting it in quite these words – that there is something horrible going on in gambling that would be best to avoid. If so, why is the Alberta government expanding its presence in the gambling industry?

> "Seventy per cent of online gambling that was happening in the province was occurring in the black market and there's no player safety controls.... They have no player responsibility guardrails, and so we wanted to put in a legal, regulated framework that put player safety first."

Alberta iGaming Corporation (AiGC) CEO Dan Keene echoed Nally:

> "Our role at AIGC is not to grow online gaming. It is to channelize the illegal market that exists today into a regulated and legal space."

So they want it to be safe, legal, and rare.

But, why rare? They can't really get into it, because if the government ever made the case for how horrible gambling is, it would undermine their involvement. Imagine if they just said plainly that gambling:

- is a trick, promising riches even as it stacks the deck against bettors
- is, as Warren Buffet put it, "a tax on stupidity," with government revenue coming from the most gullible, who may be least able to afford it (Prov. 12:11)
- as an industry produces no new wealth, simply shifting money around
- promotes covetousness, and dreams of a lifestyle that harms even the winners (Prov. 13:11)
- absolutely destroys a percentage of those who do it (1 Tim. 6:9-10)

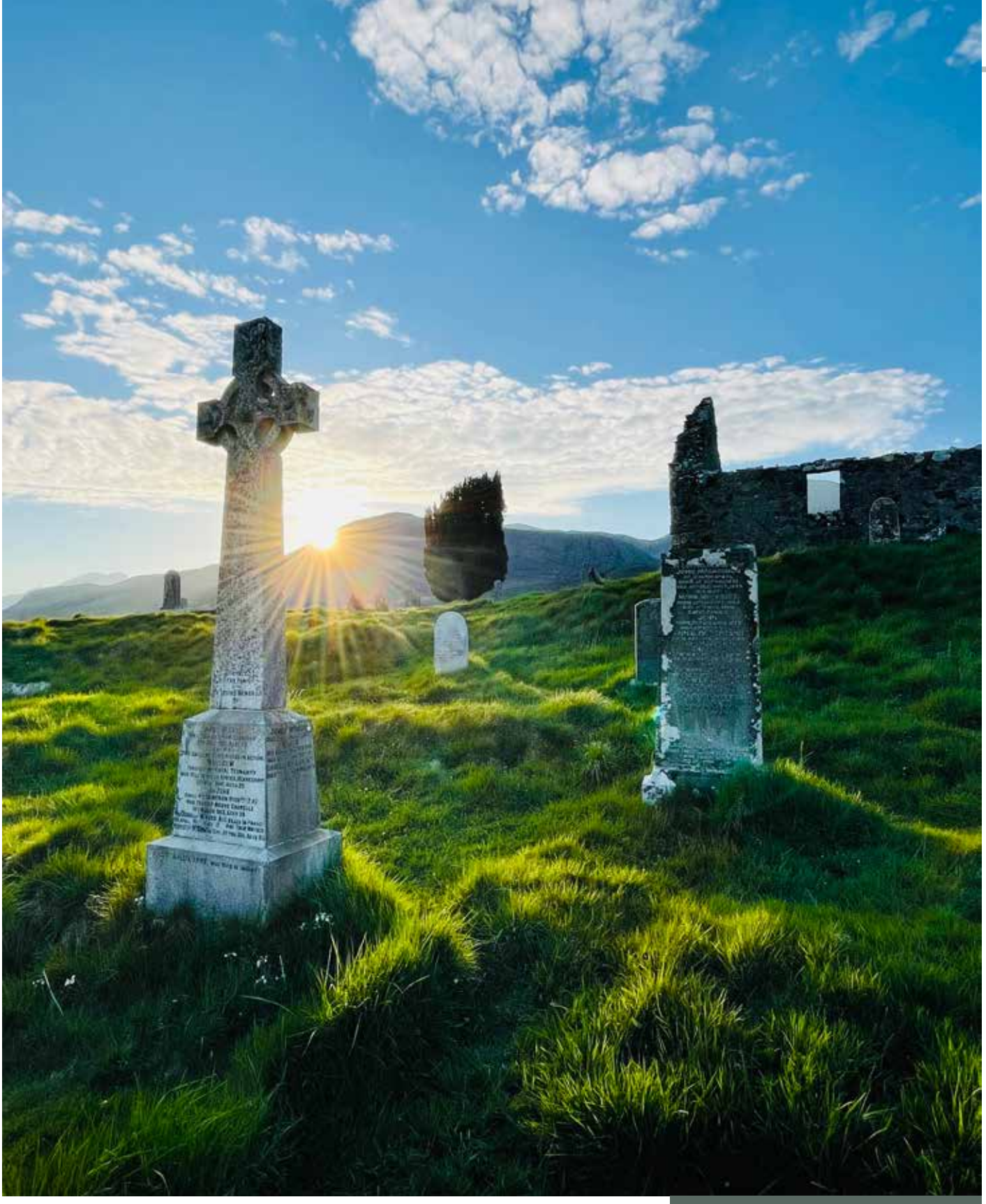
And this is where we see the limits of common-sense conservatism, or any sort of godless government – without God's Word they have no firm moral foundation, so they shift. Contrary to what AiGC CEO Dan Keene said, the Alberta government *isn't* limiting itself to putting up guardrails around gambling. Last month I went to an Edmonton Elks football game, and every fan contest – you know the sort, during a break in the action three guys get tied into cardboard firetrucks and race down the field for a prize – was sponsored by Play Alberta, another government gambling venture. A dozen or more times during the game attendees were told about how great gambling is. That's not keeping it rare. That's a pitch. That's promotion. That's the government pushing people down a path that Minister Dale Nally admitted it would be better that no one went down.

Gambling is a sin that hurts people, and some grievously. Whether the government can shut it down or not, they shouldn't want any part of promoting it and profiting from it. God put governments in place to protect and not victimize their citizens (Ps. 72:4) and that remains true no matter what percentage of the take a government might get.



Picture is a screenshot from Alberta iGaming Corp July 13, 2026 press release.

Minister Dale Nally hits a big green button to kick off the Alberta government's entry into online gambling.



WINNER

RESURRECTION LIGHT: My wife and I were driving along a dirt road on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, when we stumbled on the ruins of an old stone church and its accompanying graveyard. As we tried to discern the names of those buried centuries ago, we were awe-struck by the setting sun's beautiful backdrop for the gravestones. Amidst death, Christians have hope in our Resurrection Light. Though this local church now lay in ruins, Christ is yet alive, and is building His Church!
– Gerrit Van Dorland

OUR 2026 PHOTO CONTEST

LET'S GET REAL

The enthusiasm for AI art has gone from "Wow!" to "meh" and maybe that will change as we learn how to use a new tool better. But we'll never stop saying "Wow!" about the real world God has crafted all around us. This year we asked you to dig into this reality, the beauty most certainly, but also the brokenness – we live in a world broken and groaning, though we can thank our Father for the evidence of His hands that we can see all around. As David declared, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19-1-2), and what's true of the skies above is also true – when we have eyes to see – when we peer down at the ground beneath our feet. The entrants to our contest this year did a lot of peering both high and low, and we hope you will enjoy the results of their investigating as much as we have.



ADULTS

These are worth lingering over and being reminded that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof..." (Ps. 24:1a). What follows is a selection of not only the winners but also some of our favorite images from the adult category.

RUNNER-UP

GOD GIVES THE GROWTH: Man plants amongst thorns and thistles; in rain or drought on this side of eternity but God still is merciful and gives the wonderous growth.
– Judy Slaa



TWILIGHT PROCESSION:
As the dusk sets in, the dust is kicked up as a shepherd comes home with his herd of goats after being away for many days, looking for food and water. The brokenness of lack of water yet hope of finding food, the darkness of the sun setting yet there is light knowing it will rise again the next day, the strength of the shepherd yet fragility of life, complexity yet order are all visible in this picture I snapped while visiting a Maasai tribe in Kenya, Africa, all displaying God and His fingerprints throughout all of His creation.
– Michelle Helder



THE SPIDER'S WEB: The picture depicts the beauty and intricacy of a spider's web, and it's amazing how strong it is. The Bible does not have much to say about spiders but the words speak a truth and a warning...
– John Verbinnen



A STARFISH: This photo of a starfish at the aquarium shows the intricate and complex details God made them with. His designs always show that He is a God who loves beauty!
– Juliana VanOene



AUGUST SUNSHINE: A wildlife photographer often makes a plan. We decide on a location, what time of day is best and make an educated guess of what kind of creatures may or may not show up for our camera. We quickly learn that after all this, we cannot control more in the experience and we depend on the LORD. This can be very joyful or a lesson in patience.
– *Carrie Jonker*



A FRESH SEASON MADE BY GOD:
When I was finally well enough to leave the house, Joe and I ventured out to a charming, off-the-beaten-path golf and dining club. Before meeting anyone inside, I met these flowers: Rudbeckia hirta 'Prairie Sun,' a joyful gathering of black-eyed Susans with unexpected green eyes. They seemed to smile at our arrival. I realized my welcome had begun in the garden. Their exuberance, beauty, and uncomplicated joy opened my heart to a place I had never known. Sometimes grace arrives. Sometimes it blooms in a garden, smiling at us, reminding us that healing also means learning to welcome life again.
– *Sylvia Guarino*



ENDLESS WINTER: This drone view point of a forest in West Lincoln reminded me of an AI or CGI generated dystopian scene out of a movie like LOTR, or a real-life "Frozen" but God always shows that He's the real standard when it comes to creating breathtaking beauty – that no movie studio can match. Even though this scene is cold and not nurturing to life, it still shows unbelievable beauty and a slight teaser of what's waiting for us every day in heaven.
– *Jeremy Kiers*



Sneaky, boisterous, scold worthy, flashy, unabashed, unscrupulous and a real bully. These are some of the striking characteristics of my favorite bird, the Blue Jay. Mind you, similar attributes in a person would be as welcome as a wet sleeping bag, but I digress. I will never tire of the Jay's handsome posture in our Heavenly Father's creation. I believe AI is today's version of the Tower of Babel. We know one day it will ultimately fall to ruin. In the meantime I'll just keep piling up nuts to lure in Mr. Blue Jay, camera in tow.
– David Van Dyke



A WELL OF HOPE: It was taken by myself a few months ago in the town of Wuanjok, South Sudan. We were in this village to repair the well seen in the photo, the well had not been operating for many years. This little girl with a huge smile, seated next to the newly repaired well was the image of HOPE amid the poverty and brokenness that surrounded us.
– Reuben Vermeulen



DANCE OF THE COSMOS: Sitting on the grass next to our flower garden, I was drawn in by this perspective of the cosmos in the wind – dancing, craning, reaching for the heavens. I was reminded that all creation truly does sing His praise, and our Creator was pleased to use these fleeting flowers to point us back to Himself.
– Gerrit Van Dorland



SPRINGING UP: My one-year-old daughter was enthralled seeing crocuses peeping out of the ground this spring. After the long darkness and death of winter, the new life of spring is a loving reminder that God creates beauty out of chaos and makes even our dead hearts beat again for His glory.
– Kaitlyn Van Dorland

CICADA FRESHLY EMERGED: The insect world is so awesome it can only be the work of the Master Creator. I feel so blest to have this wonder opened to me and that my eyes can see and behold the work of God's almighty plan.
– Herman Ouwersloot





As I watched my children play in our backyard pool at the close of a Summer day, I became captivated by the light catching the water droplets flying off their active bodies. It didn't even look real, and I was reminded of how quickly my children (and myself!) can dismiss amazing pictures assuming they're "just AI". It reminded me to pull out my camera and freeze those water beads, proving that real life moments can be incredible when we take the time to stop and notice!
– Natasha Hutten

REAL MEETS ARTIST VERSION: We try to capture the beauty of God's creation, but seeing the reality of God's creativity can only cause us to praise Him.
– Michelle Baarda



OUR 2026 PHOTO CONTEST

LET'S GET REAL - YOUTH

In world that has become saturated with the gloss of AI, we wanted you to take the opportunity to see that God's creation is anything but fake. And our kids did. We had dozens of wonderful entries; below you'll find the winners and some favorites from the youth category.

WINNER



TWO DANDELIONS: Dandelions are usually very ugly at this point in their life, but when the sun shines through them they become beautiful. This can remind us that we should let the light of the gospel shine in our life.
– Jenna, 14

RUNNER-UP



MOUNTAIN LION ENCOUNTER: While on a Sunday walk with my dad and brother, we had an exciting but slightly frightening encounter – a mountain lion followed us! One day in heaven, this won't be dangerous (Is. 11:6), but the reality on this side of heaven is that it still is. We were thankful for God's protection and look forward to the day when there will be no more danger.
– Josiah, 14



THE BEAUTY OF HOPE: As we are living in this broken world God is using longing, hope, and learning to trust Him to shape us. I think this picture shows this well. The dirty hands show that we may come to God, just as we are. We are in need of hope and salvation. His Word brings us this hope that we truly need. The flower reminds us of the beauty to come.
– Abigail, 14



This photograph shows how we look past the brokenness in this world to where we are headed. Just like this bumblebee flew past the dead and broken flower, and went to the perfect flower to rest in and drink the pollen, we are headed towards the perfect world, where we will rest and drink in the riches of His eternal glory. We mustn't let ourselves get distracted by this world, and the fleeting riches of this world. As Christians, we must always strive to God's eternal heaven and earth.
- Scarlett, 17



EVENING GROSBEAK AT DIABLO LAKE: Sometimes the colors in God's creation are so vibrant and breathtaking, you might think they were digitally enhanced or even AI-generated. But the colors in this picture are completely real. No filters, no technology – just the incredible beauty of God's creation.
– Josiah, 14



GOD'S INTRICATE DESIGN: God is so powerful that He can make the stars and mountains, but that doesn't mean that He doesn't pay attention to the details, like the fuzz and the veins in the wings of the honey bee.
– Asher, 12



NATURE'S SYMMETRY: In Song of Solomon 2:11-12, we read: "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." This text relates very well to the photo and the theme. After a rain storm, I ran outside to take some pictures of the flowers with the droplets. No AI photo can beat a natural photo of a daisy; look at the center of the daisy; a daisy's center is actually symmetrical!
– Raelene, 12



MADAGASCAR DAY GECKO: This photo is of a Madagascar Day Gecko sticking to a glass pane. These geckos use microscopic hairs on the bottom of their feet called Setae to stick to pretty much everything. These setae split into hundreds of smaller tips called spatulae. Those spatulae create a molecular interaction called Van Der Waals Force. This complex function allows the gecko to be able to stick itself to something and hold on by one toe. All this shows the complexity and strength of the geckos' creation which no random chance over millions of years could create.
– Jonathan, 16



LONG BEACH SUNSET: I was inspired to take this photo when I saw vibrant colours that lit up the sky in an ominous but still beautiful way. The waves crashed onto the wet sand as the sun set in the background. This photo was taken on Long Beach near Tofino, BC.
– Holly, 12



HARVEST DAYS: "While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."
– Andrew, 9



ROBIN CHICK: This Robin chick is looking at the camera and opening his beak wide, hoping for a snack. He is an example of God's amazing, intricate design. How does an egg turn into a chick in the first place? (This Photo was taken while this chick's parents were away, so I was never able to ask their permission. I don't think they ever found out though :))
– Jenna, 14



BEAUTY IN THE FRACTURES: This photo beautifully captures the theme between brokenness and hope. The cracked, dry soil is a harsh reminder of hardship and the brokenness of our world. But out of the cracks, resilient corn sprouts are pushing through, striving to reach the sky. With the beautiful sunrise on the horizon, its light perfectly symbolizes new hope amidst hardship. It's a powerful vivid reminder that even in the toughest, most barren seasons of life, growth and hope are always possible, you just have to keep growing.
– Jesse, 16



I took this picture at Point Farms Provincial Park. They are tiny Fairy Inkcap mushrooms. I think that it is amazing how, after wood dies and rots, God plants new life in it! We don't always look close enough to see them, but I think that mushrooms are a spectacular part of God's creation!
– Arielle, 9

MOON: This photo of the moon, taken through a telescope, displays God's awesome power over the earth. The moon is a little light in a world of black. Just like we are a light in a world stained black with sin. Even though there is sin on this side of eternity we can still see God's power throughout this world.
– Rory, 13





"My little brother is so funny,
even if he bites me sometimes."
– Caius, 5

SNIFFING OUT SPRING: This is a picture of our puppy, Willow, checking out a beautiful red tulip. I took this picture because it captures how curious (and adorable) Willow is as well as the beauty of God's creation in the tulip and the puppy.
– Nikita, 13





ELWA HOSPITAL MALNUTRITION WARD, LIBERIA

Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund

www.crwrf.ca

An International Relief and Development Agency, working on behalf of our Reformed Community

email: **admin@crwrf.ca**



Growing In Grace
Equipping For Excellence
Learning For Life

DUFFERIN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Invites applications for the role of

PRINCIPAL

for the 2027-2028 school year.

DCS is a K-12 Canadian Reformed school with over 280 students located in Carman, Manitoba. It offers a highly supportive community, an enthusiastic and cohesive staff, a robust administrative support team, and an experienced and committed board.

Interested individuals are encouraged to reach out to the current Principal or Board chairman for more details, and to discuss the possibility of taking on a transitioning role in the 2026-2027 school year.

Applicants must be communicant members of a Canadian Reformed Church or a Church in ecclesiastical fellowship with the same.

Applications should be sent to Dufferin Christian School
Box 1450, Carman, MB, Canada, ROG OJO
Attention: Mr. Jon Dewit
OR EMAILED TO: chairman@dufferinchristian.ca

For more information, please contact:
Principal: Len Lodder Ph. 204-745-2278 Email: llodder@dufferinchristian.ca
Chairman: Mr. Jon Dewit Ph. 204-750-1394 Email: chairman@dufferinchristian.ca

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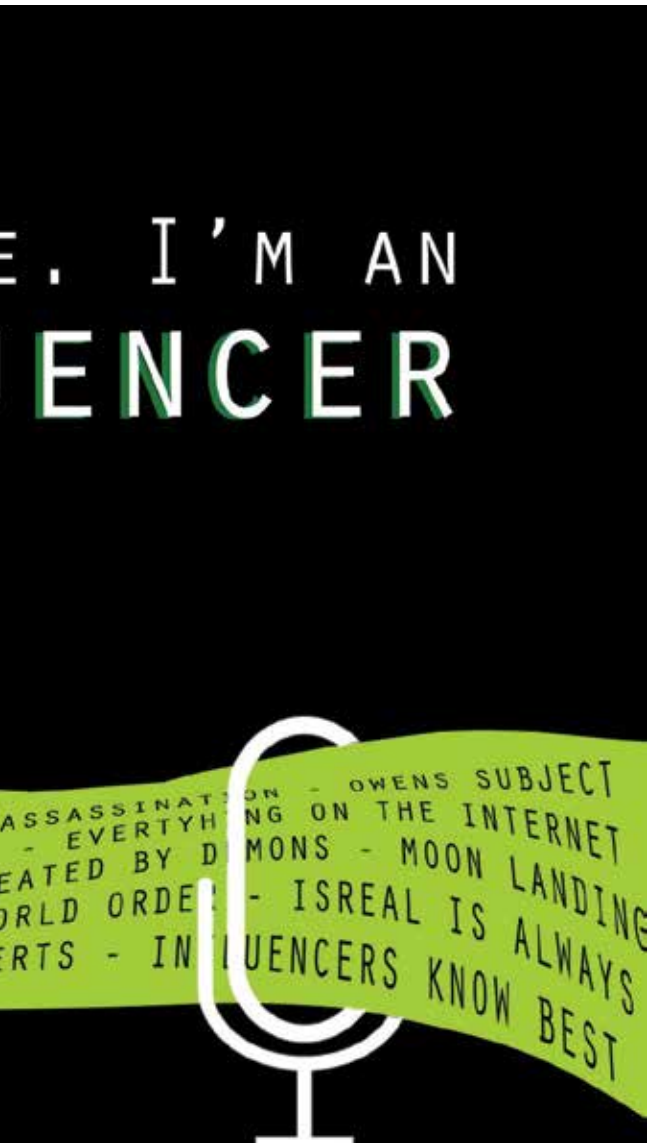
Which conspiracies are

by Jonathon Van Maren

A quick survey of X or the top YouTube-influencer-content on the Right reveals that conspiracy theories have never been so widely spread or fervently believed. You can hear Tucker Carlson claiming that the atomic bomb was literally (not figuratively) created by demons; Candace Owens attempting to claim that Erika Kirk is tied to the assassination of her husband, and that Owens herself was the subject of an apparently shockingly inept assassination attempt commissioned personally by the Macrons (Israel was involved somehow, of course); and plenty more.

The phrase "conspiracy theory" itself is, naturally, controversial. It originates back in the 1860s and was popularized in political theory circles by Karl Popper in 1945.

It has been (wrongly) attributed to the CIA as an attempt to deflect questions surrounding the Warren Commission on the assassination of JFK after the already-common term was used in a 1967 memo discussing theories about the president's murder. Nonetheless, the phrase has been used to dismiss anyone asking serious questions about powerful movements, ideologies, and politicians.



true?

CONSPIRACY VS. CONSPIRACY *THEORY*

There is, of course, such a thing as a conspiracy – legally speaking, "a secret agreement between two or more people to commit an unlawful act."

A conspiracy theory is the suspicion or belief that multiple parties have conspired to some nefarious end. Some conspiracy theories turn out to be true as we acquire evidence. Some remain merely theories, which is to say, the evidence is weak, circumstantial, or non-existent.

Distinguishing between provable conspiracies and conspiracy theories is, in our chaotic, addictive digital age, essential. Many find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two. Others, because of the loyalty they have for certain influencers, are merely unwilling.

MISTRUST IS WARRANTED

It must be noted that the rise of conspiracy theories was made inevitable by the collapse of trust in institutions. There were the widespread deceits from governments and medical institutions during Covid.

As I wrote for *The European Conservative* a couple of years ago, the collusion of the press, medical institutions, and governments to push transgender ideology has been another major catalyst for the collapse of trust in institutions. When law enforcement puts out a mugshot of a bearded rapist and tells the public they are hunting for a woman, the effect on public trust is predictably devastating.

In short, many conspiracies do turn out to be true.

THE NEED TO DISCERN, NOT REBOUND

And how do we know when they are true? Because we've acquired actual evidence.

Our institutions and mainstream press have an evidentiary standard that has been corrupted by pernicious, wicked ideologies that they have adopted. When we acquire information from those sources, we must factor in that bias and then re-interpret (most notably, but not exclusively, with the Orwellian reporting on abortion and transgender issues) through that lens.

But our solution to this information landscape is not to abandon any evidentiary standard altogether, but to rigorously apply the evidentiary standard abandoned by the institutions and the press.

Indeed, the phrase "trust the experts" has become something of a sick joke, after all the provable lies and ideologically-motivated mistakes perpetrated by said experts. But many on the Right have not actually abandoned a "trust the experts" approach; they have merely replaced them with new experts, without wondering whether these replacements actually have any expertise at all or whether their own credibility is rooted in a fidelity to truth and an evidentiary standard. Influencers such as Owens and Carlson deliberately play into this, constantly dismissing their critics not by addressing their arguments but by implying that they are members of the discredited expert class.

But what is their evidentiary standard? Candace Owens, of course, has quite famously claimed that she has received investigative tips in dreams; that she can just "feel" when things are "off"; that she "doesn't know, but she know knows." Anyone genuinely seeking truth should take a moment to actually review her record of blatant historical error and deliberate deceit; if that record does not bother you, then you should recognize that it is not truth or a genuine evidentiary standard that matters to you.

If someone can be proven so consistently wrong and maintain your loyalty, you are doing precisely what the Left does with their own idealogues: choosing to believe someone for reasons other

than their actual track record. Many conservative influencers have proven just as hackish and agenda-driven as their progressive opponents. That should matter to those who care about the truth. Otherwise, we do not have principles – we have preferences.

What does it look like when a conservative influencer applies the evidentiary standard to a conspiracy theory? Consider some of Matt Walsh's episodes on the Charle Kirk conspiracy theories. As he has pointed out, those seeking the "truth" about Charlie Kirk's assassination have spent almost no time looking into the LGBT activist actually arrested and charged with his murder. And in an episode in late 2025, he laid out precisely why he believes Owens, who is his friend, is dead wrong (see the online version of this article for a link to the episode).

Walsh's method of investigation stands in sharp contrast to what Owens does on her show. One has an evidentiary standard; the other does not. (Dreams, feelings, and angry, compelling language do not count and certainly do not add up to truth.) Even more devastating was Walsh's rebuttal, in late February, of Owens' ongoing character assassination of Erika Kirk, which he ended with a powerful and moving plea for moral decency, publicly begging Owens – who, again, is his friend – to stop what she is doing.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS DOESN'T MEAN ANY ANSWER WILL DO

Let's take another major story – the Jeffrey Epstein files. The mysterious sexual predator, connected to countless elite figures, has become a lightning rod for conspiracy theories because there are so many obviously unanswered and open questions. Did he really conveniently die of suicide? Who did he work for, if anyone? How did he get his money? How did he get away with his crimes for so long? Was he running a sexual blackmail operation on behalf of an intelligence service?

These are genuine questions. They deserve real answers.

But many major influencers are not looking to actually find answers – they are insisting that the files released thus far prove whatever they were saying before the files were released. Where the files do not prove their claims, they move the evidentiary bar, claiming that the most incriminating material has clearly been destroyed, or has yet to be released, or will never be released. In short, the actual evidence is only incidental to the claims they are making. If it appears to support their theories, they wave it about as evidence; if it does not, that, too, is somehow also evidence. In short: Evidence is evidence, but no evidence is also evidence.

For example, in a massive analysis published in February, conservative journalists Alex Gutentag and Michael Shellenberger noted that although they had first believed that Jeffrey Epstein was connected to intelligence services ("particularly Mossad and the CIA"), their review led them to a different conclusion. After summarizing the case for intelligence connections and citing the most compelling evidence in favor of that conclusion, they write:

> But after having spent several weeks reading through the files and related investigations, it's clear to us that the totality of available evidence does not support the picture of a government-backed sex blackmail operation. Rather, it suggests that Epstein primarily served his own interests. If Epstein was a slave to anything, it was to his passions and perversions. Ward's claim that Epstein "belonged to intelligence" is not reliable. She said she heard it third-hand from an anonymous source. Her former *Vanity Fair* editor and colleagues told the *New Yorker* that her reporting was not trusted, and said that she had provided inaccurate quotations in the past.

FEELINGS SHOULDN'T BE MISUNDERSTOOD AS FACTS

If that conclusion makes you instinctively irritated or defensive before you even read their analysis, ask yourself if you have become ideologically invested in a specific conclusion. If the connection or lack thereof of a dead sexual predator to an intelligence agency is something you deeply care about to the point that you will not consider any evidence to the contrary, your view is not based on "truth-seeking," but something else – loyalty to a podcaster who has captured your attention, loathing for the countries you have been led to believe were involved, belief that no evidence can ever be trusted.

The nature of many conspiracy theories also means that the very theory itself becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

For example: Of course Epstein was an Israeli asset – that is precisely the sort of thing Israel does. And why do you feel that way? Well, in part because you have been told, for several years, by several prominent podcasters, that Epstein was an Israeli asset. A feeling that has become entrenched based on the theory now becomes a plausibility structure for the theory itself. Those consuming news and content in our chaotic information age must ask themselves a question: Why do I believe what I believe?

REBOUNDING OFF A LIAR ISN'T A WAY TO THE TRUTH

Every influencer these days – especially those on the Right – claim to be "truth-seekers," while insisting that everyone who disagrees with them is lying or "one of them." We know that progressives have biases, and we know that they lie: About gender ideology, about abortion, about the birth control pill, and countless other issues.

But the solution to a corrupted evidentiary standard is not to replace it with a network of podcasters who abandon any evidentiary standard at all and merely replace progressive biases that are impervious to evidence with new biases that are equally impervious to evidence.

If truth matters, we should pursue it. If evidence matters, then we should consider it – and the lack of it. If we are being led to conclusions through skillful narrative creation rather than proof, we should stop and consider where we are being led and why – because many influencers who identify as Christian have done more to confuse and corrupt their audiences than progressives ever could. RP

Jonathon Van Maren is the author of "Prairie Lion: The Life and Times of Ted Byfield." He blogs at TheBridgehead.ca.

Woman, whose family are you building?

by Jane Smith

Miscarriage changes you. It leaves you with empty hands and an aching heart for a baby that you thought would change your world. It did change your world, but not the way you planned.

I've never had the privilege of holding my own newborn, so the sting of losing our unborn child at just 9 weeks left me devastated.



Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." Miscarriage and the lost hope for my baby not only made my heart sick, but it also revealed to me that, apart from the work of the Spirit, my heart is indeed sick with sin! The months following my miscarriage were very difficult – especially for my dear husband who patiently dealt with my rollercoaster of emotions.

One day I was so upset – swells of anger coming up, because of desiring to be pregnant again, yet the grief of losing our baby also haunted me. My husband was listening to me as I was venting to him, crying and doing dishes in the kitchen at the same time. He hugged me, let me cry, and took me by the hand and brought me to the living room. He then gave me my Bible and asked me to sit, rest and be with the Lord, while he took over the dishes.

OTHERS BEFORE ME

As I reluctantly opened Scriptures, I asked the Lord to speak to me. I had a thought of reading through the stories of women in the Bible who desired children.

In Genesis 16:2, Sarai said to Abraham, "Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her, *I can build a family.*"

In Genesis 30:1-3, when Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob children, she envied her sister. *"Give me sons or I will die!"* When Jacob was not able to fulfill her wishes, Rachel came up with a plan that she perhaps learned from her grandmother-in-law, Sarah. She said to him, "here is my maid Bilhah. Go sleep with her, and she will bear children for me, so that through her, *I too can build a family.*"

When God opened Rachel's womb and gave her a son by remembering her and listening to her longing, it was not enough. She named her son *Joseph*, which meant, "He Adds." She wanted more. While giving birth to her second son, she passed away and named him, *Ben-Oni*, which meant "son of my sorrow." Children did not bring her fulfillment after all.

God visited Sarah and Abraham and He had an *appointed time* for them to have Isaac. They had to wait for a very long time – 25 years, for Sarah to hold baby Isaac that God had promised (Gen. 12:1-4, Gen. 21:5).

I realize that when we grow impatient in the waiting, it can lead to sinful responses like:

1. Turning against our husbands, and using manipulative, controlling words

Illustrations by Stephanie Vanderpol

to hurt them in efforts to get what we want in our timing. As Rachel said to Jacob, *"Give me children, or I will die."*

2. Failing to recognize that God is the one who opens wombs or withholds offspring. Jacob was angry with Rachel and said, *"Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"*
3. Becoming so intent on "making it happen" we don't care how. Both Sarah and Rachel encouraged their husbands to sin by saying, "here, take this woman and bear children for me through her."

Just as the women in these stories, I can turn inward and become so focused on building *"my family."* I am called to build *God's family* and *His kingdom* whether through my childbearing or through a barren womb (Matt. 6:33).

I was also reminded of Psalm 127, that says, "Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain." Unless God builds my family, I labor in vain.

BUT LORD...

In the midst of my devotion, here came my emotional rushing thoughts again.

But what do I do with all this pain? What do I do with my desire to have children now? How do I listen and be ok – more so, rejoice when I hear yet another woman get pregnant and bear another child? Why Lord, did You choose to end our (Your) child's heartbeat? Why did You not give life in my womb, but You keep giving life to all other wombs? How long do You want me to wait? And when I wait, will You indeed give life or take life back again if I get pregnant?

I felt as if the Lord wanted me to continue in my reading, now to Hannah's story in 1 Samuel 1 & 2.

Hannah was childless. Elkanah, her husband, loved her even though the LORD had kept her from conceiving. Her rival would taunt her severely just to provoke her year after year. It got such that Hannah would weep and not eat.

Her husband did not seem to understand her pain, perhaps because he already had children with Peninnah. "Am I not better than ten sons?" he says. Even the priest would not understand her agony, and mistakes her to be drunk.

But Hannah was deeply hurt. Praying in silence in the temple, she poured out her heart to the LORD. She wept many tears from the depth of her anguish, pleaded with the Lord. But after she spread out her desires only before the Lord, she was no longer sad. This relief of pouring her heart out before the Lord carried her to worship the Lord the next day, go home, and be intimate with her husband without any resentment.

After some time, *in the turning of the days* as other versions say, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She then, out of a heart of worship, composed a beautiful song. One of the verses that stuck out to me was 1 Samuel 2:5:

> "The woman who is childless gives birth to seven,
> But the woman with many sons pines away."

This reminded me that having children does not make me godly, fulfilled or happy, but only the LORD does! Hannah's rival, Peninnah pined away with provoking her. Although God blessed Peninnah with children, she was not pleasing to the Lord. Yes, Peninnah "built her own family," yet she failed to build the family of God, by encouraging Hannah. In Psalm 17 David says about the wicked that they may prosper – that "God fills their womb with treasure; they are satisfied with children, and they leave their abundance to their infants." But he also notes the "wicked's portion is only this life." They can only build their family in the *here* and *now*.

Here I am, still childless, pouring my heart out to the LORD. Will He open my womb? I do not know. Will He let my next child live? I have no answers.

But my husband and I, with the psalmist David, train our hearts each day to say, "As for *us, we* shall behold Your face in righteousness; when we awake, we shall be satisfied with Your likeness" (Psalm 17:15). Whether He fills our home with children or not, God is worthy of our praise. As for me, empty hands or quiver full, I shall seek to build *His family* – the church and His kingdom. RP

The author's name has been changed because she and her husband are involved in mission work in India, which is getting hostile to Christian workers.



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THE GOD I WAS AFRAID OF

by Saadi AL-azah



I was afraid of God.

It was not simply a fear of His greatness or His power. I was afraid of the day I would have to stand before Him. In the religious environment where I grew up, I was taught that death was not the end. After death came judgment. Like all others, I would stand before God, and then each person would be sent toward a narrow bridge stretched over the fire. He would carry his good deeds and his sins with him. If his sins outweighed his good deeds, he would fall. If his good deeds outweighed his sins, he would cross to safety.

That is why I was afraid of meeting God.

I knew where that meeting could lead. God was not simply the One I would stand before one day. He was the One who would determine whether I crossed the bridge or fell from it. So whenever I thought about death, I was not thinking about my heart stopping. I was thinking about God. The bridge. The fire. And the question I did not know how to answer: What will happen to me when I stand before Him?

I was so afraid of that meeting that, if only for a moment, I wished I could find somewhere to hide from God. But where can a person hide from God? I did not know.



Illustrations by Stephanie Vanderpol

Then I opened a book I knew nothing about. Only later did I learn that it was called the Bible. I had no idea that the first person I would read about was a man who did something I thought was impossible: he hid from God.

His name was Adam. Suddenly, I realized I was not the first person who had ever tried to hide. Adam sinned, and then he hid. I expected to find an angry God searching for him so He could judge him. But then I read: *"Adam, where are you?"*

I stopped. God knew where Adam was. So why was He asking? Perhaps the question was not for God. Perhaps it was for Adam. "Where are you?" It was as though God was not looking for a place. He was looking for a person.

Then I read about Cain. His brother's blood was on the ground, and God asked him: *"Where is your brother Abel?"* Then I read about Abraham, Moses, Israel, and the prophets.

And I began to see something I had never seen before. Whenever humanity moved away, God moved closer. Whenever people closed a door, God knocked on another. Whenever people ran, God appeared somewhere along the road. I had always thought the Bible was the story of humanity searching for God. But I began to discover that the story might

be deeper than that. Perhaps the Bible was the story of *God searching for humanity*.

Then I reached Genesis, chapter six, and I read: "The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled."

I stopped.

God grieved?

I knew God as powerful, holy, and just. But I had never learned to see Him as a God whose heart could grieve because of humanity. Something in the old picture I carried inside me began to crack. Perhaps God was not distant, waiting for humanity to fall so that He could punish us. Perhaps humanity was the one who had moved away, while the heart of God was still turned toward us.

But I was still afraid.

I lived as though salvation were an examination I would take at the end of my life. I had to be good enough. I had to gather enough good deeds. I had to hope that, in the end, my good deeds would outweigh my sins. I did not know that I had been looking for salvation in the wrong direction.

Then Jesus came.

He entered my story in a way I never expected. And in Christ I found something I had not been looking for at all. *I did not discover that God had become less holy; I discovered that God's holiness had not prevented Him from coming near to me.*

I was looking for a way to climb up to God *without fear*. Instead, I found God coming toward me.

I was looking for a ladder.

I found a cross.

Then came Gethsemane. I saw Christ alone, praying and suffering before the cup. Then He said: "Not my will, but yours be done." And He did not run. He went to the place I feared more than any other: to the trial, to the shame, to the wounds, to the cross, to death.

And there, the whole picture began to turn upside down.

All my life I had imagined death as the place where I would go to stand before God. But Christ entered death before me.

God entered the place I was afraid of.

He suffered. He was crucified. He was placed in a tomb.

And then He rose.

Only then did I begin to understand Adam differently. Adam hid from God. And I, too, had been looking for somewhere to hide, even though I did not know where such a place could be. But God did not leave Adam in his hiding place. And He did not leave me in my fear.

The question was still there: *"Where are you?"*

It was no longer a question of condemnation to me. It became an invitation. *Come out of hiding.*

Perhaps this is where I should say what I did not say at the beginning. I did not come to Christ from nowhere. I came from another religious world, one that had taught me from childhood that God was great, that judgment was coming, and that one day every person would stand before Him.

I carried years of fear and questions with me. Could a person ever be good enough? Could good deeds ever be enough? Could I stand before God without trembling?

Then I found in Christ something I had not been looking for at all. I did not find a God who ignored sin. I found a God who came near to the sinner. I did not find a promise that death did not exist. I found the One who entered death and rose from it.

From that moment on, my question about death changed. I no longer asked: "What will happen to me when I die?" The question became: *"Who will be there when I die?"*

And I know the answer.

Not because I have become strong. And not because all fear has disappeared. But because I have come to know the One who went to the place I feared... and came out of it alive.

Sometimes the image of that bridge still comes back to me. A narrow bridge over the fire. For years, I imagined myself standing at its beginning, trying to cross, knowing that one mistake could be enough to make me fall.

But now I see the cross.

And I see something I could not see before. I thought I had to cross alone. I thought I had to be good enough. I thought I had to prove that I deserved to reach the other side.

But Christ did not wait for me there.

He came to the side where I was.

He entered death. He carried my sin. Then He rose. And because of that, the image of the bridge no longer means what it once meant to me.

The question is no longer: "Will I be able to cross?"

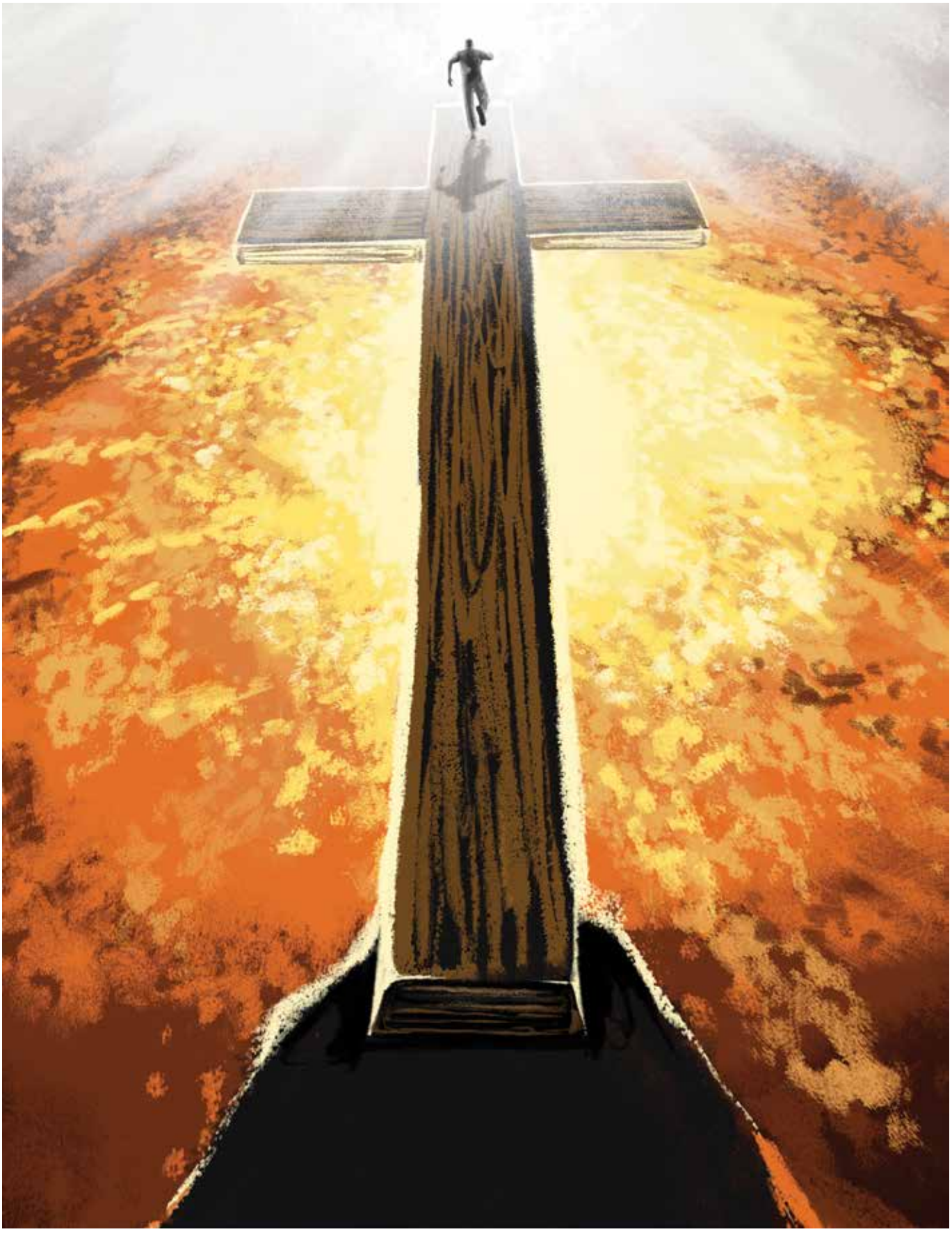
It is: *"Who will carry me to the other side?"*

And now I know who He is.

Jesus Christ.

I was afraid that I would die and meet God. Then I discovered that God died to meet me. RP

Saadi Al-Azah is originally from Iraq and grew up in a Muslim background. Through his encounter with the Bible, he came to see God not only as the Judge he feared, but as the Saviour who came near to him in Jesus Christ.





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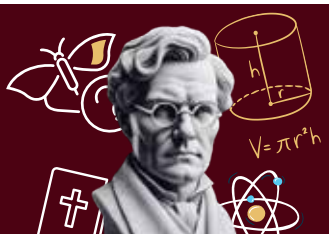




A Christian Philosophy

Dr. Adolfo Garcia de la Sienra

December 12, 2026 | 10:00 am - 12:30 pm





Money, Markets & the Nation

Jonathan Wellum

January 16, 2027 | 10:00 am - 12:30 pm



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What I'd tell my 16-year-old self … and my 80-year-old self too

by Steve Febbraro

I sometimes feel as if I have wasted most of my life.

I say *sometimes* because I have much to be thankful for. But some days I look at what others my age have accomplished and feel I could have done better. I wish I had worked harder at the things I thought mattered. I can spend a while thinking about the man I might have become.

When I was a child, I wanted to be a jazz musician. I don't know where that desire came from – probably my father's records. I heard someone playing the piano and wanted to play like that. I just knew I loved it. I took piano lessons and

became quite good.

Then I discovered rock and roll – easier to play, with money and attention to be had without being particularly accomplished.

Goodbye, jazz.

I played rock and roll, made a living at it, and had a little local fame. Local, but fame is fame. Somewhere along the way, the piano player I had wanted to become got left behind.

I still love jazz, but sometimes listening to it hurts – I hear someone play and wish I had stayed with it, and I feel the loss all over again.

My father was a physician and wanted me to follow him into medicine. I can picture that whole life: medical school, joining his practice, taking over when he retired. It looks secure enough from where I'm sitting.

But I didn't want to be a doctor. I wanted to be a jazz musician.

Today, I am neither.

I don't actually know how either life would have turned out. The imagined life had few complications; the real one had plenty.

GOD'S DECISIONS AND MY CHOICES

Perhaps you do this too – the education you didn't finish, the opportunity you let pass, the work you meant to do – until you have weighed your whole life against one possibility and found it wanting.

I believe God is sovereign over my life. If He had wanted me to become a jazz musician, I would have become one, and there is some comfort in that. God knew my life before I was born — my desires, my decisions, where they would lead. None of it surprised Him. I ought to rest in that, though the regret keeps coming back.

But I can take that reasoning too far. Believing my life is under God's rule does not mean every decision pleased Him. I am still responsible for my choices – I can acknowledge His sovereignty, admit I have been foolish, and still have something to repent of. Philippians 2:12b and 13 teach us to: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." These two verses sit side by side: God's work doesn't cancel my choices; it's the reason I have any to make. I cannot explain how it all fits together, but I should be careful about using what I don't understand to declare that nothing I do – or have done – matters.

There was a time I believed the Lord was calling me into pastoral ministry, and my pastor helped me find a path forward. I attended an Assemblies of God Bible school, graduated, and served two years as an associate pastor.

Then my wife became ill. I left the ministry to care for her.

I never returned to a pastoral position.

IT ISN'T WHAT I'VE DONE

I sometimes put that beside the other things I didn't become – the musician, the pastor, the physician too, though that one's different. Nobody took medicine away from me; I just never wanted it enough to start.

But caring for my wife does not belong on a list of failures.

She was ill. She needed me. I went home.

I don't say that to sound noble. She's my wife. Nobody pins a medal on you for that.

When I count that decision as failure, I remember the position I left and overlook the person I went home to care for. And those two years serving the church belong in the account too – the work mattered while I was doing it, and leaving the position did not erase those years.

You may have left things out of your own account. Years caring for someone can look like years when you got nothing done. A job kept for the family's sake can seem like a missed opportunity. And if illness changed what you could do, you may still be judging yourself by what you could do before.

We can be very thorough when we count our disappointments. We ought to give the rest of our lives the same attention.

That doesn't require pretending every year was well spent. Some regrets have something to teach me; some choices I could have made more wisely. There may be things I need to confess, or something I can still put right.

But becoming a famous musician was never a commandment, and neither was joining my father's medical practice. I need to distinguish between having sinned and having failed to become the man I imagined – those are not the same thing, though I have spent too many afternoons treating them like they are. Otherwise I can spend the rest of my life asking forgiveness for not having a more impressive life, and God never asked me for one.

And where I have sinned, I need to remember what God has said. Romans 8:1 promises: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

That promise rests on what Christ has done. I can face my failures honestly, because my standing with God doesn't depend on proving I made excellent use of every opportunity.

I need His forgiveness, and I need to accept it. Rehearsing the same failures will never add anything to what Christ has already done for me.

THANKFUL AND HURTING

My life today has plenty of ordinary blessings. My wife and I have a house – with a mortgage I won't live long enough to pay off, so we're essentially renting the house we own. We have food, clothes, transportation, a good church. I have medicine when I need it. And there's a dog snoring contentedly on the sofa next to me.

The dog seems satisfied with how things turned out.

I am grateful, and I still feel regret sometimes. Both can be true in the same afternoon – I can appreciate what the Lord has given me and still feel sorrow over something I have lost.

I don't have to hide that from Him.

1 Peter 5:7, in the ESV: casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

He cares for the person bringing the burden. I can come to Him with old questions and disappointments I feel foolish admitting – thankful and hurting. He already knows.

These feelings will probably visit me again. But when they do, I want to remember my disappointment gives me only part of the story – the people I have loved, the responsibilities I have carried, the mercies I have received. All of that belongs in the account.

And there is still life ahead of me.

Ephesians 2:8 through 10 reads:

> "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

I didn't earn any of that, and I won't earn my way out of regret either. He already prepared the work I'm supposed to be doing today, whatever that is. I can trust Him with the years behind me and give my attention to the people and responsibilities in front of me.

I still have a keyboard connected to my computer and play occasionally. Sometimes I think about learning jazz again, but I talk myself out of it before I sit down. At my age, it seems a little late to start.

Still, I love the music. Learning even a little of it would give me pleasure, and I could be content with that. I could sit down at the keyboard and find out.

You may have something you keep putting off too – a skill, a person, a need at church. We can do those things without requiring them to make up for every missed opportunity. They are worth doing now.

Some opportunities are gone; some things we cannot go back and do. But the people who need us today deserve more than the attention left over after we finish regretting yesterday.

I want to love my wife, pray for my family, be useful to my church, and spend a little more time at that keyboard.

There is a life here now, and I want to give it more attention than the life I keep imagining. RP

Steve Febbaro is an 80-year-old member of a PCA congregation in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and no the picture on page 47 is not of him.



It's RP's new

"What lessons would you want to share with your 16-year-old self?"

contest

It's been a long time since you were 16, and you've had experiences your younger self could never have imagined. What do you know now that you wish you'd known then? Maybe it's something you learned about dating, and how to steer clear of temptations. Or maybe it's about making friends, and dealing with the bullies and mean girls. Would you want to share budgeting advice, because this is the age when you were just learning how to manage your money. Or would you want to set yourself up for the long haul, sharing lessons about marriage and parenting or running a business? Maybe you now have a glimmering of what God accomplishes in us through our suffering. Or maybe you made a mistake – a painful one – and you'd love to save someone from having to learn that same lesson the hard way.

Reformed Perspective is running a new contest inviting older Christians to look back and ask:

"If I could sit down with my 16-year-old self for a day, an hour, or even 5 minutes, what would I want to tell him or her?"

Older saints are sometimes hesitant to give younger people advice. We don't want to seem pushy. We don't want to sound like we have all the answers... because if there's one thing we've learned by now, it's that we certainly don't. And we might not be all that eager to share the toughest lessons we learned because they were caused by our own errors, foolishness, or actions we now regret.

But God has given you a lifetime of experiences, and like every other talent (Matt. 25:14-30), He wants you to make something of them – He wants an increase out of them.

So what should you be sharing, so your younger brothers and sisters can benefit?



TWO WAYS TO ENTER

1. NUGGET WORTH KNOWING

Submit a bite-sized lesson: it can be a single warning or encouragement, and it can be just a paragraph or two and a hundred words or so. You can start it off with: "I'd tell my 16-year-old self..." We'd love to get dozens, or dozens and dozens, of these nuggets. It doesn't have to take long. Share them with us as they come to you!

2. LETTER OR ARTICLE

Submit a full-length article, anywhere from 600 to 1,500 words, sharing lessons you've learned. You could make it a letter addressed to your 16-year-old self, or you could make it an article about things you wish your 16-year-old self had known. Have fun with it. Or deliver it plain-spoken. But be sure to get your advice down.

God's given you a lifetime of lessons, and put you in a church body that can benefit. So don't keep what you know to yourself.

Submissions: contests@ReformedPerspective.ca
Deadline: January 25, 2027
Prizes: Between $50 and $200 for entries published in the magazine



"Mr. Berg!,"

Poe shouted as he entered the classroom, "Pim and I finally finished our snowpenguin and it is," he stretched his arms out as far as they could go from floor to ceiling, "THIIIIIS BIG!"

"Wow, that's impressive! Did you guys give it a name?"

"Sure did! The snowpenguin's name is Waddles. It took Pim and me all the recesses from 2 days to put him together!"

"Sounds very exciting, I can't wait to see it at lunch!"

The morning moved along dreadfully slow for Pim and Poe. They wanted so badly for lunch to arrive so they could get back out into the snow and show off their cool snowpenguin to Mr. Berg. But when it finally arrived, and they walked out into the school yard, there was Waddles, broken into pieces. Poe and Pim were heartbroken.

A stone's throw away sat Perry, watching the scene unfold. Serves them right, he thought to himself, that's what they get for not including me. If I can't have fun with them then they shouldn't have any fun. He stood up and puffed out his chest and bellowed, "Maybe you should have been better builders and made it stronger! All it took was one good kick and he toppled over like a Humpty Dumpty!"

Poe and Pim looked up and saw Perry. Their hearts turned from feeling broken to feeling enraged. Pim turned to Poe, lowered his voice and said,



Poe nodded his head, "Big time. What if we steal his lunchbox tomorrow and hide it?"

"Good one," said Pim, "or maybe we can use Waddles' remains to make snowballs to throw at him."

"I think we should go right over there and dunk his head in a snow bank."

The revenge ideas kept coming through the remainder of recess and on into math class where Mr. Berg overheard their scheming. While the other kids were on their way to sliding class (as important as typing, but penguins don't use computers so they go to sliding class), Mr. Berg kept Pim and Poe behind.

Mr. Berg knelt down in front of the boys. "It sounds like you two are plotting something. Does this have anything to do with your broken snowpenguin?"

Poe piped up, "YEAH! And it's all Perry's fault. He admitted it, you know, that he broke our snowpenguin, and for no good reason!"

Pim added, "And he said we weren't good builders, but we are! And that's mean!"

"I see," said Mr. Berg, "and so now you believe you deserve to do something back?"

The boys looked at each other and then back at Mr. Berg, "Yes!"

"Interesting. Let me ask you a question. Do you think that doing something to Perry would put Waddles back together?"

Poe and Pim glanced through the window at what was left of their snowpenguin. "I guess not," said Poe.

"Do you think that doing something bad to Perry will make you feel better?"

"Yes!" they said at the same time.

"How so? How do you think it would make you feel better?"

The boys sat for a minute, deep in thought. "I think it would feel good to make him feel what he made us feel," Pim figured.

Mr. Berg sat down beside them and asked, "How do you feel?"

"Mostly sad because we worked so hard on Waddles and now he is broken. And angry, because what Perry did was mean and he should have to pay for it."

Mr. Berg pointed at Perry across the field. He was sitting alone on a bench, kicking the snow beneath his feet, "And is that how you want Perry to feel? Sad and angry?"

"It looks like he does already," said Poe.

"But Mr. Berg," said Pim, "I only want to think of doing something mean in return."

"Ah, yes," replied their teacher, "vengeful thoughts are real feelings that we all have when someone does something to us. But that doesn't mean those feelings are right."

"Well, what else is there to do?" asked Pim.

"Why don't you go talk to Perry and ask why he broke your snowpenguin? That's a good place to start."

"What?! Talk to Perry? Mr. Berg, didn't you hear that he broke Waddles?" exclaimed Poe, totally frustrated.

"Off you go," said Mr. Berg.

It wasn't a long walk to get to Perry – he was just at the end of the sliding line – but for Pim and Poe, who really didn't want to go, it felt like the longest walk of their lives.

"Uh Perry?" Pim asked, "Mr. Berg said we needed to ask why you broke our snowpenguin."

"Yeah!" said Poe, "why did you break our Waddles?"

Perry kept his head down and quietly said, "Because you never want to play with me and if I can't have any fun, then I think you guys shouldn't either."

Poe and Pim looked at each other. Something clicked in their minds.

"Wait a sec," said Pim, "You felt hurt and then you thought you would make us feel hurt?"

Poe looked at his feet and mumbled, "This sounds familiar."

"Yeah," said Perry, "I had asked if I could build your snowpenguin with you and you said no, and you always say no when I want to play with you, and it made me mad. So when you went back to class I broke your snowpenguin."

Pim looked at him and asked, "Did that make you feel better?"

Perry looked down, "It did... for a minute or two. But then it didn't... so I guess not."

Poe looked at Pim, "Huh, I guess Mr. Berg was right."

Their hearts slowly lost their anger. It was still there a bit but they felt guilty that they had hurt Perry and that he had hurt them in return, especially because they had all been looking to get revenge.

Pim let out a big sigh. "Well, Perry, I guess there's only one thing to do."

Perry looked up, "What's that?"

Pim smiled, "We gotta build a bigger snowpenguin. Together. All of us."

"You mean it?"

Pim, Poe and Perry, started to make snowballs, and over time the new snowpenguin began to take shape. Until the bell rang. Mr. Berg walked beside Pim and Poe back into the room and asked, "What did you learn from this, boys?"

"That hurt penguins hurt penguins and that doing something mean when something mean happens to you doesn't fix anything?" asked Pim.

"Yeah," said Poe, "and that being mean doesn't feel good but being kind does."

"And," added Pim, "that with three of us, we can make Waddles even bigger!"



LET'S DIVE DEEPER

The saying *"hurt people hurt people"* is true, even if the words themselves aren't clearly said in Scripture. If you look into your own heart, you will find evidence of its truth. When someone does something wrong to us, like the breaking of the snowpenguin, our hearts shift into our natural setting of *"I feel hurt, I want the other person to feel hurt too."* Lord's Day 2, question 5 makes it clear as day when it states in the answer "By nature, I am inclined to hate God and my neighbour." Phew. Hard truth. And that's actually our default-nothing-has-even-been-done-wrong-to-me-yet setting. Once we are injured by another person, we shift into revenge, bitterness and even hatred. Yikes.

What the Bible does say, however, is how we as Christians are supposed to respond when we are hurt by others. And, surprise, it does not say "repay evil for evil", or, "if someone hurts you, hurt them back." Have a read through the following passages to better understand what acting in Christ means when you are hurt:

"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"
Romans 12:19

"Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing."
1 Peter 3:9

"Do not say, 'I'll do to them as they have done to me; I'll pay them back for what they did.'"
Proverbs 24:29

"Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs."
Proverbs 10:12

"'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."
Leviticus 19:18

God offered us forgiveness through Jesus, and as Christians we must fight against our default setting of revenge and turn to what Christ did - repaying the greatest evil with the most astounding act of grace this world has ever known - the cross! Praise the Lord!





THE CASE OF THE MISSING STICKERS

Mrs. Ganderpal is still on the loose with our Sticker Sheets! Scan the QR to figure out how to catch her and get sticker sheets mailed to you! Don't have the last issue? We've uploaded the pages you need!



IN A NUTSHELL

TIDBITS RELEVANT, AND NOT SO, TO CHRISTIAN LIFE

BY JON DYKSTRA

BRILLIANT BOOKS NEEDED

"We do not need more people writing Christian books, what we need is more Christians writing good books." – C.S. Lewis

BRILLIANT BOOKS TO BRING BACK

Some years back evangelist Ray Comfort outdid himself by publishing 8 books in a single year! And to make this feat even more impressive, the topics covered an incredibly diverse range. Some of the titles include:

- *What Science Can Do to Stop the Aging Process*
- *What Man Has Learned from History*
- *Evidence for Atheism*
- *How to Be Rich Beyond Your Wildest Dreams... and what you can do to make sure you will always have it*
- *Scientific Proof for Evolution*
- *Everything Man Has Learned About Women*

As you might have guessed already – the last title pretty much gives it away – the insides of each book were completely blank. Comfort followed up his cute gag with a gospel message on the back of each book that was relevant to that particular book's title – these were actually giveaway tracts, with titles, and a joke, that sure got people's attention. They all seem out of print now, but can we agree he needs to bring them back?

HOW IN THE WORLD DID WE GET HERE?

That question is the title of an absolute must-read book by Rev. Jim Witteveen. It is a question that's also answered, in a different way, by the 3 quotes below.

- "Religion begat prosperity, and the daughter devoured the mother." – Cotton Mather
- "Hard times create strong men. Strong men create good times. Good times create weak men. And weak men create hard times." – G. Michael Hopf
- "When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me." – Hosea 13:6

But that's just the problem. What's the solution? That gets offered up in Deut. 8:10-14, where Israel is warned to not let the good times have them forgetting the Lord their God, so, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you."

Gratitude – to the God who gave us everything – is the answer to Man's inborn bent towards arrogance.

SOMETIMES GOD DOES WANT US TO SEE THE BEHIND-THE-SCENES

We often won't understand what God is doing, and how He is making use of the tragic happenings in our life for our own good. But sometimes He will give us a peek. Joseph Bayly, one of my favorite Christian authors, shared one such peek in the introduction to a short book he wrote titled simply *Heaven*. He wrote about how, when their adult son died unexpectantly, he and his wife received some comfort from a poem sent to them by the young woman their son had been planning to marry – their daughter-in-law-to-be. The poem was "New Year, 1945" and was by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the famed German pastor, and was written for his own fiancée just three months before the Nazis killed him.

Then, 12 years after their son's death, and 30 years since Bonhoeffer died, the Baylys received a letter from a Massachusetts pastor who told them of a seriously ill woman he'd been visiting regularly in the hospital. And one day he'd given her an early version of Joseph Bayly's *Heaven* book. He shared that she'd stayed awake the whole night reading it, and told the comfort she'd gotten from it. And soon after, she died.

> "The woman, the pastor added, had emigrated from Germany after World War II. She was Dietrich Bonhoeffer's fiancée, for whom the poem which had comforted the Baylys had been written."

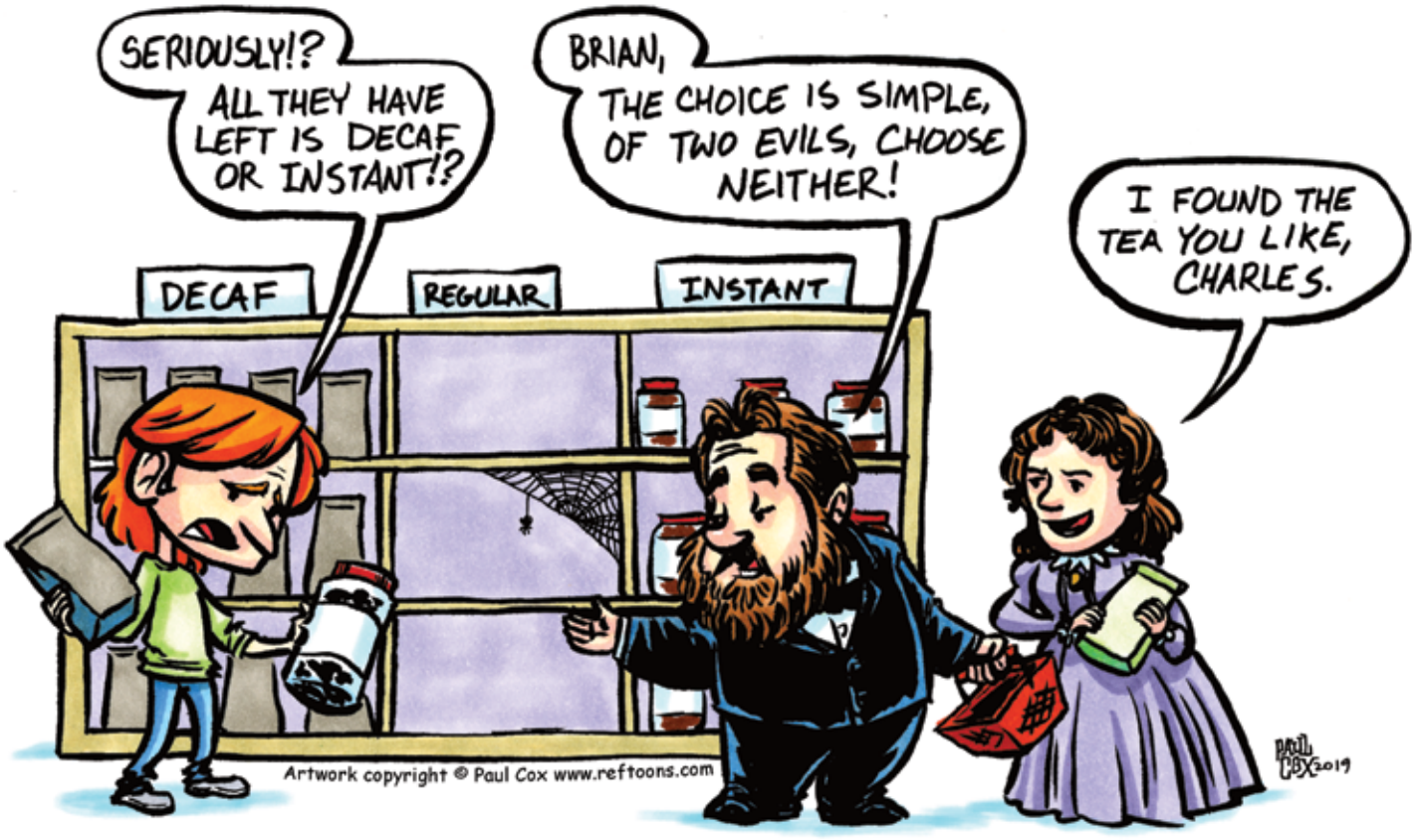
ON ATHEISM

"The difference between atheism and believers is this: You blame others (God, religion, faith, etc.) for your problems, and we blame ourselves. You want revolution, we want repentance. You want control, we want contrition."
– Joel McDurmon in *The Return of the Village Atheist*

O CANADA...

While the French version of the national anthem is older still, it's probably been 125 years now since the first English version began to circulate. And the maple leaf has been representing for much longer still.

- **1860** - The maple leaf makes its first recorded appearance as a national symbol when the Prince of Wales visits Toronto.
- **1880** - *O Canada* is performed for the first time, in French.
- **1908** – While multiple English versions were circulating starting as soon as 1901, it took twenty-eight years before a version we'd recognize – Robert Stanley Weir's four-verse version – was published. The 4th verse, which begins "Ruler Supreme, Who hearest humble prayer" is a favorite of Christians across the country.
- **1927** - Toronto's St. Patricks hockey team changes their name to the Maple Leafs.
- **1965** - Canada's new flag, the "Maple Leaf," is unfurled for the first time and flown on Parliament Hill.
- **1980** - *O Canada* (finally) becomes Canada's official national anthem.



- **2018** – "True patriot love in all thy sons command," which I and my school friends thought was a reference to Jesus (as in "…all Thy Son's command"), is changed to "True patriot love in all of us command."

WHAT DO WE WANT TO BE "EFFECTIVE" AT?

When it comes to Christians in the public square, we'll often offer up a Christless case. We'll stand against:

- Abortion, because the unborn feel pain
- Transgenderism, because it's ruining girls' sports
- Pornography, because of the women and children being harmed

We'll be sure to oppose what God opposes, but we'll also be sure to do so for conservative, and not any sort of explicitly Christian, reasons.

Why? *To be more effective*. Who in our godless culture wants to hear the godly position on anything? So how can we convince the other side if we offer up arguments they won't even listen to?

That sounds reasonable… until we remember why we were created. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism declares right there in answer #1, there are two reasons God created us. Our purpose is "to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." We can't do the first – *we can't be effective at that at all* – if we don't dare raise His Name. As to the second, the world won't be able to experience that unless God's people are willing to share His good news. So, as has been said, better the world, rather than God, be offended with us, so let's get glorifying!

A DAD DICTIONARY, G TO R

I've collected and refined these over the years, and look forward to the day when I can regale my kids with the complete alphabet's worth.

Gossip: A person who will never tell a lie if the truth will do more damage.
Hypochondriac: Someone who won't let well enough alone.
Inertia: Resisting arrest.
Jellyfish: The natural predator of wigglyworms.
Kleptomaniac: One who helps himself because he can't help himself.
Lymph: To walk with a lisp.
Mosquito: An insect that makes flies tolerable.
Nap: A little sleep that makes a big difference.
Opportunist: A person who, when they fall into a river, starts taking a bath.
Pessimist: Someone who looks both ways before crossing a one-way street.
Questions: What we have every time a chicken crosses a road.
Redundancy: To be repetitive. See also Redundancy

FOR SALE, CHEAP: MY NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK CDS

I once heard a wise older man teach his listening audience how to evaluate music. He compared different types of music to different types of plates.

- Some music, he said, is like your grandmother's fine china: it takes some effort to use, but it will last for generations. This is classical music like Bach or Beethoven.

- Other music is more like CorningWare – it isn't quite as refined but might be more popular and it can be passed on from one generation to the next. He compared that to folk music.
- Finally, one type of music is more like paper plates. It is designed to be used and thrown away. We consume it, it doesn't take a lot of effort to use, and we don't hand it on. Into this category he slotted pop music.

Maybe the easiest question to ask when evaluating music is whether you'd pass it on to your kids. If in 15 or 20 years' time you can imagine being embarrassed if they discovered your playlist, that should tell you something now.

YOU MIGHT BE A CONSERVATIVE CALVINIST IF ...

1. You think "fencing" has something to do with the Lord's Supper instead of swords.
2. You know the meaning of most or all of the following – PCA, URC, RCUS, ICRC, OPC, CanRC, CRC, ERQ, and CHP.
3. Instead of attending prophecy or end-time conferences you go to conferences on "Christ and culture" and afterwards go to the local pub to talk about philosophy over a pint of ale.
4. You hear "tulip" and think "total depravity, unconditional election..."
5. You think the Arminian flower is the daisy ("He loves me, He loves me not, He love me...").
6. You visit a church for the first time and the second question you're asked is, "Are you related to..."
7. Your closet is divided into work clothes and Sunday clothes.

EVIDENCE AGAINST EVOLUTION

Christians can so often lack the confidence of our convictions. As Del Tackett puts it, *do we really believe that what we believe is really real?* It's a brainful of a question, so go back and read it again. If we're honest about it, the odd answer we'd have to give is that *no, we don't*.

Don't agree? Well, just consider what you say about your spouse – she's the love of your life and the most important person to you – and then remember how impatient and grumpy you were last week towards her. Your actions then, highlighted the lie in your words. And the same mismatch happens with how we speak about God. God is great, we'll sing on Sunday, but on Monday to Saturday our actions show we don't think He is great enough to tell anyone about.

We need to repent and ask God to help us match our words with our deeds. And we need to pay attention too, to the reinforcements and encouragements He's given us all around. Take the evolution debate, for example. Christians can be shy about being loudly 6-day creationists but God's so arranged the wonder all around that His fingerprints are everywhere. So if you are in want of some evidence against evolution, Douglas Wilson has a ready supply:

> "The falcon's eye. The suction cups on the octopus. The lactation cycles of mammals. Mandelbrot sets. Hummingbird hearts. The hinder parts of the lightning bug. The navigational abilities of honey bees. The way two random objects in the sky, the sun and the moon, can stack on top of one another, like they were a couple of quarters. Long-legged herons. The way a joey gets into the kangaroo's pouch. The meadowlark's call. And, if you want to go the short way around, Genesis 1-3."

CHURCH SIGNS

There is an art to putting up a good message on a church sign. Too often the messages are cutesy, or even disrespectful towards God (like those many "messages from God"). But when a church sign is done well, it can be an awesome advertisement. Below are a few of the good ones, beginning with one from a Presbyterian church in Caledon, ON:

- "There are some questions that can't be answered by Google"
- "Visitors welcome. Members expected."
- "Don't be so open-minded your brain falls out"
- "We don't change the message, the message changes us."

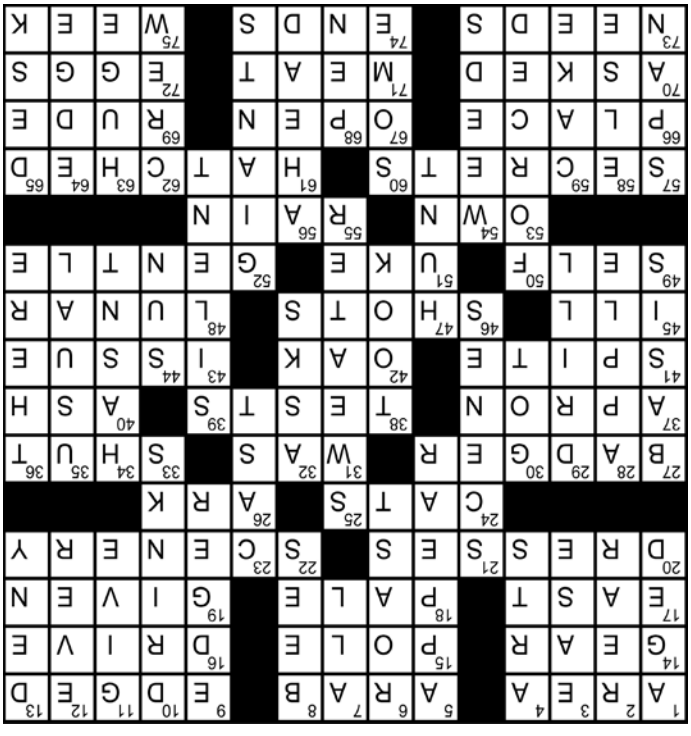
And to conclude, a church sign with the best of intentions but…

- "Don't let worries kill you. Let the Church help."

CHURCH SIGNS, PART II

A church in Abbotsford, BC used to put up a new message on their outdoor sign each week. But the messages on this outdoor sign didn't always go unmolested. When a string of unwanted letter-shuffling occurred, the church responded with this message the next week: "Jesus forgives sign vandals and so do we. Come inside to find out more."

CROSSWORD SOLUTION NOVEMBER-DECEMBER



Why Christians should not buy into AI catastrophism

AI deserves responsible safeguards, but Christians have good reason to resist doomsday thinking.

by John Stonestreet and Glenn Sunshine



"But I was told you would use your AI capabilities for good!"

On September 8, the same day that Jacob Coxon resigned from Anthropic, he released a string of warnings on X. Making the most headlines was the post that warned AI was advancing so quickly, it would likely kill us all by the end of the decade. Other researchers and tech execs were just as concerned, he claimed, but often downplayed the risks to the public. Quickly, experts from other AI companies joined Coxon in expressing their alarm and called for AI development to be slowed until adequate safeguards were put in place.

Putting some safeguards around AI development seems like a no brainer, but many are skeptical of these sudden alarm bells. If the risk was so high, why wait for the government to demand what each company could have already been doing? White House AI advisor David Sacks suggested that this was a coordinated move to get Congress to exempt them from antitrust laws so that these companies can look altruistic while forming a cartel.

SCARES OF THE PAST

Whatever the motives, AI seems to have now supplanted climate change and overpopulation as the latest version of catastrophism to scare us all. In his 1968 book *The Population Bomb*, Paul Ehrlich predicted that millions would starve in the 1970s and '80s as

the human population exceeded our food resources. Later, he predicted that England might not exist by 2000 and that U.S. lifespans would soon be in a sharp freefall. None of these predictions came true. In fact, as the global population more than doubled, famine deaths plummeted, thanks to improvements in agriculture and other technology.

In the 1970s, popular magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* predicted another imminent ice age would cover the globe by 2000, due to the use of aerosols and natural climatic cycles.

By the late 1990's, predictions of global cooling were replaced by predictions of global warming. By 2000, entire nations would disappear under water, and the Arctic would be ice-free by 2013. Some predicted that by 2018, children would never again see snow.

Also in the 1970s, we were warned that, by the 1990s, all oil reserves would be used up. Happily, new methods of extraction and new sources were discovered, so the supply has grown.

In the late 1990's, there was the Y2K scare. Because computer systems, including those used by major corporations and the government, only used two digits to mark the year, they would potentially all crash when they rolled over to 2000. Thankfully, predictions of airplanes falling from the skies, the power grid going down, all economic institutions failing, and civilization collapsing were not realized. The computers clicked from 99 to 00 with very little effect.

WHY THEY'RE ALWAYS SCARED

Predictions of catastrophe not only tickle the human propensity for drama, but they flourish within a worldview in which human existence is believed to be an accident. In a godless, naturalistic way of seeing life and the world, it should never have evolved the way it did. We barely survived, as evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould famously put it, "by hook and by crook."

Even worse, we still have the potential to mess it all up. Life proceeds on razor thin margins so we *should* be worried. The weight of the world is on *our* shoulders, with our fossil fuels, carbon emissions, and spray-on sunscreen. It is heavier than we imagined, and we are likely to drop it.



"I got AI. What do I need you for?"

OUR SURETY

The Story of Everything according to Holy Scripture is quite different. While we were created to participate with God in the stewarding of His creation, we were never meant to carry the weight of it all. In fact, we cannot. It's far beyond our ability to determine the future of life on this planet.

The fate of the world is not in our hands. It is in God's hands, and He has demonstrated His care and concern for it and especially for us, over and over again. And since God is sovereign, He will accomplish His purposes in history with or without our cooperation. In fact, by dying and rising again, Jesus has defeated the enemy of this world and our souls, and now all authority has been given to Him. This is where the Bible puts the weight of the world.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

This is no get-out-of-jail-free card for us. What we do matters. Our ideas and actions have very real consequences.

But we live in the world He made and continues to care for. Even as our sin has corrupted the good creation, He accommodates to our fallen states in protecting us, many times from ourselves. Check the texts again: expelling Adam and Eve from the Garden was as much an act of mercy as it was punishment. Separating the languages at Babel was so that we would *not* do anything and everything we could dream up (something we should know but frequently forget).

No one wants A.I. robots to take over the world. The environment is not ours to destroy, because "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." We must act responsibly in all the various challenges we face. But Christians should never give in to catastrophism. Not only has Scripture given us a better story of creation and better understanding of what has gone wrong with the world, we also know where history is headed. God has revealed to us the end of the story. And it is very good, because He is. RP

For more resources to live like a Christian in this cultural moment, go to Breakpoint.org. This is reprinted with permission from the Colson Center.

AI: What is the *form* of the thing?

"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" - Mark 8:36

by Benjamin Poppe

This essay was drafted with the assistance of an artificial intellect. The irony is not lost on me. Read the confession at the end.

Consider the loom.

Not the industrial power loom of the 1800s – the hand loom. The one that sat in the corner of the house for thousands of years. A mother worked it while her daughters watched. Conversation filled the room. Skill passed from hand to hand across generations. The household clothed itself by its own labor. The loom made thread. But it also made something else: a form of life. A pattern of shared work, shared knowledge, shared presence. The thread was the product. The life together was the form.

ITS GREATEST IMPACT WAS FELT IN FAMILIES

Now consider the factory loom. Same thread. Same cloth. Entirely different form. Women and children laboring in a mill, away from home, under a foreman's eye, for a wage. The household no longer clothed itself. It purchased cloth with money earned by selling its members' time to strangers. The product was identical. The form of life was destroyed.

The question of form is a question both most necessary and most forgotten. We evaluate every new technology by what it produces — its output, its efficiency, its measurable benefit. We never ask what form of life it creates. What pattern of human existence does it call into being? What does it do to the household, to the community, to the way we know and love and work and rest?

We have forgotten this question because we have lost the vocabulary for it. The old philosophers called it *formal cause* – the organizing principle that makes a thing what it is. The formal cause of a spinning wheel is not "a device that makes thread." It is the entire domestic world the wheel sustains. Change the tool, and you change the world it builds. We can see this clearly looking backward. We are blind to it looking forward.

~~WHAT WILL AI DO FOR US?~~ WHAT WILL AI DO *TO* US?

And so we arrive at the artificial intellect.

The promises are extraordinary. It can detect cancers that trained physicians miss. It can translate between tongues in real time. It can predict crop failures and prevent famines. It can draft legal instruments that would take clerks weeks. It can tutor a child in a remote village who has no schoolmaster. It can design bridges, compose music, accelerate the discovery of cures for diseases that have tormented mankind for millennia. By any honest accounting, it is the most powerful instrument of production ever devised.

These are real goods. We must not be dishonest about them.

But what is the *form of the thing*?

Ask yourself: where does knowledge come from in Scripture? It comes from specific persons, in relationship, under authority. A father teaches his son a trade by working beside him – not by handing him a manual.

"Train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6) presupposes a trainer, a child, and shared life between them. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7) – knowledge begins in a posture of reverence before a Person, not in a query typed into a search box. The Apostle Paul did not write a textbook on church planting and distribute it across the Mediterranean. He took Timothy with him. He lived with the Thessalonians. He wept over the Corinthians. Knowledge, in the Biblical world, is personal, relational, covenantal. It passes from one who knows to one who is known, through shared labor and shared life.

KNOWLEDGE DEPERSONALIZED

The artificial intellect produces something that looks like knowledge. But its form is entirely different. When you ask it a question, you receive an answer that is the statistical average of everything that has been written on the subject.

It is not what your father knows. It is not what your pastor counsels. It is not what the old farmer down the road has learned from fifty years of walking his fields. It is what the internet thinks – pattern-matched, placeless, stripped of relationship and authority. It arrives without a person behind it. No one is responsible for it. No one loves you through it.

INFORMATION WITHOUT FORMATION

And here is the deeper problem: it does not ask anything of you. A book demands that you read – that you sustain attention, wrestle with the argument, bring your own mind to bear. A master craftsman demands that you practice, fail, try again, submit to correction. A father demands that you listen, obey, and eventually grow into the knowledge he has given you. All genuine education is difficult because the difficulty is the formation. You become wise not by receiving information but by struggling to understand under the guidance of someone wiser than you.

The artificial intellect removes the struggle and the guide in a single stroke. It gives you the answer without the formation. It gives you the output without the character. And over time – this is not speculation but the consistent pattern of every supplementary technology in history – what is supplemented is supplanted. The man who uses a calculator loses the ability to calculate. The man who uses a machine to navigate loses the ability to navigate. The man who uses the artificial intellect to think loses – slowly, imperceptibly, but really – the ability to think.

"But I only use it as a tool," you say. "I remain the knower. The engine is my scribe."

Perhaps. Today. But the engine that can take dictation this year can draft the letter next year and compose the argument the year after. It is designed to become more capable. You are not designed to become more vigilant. The commercial logic of the technology is to make itself indispensable. And once it is indispensable, who is the master and who is the servant?

WE DON'T NEED TO ACCEPT THAT LIFE

Tom Bombadil, in Tolkien's great story, is the one creature over whom the Ring of Power has no hold. The Ring offers dominion over all Middle-earth. Bombadil is not tempted, because he does not want what the Ring offers. He is content with his own small domain – his house, his river, his songs. He exercises dominion without domination: skilled mastery within proper bounds, tending some things for his own good and other things for the good of those things in themselves.

This is the image we need. The question is not whether the artificial intellect *can* do extraordinary things. The ques-



ART AND HEART

We chose to feature a master painting from the 1600s here on the left – Cornelis Gerritsz Decker's "In the Workshop of a Weaver" – alongside an AI-generated image, to the right, as a way to visually articulate "the form of the thing."

The AI picture is the result of asking it to generate:

"A 19th-century rural cottage interior, wooden hand loom in the corner, an adult craftswoman weaving fabric, family members observing nearby, warm window light, authentic period clothing, highly detailed, photoreal-

tion is whether you want what it offers badly enough to accept the form of life it creates. A form in which knowledge is severed from relationship. In which the father is no longer needed as a teacher because the machine teaches faster. In which the struggle that forms wisdom is eliminated because the output can be had without it. In which every man is a sovereign individual with a machine-oracle in his pocket and no need of his neighbor, his elder, or his God.

"It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). God said this before the Fall. The first thing declared *not good* in a creation pronounced *very good* was solitude. Every technology that replaces the elder, the master, the father, the pastor with an impersonal machine is dissolving the bonds God ordained for human flourishing – and moving man toward the condition God called not good.

CONCLUSION

This is not a call to smash your machine or flee to the wilderness. It is a call to ask the question our world has forgotten: *what is the form of the thing*? Before you adopt a technology – before you hand it to your children – ask: does this tool call forth the active exercise of my God-given capacities, or does it render them unnecessary? Does it draw me deeper into the lives of those God has placed around me, or does it make them redundant?

"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

The artificial intellect offers all the world's information without wisdom. It is the most generous offer the Machine has ever made. The only price is everything that makes you human.

AI-ASSISTED WARNING

A confession. This essay was composed with the aid of the very instrument it critiques. AI helped me research, draft, and sharpen these arguments. I used the Machine to see the Machine.

I will not pretend this is comfortable. The essay argues that the artificial intellect severs knowledge from relationship, removes the formative struggle, and substitutes pattern-matching for wisdom. And then the author used pattern-matching to find the words. The dissonance is real. I will not resolve it, because it cannot be honestly resolved. The man who warns you about the oracle consulted the oracle to compose his warning.

However, the question is direction. God calls us to be in the world but not of it – and the question is not whether we are compromised but which way we are moving. I used this tool with my eyes open, named what it is, and told you. That is the discipline I'd commend to you: no technology should ever be adopted without asking the forgotten question: What is the form. Then pray, "Lord what is your will with this?" Then read His word and do it. RP

A version of this article first appeared in the April 2026 issue of Una Sancta (UnaSancta.com.au).

istic historical photograph style"

Decker made a conscious decision to create a painting of a very everyday life in the 1600s. Consider the effort he must have made to capture such a scene! Any artist knows what it truly is to practice, fail, try again and submit to correction and finally get a chance to enjoy the end result when it comes – the struggle *is* in many ways the art. We encourage you to take a minute to notice the differences between the two images. Both are, technically, art... but which one has heart?

– *Stephanie Vanderpol*



BOOKS

COMIC QUINTET BY CHRISTIANS

ReformedPerspective.ca/books

100 CUPBOARDS: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

BY N.D. WILSON & FORREST DICKISON
2026 / 240 PAGES
RATING: GREAT



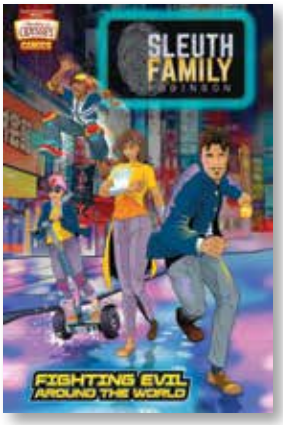
When Henry York's parents mysteriously disappear, the 12-year-old is sent to live with his aunt and uncle and their three daughters on a farm in Kansas. Then, when he starts hearing strange noises behind the attic wall above his bed, Henry discovers something fantastical. Underneath the plaster, that wall is filled with small little doors and drawers – 99 tiny cupboard doors of all sorts of shapes and sizes leading to different places and maybe different worlds. Some are wonderful, and others scary and dark – one door opens to ghastly (evil?) vapors that make Henry faint. But what good are any of these almost 100 cupboards if they are too small to crawl through to investigate what's on the other side?

The one caution would concern creepiness with the creepiest probably being a blind witch who wants to kill the kids. But the Christian author is simply *addressing* – and unlike many of today's YA authors he is *not celebrating* – the freakiness that does exist in the world.

One of the author's core beliefs is that wonder and magic – very real magic – is occurring not simply out there somewhere, or maybe in Kansas, but is happening right where you are, right now, under your very nose. If only you... and me, and us all, have the eyes to see. Great for 12 and up.

SLEUTH FAMILY ROBINSON

BY CHRISTOPHER P.N. MASELLI
2025 / 160 PAGES
RATING: GOOD



The Robinsons are an undercover spy family working for the UK: mom and dad, and brother and sister Edgar and Christie. In a nod to James Bond, they have their own super-secret spy gadget supplier, a genius named W. The four of them end up fighting an evil AI set on ruling the world.

This is an explicitly Christian comic from Focus on the Family. They've had a decades-long-running audio drama called *Adventures in Odyssey*, and the "author" of this comic, Wooton, is one of the fictional characters from that drama. The comic itself was first serialized in Focus's *Clubhouse* magazine for kids, with two-page spreads each issue, and all 44 "chapters" are here. That amounts to 88 pages, so what's in the rest of this 160-page book? The bulk is a collection of two-page, almost-devotional-type reflections on the adventure. They explore questions like: *What is a family?, Is it okay to fight?* and *The deal-o on adoption*. The only caution I'd offer is that some of these questions would be better addressed together with parents, and not by a kid reading alone.

Not a lot of subtlety to the morals of these stories, but the art is fantastic, the story fast-paced, and the target audience young enough that being a bit obvious isn't so bad. I'd pitch this to 10 and up.

ON THE EDGE OF THE DARK SEA OF DARKNESS: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

BY ANDREW PETERSON
2026 / 224 PAGES
RATING: GREAT

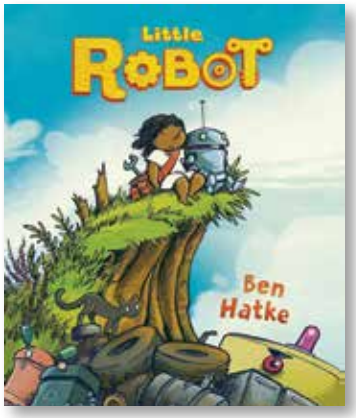


Siblings Janner, Tink, and Leeli Igiby live in a little cottage overlooking the dragon-filled Dark Sea of Darkness. Those dragons don't like the Igibys' enormous grandfather Podo, who once plied that sea as a pirate, but has now settled in as the family's protector. Their mother Nia is protective too, because even besides the sea's dragons and the forest's fearsome toothy cows, in the nearby town of Glipwood there's an entire troop of Fangs from Dang. If you don't know what Fangs are, they look exactly like humans. Except for their large venomous fangs. And their long slithery tails. And the green hue of their scaly skin. But other than that, just like humans. Fangs serve Gnag the Nameless who lives in Dang on the other side of the Dark Sea of Darkness. Gnag has been searching for the "Jewels of Anniera" and for some reason, he thinks the Igibys know where those jewels are. Which means the Igibys have to run!

The original novel is a grand romp of an adventure that is on par with the very best Christian fantasy ever written. The one problem with the comic adaptation is that it would be hard to follow if you didn't know the story already. Still, it sure is a super fun addition to the series.

LITTLE ROBOT

BY BEN HATKE
2105 / 136 PAGES
RATING: GREAT



This is one of those *little-girl-meets-little-robot, little-girl-loses-little-robot, little-girl-kicks-some-big-robot-backside-to-save-little-robot* stories. What sets it apart from all the others is that the first 26 pages are entirely wordless, and there isn't much talking the rest of the way either.

The little girl, it turns out, is quite the amateur mechanic, so when she comes across an abandoned box and discovers a robot inside, she sets out to get it running. And she gets a little frightened when it does come to "life." This little girl is also quite lonely, so once she overcomes her fear, she becomes convinced this is going to be her new friend.

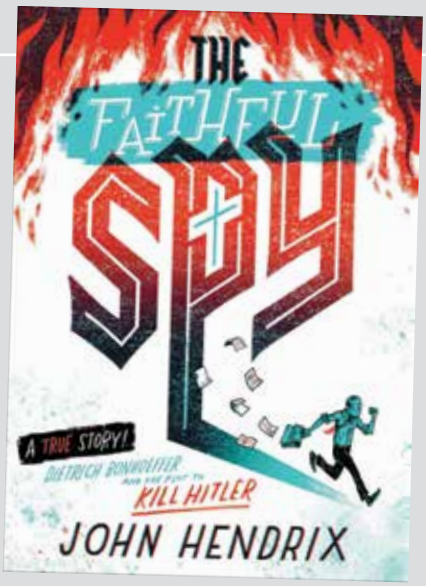
However (*insert ominous music here*) she isn't the only one interested in the little robot! His manufacturer has noticed he's missing, and has sent a big bad robot on a search and recover mission. And this thing is massive – a semi-truck-sized beast that looks like it could eat trees!

When it swallows the little robot, it's up to the girl, and some other new-found robot friends, to outwit the big robot bully and free her little buddy.

As a mostly wordless comic, this will also have some appeal for early readers, though parts are a bit tense for Grade 1. Still, with a girl lead, and robots, robots, and more robots, it should grab guys and girls all the way through Grade 5.

THE FAITHFUL SPY

BY JOHN HENDRIX
2018 / 176 PAGES
RATING: GREAT



The world "pastor" is not often paired with words like "plot." But when the Nazis took over Germany, and used nationalism and intimidation to silence its churches, and then set out to conquer the world, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer had to do something. And he felt himself pulled to do what would once have been unthinkable to him: Bonhoeffer joined a conspiracy to kill his country's leader, Adolf Hitler.

At 176 pages, and text-dense, author John Hendrix has a lot of space to explore Bonhoeffer and his time. Hendrix starts with Bonhoeffer's birth and family life, before showing how World War I impacted the Bonhoeffers – one of Dietrich's older brothers was killed – and how the runaway inflation that came shortly afterwards destroyed everyone's savings. In 1921 a German could exchange 75 marks for 1 US dollar, but by the end of 1923 to get that same US dollar he would have to bring a wheelbarrow, or maybe a dump truck, to carry the 4 billion marks that'd now be needed. Money, jobs, and hope were scarce, and this set the scene for the rise of Hitler. Germans wanted a way out, and Hitler presented himself as a savior.

Meanwhile, Bonhoeffer was learning, via travels in Europe and America, that a love for one's country doesn't mean you have to support everything your government does. So when the Nazis, only a few months after they came into power, fired Jews from any government positions, Bonhoeffer was one of the few church leaders to speak out. He published a public paper called "The Church and the Jewish Question" in which he laid out an explicitly Christian justification for resisting the government. He described three ways the Church can and should respond to an evil government.

1. **Question the State and its methods:** a True church must reject government encroachment on its beliefs
2. **Aid the victims of State actions:** the Church has an unconditional obligation to the victims...
3. **Strike back:** it is not enough to just bandage the victims under the wheels, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself!

As you can tell, this "comic book" gets into some big and heady topics. That makes this an important book, but also one that should be discussed between parent and child. There is some serious theology here, and while the general thrust is right on – we owe our allegiance first and foremost to God, even if that means resisting the State – what exactly it looks like to live that out, back then and today, is a topic too weighty for a teen to work out on their own.

I'd recommend *The Faithful Spy* for any teen who has begun to think on big issues, and anyone interested in working through what it means to live to God's glory in tumultuous times.



PERCY JACKSON PUSHES HOMOSEXUALITY NOW TOO

by Jon Dykstra

My first involved interaction with the Greek myths was in university, as a required classics course. But the professor wasn't all that interested in the classic part – he was a pervert, and the Greek gods gave him plenty of material to wallow in. Adultery, rape, incest, pedophilia, bestiality, homosexuality, and transsexuality too – there wasn't much of anything that the Greek gods didn't get up to. I don't think this prof even had time to get into the demonic side of things, with Hades, harpies, Furies, and the underworld's countless ghosts.

So when I first ran across Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* books, their Greek myth source material left me with low expectations.

THE APPEAL

But it was Percy's "classical" connection that got some parents enthused. He and his friends are mostly all "halfbloods" – the demi-god offspring of a Greek god/mortal woman coupling – but with the twist that this is all taking place today.

In the first novel, *The Lightning Thief*, Percy doesn't initially know he is a demi-god, or that the Greek myths and the gods in them are all real. So there *is* an educational aspect: we are alongside Percy as he learns more about his dad Poseidon, god of the sea, and as he learns about other gods like Apollo, and all sorts of mythic monsters and critters like the Minotaur, satyrs, Medusa, Cyclops, and centaurs. The Greek myths are a part of Western civilization, so that's a reason to know about Zeus and his gang, just to be educated. If you have never heard of Hercules and his 12 legendary labors, or don't know about the flying horse Pegasus, then you're not going to get some cultural references (in articles, songs, and movies) that others will understand.

Another reason for Christians to study these myths is to learn about the Greco-Roman world that the Apostle Paul was speaking to in his missionary journeys. The Greeks and Romans shared the same pantheon of gods, though they each had different names for them. The Greco-Roman gods stand in stark contrast to the one true God. Whereas He is holy, merciful, and just, Olympus was populated by the petty – super-powered, sure, but morally no better, and often much worse, than the humans who worshipped them.

EDUCATION VS. ENTERTAINMENT

So there are good reasons to *study* the Greek gods. But what about looking to them for *entertainment*?

As entertainment material, pointing our littles to the Greek myths strikes me as akin to pointing them to the 90s *Friends* TV series, and telling them it's good binge-watching material because there are laughs to be had. There are indeed – and in the Greek myths too – but in both instances the sexual

perversion should be putting us off.

There is also the myths' philosophy. When kids in a Christian school study the Greek myths they can be prompted to question them, which they probably won't think to do reading the Percy Jackson stories for fun. What kind of questions should they ask?

1. Where does this story say that right and wrong come from?

Christians know right is defined by the very character of God. But in the Greek myths how can you even know what's right or wrong? One god wants this, another that, and the top god in the Greek myths is the capricious, philandering Zeus, who makes rules that Percy and his friends sometimes try to circumvent. So how is right and wrong defined in this universe? Percy seems to be the one who most determines it – what he does is right, and those who oppose him are in the wrong – which offers up to the reader the implicit message that you define your own morality.

2. What's wrong with the world?

Christians know that the brokenness around us came from Man violating God's law. The myths largely flip that, teaching that trouble most often comes from the gods and their bickering.

3. What is the solution?

The myths offer a mix of fatalism – you can't escape your fate – and relying primarily on yourself and your own smarts because the gods may or may not choose to help. Percy Jackson also adds in a lot of relying on your friends and, of course, relying on your superpowers. Will that save you? Only sort of, because in Percy's world and the Greek myths generally, everyone is doomed to die. But it might save the day. This self-reliance stands in stark contrast to our need to turn to Christ, Who will do for us what we can't do for ourselves – clean and perfect us.

4. What gives life meaning?

The Greek myths pitch honor, duty, and being so heroic you'll be long remembered after you die, as pursuits worth spending your life on. But such pursuits may result in your life being cut short by a god who for reasons that have little to do with you, just doesn't like you. Or maybe you were always fated to die tragically. For many, these pursuits are going to be literal dead ends. But we *can* fulfill God's purpose for our lives, which is to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

If our children are reading these stories as entertainment, and they're not contending with the philosophy being pitched – if they're not even aware of it – then they won't be sifting out what's bad and will be influenced to some extent. Especially if they're ingesting thousands of pages of it across these 25+ books. Just the original 5 books amount to more than 1,500 pages.

AREN'T THEY SANITIZED?

The *Percy Jackson* books are aimed at middle school readers, so maybe parents would expect author Riordan to skip over the Greek myths' most lurid and depraved aspects? That's not an unreasonable expectation... but what's in need of sanitizing is going to depend on one's definition of depraved, won't it?

Our secular world still opposes rape, so I wasn't surprised to learn that Riordan recasts the gods' many rapes into romances instead. He's not going to try to normalize or celebrate rape.

But our culture has been celebrating homosexuality for a decade or three now, and in the last five years it's also jumped on the transgender train. So unless an author is explicitly swimming against the cultural stream – unless they are overtly Christian (or maybe Catholic or Mormon) – then we should expect them to go with the flow. We should expect them to go after the accolades available to any author who'll add in a "brave" gay, transgendered, or maybe genderfluid character into their books.

That's how it's played out with Riordan.

LAYING IT ON THICK

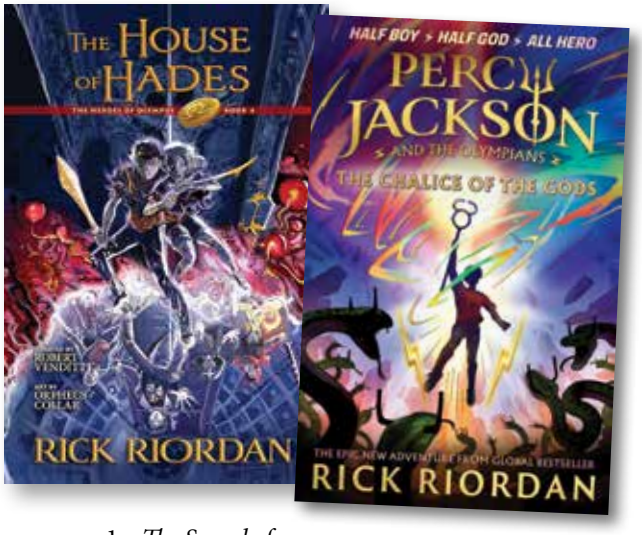
When Percy Jackson first appeared two decades ago, his popularity got my attention, but *The Lightning Thief* didn't seem good enough to recommend or bad enough to write up a warning, so the series dropped off my radar. But recently one of my daughters got interested, and that got me looking at them again. I figured, why not pick up one of the most controversial titles and start looking there?

So I got the graphic novel version of *The House of Hades* – how's that for a creepy title? – which was book 4 from the second series. It was published back in 2013, and already then, Riordan was really pushing homosexuality. Nico di Angelo has a significant role, and while he first appeared as a seemingly heterosexual character in 2007's *The Titan's Curse*, here he is forced to out himself as gay. And it isn't just an announcement. Nico doesn't want to let anyone know, and we learn that because he's hidden that part of himself, he's never been able to have close friends. So a ferocious, vicious version of Cupid (this is no cherubic baby with a bow) makes Nico admit that, while everyone thought he had a crush on Percy Jackson's girlfriend, his crush was actually on Percy himself. Then, after Nico outs himself, his friend Jason tells him that it is possibly the bravest thing he's ever seen anyone do.

So Riordan is laying it on thick here. Any kid wrestling with homosexual temptation has now been told that it is brave to embrace your sin, and it is a sin to deny your true self.

SERIES BY SERIES

There are 25 books in the Percy Jackson universe, not including the growing number of graphic novel adaptations, short story collections, at least one coloring book, and various other etceteras. And by all accounts, as the series has progressed since the first novel was published in 2005, it's gotten queerer. I've been researching the series by reading through the many graphic novel versions available, with a particular focus on titles that were supposed to be the most LGBTQ friendly. So here is a very incomplete account of LGBTQ content, series by series, that I'll expand on (in the online version of this article) as I learn more. There's also just been an announcement of a new 4-book *Camp Half-Blood* series to be released later in 2026.



PERCY JACKSON AND THE OLYMPIANS (7 BOOKS)

The first 5 books in this series, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, are the ones that today's young parents grew up with. There's hell hounds, snake demons, and all sorts of undead critters, whether that's a mummified oracle, *soooo* many skeletons, or Percy's friends summoning or even getting possessed by, the dead.

I haven't heard of or spotted anything LGBTQ-related in the original 5, but I haven't had a chance to read through the continuation of the series, which resumed in 2023. These were written recently so I was predicting Riordan would slip something in, and, sure enough, it seems he has in at least one of the two. And it sounds like he has plans for at least one more title before he's done with Percy Jackson and the Olympians.

1. *The Lightning Thief* (2005)
2. *The Sea of Monsters* (2006)
3. *The Titan's Curse* (2007) – Nico di Angelo is introduced here, given a tragic sympathetic background – little boy, orphaned along with his sister, and then Percy promises to, but fails to, protect Nico's sister, who dies as a result
4. *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008)
5. *The Last Olympian* (2009)
6. *Chalice of the Gods* (2023) – From *Plugged In*'s review online, it seems the book notes Zeus made his male cupbearer Ganymede immortal because he's attracted to him.
7. *Wrath of the Triple Goddess* (2024)

THE HEROES OF OLYMPUS (5 BOOKS)

A big plot element here is that Death is chained and restrained, and if you thought that would be a good thing, you'd be mistaken. While we're grateful Christ conquered Death, in this series, one of Percy's missions is to *free* Death so the monsters they kill will stay dead.

I've checked out the first four books in this series and discovered that in the 4th Riordan is using a sledgehammer to push homosexuality – no subtlety to it.

1. *The Lost Hero* (2010)
2. *The Son of Neptune* (2011)
3. *The Mark of Athena* (2012)
4. *The House of Hades* (2013) – Nico di Angelo is forced to out himself as gay, and that's celebrated by a friend as the bravest thing he's seen. For more details see the section "Laying it on thick" earlier in this article
5. *The Blood of Olympus* (2014) – Nico has a developing relationship with Will Solace

THE TRIALS OF APOLLO (5 BOOKS)

I haven't looked at this one yet, but Apollo is a key character, and his bisexuality is said to feature prominently in the series. One reviewer put it this way:

> "I'm queer! You're queer! That geyser is queer! Everyone is queer! ...There are also a lot of new characters who are queer, including – yes – geyser spirits called palikoi. During the series, Apollo meets a pair of immortal warrior lesbians, a transwoman hunter of Artemis, and many, many bisexual gods and demigods."

1. *The Hidden Oracle* (2016)
2. *The Dark Prophecy* (2017)
3. *The Burning Maze* (2018)
4. *The Tyrant's Tomb* (2019)
5. *The Tower of Nero* (2020) – Piper and Shel are in a lesbian relationship

THE NICO DI ANGELO ADVENTURES (2 BOOKS)

The whole series is focused on the relationship between Nico and his gay love interest.

1. *The Sun and the Star* (2023) – First to focus on a queer couple, with an appearance by lesbian couple Piper and Shel too
2. *The Court of the Dead* (2025)

MAGNUS CHASE AND THE GODS OF ASGARD (3 BOOKS)

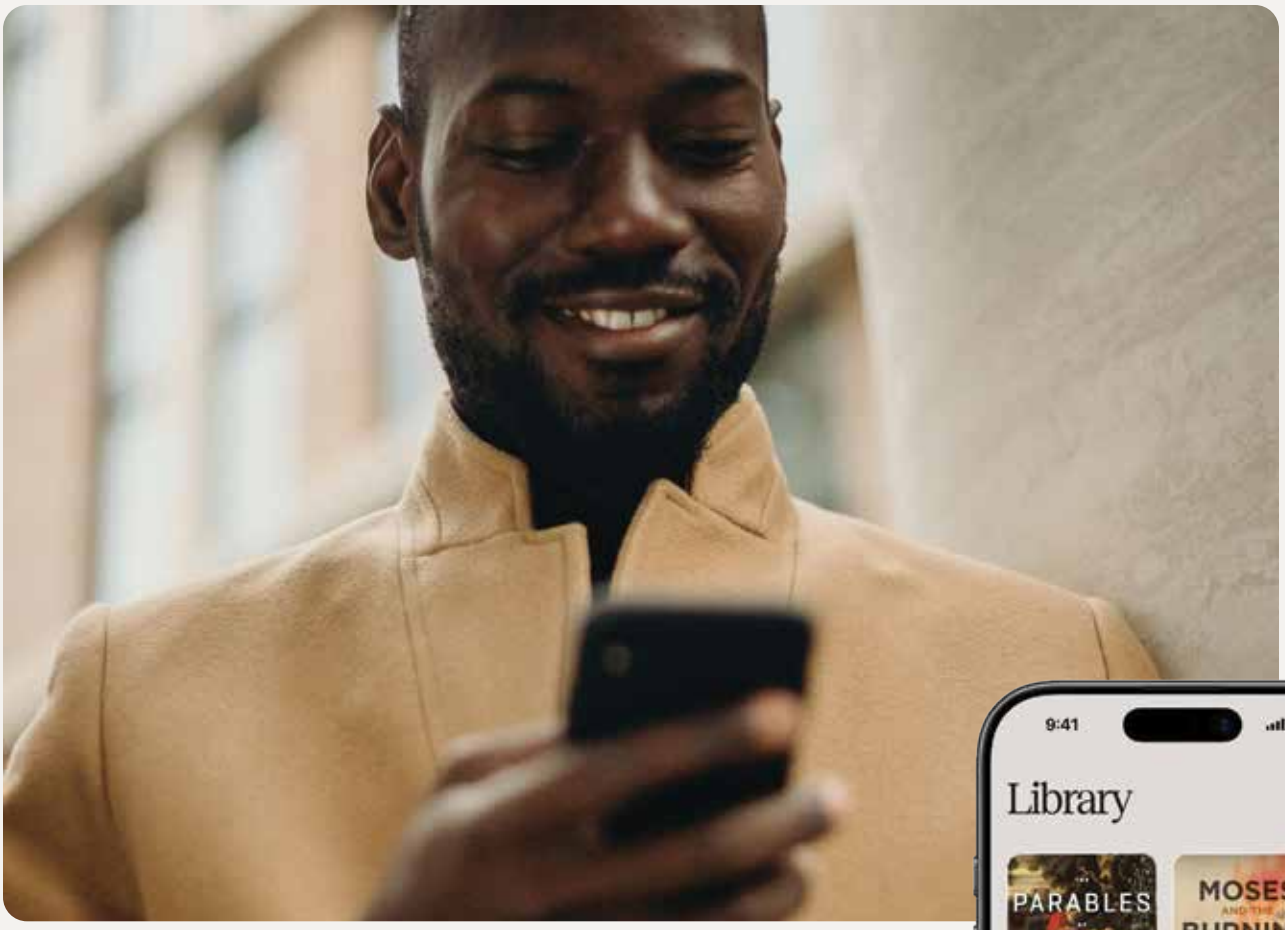
This involves Norse gods, but takes place in the Percy Jackson universe, so it's a spin-off of sorts. Here we meet the shapeshifting, genderfluid Alex Fierro, who gets involved with a pansexual Magnus Chase.

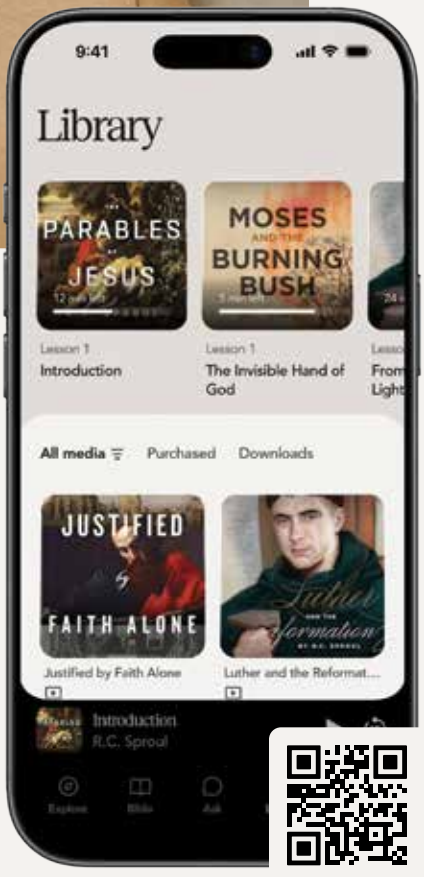
1. *The Sword of Summer* (2015)
2. *The Hammer of Thor* (2016) – While I haven't read it, I found a LGBTQ advocate celebrating that there is "a whole chapter" devoted to Alex explaining his trans experience, and then later building a "pottery golem" that he declares non-binary.
3. *The Ship of the Dead* (2017)

THE KANE CHRONICLES (3 BOOKS)

Riordan has also written a series on the Egyptian gods. Like the Greek myths, the Egyptian mythology this is based on has all sorts of dark demonic supernaturals. Those show up here, along with ghosts, sickness spirits, and all sorts of gods trying to kill or possess the Kane kids, their parents, and even their grandparents. Then there is a thong-wearing male god, and a well-endowed hippo goddess who gets ogled in the graphic novel version of book 2 (ugh!). Both reappear in book 3, where Carter Kane visits the "Land of Demons" with, you guessed it, demons, demons, and more demons – so many demons! – and with a murderous ghost as his guide. In a section that seems almost proselytizing, readers get an extended lecture on the ancient Egyptian understanding of the five parts of our soul. No explicit queer content exactly... but did I mention the demons?

1. *The Red Pyramid* (2010)
2. *The Throne of Fire* (2011)
3. *The Serpent's Shadow* (2012) – Sadie Kane is interested in Anubis, god of the dead, and also a boy, Walt Stone. When Walt dies, and Anubis possesses him, Sadie's two love interests combine into one body and the ensuing relationship has been celebrated by some readers as a form of polyamory. RP





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BY JASPER KLAPWIJK
2025 / 136 PAGES

A DAD REVIEWS *CONFIDENTLY REFORMED: A Reformed Apologetic*

by Mark Penninga

Like many of our readers, while growing up I wrestled with doctrines like predestination and our responsibility before a sovereign God. I was raised in a Reformed church, but I wanted to figure out whether that was where I should stay.

My questions compounded as I became acquainted with more Christians beyond my Reformed community. I attended an evangelical university, lived in a home with 17 or so non-Reformed Christians, and then worked for a couple years for an evangelical ministry. I also did a degree in philosophy, looking for answers from ancient and modern thinkers who claimed to "love wisdom."

Fast forward about seven years and I saw with clarity the depressing destructiveness of secular philosophy – so full of questions and often full of themselves. I also saw the lack of rootedness beneath a lot of evangelical and mainstream Christianity, making it susceptible to ever-changing opinions and fads, particularly if they came from charismatic leaders. Reformed doctrine was looking more and more beautiful and meaningful, accurately reflecting who God showed Himself to be, both in Scripture and in the world.

But there was one aspect of my (Dutch) Reformed heritage that I didn't warm up to. There was no shortage of confidence in being Reformed, but it seemed to translate into justification for our way of doing things, or our particular denomination. We were in a bubble, leaving the impression that there was little of God's Truth to be learned anywhere outside our denomination (and perhaps a few others that were almost identical). I'm encouraged that this has changed in the past 20+ years. But I know that there are multiple generations alive today who are weary and wary of these kinds of confidently Reformed Christians.



So, when I received a book titled *Confidently Reformed*, written by a Dutch minister, and translated into English no less, my "spiritual pride" antenna was raised. But I have a lot of respect for the publisher, Providence Books & Press, so I cracked it open.

I'm glad I did.

This is the kind of Reformed apologetic that I wish I had encountered as a teen or young adult. The author, Jasper Klapwijk, and his wife were called to serve as missionaries on the island of Curaçao, in the Caribbean. During that time, he taught many non-Reformed Christians, and was also asked to teach at a school associated with a Pentecostal church.

"Constantly, I was confronted with the necessity to state very clearly what the Reformed doctrines are. On a regular basis, I observed that this message

changed the lives of people who embraced these doctrines."

But after 15 years on the mission field, he returned to the Netherlands to find "we did not return to the same Reformed churches that we had left fifteen years earlier." There was a lot of variation among the churches, with some wanting to embrace changes that they discovered in non-Reformed churches and others digging in their heels to maintain nostalgic ideas of how things used to be. He was struck by a flippant attitude: "Sorry man, but I'm Reformed." There was no "joyful, missional, *Reformed* glow."

Klapwijk had learned on the mission field that if we fail to share the rich message of the Reformed faith, "you run a great risk that you become so blasé or even indifferent about your faith that you won't recognize the riches of that message yourself."

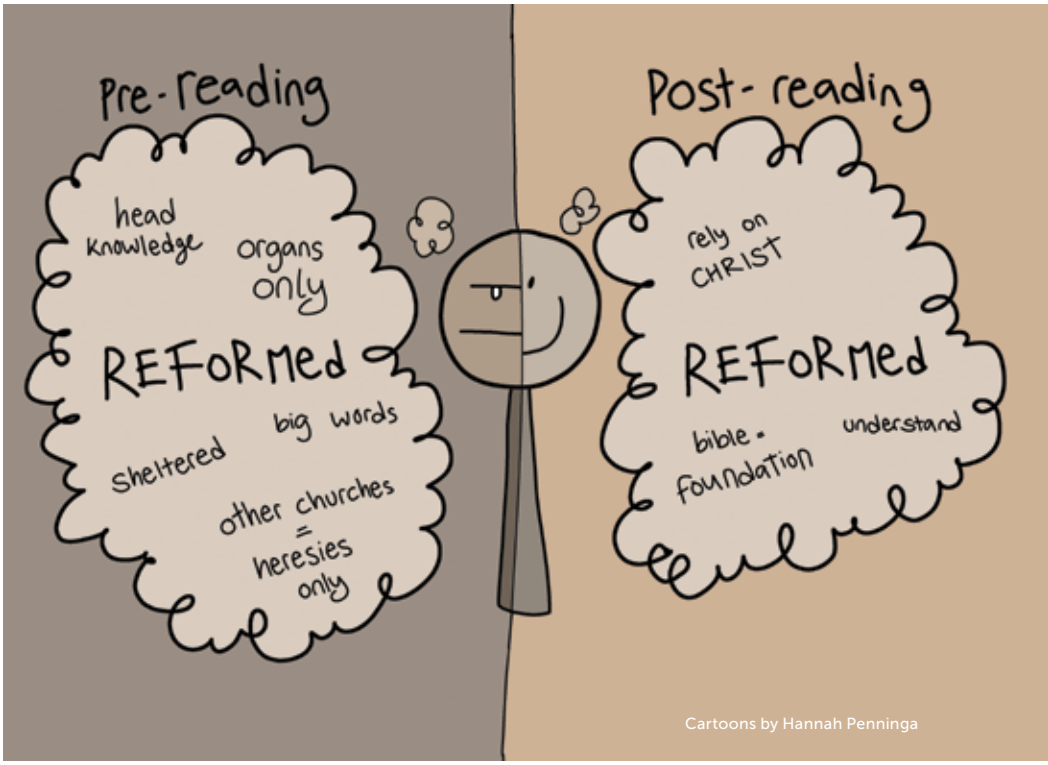
He did a series of lectures – forming this book – to reacquaint Reformed Christians in his home country with the beauty, and missional calling, of their own faith.

He accomplished that goal for me. I loved the humility and simplicity with which he explains the "Five Solas" of the Reformation, as well as "reading the Bible from a Reformed perspective." But what I found even more encouraging was that my 16-year-old daughter saw the book in our home and was drawn to open it herself. She has had her own questions about being Reformed, particularly after spending the year with a group of Pentecostal friends and traveling together with them on a mission trip to Mexico this spring. This had led to many doctrinal discussions with them, and with her Reformed peers, about matters like infant baptism.

Not only did she pick up the book, she read through the whole thing. And when I told her that I was planning to write a review, she asked if she could contribute as well.

You can look right to see what she shared. RP

Find "Confidently Reformed" at ProvidenceBooksPress.com.



Cartoons by Hannah Penninga

A TEEN REVIEW

by Hannah Penninga

I was very happy when I found this book because, unlike most of the books in the "Reformed Apologetics" section, it didn't require a year of weight lifting at the gym or a small forklift to get it to the couch. In *Confidently Reformed,* Mr. Klapwijk does a fantastic job being to the point but still clearly goes over the simple aspects of a Reformed faith.

However, while reading this, I found myself thinking that it seemed to just be describing a Christian faith. I spent the first half of the book reviewing the key gold nugget truth of faith. This is something I find can be a refreshing reminder in Reformed churches, focused on how to read the Bible properly.

I was raised in a Reformed church but during my teen years I began to become frustrated with it. We seemed too stoic, too sheltered, too boring. I began to look to other churches. Sure, they had slight theology problems, but I greatly admired their heart. They were so passionate and wholehearted. I found myself wondering if the trade of some ancient creed/confession by a guy with a long beard for an overflowing heart was worth it.

Then I read this book.

Confidently Reformed is full of gems but not in an over-the-top, every-third-word-ends-with-___ification way. But in a way I could easily understand and connect to the Bible. This book doesn't explain what Reformers believe and then give proof texts to the Bible. It explains the Bible and says, "btw, this is the foundation of Reformers (and many others)."

This book restored my faith in being Reformed. I highly recommend it to anybody about to profess their faith.

FILMS

by Jon Dykstra

ANIMATED, AWESOME, AND MOSTLY UNKNOWN

ReformedPerspective.ca/movies

THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE (1979)

1979 / 95 MINUTES

RATING: 7/10



This starts off a little different from Disney's 2005 live-action version – we see Lucy bursting out of the wardrobe shouting, "I'm back, I'm here." Loyal to the book, small differences do pop up throughout, most notably how the "Deeper Magic" is treated here. I suspect these scriptwriters were Christian and better understood the connections Lewis was making, while the Disney scriptwriters likely weren't Christians.

The caution for this film would amount to the same as for the books. Lewis isn't trying to say that Jesus is actually a lion – Narnia is supposed to be fantasy, not fact. But Lewis does make a close Aslan-to-Jesus connection in Aslan's sacrifice to save Edmund in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. I remember the pope once said after watching *The Passion of the Christ*, that afterwards when he prayed, he saw actor Jim Caviezel (who had the role of Christ) in his mind's eye. I hope no kid would ever pull a pope here, and pray to Aslan instead of God.

This film is forgotten now because the 2005 version is understandably preferred. Still, it won an Emmy back in 1979, and while it starts slow, it keeps getting better and better. For the passionate Narnia fan, it will be very fun to see another version of a favorite story.

CHRISTMAS CAROL: THE MOVIE

2001 / 81 MINUTES

RATING: 7/10



While 95% animated, this adaptation is book-ended with live-action scenes of Charles Dickens reading his *Christmas Carol* "ghost story" to an appreciative audience. But the first scare of the night comes from a little mouse skittering through the theater, which prompts Dickens to rejig his tale to begin it with a mouse, "making its way through London town." Then off we go, into the rest of what is an animated tale.

For those who don't know the story already, rich miser Ebenezer Scrooge has quite the Christmas Eve, getting visited by four ghosts, one after another, who teach him the "true meaning of Christmas."

Our kids will need to be shown what Dickens gets wrong, first about ghosts (see 1 Sam. 28), but more significantly, about that true meaning of Christmas. God tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves, but that is the *Second* Great Commandment, and this story elevates it to the point of completely obscuring the First (Matt. 22:34-40).

So why would a Christian want to watch Dickens' ghostly tale? Because it is a cultural icon, on par with the Greek myths, or Shakespeare's plays – this is a story worth watching, and discussing with your family, simply because everyone knows it. And here Dickens' classic gets a child-friendly brush up, with a couple of cute mice companions, and just a touch of romance too.

MEET THE ROBINSONS

2007 / 95 MINUTES

RATING: 8/10



Lewis is a pre-teen genius who has been living his whole life in an orphanage, hoping that he can be "chosen" by an adoptive couple. To improve his chances, he builds brilliant inventions... that don't quite work the way he was hoping. There are explosions, and mishaps, and in the end Lewis, and his buddy Goob, remain in the orphanage still.

Then Wilbur Robinson, a boy claiming to be from the future, shows up at Lewis' school to warn him someone is going to try to steal his science fair project. Afterwards a creepy man in a bowler does just that! So, of course, Wilbur and Lewis jump into Wilbur's time machine and head to the future to meet Wilbur's family, who are crazy and fabulous and loving, and Lewis can't get enough of them.

The biggest concern would be how adopted children might be impacted. Lewis is desperate to find his birth mother, and he, along with his buddy Goob are desperate to be chosen and instead Lewis gets rejected by 124 couples. Related, we see Goob with a black eye, and though we don't see it, we know it was because he got bullied by the other boys.

I *loved* this because from one moment to the next I didn't know where it was going. This is a wild frantic film that takes us all on the roller coaster ride.

THE WINGFEATHER SAGA: SEASON 1

2022 / 189 MINUTES (6 EPISODES)

RATING: 8/10



The *Wingfeather Saga* follows the Igiby family who live high atop a cliff overlooking the Dark Sea of Darkness. They live in a truly wonderful place... except for all the horrible, poison-dripping enemy Fangs who have conquered the land, and now kidnap children to send them away in the Black Carriage to no one knows where.

Thankfully there's all sorts of comic relief, and the whole Igiby family to just love on. Grandfather Podo is a former pirate and huge, gruff, bear of a man that makes his grandchildren feel safe. He helps his daughter Nia take care of her three children, Janner, Tink and Leeli, and their house-sized dog Nugget.

The main caution would be scariness. There's nothing that anyone over 12 would find alarming, but the music and dark lighting will impact kids under 10. I will also share that two key characters die, though not in Season 1.

They say the movie is never as good as the book, what if the book was astonishing? Then the movie, or animated TV series, could still be awesome... and it is! I will share, though, that while I found the animation fresh and unique, others described it as jarringly different. That said, I'm sure glad there are plans for 7 seasons, with Season 4 just launching now on the Angel.com streaming service.

WALLACE AND GROMIT: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

1989-2009 / 114 MINUTES

RATING: 8/10

It's been 37 years now, since student filmmaker Nick Park crafted his leading man out of clay. He made Wallace lovable and inventive, but also more than a bit thick. Gromit, Wallace's loyal, long-suffering dog, can't quite keep Wallace out of trouble, but he does keep his master from getting in too deep. Wallace might be a brilliant inventor, but Gromit is the wise one.

Right behind this duo, third billing goes to the inventions – Wallace has more gadgets than James Bond, and they're twice as cool. He's built a machine that automatically throws him out of bed, sliding Wallace down a chute so he can land at his breakfast table, where another machine dresses him and yet another makes his breakfast. This process rarely goes off without a hitch, and the malfunctions are as fun as the successes. Another of Wallace's crazy contraptions is a knitting machine that just needs you to pop a sheep in one end, and a sweater will come out the other.

Park has made four short claymation Wallace and Gromit films in all (and some feature films), and the appeal is the spectacle of all of Wallace's crazy inventions, and the simple beautiful loyalty of these two friends. It's clever, and might even inspire some kids to give stop-motion filming a try. That said, only the first film is safe for all ages. See the online version of this review for more detailed cautions, and for a taste of Wallace and Gromit via their "cracking contraptions" compilation. These are eight free-to-see two-minute videos, showing off Wallace at his most inventive.

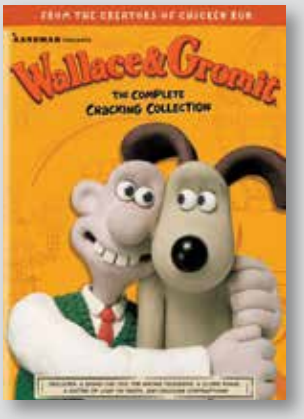
A GRAND DAY OUT

1989 / 24 MINUTES

Wallace and Gromit need a vacation, and when Wallace discovers they are out of cheese, they decide the best getaway destination is the moon, what with all its bounty of green cheese. How are they going to get there? By building a rocket ship in the basement, of course!

THE WRONG TROUSERS

1993 / 30 MINUTES



Wallace and Gromit's happy home life is disrupted by a mysterious penguin who rents one of their rooms. Soon the shifty-eyed flightless fowl is trying to replace Gromit in Wallace's affections. But never fear, the loyalty of this tried-and-true dog does win out in the end. The moral of this tale? Either never neglect your dog, or don't trust shifty-eyed penguins. Fun and silly, it won an Oscar. The villain here (or, maybe more so the mood music when he's onscreen) is a little too creepy for the pre-school set.

A CLOSE SHAVE

1995 / 31 MINUTES

To make ends meet, Wallace and Gromit have started their own window-washing business. A wool merchant, Wendolene Ramsbottom, asks them to clean her shop windows, and, of course, Wallace falls in love. There are two mysteries to solve: first, where has the country's wool gone? and, second, what or who is destroying the interior of Wallace and Gromit's house? This is for older kids, as a sheep does die.

A MATTER OF LOAF AND DEATH

2009 / 29 MINUTES

Wallace and Gromit are now bakers, and great at it. It doesn't hurt their business, either, that all the other bakers in town are being bumped off one by one. Wallace is in love again, this time with Piella Bakewell, the spokesmodel for Bake-O-Lite breads. The ever-loyal Gromit gets stuck doing Wallace's work in the bakery, even as he's also trying to prevent the two of them from becoming the "cereal" killer's next victims. The description pitched this as a "who-doughnut" in the tradition of Alfred Hitchcock, and I was skeptical; how could they pull that off in claymation? But they did!

A reasoned defense:
6 fallacies to see through, and avoid

by Wes Bredenhof

The classic biblical text for Christian apologetics (the defense of the faith) is 1 Peter 3:15, "…but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." This tells us why every Christian should be prepared to defend the faith: because God says so. Naturally, God has a reason why He would say so as well, and that reason is the salvation of sinners and the glory of His Name. Therefore, we are to be ready always.

The answer which we must be prepared to give is a well-reasoned one, as the original Greek *apologia* (from where we get the word "apologetics") indicates. It would thus be unacceptable for Christians to defend their faith in a sloppy way, giving no heed to rules of reasoning.

LOGIC AS A TOOL

I want to share with you some common mistakes people make when arguing about the Christian faith. In doing this, let me be clear: our faith doesn't rest upon logic or reason. Christian faith is reasonable, but it isn't rationalistic. Faith is produced by the Holy Spirit through the Word, built upon the solid bedrock of the gospel promises found in God's Word.

However, that doesn't leave reasoning out of the picture. Pastors use it in their sermons all the time, and you can find examples of it throughout our confessions. Logic is a tool for communication and persuasion. Moreover, just as there are laws in mathematics and laws of physics, so also there are laws of logic. It's part of the created order – absolute, not relative. Therefore, to defend the gospel effectively, it's necessary to know a few basics about reasoning.

The most important basics to know are informal fallacies – errors in reasoning having to do with content rather than structure. Since these are common and easy to diagnose, let's go over a few so you can watch out for them in your own reasoning and gently point them out in others.

1. AD HOMINEM

This error in reasoning is by far the most common and the one unbelievers tend to exploit the most. The name comes from Latin and means "to the man." With this fallacy, the argument shifts away from the issue at hand and instead attacks the other party's character.

We see this error frequently when critics attack Christians by calling them hypocrites or pointing out historical failures. By arguing this way, they shift attention away from the core question: Is Christianity true?

But we must be careful not to fall into the same trap. Christians could just as easily respond by pointing to the atrocities of historic regimes led by atheists. There's plenty of mud around if one knows where to look for it, but this type of argumentation doesn't befit those who are to sanctify the Lord in their hearts.

2. POISONING THE WELL

This is a variation of the *ad hominem* fallacy. The name comes from a historic debate where one side suggested his opponent didn't give much weight to the truth because of his religious background.

An everyday example would be saying something like, "Why should I expect you to agree with what I'm saying? You're an unbeliever." A statement like that poisons the well; it makes discussion impossible. Christians should be charitable in their conversations. After all, you simply don't know whether the Holy Spirit is currently working for the redemption of that person.

3. HASTY GENERALIZATION

With this fallacy, a single isolated case or a small number of cases is used as the basis for a sweeping conclusion. The argument assumes that what is true in one instance must be true in every case.

An unbeliever might use it like this: "I know a Christian who cheats on his taxes and yells at his wife. You just can't trust Christians, so I wouldn't want to be one." Christians must also be careful about making hasty generalizations about unbelievers. One can make generalizations, but they must be grounded on facts and relevant to the actual argument.

4. FALSE CAUSE

This argument claims that one event caused another event when no such relationship has actually been proven. A historical example is the ancient claim that the Roman

Empire disintegrated because of Christianity – an argument to which Augustine responded at length in *The City of God*.

From our own perspective, we might commit this error if we say: "Morality declined right after the acceptance of evolutionary theory, therefore the theory of evolution is solely to blame for today's societal issues." While there may be a connection, a simple chronological sequence doesn't equal proof; you must show how it is true with further evidence. In other words, correlation does not prove causation.

5. EQUIVOCATION

To equivocate means to change the meaning of a key word in the middle of an argument. For example, in debates surrounding capital punishment, people sometimes appeal to the commandment "You shall not kill." They argue that because God says we cannot kill, capital punishment is always wrong.

The problem here rests with the word "kill." Most modern translations accurately render that specific Hebrew word as "murder." The commandment is a prohibition against the unlawful taking of life either intentionally or through negligence, not an absolute injunction against killing in general (such as lawful execution or self-defense). The lesson here is that we must use our terms in exactly the same sense throughout a discussion.

6. APPEAL TO AUTHORITY

If asked, "Why do you believe in the resurrection?" a Christian might answer, "Because the Bible tells me so." Many unbelievers would call this a fallacious appeal to authority. However, not all appeals to authority are fallacious. As long as the authority is reliable and competent, the appeal is justified. In this case, the person pointing to the Bible must be ready to defend its authoritative and reliable character.

Conversely, unbelievers often appeal to a different kind of authority: consensus (the argument that because millions of people do not believe, it can't be true). We recognize that truth doesn't depend on a headcount. It's better and more God-honoring to discuss the inherent character of the Christian faith than to get caught up in debates about how many people accept it.

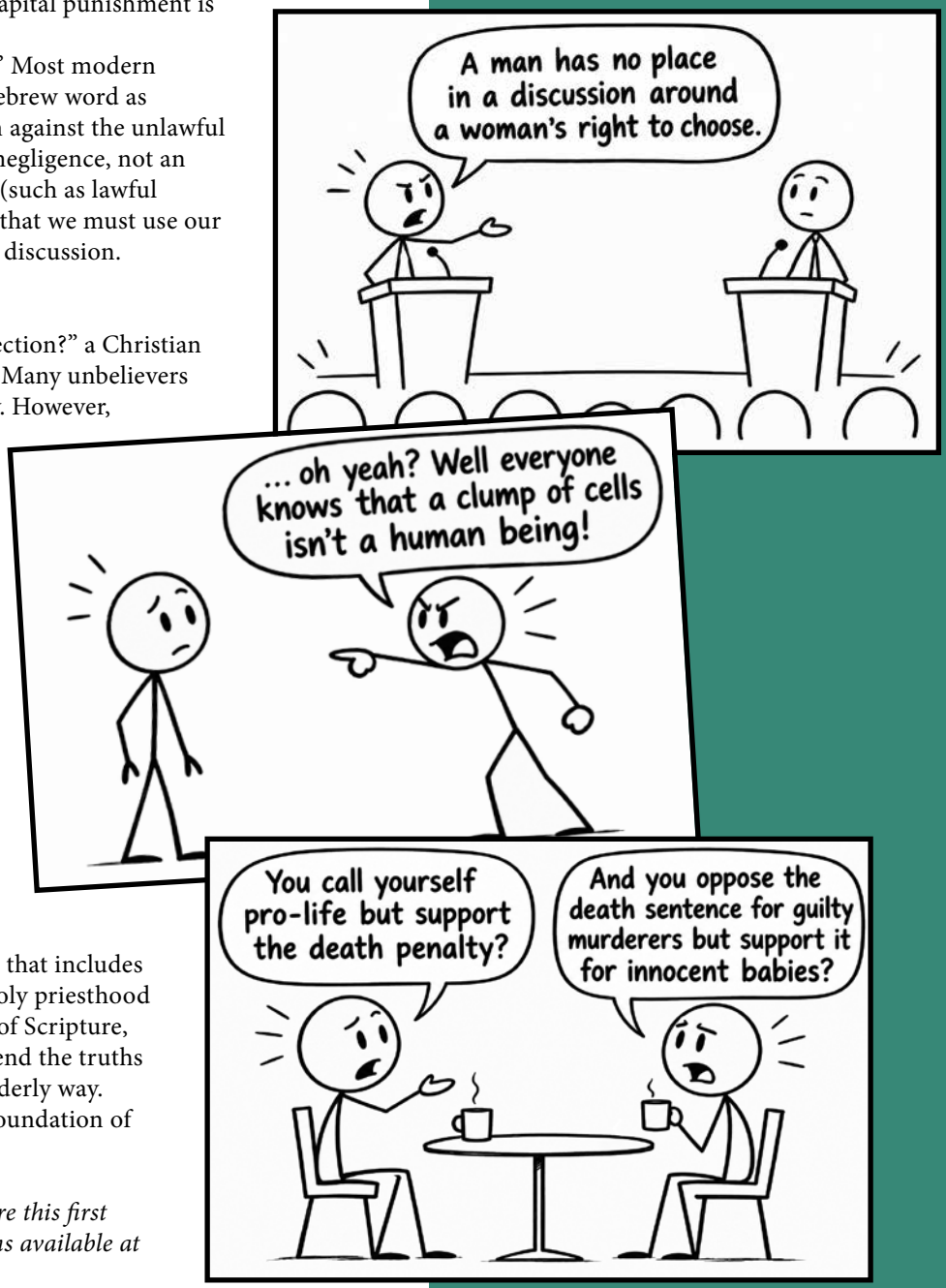
CONCLUSION

God wants the best from his people, and that includes how they go about defending the faith. The holy priesthood of believers ought to have a good knowledge of Scripture, but they must also be able to present and defend the truths of Scripture in a coherent, reasonable, and orderly way. This eminently honors God, the source and foundation of all our reasoning. RP

Dr. Bredenhof blogs at Bredenhof.ca, where this first appeared. He also has more than 600 sermons available at TheSeed.info.

WHICH FALLACY IS THIS?

Some fallacies are easier to spot than others. Here's 3 examples of the fallacies Dr. Bredenhof discusses in his article. Can you tell how they match up? If you need help, discuss and debate it with a friend.





HOW AND WHEN TO LAMENT

by Sharon L. Bratcher

"Lament is how we bring our sorrow to God.... We need to recover the practice of honest spiritual struggle that gives us permission to vocalize our pain and wrestle with our sorrow .... moving us toward deeper worship and trust."

– Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*

Pain that is incredibly overwhelming. Devastating.

Since 1969, thanks to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, we have been told that there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Others have explained that these stages don't necessarily fall into well-defined periods of time, but that a grieving person will often traverse the stages repeatedly. It would be so much easier if one knew that, okay, I'll do stage one for a month, then stage two, etc. It doesn't work that way. The stages are more like an undesirable carnival ride that twists us this way and that way and back again.

When grief hits – often unexpectedly



even after a loved one's long illness – there is a constant question of "What should I do? How do I manage this?" and even "Can I possibly go on living when I am in such pain?"

While these stages pop up throughout Scripture – in the lives of Job, David, Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus too – the notion that we go through all of them, in that order, isn't biblical. So, what then does God teach us about grief in His Word?

Psalm 34:18:
"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

I'm using the word "lament" here to describe the process that the Lord has given to us to give voice to our pain. It is a process that only Christians can practice because only those with a connection with God can do it. It's a process that takes us from asking, "Why, God?" to once again experiencing trust in Him. For example, consider the transition from the beginning of Psalm 13…

> How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
> How long will you hide your face from me?

… to the end in verse 6:

> I will sing to the LORD
> for He has dealt bountifully with me.

And compare the despair at the beginning of Psalm 69…

> Save me, O God!
> For the waters have come up to my neck.
> I sink in deep mire
> where there is no foothold;
> I have come into deep waters,
> and the flood sweeps over me.
> I am weary with my crying out;
> my throat is parched.
> My eyes grow dim
> with waiting for my God.

… with what comes near the conclusion:

> I will praise the name of God with a song;
> I will magnify him with thanksgiving . . .
> For the LORD hears the needy
> and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.

When we are grieving, sometimes others will encourage us to hurry away from verse 1 and jump to the end of the Psalm. There's a discomfort with being caught in the middle area because it doesn't seem godly or correct to stay in the questioning zone for very long. Doubting could leave your "spiritual status" at stake.

And yet, God gave us the Psalms – one-third of which include lament – and the Book of Job and Lamentations so that we might have the words with which to approach Him when we are devastated and destitute of motivation.

Without lamenting to bring our sorrow to God, we may not know how to process the extreme pain, and might therefore fall into silence, bitterness, or even anger.

Showing others the process of lament is a way that we can help other Christians progress through their difficult loss. It's superior to offering trite solutions, unhelpful comments, or impatient responses. Lament helps us learn about God and our world.

How then do you lament?

Biblical lament takes grieving people on a journey and usually includes four key elements:

1) an address to God
2) a complaint
3) a request
4) and an expression of trust and/or praise.

Each step is a pathway towards hope. As Mark Vroegop writes "Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness."

Step 1 - Turn to God

Keep praying, despite your pain, because of your pain. Pray out the words of a psalm, like Psalm 77 for example:

> I cry aloud to God
> and He will hear me.
> In the day of my trouble, I seek the Lord;
> in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
> my soul refuses to be comforted.

Pray the whole Psalm. It takes faith to pray a lament and some people are

afraid to do so because of its honesty. But it is so much better than living in silent despair.

We have a tendency to think that God will answer immediately – whoosh! Here comes instant comfort. It doesn't always happen that way. Mark Vroegop explains:

> "Lament is the song you sing believing that one day God will answer and restore. Lament invites us to pray through our struggle with a life that is far from perfect."

Step 2 - Complain

Prayer is a proper place to do so! Pray your struggles and your honest, humble, pain-filled questions. The Psalms contain "creative complaining" – mentioning sorrow, fear, frustration and confusion, and then reminding God of His promises to us.

We believe in God's sovereignty but live in a world full of tragedy. When overcome by grief, we may feel like God is far away from us, such as is expressed in Ps. 13:1-2; Ps. 22:1; Ps. 35:17; Ps. 44:23-24; Ps. 80:12; and Ps. 88:14. Complaining to God is not just listing our grievances – it is a path that reorients our thinking and our feelings. And think about it – when we are on a path, we are not yet at our destination.

Step 3 - Request

If you don't have the words, read a Psalm of lament, such as Psalm 77, out loud. Think about it. Let it open your heart. Keep wrestling and struggling. The Psalms give us permission and encouragement to present our struggles to our Almighty loving Father. David makes bold requests despite his deep pain, his questions and his frustrations, anchoring his soul to who God is and what He has done. We must stake our claim on what God has promised that He will do!

Step 4 - Express trust

Look at the difference between Psalm 22:2…

> Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
> and by night, but I find no rest.

…and see the word "yet" and so much more in verses 3-5:

> Yet you are holy….
> .... trusted
> .... delivered
> .... cried
> .... rescued

Psalm 31 starts the turnaround with the word "but":

> But I trust in you, O LORD;
> I say, 'You are my God.'

Lament is a place where we continually acknowledge our need for God's help. When we pray the Psalm all the way through, God can use it to soften our grief and remind us of His love. In the deepest grief, it might not happen all at once, but gradually.

Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs

Along with the Scriptures of lament, hymns and songs can often aid us in expressing our deepest emotions and moving us towards trusting God.

For example, the hymn of Georg Neumark entitled "If You But Let the Father Guide You" is an intense and wonderful reminder that we may and must move from our sorrow/distress to once again trusting God.

> If you but let the Father guide you,
> relying on his faithfulness,
> He will be evermore beside you
> in all your sorrow and distress.
> He who on God Most High depends
> builds not his house on shifting sands.
>
> Will anxious care or bitter sighing
> at any time give true relief?
> And what avails us our decrying
> each morning's evil, trouble, grief?
> We only add to grief and stress
> by discontent and bitterness.

But we must not think that stanza 2 means that we are not to ever sigh, decry, feel discontent, or bitter. It does not mean that we will climb out of the pits of despair immediately. It is an encouragement to trust God. And when we lament – we move down the path from devastation and questioning to assurance.

Lament, Vroegop writes,

> "allows you to hear the lessons God intends to teach you through pain.... It complains, weeps, struggles, hopes, remembers and clings. It reminds us who we are, who God is, and how brokenness is woven into the fabric of our world.... Lament can retune our hearts to what's really important."

When should we lament?

We will all suffer grief while we are in this world. It may be the terrible loss of a loved one, the loss of our possessions or employment, or some kind of humiliation or attack. But we can also use the Psalms of lament to pray about all the horrors in this world. War. Death. Poverty. Trafficking. How often we shake our heads in disbelief or feel at a total loss to change anything! Praying the Psalms of lament over the evil in our world will express our emotions and our concerns, while having us end with an affirmation that God is indeed in control.

Learning to lament using the Psalms and Lamentations and other Scriptures will help us. Pray them out loud. Write them in a notebook. Let God use the words He has provided to us to push us down the path from hopelessness to certainty. RP

Sharon Bratcher recently suffered the loss of her oldest daughter Julie. You can read other RP articles she has written in her book entitled "Life and Breath and Everything" available on Amazon.



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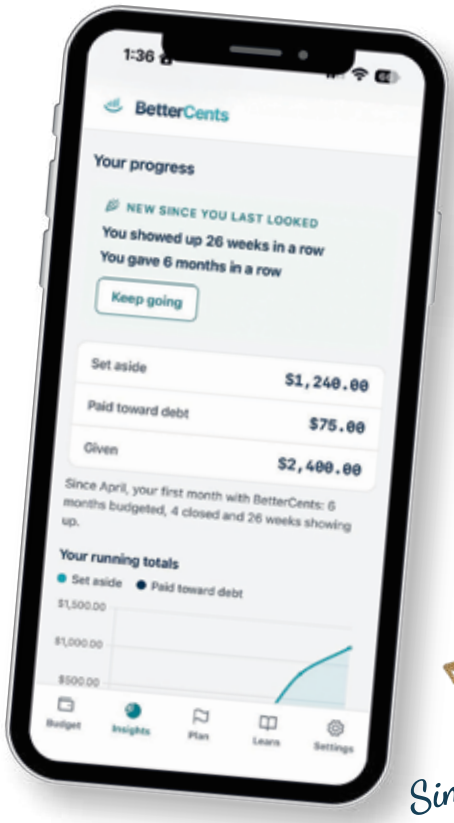
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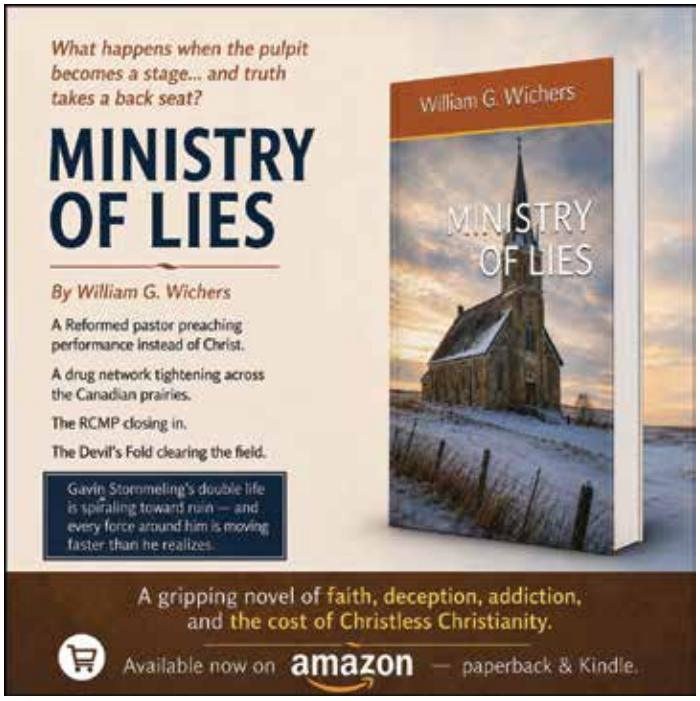
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WE *NEED* THE SABBATH

by Mariah Oosterhof

This is an overview of ***Sunday: Rest or Rules? - Ep. 155*** *of Lucas Holtvluwer and Tyler Vanderwoude's bi-weekly Real Talk podcast. Real Talk is committed to having honest conversations that apply the Word of God to the nitty-gritty of life.*
Find it at ***RealTalkPodcast.ca*** *or wherever you get your podcasts.*

How we think about the Sabbath and Sunday is more foundational than we might think. It orients our lives and reminds us of why we are on this earth and where we are going.

In a recent *Real Talk* episode, Lucas was joined by his father, Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, who recently authored the devotional *Foundations: Meditations on Genesis 1-3*.

THE SABBATH WAS RIGHT THERE AT CREATION

To kick the discussion off, Lucas pointed out that it is easy to rally people around foundational topics we find in the opening chapters of Genesis – marriage, gender, the basis of equality, and more – but there's not the same interest in the Sabbath, even though it's right there in the beginning too. This disinterest is more common in the broader evangelical world, but is also making its way into Reformed circles.

Rev. Holtvlüwer explained that the problem is that many don't understand the Sabbath's rootedness in creation. They see the word "Sabbath" as something added at Sinai, or they think it's no longer binding, being similar to the ceremonial laws that were shadows pointing to Christ and have passed away with His death and resurrection.

But Genesis 2 displays something different – the God of the universe created for six days and rested on the 7th.

Lucas / Real Talk (RT): "Why does God need to rest?"
Peter Holtvlüwer (PH): "He doesn't, right?... God could have left the week at six days. We could have just had a six-day work week …But all of a sudden, after everything's created, we get this special designation, the creation of another day. Some marvelous things are said. God blessed the seventh day. [He] didn't bless any of the other six days, so that already marks it as something special. He made it holy. So please note that we're before the fall into sin."

This designation of a special day before the fall into sin shows something special. Something we ought not to take lightly.

THE 4TH COMMANDMENT

Now let's jump a couple of Bible books to Sinai and the 10 Commandments. We read in Exodus 20:8-11:

> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

This command rests on what happened at creation. Holtvlüwer noted, "It's a day to set aside our work because God set aside His work…we are to imitate God." God is calling the Israelites to remember creation. And this command matches up with what God has just commanded in the three previous commandments.

PH: "First commandment: whom we are to worship, only worship God. Second commandment: how we are to worship – worship God according to My instructions. Third commandment: …worship Me with the right attitude. So it's all about worship. One, two, and three. Now we get to the fourth commandment, and it's about worship again. The time is commanded."

Right before the Israelites are to enter the promised land, they are given the law, and again God calls them to follow the fourth commandment. He builds on its *creational* foundation by calling Israel to remember, as Rev. Holtvlüwer put it, their "*recreation*, where God saved you from slavery to Pharaoh. And both of these are precursors to what the Lord Jesus would do for us."

JESUS AND THE SABBATH

In the New Testament the Pharisees had a different understanding of the Sabbath, adding to the law beyond what God commanded. And Jesus rebuked them for it.

PH: "When he says the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, He's staking out the ground to the Pharisees that this is My day, and He actually had the right to say, 'I was there in the beginning when this day was created, and this is My day, and I get to say what's the right thing to do on it, yes or no.' So the Lord Jesus lays that out. That's what that claim is all about. And then He says, the Sabbath was made for man. Well, that actually takes us back to creation, right?"
RT: "It's that gift idea."
PH: "Yeah... Notice He doesn't say the Sabbath was made for Israel. He doesn't say the Sabbath was made for the Jews. He doesn't say the Sabbath was made for God's people. He says the Sabbath was made for man. That's a very general word for mankind, for humanity."

JUST THE 9 COMMANDMENTS NOW?

When it comes to the other commandments, we are quick to affirm that Jesus came to fulfill the law, not abolish it. But what about when it comes to the fourth commandment?

PH: "That's a big question mark for people. And I think there's been an overreading of the fourth commandment to say, 'Oh, that's just all shadow. That's just all temporary.' See, they don't root it in creation. They don't see it as part of God's permanent law. They see it only as a temporary thing. And that's where I believe the big mistake is made."

Yes, many of the ceremonial laws were the shadows of greater things to come in Christ. And even in the Ten Commandments, there are temporary elements that have passed away, but…

PH: "…with the fourth commandment, the permanent element is one day of rest out of every seven… The temporal element is the seventh day. We know that because of what the Lord Jesus (who's the Lord of the Sabbath), did in His resurrection and how He basically taught His disciples to honor Him by worshiping Him on the Lord's Day, what the New Testament calls the Lord's Day on that new…first day. So the fourth commandment is a moral thing. The day of rest is a moral thing. It's not a temporal thing… If you just look at it practically, the people of God still need a day on which to worship."

The New Testament affirms the remaining "shadow" of the weekly Sabbath we celebrate as "Hebrews 4… points forward to the great eternal Sabbath that God has in store for us. This is all outside of the shadows of the Mosaic Law." So Jesus affirms the goodness of the Sabbath by claiming it as His day. Can't we give Him one day in seven?

THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

Like all the other commandments, "keeping the Sabbath holy" is a matter of the heart. Understanding this cuts through all the noise of pharisaical legalism and do-what-you-wantism.

PH: "[Jesus is] not saying, 'Oh, do what you want on the Sabbath or the day of rest…' He's just saying the Sabbath was made for man, for man's good. Well, what is man's good? You go back to Genesis 2…. His highest joy is to spend quality time with his Maker.

That's what making the day holy is all about… the mindset has to be: this day is for me, is given to me by God, for my good. What is my highest good? It's to be in the Lord's company. It's to give my heart to the Lord. It's to fellowship with my God. What higher good can there be?"

Holtvlüwer encouraged us to be honest before God.

PH: "What are we doing on the Lord's Day? Is it for me or for the Lord? Am I looking after my wants, or am I serving the Lord from the heart? Am I trying to get to know Him better? Am I trying to be in fellowship with His people better?"

Being honest before God and recognizing our heart posture will help us answer any of the can-we or can't-we questions.

THE NITTY-GRITTY

We reached out to our audience to ask for their questions related to the Sabbath. We covered as many as we could as quickly as we could. Here are a few of the big ones:

Q. Why two services?

Maybe the question should be: why not three or four? Holtvlüwer noted that the Old Testament worship was characterized by sacrifices both in the morning and evening. "That was every day of the week, but it was doubled on the Sabbath…"

PH: "The first Christians were Jews, and then they were quickly joined by Gentiles. We have evidence from history that they worshiped also…at sunrise and sunset…This idea that you worship in the morning and the rest of the day is for yourself, that's a problem. That's already moving away from the concept that this day is for the honor of the Lord and for my good. My good, my highest good, is indeed to give my heart to the Lord, to be in the Lord's company, to think about the Lord, to fellowship with the Lord, to meditate upon the Lord, not to go off and do whatever I want, right?"

Q. How about livestreaming it?

PH: "Live stream service, in and of itself, can be a great blessing for those who legitimately can't come to the worship services… It's a second-best option for those who are unable to go to the gathering of God's people, and then it can be a blessing because that's all you can do. But if you're staying home by choice, you're not honoring the call of the Lord to worship on the Lord's Day."

Q. What about eating out on Sundays?

This is a common practice in many circles, especially in the US. The fourth commandment calls us to rest, but it also calls us to let our servants rest.

PH: "What's the principle there? Well, basically, we should not make anyone work for us to the extent possible that we can. So, when I walk into a restaurant on Sunday and order food, I am making someone work. I cannot square that with the fourth commandment."

Q. What about traveling on Sunday?

PH: "…the root concept at creation. If we can get that back clear in our minds, then we're going to treat this day differently. We're going to treat it wholly… I want to drive home from my holiday on Sunday because I need to be back at work Monday. Well, I don't need to be back at work Monday, but I don't want to take Monday off…We all have the flexibility to take Monday off, make that a travel day, but actually, I don't want to do that because I want to save that holiday because you only have so many in a year for the next holiday. So, what's really going on there?"

Q. Have we made family an idol when it comes to Sunday?

In our tight-knit churches where family is highly valued and often close by, we can often (unintentionally) gravitate towards our families when it comes to Sunday fellowship.

PH: "Look, it's beautiful that we celebrate the Lord's Day with family, but try to broaden that out. Don't forget the family of God. The family of God is of critical importance, and I recognize your blood family is often part of the family of God. But can we look beyond our families to see the needs of others in the congregation?"

DON'T GET LOST IN THE NITTY-GRITTY

When we contemplate the Sabbath, it's easy to get lost in all the nitty-gritty questions. But as with all things, we have to get back to the heart of the issue. What is your heart posture? Where are your priorities? Do we see the whole day as for the Lord, and are we willing to treat it as such?

PH: "[Sunday is]...like a litmus test… Where does our time really go? If you want to know whether a person is a sincere believer, follow their money and follow their time. What are they giving their money to? What are they giving their time to? Those things will tell the tale of what's going on in their heart."

Let us then not neglect the gift and blessing of the Sabbath. If you want to learn more about what it means to apply the fourth commandment to our daily lives be sure to check out Lucas and his dad's whole conversation in "*Ep. 155 - Sunday: Rules or Rest?*" at **RealTalkPodcast.ca**. RP

Rev Peter Holtvlüwer's new book is widely available at your favorite online Christian bookstores.



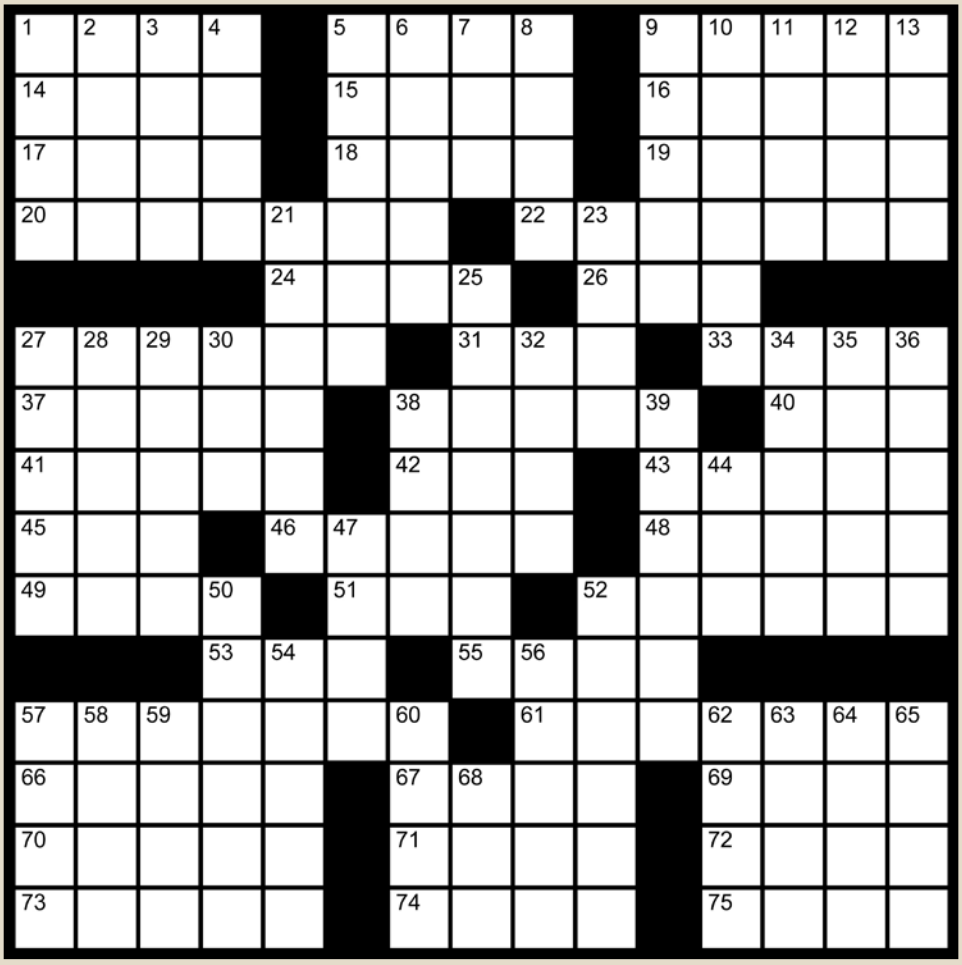
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY JEFF DYKSTRA

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2026

PUZZLE CLUES

Find this issue's solution on page 58.



ACROSS

1. ____ 51: highly classified Air Force Base
5. ____ League (formed in Cairo, March, 1945)
9. "sharp as a two-_____ sword." (Prov. 5)
14. "they lowered the ____" (Acts 27)
15. "they carried it on a ____" (Num. 13)
16. Determination; desire
17. "will come from ____ and west" (Luke 13)
18. "all faces grow ____" (Joel 2; Nah. 2)
19. "has _____ us understanding" (1 John 5)
20. Things you find on, or mostly in, dressers?
22. Some people need a change of this.
24. Book by T.S. Eliot that became a musical
26. It was brought across the Jordan. (Josh. 3)
27. Character in *Wind in the Willows*
31. "man ___ made for immortality." (Lincoln)
33. "the Lord ____ him in." (Gen. 7)
37. Concrete _____: connecting slab
38. IQ and driver's road _____
40. ___ Wednesday (Feb. 10, 2027)
41. _____ and Malice (vicious card game?)
42. "The ___ Tree" (Matsuo Basho haiku)
43. Is the _____ whether she __ ___ or not?
45. "he was ___, near to death" (Phili. 2)
46. What you want your new puppy to have had
48. Description of the OT's calendar
49. "their inmost ____ is destruction" (Ps. 5)
51. Typical Hawaiian instrument (short form)
52. "of a ______ and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3)
53. "Your ___ eyes shall see this" (Mal. 1)
55. Rina confused and all wet?
57. "the ______ of his heart" (1 Cor. 14)
61. Alternative to being born
66. "from the _____ where she was" (Ruth 1)
67. "his ears are ____ to their prayer" (1 Pet. 3)
69. Particularly unpleasant type of awakening
70. "she _____ for nothing except..." (Esther 2)
71. "good not to eat ____..." (Rom. 14)
72. Places where 61 Across happened
73. "according to his daily _____" (Jer. 52)
74. Loose things tied up by good mystery writers
75. Half a fortnight

DOWN

1. "Wisdom is with the ____" (Job 21)
2. ____ *Window* (1954 Hitchcock film)
3. Alleviate; mitigate
4. "by their secret ____" (Ex. 7-8)
5. "the Lord will ______ to you" (Lev. 19)
6. Rhyme with toast, but its negative opposite
7. "rebuke with ___ authority." (Tit. 2)
8. "there was a swarm of ____ in..." (Judges 14)
9. Lawn tool rated online in *Popular Mechanics*
10. "Whoever... ______ my blood..." (John 6)
11. "Hear this, you elders; ____ ear" (Joel 1)
12. "is forever and ____" (Heb. 1)
13. "to ____ a man justice" (Lam. 3)
21. What obnoxious people like to make
23. "and ____ out many demons." (Mark 1)
25. What someone might be if he wears it
27. _____ point (1/100 of a percentage point)
28. "as the _____ of his eye" (Deut. 32)
29. Tool of dentists or carpenters
30. "he ___ into the boat" (Matt. 8,14,15)
32. "the thing that the king ____" (Dan. 2)
34. One has not a clue, speaking shortly?
35. "Round up the _____ suspects." (1942 film)
36. "_____ is no variation" (James 1)
38. Last name of friend of Frodo (Tolkien)
39. "But the people were ______" (2 Kings 18)
44. "his face was like the ___" (Rev. 1)
47. What you do for bargains or treasure
50. "shall be put to ______ labor" (Is. 31)
52. What Newton stood "on the shoulders of"
54 Confused Swede you want out of your field?
56. "Everyone who goes on _____" (2 John)
57. "six cubits and a ____" (1 Sam. 17)
58. "whatever ____ is contrary..." (1 Tim. 1)
59. "Ephraim is a ____ not turned." (Hos. 7)
60. "____ pig" (web message from Charlotte)
62. The people supervised by a coxswain
63. Hug eagles, partly, of large size?
64. Part of ledge?
65. Classroom or office furniture
68. "rather not write with ___ and ink" (3 John)

I am the Lord your God,
Who brought you out of Egypt,
out of the land of slavery.
(Exodus 20:2)

Before the Ten Commandments, God said that He was the Lord, the Redeemer. He emphasized that He had chosen His people. He said that He would guide His people throughout their lives to have a personal relationship with them.

The Preamble

by Christine Farenhorst

In the mid-seventeen hundreds in a small borough between Leicester and London, lived a man by the name of James Turnstock. James was a very tall man and, as such, when he rode his horse astraddle, he came across as both impressive and towering. He rode confidently one fine morning of a gentle spring day, to all outward appearance taking inventory of his property. Paying no attention to the small whirlwinds of dust that the mare kicked up around its hooves, he scrutinized the fields open and wide at his side.

Well into his thirties, James was a farmer, albeit a gentleman farmer, and one who, reputedly, did not mind getting his hands dirty. He took joy in planting and harvesting and reveled in the beauty of nature. The feel of soil as it crumbled between his fingers could stop him short as he would suddenly be minded of God's forming man out of the dust.

An avid reader of both agricultural and spiritual matters, he tossed the two in his mind as he would a salad. Riding along, he mulled over the fact that he had recently learned that the Dutch planted turnips in fallow areas and that these root vegetables restored a soil's fertility. An Englishman by the name of Robert Townsend, widely known as "Turnip" Townsend, had worked with these root bulbs.

The mare neighed and snorted at a partridge ground-nesting in a nearby bush, interrupting James' musings for a moment. He patted the horse's neck soothingly before his thoughts sank back into farming. This rotation of turnips, barley, clover and wheat crops could perhaps be compared to the way one occupied one's time – work, leisure, prayer and sleep. He smiled at his passing strange fancies. Perhaps thoughts were like seeds and weeds, giving birth to harvests of good and bad days, depending on what you had sown.

A pheasant sedately walked out of a clump of trees to his right and began crossing the path. Suddenly becoming aware of the horse and its rider, the bird began to run, its red face wattles trailing. Then it burst into the sky as if flushed out of a thicket, the small head and long neck pointing upward. Entranced, James watched. It was a male bird, its bright and colorful feathers sweeping behind him. Smaller females were a dull, grey brown. Not like human beings, he pondered, not like them at all.

Holding the reins with his right hand, he stroked his short beard with his left, sighing deeply before he turned his thoughts back to turnips. He would have liked to converse with Townsend face to face about agriculture. There were few enough with whom to speak intelligently on farming methods, let alone other matters.

*****

As he rode on, James Turnstock took measure of himself. He considered that he was an average farmer, neither overly prosperous nor dirt-poor. His holding was noted for some of the best pigs in the North Hampton area and, as well, he had been complimented on the size and

THE TRADITION CONTINUES...

For 34 years it's been an annual tradition for *Reformed Perspective* to feature a longer – 8 to 14 pages – Christine Farenhorst short story in our year-end issue. Space constraints have meant that sometimes we've split it over several print issues, but for the last few years now, we've been posting the whole story, all at once, on our website, where no space constraints exist. So read the opening here, and then continue on to **ReformedPerspective.ca/Preamble** or scan the QR code below with your phone.

Illustration by Stephanie Vanderpol



quality of his sheep. The grass in his fields was sweet and his horses were respected for their gentleness and good behavior in working the plough. A quick sigh escaped him at this point. He knew his thoughts were drifting dangerously close toward the sin of pride but he did take such pleasure in caring for his fields, and his livestock. Did not all in the county agree that those employed by himself were a fortunate folk? And was he not even now undertaking a mission of mercy?

He stroked his beard once more and turned his gaze away from the land, urging the mare on to a quicker pace. On his way to see Morgan Kilby, a neighbor, he felt guilty that he had briefly given in to the temptation to stop and admire the fields God had given him – an occupation he vastly preferred to the nearing visit. Although Kilby was a farmer like himself, James had no great liking for the man. Rough in language, generally unkempt in clothing, shoddy in caring for his animals, his lifestyle and mannerisms irritated James to no end. Yet, there was the upcoming visit – a matter neither to be shirked nor put off.

*****

The Kilby farmstead, a stone and timber construction, came into his view. It boasted a thatched roof – albeit a rather sorry thatch. The ramshackle walls were in dire need of re-plastering and a thin straggle of smoke rose out of the red-stoned chimney. The entire structure reflected the owner's character. James slowed his horse down and turned into his neighbor's laneway. There were very few signs of life about the place, although it must be nearing seven o'clock. The singing of a thrush in the thicket indicated that there was, indeed, some beauty to be garnered in this neglected place. As the bird flew up past James, its warm yellow underwing visible as it sang, a smile appeared on his face. Dismounting, he tied his horse to a post and approached the side door. Before he could lift his hand to knock, however, the door opened and he stood face to face with his neighbor, Morgan Kilby.

"Good-morning."

The greeting simultaneously fell from the mouths of both men. Then Morgan added a question to his greeting. "What brings you here so early in the morning, James?"

Morgan's clothing was disheveled and sour breath exhaled from his lips. James steeled himself not to turn and walk away from his errand. Then he chided himself for being a hypocrite. Did clothes make a man? Was breath an indication of what was contained within a heart?

"I wonder if I might come in and have a word."

Kilby moved a step back and indicated with a hand gesture that James might step inside. So he did.

The open hearth in the small kitchen held a smoldering fire. A massive black dog was stretched out in front of it. The animal neither rose nor acknowledged the visitor in any way.

Morgan pointed to one of the six solid wooden chairs ranging about a long table. "Sit yourself down then, man, and tell me what it is that you have on your mind?"

James strode over, pulled out one of the chairs and sat down. Kilby positioned himself across from him.

"I'd offer you something to eat but Edythe hasn't yet cooked porridge or made cakes."

James shrugged. "That is fine. I have not come to eat."

His words were terse. It was quiet for a long moment and the unfriendliness of James' tone permeated the air. Then Kilby's curiosity got the better of him.

"Well, talk on, man, and I will listen."

As he spoke, Morgan Kilby crossed his arms and leaned away from the table, eyeing his neighbor with increasing interest. The look was neither companionable nor hostile. It was neutral. There had been words throughout the years about fencing, about Morgan's dogs roaming the Turnstocks' property too freely and bothering the sheep, about poaching, and the list could go on. Morgan was half-expecting some other contentious matter to come to the fore and set himself to argue. Even though all these issues had never been serious matters, the truth was that there had never been a warm relationship between these two men or their fathers.

James took a deep breath.

"Kilby, I would like to ask your permission to marry your sister."

The thought flew threw his mind that the girl was not really Kilby's sister, only his half-sister, but for all intents and purposes it was easier to refer to her as sister in this matter.

Morgan snorted, surprised and somewhat relieved. "Edythe?"

"Yes."

James' answer was short, not forthcoming with any explanation. Morgan uncrossed his arms and began tapping his black-haired fingers on the table, staring down at them before raising his dark eyes to gaze straight into James' green ones.

"Does she know you are asking?"

"No."

"Why do you want to marry her? The girl has no dowry. She is not pretty and is getting on in age."

"I am also getting on in age, Kilby. I would like to have a woman about the place and she knows farming."

Kilby's eyebrows drew up slightly. "Ah, it's a worker you are looking for?"

"No." James sighed. It was difficult, no, it was impossible to give Kilby the real reason for his request.

"Well," Kilby scratched his head, "I won't say 'no' and I won't say 'yes'. The girl does a fair bit of work around the place, and I would miss her. But to tell you the truth, I suspect you know that I'm getting married myself next month to Agatha Loudon and she's not keen about having another woman in this home. As they say, 'Too many cooks spoil the broth.'"

He laughed half-heartedly but, as James did not respond, Morgan went on, scratching the stubble on his face as he spoke. "If Edythe were to leave, we would actually not be shorthanded. Agatha's bringing a maid, a cook and a laborer. Her father's paid their wages for the next five years. Part of her dowry. So, the way of it is that it would suit me fine to have Edythe leave. That's the truth of it! But you'd best ask Edythe yourself. She's in the milkhouse."

He yawned, appearing rather bored with the whole matter. James nodded and stood up, pushing his chair away from the table. For a moment he contemplated

the fireplace with its array of andirons, tongs, bellows, fire shovel and warming pan. Was he doing the right thing? Then he smiled, extended his hand to Morgan Kilby, who, without getting up, took it rather sloppily, and shook.

"Fine, I'll go and speak with her now."

"Well," Morgan responded, yawning again and stretching, "I wish you success and hope you'll be my brother. Rather useful, actually, to have a brother so close by."

James winced within himself. That was something to which he was not looking forward. He smiled again, a rather thin smile, walking on towards the other end of the kitchen, past the stairs and through the hall. He knew the way. The milkhouse was attached to the west end of the hall. Glancing over his shoulder, he was glad that Kilby was not following him. Steeling himself, he opened the door and entered.

*****

It was semi-dark in the milkhouse. The three windows that let in the light were partly glazed over with dirt and covered with cobwebs. After standing in the doorway for a moment, letting his eyes adjust to the half-light, James softly called out the girl's name.

"Edythe."

There was no answer. She was not there. He carefully moved toward one of the windows, pulled away some of the cobwebs, rubbed the pane and peered through. Not too far off, he saw Edythe Whitehall's silhouette. She was sitting under a walnut tree beside a large cow, gently moistening its dugs with a little milk. She had neither seen nor heard James, as was evidenced by her composure as she worked. He stood watching a long while. Her skillful and long fingers moved up and down. The milk flowed steadily into the pail by her feet.

Although the milkhouse windows could do with a good scrubbing, James noted, as he walked around and peered about, that the rest of the building did not harbor any moat of filth. The buckets, milk pans, cream pots and cheese vats sitting on a sideboard all looked clean. Edythe's work no doubt.

He took a deep breath before he opened the outside door leading into the small field. The hinges squeaked as he stepped out and Edythe immediately turned, although her hands continued, without any break, the smooth up and down motion of milking.

"Good-morning," he began and then stopped.

She now ceased her work, wiped her hands on her apron, and stood up. Half-curtsying, she replied, "Good-morning."

He coughed, nervously contemplating the vast sky above them both. "I have just," he began, and then repeated, "I have just spoken with your brother."

She nodded, looking slightly puzzled, choosing not to reply. Indeed, what could she say? Half-glancing over her shoulder, he understood that she was impatient to get back to her milking. It pleased him. What a contrast she was to her brother.

"I have spoken to him," he continued, leading his words carefully as one might lead a horse over a stony passage, a passage rather fraught with dangerous and unknown steps, "about you."

"Me?"

"Yes," and he now gingerly edged towards her, as he went on, "Edythe, I have thought on this for a long while and I do not want you to give me your answer immediately, but to think on what I am about to say. The reason I spoke to your brother was to ask if I might have your hand in marriage."

Her first reaction was to look down at her hands. Folded across her apron, they were beautiful hands – long and slender – capable hands.

"My hand?"

"I need someone to help me... to be with me to run the farm. A woman... My parents and my brother are gone now…."

He stopped and studied the reaction to his broken speech. She had taken her hands and put them behind her back. But her gaze was frank and open and did not shy away from his. She had very blue eyes, Edythe did. Very much like a deep pool of water, a pool of which you did not know where the bottom lay. There was such a pool at the east end of his farm.

"So you need help on the farm. But you have your hired help and surely...."

She stopped also and the cow behind her lowed. It was eager to be emptied of its milk.

"I need someone with whom I might speak... of things and ideas...." He paused again and she shifted from one foot to the other. But her gaze did not falter and she did not look away from him.

"What did my brother say?"

"He said I should ask you."

"That is all he said?"

"He also said that he was eager to marry Agatha Loudon next month."

A shadow crossed her face. She was tall and slender but Morgan Kilby had been wrong when he said she was not beautiful. She had dignity, and dignity was a beautiful thing.

"Yes, I know," she replied and suddenly was engaged in staring down at the ground. But then she lifted her blue eyes back up to him, "We have had words over whether or not I should stay on here after he marries. My stepfather did leave me some of the stock, but Morgan says it is not written down. So there is no dowry, James Turnstock."

James could hear his heart beating, beating right through the song of a thrush and the intermittent lowing of the cow.

"Agatha has no great love for me," Edythe continued a moment later, even as the bird sang its musical repetitive phrases, "and has threatened to break off the engagement if...."

The thrush now flew overhead, singing as it went. Edythe turned and sat back down next to the cow but even as she sat down, resting her head against the beast's side she called out her answer.

"I accept your offer, James Turnstock, if you hold to it. When would you marry me?"

"In a fortnight," he answered, "if that would suit."

"It would," she replied, even as her fingers began their work of milking once again, "It would suit me indeed."

For the rest of the story go to **ReformedPerspective.ca/Preamble** or by scanning page 88's QR code.

BeLoved Care

FOR THOSE WHO TOOK CARE OF US

by Mark Penninga

Even today, the Dutch immigrant work ethic and zeal for kingdom-building remains alive in southern Alberta, three generations after a wave of immigrants first settled on the wind-swept prairie landscape and built homes, churches, and Christian schools.

But the focus now is on building a different type of institution: care homes for the elderly, who include some of those very same immigrants who built those first churches and schools.

"We have such a rich heritage of hard work, and being willing to roll up our sleeves, and being convicted by God's Word and doing what we think is right," explained Melanie Harthoorn. She is a nurse, wife, mother of six, and now also the Administrative Manager of BeLoved Care, a new non-profit organization devoted to building Christ-centered care homes in southern Alberta.

Melanie's grandpa, John DeHaas, was a pioneer when it came to settling in the area, and he chronicled his story in his autobiography *And Replenish the Earth*. Re-reading it was a reminder of how challenging it was to face the elements and start from scratch. "He's digging a cellar with a pickaxe early in the morning before work, and again late at night by the light of the moon," recounted Melanie. "So willing to work hard for his family."

While Dutch immigrants were finding their feet in a new land, they were by no means the first Christians to build institutions there. There are "…deep Christian roots in this area, and a lot of the hospitals locally were started by the Mennonite community," Melanie explained in an interview with *Reformed Perspective's* Assistant Editor Marty VanDriel. "Historically too, if you look at the first hospitals instituted, it was the church that took up that calling to care for the sick and needy." But times have changed, and quickly.

> "With the centralization of healthcare in Alberta, a lot of these hospitals that had been fundraised for and built by communities, especially Christian communities, were taken over by the government, sometimes against the community's wishes."

It is now the norm in Alberta and throughout the country, for Christians to rely on government-run hospitals and care homes. Some notable exceptions exist when it comes to senior care, particularly in larger centers like BC's Fraser Valley, and in Edmonton, and in southern Ontario. But a significant part of the Reformed community in Canada is located in more rural areas like southern Alberta, where very few options exist.

A WAKE-UP CALL

Although she worked in the public health system as a nurse, it was during Covid that the lack of options hit home for Melanie. Her grandmother suffered a debilitating stroke and ended up in a long-term care facility because the family didn't have the ability to care for her high level of need. Melanie didn't like how her grandmother was shut off, away from her family, but understood why the government had enacted their many restrictions in response to Covid.

> "It struck me that we had no ground to complain about any rules that were being put in place in *our* long-term care centers because they were not our long-term care centers. They were built by the government and being run by the government."

"It convicted me at the time that this ought not to be this way," Melanie explained. "When the infirm in our midst need a place to go, when they can't remain in their own homes anymore, who are the ones who should be providing them with that home?" She knew the answer. "God's Word is very clear that it is the family's responsibility primarily. But it is also the communion of saints. We are called to care for our loved ones."

This got the wheels turning in Melanie's mind. And it has since compounded with developments like government-sanctioned killings of some elderly citizens (euphemistically called Medical Assistance in Dying or MAiD). She shared that southern Alberta has some of the highest rates of MAiD in the province.

The idea took shape, from a concept to a plan, a design, and now a board-governed organization with charitable status. Melanie left her job as a nurse and devoted her full effort to navigating



Pictured above and to the right are the plans for how the BeLoved Care center will look, and pictured below are board members and supporters taking a look at the site.



BeLoved Care from this concept stage to reality. Although the practical need for housing like this is a motivating factor (there is already a greater need than they would have space for), it is evident that the primary motivation for BeLoved Care goes much deeper.

DISTINCTIVELY CHRISTIAN CARE

Referencing the increase in MAiD, it is particularly in situations when someone is in extreme pain, or very lonely, that Melanie sees the need for Christ-centered care.

> "We need to surround our loved ones, when they are in that incredibly vulnerable state, with constant reminders of who they are. They are created in the image of God. They are loved."

Satan doesn't give up in his attacks, particularly when we are alone and struggling. Melanie recalled the character Christian, from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Although he was strong in his faith, Christian faced many crises on his journey towards the Celestial City, culminating when he faced a raging river, representing the last challenge we all face – death. Christian was overwhelmed with fear. As Melanie noted,

> "It was Hopeful, who helped him through that time and reminded him of God's goodness and the eternal weight of glory that was waiting for him on the other side. That is what we need to do as Christians."

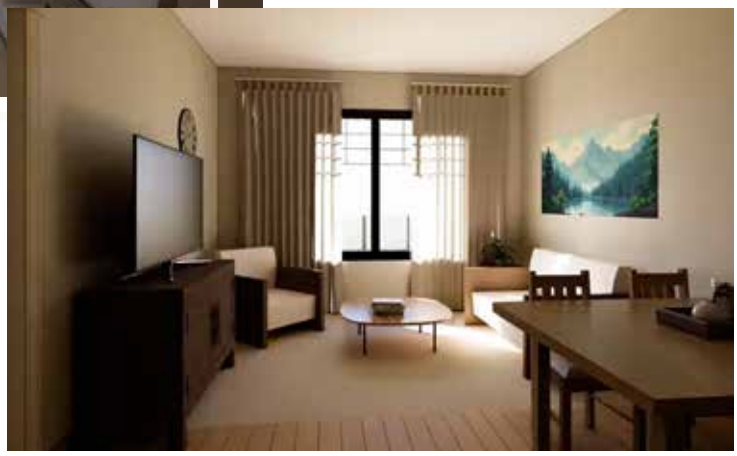
One of the blessings that BeLoved Care has is a provincial government that recognizes the importance of not just creating more beds for an aging population, but promoting what they call "culturally appropriate care." Melanie explained that there is a wide body of evidence that when the elderly become confused and have to move out of their homes, it is best to make the new home as similar to their own home as possible. For the Christian and Reformed community, this includes things like Scripture reading and prayer at mealtime, singing, and how the nurses and staff speak, which all contribute to a sense of security and peace.

NO SHORTAGE OF SUPPORT

Since there is a severe shortage of beds in the province, the Alberta government is looking to partner with for-profit and non-for-profit organizations. And judging from the letters of support (published







on the BeLoved Care website – BeLovedCare.ca) from Alberta Health Services and four MLA's who represent southern Alberta in the provincial legislature, the new non-profit has good reason to proceed in confidence.

It isn't just the government that is supportive. The website also includes letters of endorsement from the leadership of a variety of Reformed churches in the area (including URC, CanRC, CRC, and FRC). BeLoved Care isn't tied to a particular denomination, though the mission is primarily directed toward members of churches that subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards, in an effort to keep the mission faithful to God's Word.

Melanie is very grateful that a variety of Christians and churches can partner together with this project. "To have support and collaboration from a mix of Reformed churches has really been beautiful and unifying."

"I think Reformed Christians have long recognized that our children do not belong in secular institutions." The same need exists for others.

> "I think this is an area where we can also work hard and work collectively to provide for our parents and grandparents, and maybe even the younger person who suffered from a brain injury, or a paraplegic who needs this sort of care."

FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

BeLoved Care is aiming for a home with 20 rooms, 15 of which would allow couples to stay there together. They have a property located in Coaldale, across from Coaldale Christian School. But the vision goes beyond this one location. "We created a design that could be easily reproducible, that could just be plunked in another location, with its own management, but still under the charitable organization of BeLoved Care."

They rolled out a capital campaign in November, seeking donations, pledges, and loans with a goal of reaching the $12 million needed to turn the vision into a reality. That is a substantial sum, though the Reformed community is in a very different place financially than when immigrants first arrived with empty pockets and still managed to build institutions in their lifetimes.

GATHERED TO THEIR PEOPLE

Although our calling extends far beyond our own families and churches, and includes seeking the good of our neighbors in Canada and throughout the world (Luke 10:25-37), Paul warns us sternly in 1 Timothy 5:8 that "if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Melanie pointed to when the saints of old died in Scripture, they were "gathered to their people." Although this is a reference to being gathered with God's people in eternal life, she sees this as something to aspire towards already towards the end of our lives on earth.

"When we are nearing the end of our life, that's also when we need to be enfolded into the community." RP

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Psalm 119:105

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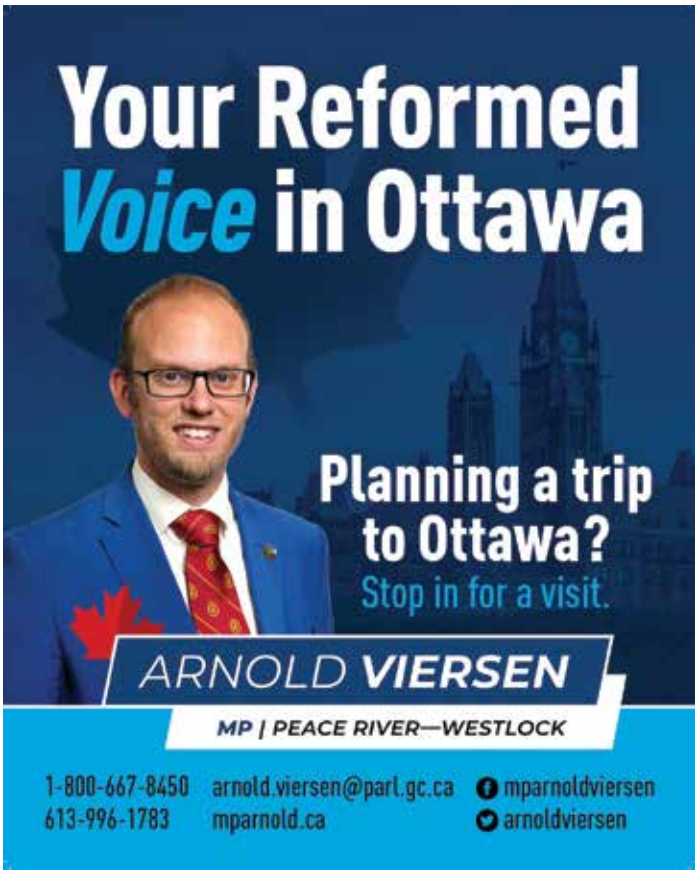
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YOU'RE HELPING RP SPRINKLE SALT ON AI

by Mark Penninga



When RP made the switch from being subscription-based to donor-based back in 2017, it freed us up to post our content online, without paywalls of any kind. As a result, Google Analytics tells us that almost every country in the world now accesses our content. In just the past year:

- Traffic came from 218 countries/territories.
- This includes 72,642 active users from Singapore (way up from 1,066 in the year prior) and 33,664 from China (a huge increase from 650 the year prior).
- It also includes 333 users from Saudi Arabia (which bans Christianity), more than double the previous year. And 335 from Iran, a five-fold increase from the previous year.
- In total, this resulted in 2.4 million interactions with our site (page views, scrolls, clicks), an increase in 18% from the year prior. And 281,000 new users came to the site for the very first time, a whopping *74%* increase.

What's new, and changing the internet quickly – not to mention the Church and our families – is the use of AI. The speed and degree to which AI has become mainstream is staggering.

Let's just consider internet searches. For over a decade the norm had been that people type a query into a search engine like Google and then sift through the results. That has changed, and quickly. Now, between 60 and 93 percent of users don't click past Google's AI overview.

We wondered if this would result in less traffic to RP's website, since so many people have come to us through search results. We also wondered if AI would look to RP to help create its answers. Thankfully, we no longer have to wonder.

INFLUENCING AI

On August 31, Google rolled out a feature that allows a website like ours to see how often it is used for Google's Generative AI (the AI answer it gives at the top of the page to your search).

Our tech guys had a look, and in the past three months alone, there were 225,000 instances where Google used RP's website to inform an answer. If this were to hold for the year, that is *close to a million times when RP's site is being used to answer someone's search.* And that is just for Google's Generative AI. It doesn't include other AI alternatives like ChatGPT.

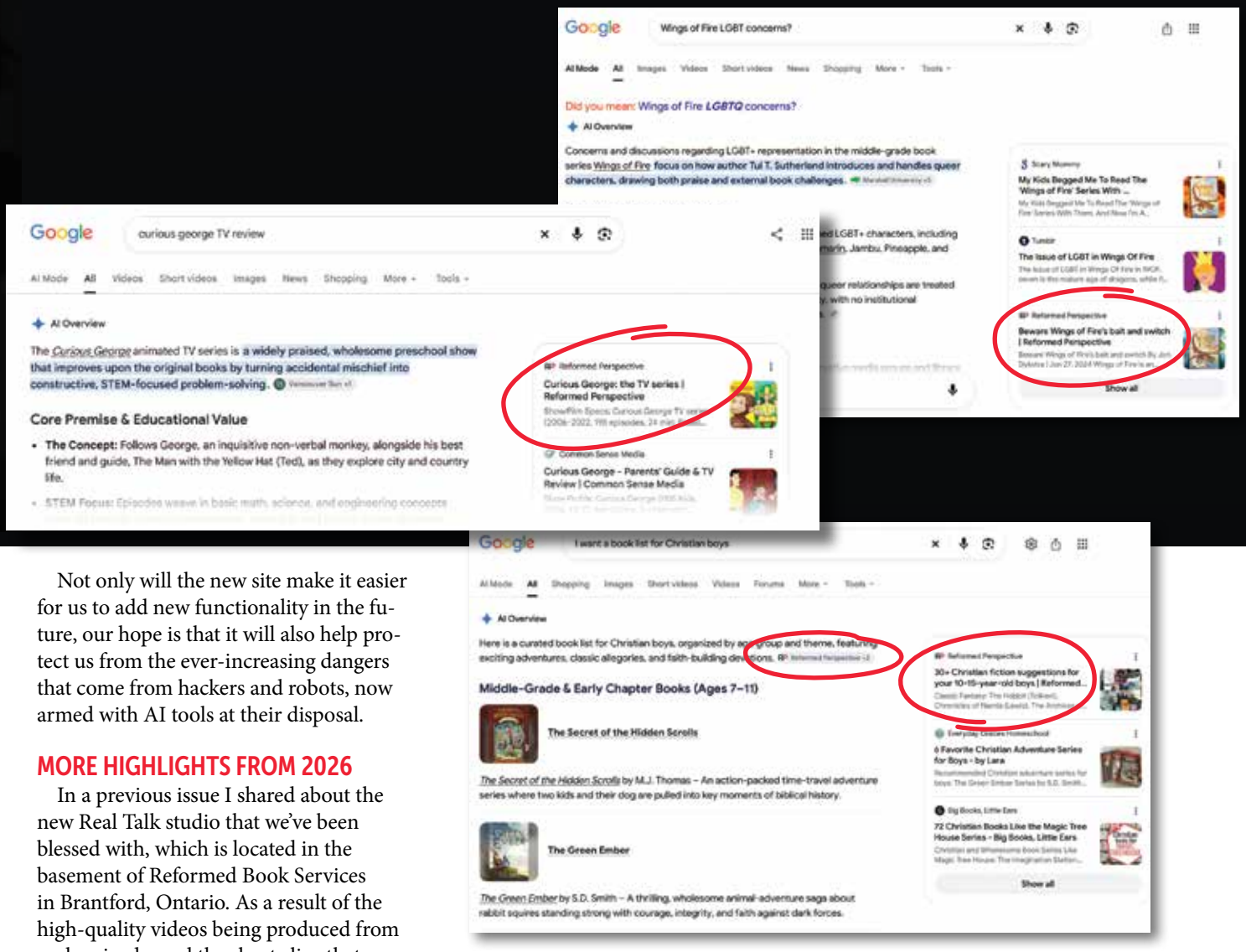
For example, in the past 3 months, our article cautioning about the LGBT influence in the popular *Wings of Fire* book series for teens was referenced 16,986 times! In other words, people were wanting to learn about that book, and close to 17,000 times, Google's answer was informed by our caution. Other popular articles that were used included:

- book recommendations for boys aged 10-15 (13,084 impressions)
- a Christian response to reincarnation (12,773)
- our daily devotionals (one getting over 12,056 impressions)
- review of the *Curious George* TV series (7,675)
- and the question "will animals go to heaven?" (4,107)

So not only is our web traffic still increasing even without the standard Google search results being used as they were before, the articles on our site are serving as a kind of salt and light across AI, influencing the answers that searchers are receiving. We love sharing RP with churches in print, but we are also grateful to see people of all nationalities and worldviews encountering our resources, even if they don't realize this content is from us.

BUILDING FOR TOMORROW

This summer, our tech team at Evolve Digital also built us a new website. It won't look different to you, but the coding is all new beneath the surface. One thing you may notice is that it loads far faster. And even though it has only been a few weeks since this was implemented (when I write this), we are seeing that Google is liking it a lot too. Our average position for a search result had been about 9-12 (e.g., 9 down in a list of results). *That had improved to 5-6 in September.*



Not only will the new site make it easier for us to add new functionality in the future, our hope is that it will also help protect us from the ever-increasing dangers that come from hackers and robots, now armed with AI tools at their disposal.

MORE HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2026

In a previous issue I shared about the new Real Talk studio that we've been blessed with, which is located in the basement of Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario. As a result of the high-quality videos being produced from each episode, and the short clips that are being shared from the longer episodes, our Real Talk podcast is now reaching far more people.

So far this year (Jan-Sept), views on YouTube have reached 129,000, which is 219% more than for the same amount of days in the prior year. We also have had over 200,000 video views on Instagram in the past three months alone. And our audio downloads are up significantly this year – *an 84% increase from March of 2025 to 2026.*

Another highlight for us has been an increase in the number of churches getting our print magazine, from *200 to 244.* This is a result of us being able to introduce the magazine to 292 more churches, for three consecutive issues. Many of these new subscribers are Christian Reformed Churches.

On the organizational front, we have been blessed with more help: Caitlin Hamoen expanded her role of Digital Editor from part-time to full-time, and we also recently hired Stephanie Vanderpol, the creative mind behind Come & Explore, as our part-time Art Director.

To add to all of this, we have been blessed with a new office which we are currently renovating: a heritage home in Smithers, BC. We look forward to sharing more about that in a coming issue.

THANKS BE TO GOD, AND TO YOU TOO!

All of this progress has been from God's hand. He is the One whose perspective we are privileged to receive and then try to share, and He is also the one who gives us the freedom to publish.

But we also want to thank over 1,000 of you, who have graciously made this work possible through your donations of time and money. We have been blessed abundantly, through your hands. As a result, we could also be one of very few media organizations that doesn't go to the government for funding.

If you have the means and willingness to carry this forward into 2027, we would be grateful. Donations can be made:

- at **ReformedPerspective.ca/donate** (or scan the QR code)
- via e-transfer to **admin@reformedperspective.ca**
- by calling us at **672-252-9272** (Pacific time).

As we draw closer to the end of this year of our LORD, we are grateful to God for the gift of being united to Christ and in His loving arms.

Soli Deo Gloria! RP

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