

NEW HORIZONS

▬ *in the* ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ▬

5 Reconcilable Differences in Christ: Philemon and Forgiveness // *by David E. Briones*

MAY 2022

8 The Fallout from Forgetting Forgiveness // *by Jonathan Landry Cruse*



APPRENTICES IN **FORGIVENESS**

BY DANIEL P. CLIFFORD // 3

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Branch of Hope OPC in Torrance, California, installed five new elders on February 6. At the installation, from left to right: Aaron Davies, Grant Spear, Bob Parucha, Eduardo Anorga, Jason Gallagher, and Pastor Paul Viggiano.



APPRENTICES IN FORGIVENESS



DANIEL P. CLIFFORD // “For want of a nail, a shoe was lost; for want of a shoe, a horse was lost . . .” Most of us have never shod horses, but we understand this proverb. Neglected details can turn out to be important, especially in making repairs. We protect things we value by making strong repairs.

Forgiveness is repair. It means choosing to salvage a relationship rather than writing it off. God himself specializes in relational restoration. After Satan vandalized creation by turning mankind against the Creator, God set about to restore us. He pardons our sin through Christ and gathers us into his family. He will finish his renewal on the day he unites everything in heaven and on earth under Christ (Eph. 1:10).

We should see ourselves as repairmen under God. Jesus apprentices us in forgiveness when he calls us to pardon our debtors. We find it challenging, though, to let go of offenses. As Herman Bavinck observed, “People who know themselves . . . also know how terribly difficult true and complete forgiveness is, and how it can only be granted after a serious struggle with oneself” (*Dogmatics*, vol. 4, 180).

This article explores dynamics of forgiveness in *ordinary* cases of Christians at odds. It does not address the nuances of recovery from traumatic harm.

We live in a day when cultural discord and anxiety have increased the level

of disharmony in the church. Such times call for special intentionality in forgiveness. Our friendships are worth protecting. The church is worth preserving. This is why we repair.

Jesus’s Pattern

We find the template for forgiveness in the work of Christ. Scripture says we should forgive each other as God in Christ forgives us (Eph. 5:32; Col. 3:13). We cannot imitate Jesus in granting absolute forgiveness; only he can satisfy God’s justice and fully discharge our debt. But we do follow him in analogous forgiveness at the level of attitude, by being tenderhearted toward our fellow sinners. It is like children sharing Easter candy, an activity sponsored by the real income of their parents. Christians similarly share grace with each other because Jesus has fully funded our forgiveness with God.

Christ’s example therefore teaches us not to delight in strict penalties nor to nurse grudges until others suffer for what they have done. An attitude of “grace for me, law for you” angers Christ,

as he teaches in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23–35). Even when, in an administrative role, we must deliver negative consequences, we should exclude any personal vengeance. We have been forgiven much.

To spur our forgiveness, Jesus lays down a rule that we must forgive those who request it. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). We must release the debts of others upon their credible repentance, following the pattern of Christ.

The Inward Dimension

But does God require us to extend our hand if the one who has wronged us does not? Some wrongdoers never admit fault and others offer threadbare apologies no one could take seriously. Christ nevertheless teaches that those who have suffered a wrong should cultivate a spirit of forgiveness. Jesus said, “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25). Jesus calls us to relinquish

bitterness, period. It's not contingent on any apology. Such inner forgiveness points to a humble spirit, which is consistent with the repentance by which we ask and receive our Father's pardon. Letting go of bitterness therefore keeps our relationship to God healthy.

Inner forgiveness also shields an offended person from the further harm of a grudge. A person who harbors angry thoughts will often proceed to poisonous words and destructive actions, followed by eventual regret. It is a trap. While hurt people should be truthful about what happened to them, they should also seek a heart attitude that wants the offender to repent and be restored. Moving past bitterness represents spiritual health for the victim at least, even if the offender persists in sin.

Common Obstacles to Outward Reconciliation

While inner repair is crucial, whenever possible we want to move a damaged relationship toward outward repair in which pardon is asked for and received. This process, however, often contains pitfalls. If we ignore them, we risk a flimsy repair. With good reason, Scripture tells us to involve wise counselors who can guide people at odds toward restoration (Matt. 18:16; Gal. 6:1).

Efforts at reconciliation sometimes founder on distrust. Those in conflict may be quick to suspect the other side of operating in bad faith; grievances may be seen as vindictive or apologies as insincere. Ordinarily, distrust should not become the basis of further accusation; trust must be earned, not demanded. It is better to slow down and explore trust issues, excavating previous hurts in the relationship if needed.

On the other hand, sometimes people actually *do* operate in bad faith. For instance, an offender may offer a bland apology such as, "I'm sorry for what I said," to get an issue off the table, preventing it from being explored and connected with other patterns of behavior. When it becomes obvious that someone is using the rules of forgiveness as techniques in a relational boxing match, this should be called out.

Lack of full honesty can also hamper progress toward forgiveness. Sometimes offended people cannot find the courage to admit what most upset them. It may also happen that an offending party, seeking to extend an olive branch, may admit fault beyond what he or she thinks is truly fair. Such partial honesty can cause resentment to lodge in the heart. It is like patching a bridge using rotten planks. A wise onlooker can ask questions aimed at teasing out the full truth and putting a more robust repair in place.

Paradoxically, insisting on full agreement can also be a pitfall. While full agreement does enable a better repair, many times people at odds will continue to differ over the facts and their interpretation. We may have to live with partial agreement (barring cases involving abuse, crime, or false teaching, in which tolerating ambiguity leads to further harm). Generally, partial repair beats no repair. Being a stickler for complete agreement pushes the other person into a corner.

The Moment of Forgiveness

The crucial moment of reconciliation comes when forgiveness is requested and granted. During this exchange, the parties should use whatever trust and mutual understanding they have gained to maximize the relational repair.

The person offering an apology needs to put as much on the table as possible. The offended person may have lost something of his or her well-being, assets, rights, reputation, or peace of mind through what the offender did. A full-orbed contrition seeks to offer something meaningful in return for whatever has been lost. After all, godly grief produces "earnestness" (2 Cor. 7:11). True repentance brings forth fruit of good works (Luke 3:9–14). It desires to make restitution for harm, as Zacchaeus did (Luke 19:8). Like the prodigal son, the truly repentant offender does not expect automatic restoration to former privileges (Luke 15:21).

The language of the apology should avoid hedging, like "I'm sorry if I offended you," or making excuses, such as

"I didn't mean to come across that way." It should also move beyond what is vague and safe, such as "I'm sorry I spoke carelessly." It is much better to say, "Please forgive me for the harm I caused," coupled with any honest addition that strengthens the apology, such as "I don't blame you for being upset"; "I don't deserve your forgiveness, but I am asking for it"; "I will cover your losses"; or, in the case of public offense, "I will apologize publicly." Each of these statements strengthens the expression of earnestness and makes the request for forgiveness more compelling.

The person receiving the apology should accept as much as possible within the bounds of integrity. To say "I forgive you" is a good start. To match the other person's statements increases the chances of substantial repair: "Jesus has forgiven me so much, and I gladly forgive you"; "I value our friendship, and I want to put it back on track."

After the formal apology, both parties should signal by their actions that they want to move forward with their relationship. Intentionally engaging in conversation or extending invitations to events and activities will help the mending to continue.

We engage in this effort because we do not follow the devil in his relational vandalism but Jesus in his relational repair. As forgiveness proceeds, the work of the church moves forward unhindered. When the Corinthian church faced a situation in which people needed to reconcile, Paul encouraged forgiveness on all sides "so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs" (2 Cor. 2:11). Forgiveness makes the bottom fall out of Satan's plans. A church without bitterness is a strong church, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Make relational repairs like you mean for them to hold. Put in some extra nails. As we commit to forgiveness, we have the honor of putting the graciousness of Jesus Christ on display. □

The author is pastor of Grace Presbyterian in Vienna, Virginia.

RECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES IN CHRIST: PHILEMON AND FORGIVENESS



DAVID E. BRIONES // **At times, relationships in the church can be marked more by the way of the world than the way of the cross. When one believer is wounded by another, the relational pain can cause the offended believer to listen to the world’s advice. They cut off the other person. Give them the cold shoulder. Never forget**

their sin. Make them pay for what they did. They are quick to cite Luke 17:3, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,” but more so as a license to sin, to hold a grudge, and to live in the misery of unforgiveness—all in the name of “righteous anger.” But the way of the cross shatters the debilitating shackles of unforgiveness.

The world happily affirms the reality of irreconcilable differences, but the gospel speaks a better word. Just think about God’s love for you in Christ. His love, John Owen writes, is like the sun rather than the moon. It never waxes and wanes.¹ Even after years of a rocky relationship with him, he will never sit you down and say, “I’m leaving you. We simply have too many irreconcilable differences.” You will never be served divorce papers. If you cling to him by faith, he will never leave nor forsake you (Heb. 13:5), because Christ has reconciled us to the Father (Rom. 5).

The God of the gospel is about

reconciling differences.² And as “imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1), we should be, too. One place where we can learn more about reconcilable differences in Christ is in the most unlikely of places—the book of Philemon.

Relational Advice in Philemon?

Now, you may be thinking, “Can anything good come from Philemon?” It is only 335 words long in the original, a letter written by Paul to a master named Philemon. Paul writes from prison on behalf of Philemon’s slave, Onesimus. Can it really be useful? At first glance, it doesn’t seem so. But when you read it carefully, one truth quickly emerges from this letter. Ready for it? It is not *primarily* about slavery. Actually, it is about relationships in Christ.

This emphasis, however, is lost in translation.

A key word for Christian relationships is a familiar one: *koinōnia* (“partnership,” “fellowship,” “solidarity”).

This word occurs in verse 6. The ESV unfortunately translates the phrase *hē koinōnia tēs pisteōs hymōn* as “the sharing of your faith,” which makes it sound like Paul is praying for Philemon’s evangelism to be effective. But the word here is better translated as “solidarity,” and Paul is intentional in using it this way. We can see that by noticing the *inclusio* in verse 6 (*koinōnia*) and 17 (*koinōnos*, “partner”). (An *inclusio* is a repeated word or phrase that bookends a section of Scripture.)

In verse 6, Paul, after commending Philemon’s faith in Christ and love for all the saints (vv. 4–5), prays that his *koinōnia* with the saints would become even more effective. He writes, “I pray that the *koinōnia* of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.” The knowledge of every (salvific) good thing makes our *koinōnia* effective. On the other end of the *inclusio* is verse 17, the climax of the

letter. After making an appeal to Philemon (vv. 8–16), he draws a conclusion. “Therefore, if you consider me a partner (*koinōnon*), receive him as you would receive me.” Interestingly, verse 6 commends Philemon’s *koinōnia* with “all the saints,” but by the time you get to verse 17, Philemon has learned that Onesimus—a recent convert—now dwells among the company of “the saints.”

So, what exactly is Paul doing here? He is testing the depths of Philemon’s (and our) understanding of Christian solidarity in light of the cross. That’s what I love about the book of Philemon. It presents us with a rocky relationship with reconcilable differences in Christ. But this raises the question: what are those relational differences?

Relational Differences in the Church

Stepping into the book of Philemon is like stepping into a room where the relational tension is so thick, you could cut it with a knife. You can sense the aftermath of a huge blowup, but you have no idea what happened. To make sense of things, we need to answer two questions.

Who was involved? Philemon is a high-status master (vv. 1–2). Onesimus is one of his many low-status slaves (v. 16). And Paul, the imprisoned apostle (vv. 1, 13), gets between them. So, there is a massive difference in social status.

What happened? Apparently, when Onesimus was an unbelieving slave, he “wronged” Philemon and therefore “owes” him (v. 18). Since Onesimus met Paul in prison (v. 10), many argue that he ran away from his master. He most likely “wronged” him by stealing from Philemon, since this is how runaway slaves funded their escape. And he may “owe” him for the time of his service during his departure. However, during his time in prison with Paul, he was converted (vv. 9–11). Although many slaves received the name “Onesimus”—which means “useful”; after all, masters wanted them to live up to their name—this Onesimus was actually “useless” (*achrēstos*). He only became “useful”

(*euchrēstos*) in Christ (v. 11). (Perhaps, Paul was subtly making a Christological point in the original—“without Christ,” *achrēstos*?) The apostle, then, writes this letter, puts it in the hands of Onesimus, a transgressor (“wronged”) and a debtor (“owes,” v. 18), and sends him back to Philemon (v. 12).

But the question becomes: what will Philemon do? Legally, he could have sought the death penalty for a runaway slave. Biblically, however, Paul’s letter beckoned him to look to the one who was crucified for his own transgressions

Paul’s appeal to Philemon contains all the hallmarks of pastoral genius.

and debts as well as Onesimus’s. He was to live Christlike before Onesimus, not insisting on his own rights but lowering himself for the sake of others (compare with Phil. 2:5–11).

Relational Resolution in Christ

Paul’s appeal to Philemon contains all the hallmarks of pastoral genius. First, he entreats Philemon on behalf of Onesimus by lowering his own status. Paul, a low-status “prisoner” (v. 1), intervenes on behalf of a low-status “slave.” Paul, like Christ, identifies with the lowly and pleads their case. As Luther writes,

[Paul] acts exactly as if he were himself *Onesimus*, who had done wrong. Yet he does this not with force or compulsion, as lay within his rights; but

he empties himself of his rights in order to compel Philemon also to waive his rights. What Christ has done for us with God the Father, that St. Paul does also for Onesimus with Philemon.³

Second, Paul subtly tells Philemon, a master, or lowercase “l” lord, that there is an uppercase “L” Lord above him. The title “Lord Jesus Christ” bookends the letter (vv. 3 and 25) and appears twice in a pivotal section (vv. 16, 20). This is Christian *koinōnia*. It always involves the Lord as the divine party in human relationships. This recalls Colossians 4:1, “Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that *you also have a Master in heaven*,” and Ephesians 6:9, “Masters . . . stop your threatening, knowing that he who is *both their Master and yours is in heaven*, and that there is no partiality with him” (emphases added).

This pastoral point has power. By redirecting the eyes and hearts of two unreconciled brothers to their common Master in heaven, Paul confronts the playing field of worldly status by highlighting Christian status. In the world, one man may be a master and the other a slave, but, in Christ, they are fellow servants of a common heavenly Lord. God shows no partiality (Rom. 2:11). There is no Hindu caste system in Christianity. Whether you make \$2,000,000 a year as a CEO or \$20,000 at Chick-fil-A, whether you have a graduate degree or lack a high school diploma, whether you are a pastor or a layperson, we are all one in Christ Jesus and have an equal standing before our God (Gal. 3:28). Our economical roles may differ, but our ontology, our very being, is identical before God. Our status, our worth, is in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

Of course, we’re still called to acknowledge and respect authorities. Just read the Westminster Confession of Faith and its proof texts on the fifth commandment. But we should not confuse earthly and spiritual status. We should live neither pridefully nor ashamedly in our earthly status over against our spiritual status. Whether a



“[Paul] empties himself of his rights in order to compel Philemon also to waive his rights.”

—Martin Luther

superior or inferior, both are glorious opportunities to serve one another with Christlike love. As Paul writes, “through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Third, Paul explicitly commands Philemon to “welcome” Onesimus. “Therefore, if you consider me a partner, welcome [*proslabou*] him as you would welcome me” (v. 17). The exact same word “welcome” occurs in Romans 15:7: “Therefore welcome [*proslambanesthe*] another as Christ has welcomed [*proselabeto*] you, for the glory of God.” This divine “welcome” is nothing other than divine reconciliation between two parties at odds in Romans 14–15: Jews and Gentiles. And this is the same story of relational resolution underlying the story of conflict in Philemon. In essence, Paul grabs Philemon and says, “Welcome Onesimus, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

But he is also speaking to the unforgiving Christian today. God had every legal right to give you the death sentence. Instead, he placed all your transgressions, your debts, and your sins on the one who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). While we were God’s enemies, God reconciled us by the death of his Son (Rom. 5:10). The offended, high-status, divine party *willingly* and *lovingly* sacrificed his only Son to destroy the hostility and reconcile us to himself in one body through the cross (Eph. 2:14–16). And he didn’t do that simply out of a sense of justice. He is both “just” and “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).

His strict justice *and* loving mercy were manifested at the cross.

Paul’s appeal to Philemon (and us) in verse 17 is a shorthand gospel proclamation. Although subtle, the essence is captured best by Ephesians 4:32: “forgiving one another, *as God in Christ forgave you*” (emphasis added). The call of the gospel is this: God has done this for you, now go and do likewise.

Don’t Rebuild the Wall of Hostility

But it is shocking to me how many of us, instead of doing *likewise*, do *otherwise*. What ingratitude. What a misunderstanding of God’s grace. At what point do we think we are greater than God? What makes us think that we can rebuild the wall of hostility that God has destroyed? What makes us think that the debt someone owes us is greater than the debt we once owed to God? What makes us think that their transgression is more punishable than ours? If we are committing those heinous crimes of ingratitude, then we are no better than that wicked servant in Matthew 18:22–35 who, after being forgiven of an enormous debt by the king (ten thousand talents, or roughly seven billion dollars), threw one of his debtors in jail until he coughed up a measly one hundred denarii (roughly four thousand dollars). God forgave our inestimable debt, and we gladly receive his grace, but then we turn around and ungratefully consider our brother’s sin against us more costly and more

offensive than our own sin against God. We rejoice over the demolition of the wall of hostility between us and God, but behind God’s back, we are picking up those same bricks and erecting a wall to cut off our brother.

If that is the status of our heart toward God and others, then we should expect the same judgment from God that the wicked servant of Matthew 18 received. For the king was shocked by his ingratitude and threw him into prison until every last penny was paid (which obviously will not happen in his lifetime). “So also,” Jesus bluntly concludes, “my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Matt. 18:35). Jesus is even clearer and harsher in Matthew 6:15: “If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” You can have no assurance that you’re forgiven and reconciled to God, if you yourself do not forgive and long to be reconciled to your brothers and sisters.

Of course, reconciliation does not mean that the relationship will be as it once was. Sin has consequences. But neither can we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts until they repent. Jesus calls us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44) and commands us to “forgive [our] brother from [our] heart” (Matt. 18:35). How do we do that? Preach the gospel to our stubborn pride and realize this: that slave is your brother. □

The author is an OP minister, associate professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, and author of an upcoming commentary on Philemon (T&T Clark).

Notes

1. John Owen, *Communion with God* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2017), 30–31.
2. Of course, God does permit divorce in the case of abandonment or adultery. But marriage is not the focus of this article.
3. Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon, 1546 (1522)” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, 390.

THE FALLOUT FROM FORGETTING FORGIVENESS



JONATHAN LANDRY CRUSE // “America has forgotten how to forgive.” So came the indictment from journalist Graeme Wood in the title of his March 2021 article in *The Atlantic*. Wood was reporting on the news that another periodical had reneged on a recent hire after some unsavory tweets surfaced from her past.

The woman’s sincere apologies weren’t enough—nor was the fact that the posts were from her adolescence—and this new chapter in her career ended before it got started.

Our current culture struggles to know what to do with “the guilty.” Beyond losing the tools to enact forgiveness, I fear we are losing even the desire for it. Ours is an inquisitorial age, one that seems to almost relish condemning others.

We could cite the disappearance of forgiveness as yet another proof that Christianity’s influence in the post-modern world is waning rapidly. Arising in its place is a godless approach to life—namely, secularism—which has little to no conception of grace. It was C. S. Lewis who, when asked what Christianity’s unique contribution was, remarked, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”

However, the point of this article is not to despair at our present moment, nor bemoan a bygone “Christian America” (if one ever existed). Instead, my aim is look at the lack of forgiveness for at least two reasons. First, to prepare us

apologetically, helping us to know how the humanistic individual is thinking and then equipping us to address others in truth and love. Second, and perhaps more urgently, to keep in mind that we Christians breathe the same air as those around us. What we see “out there” is oftentimes an indicator of the bent of our own hearts. We must be on guard to not allow the unbiblical, gospel-less standards of the day to infiltrate the church—and where and when they have, we must repent. Believers must rediscover the bedrock of our ethics, the gospel of Christ, which when received in true faith will always empower us to forgive as we have been forgiven (Col. 3:13).

To that end, we will explore two major deficiencies in the secular worldview that hinder forgiveness—its understanding of justice and its understanding of the self—while being careful to examine if we have bought into these conceptions as well. I pray that believers would recognize the powerful evangelistic opportunity that forgiveness offers us. When we prize forgiveness,

reconciliation, and restoration, not only do we show the world a better way that has been forgotten, but we also embody the new world that Christ has inaugurated through his death and resurrection. In that vein, I conclude with two recent examples where the world glimpsed the grace of forgiveness.

Justice without Grace

In recent years, the public interest in social justice has risen tremendously, for which there is much to be grateful. But grace has not risen in equal measure to justice. This has resulted in what is often referred to as “cancel culture”—where the indignation against a perceived wrong is so great within the majority culture that there is no alternative but to excise the offending parties and excommunicate them permanently. Have we ever stopped to ponder why this is so? Why is there no middle ground? Why must we now always gang up on the guilty with the zeal of a full-blown pitchfork-and-torches mob? It is evidence of a certain understanding of the human experience, which, although

offering a seemingly robust doctrine of judgment, is devoid of any doctrine of salvation.

But this should not surprise us. The grace of salvation is unnatural to us. Judgment, justice, and guilt (the law) are hardwired into us from creation. But true forgiveness and restoration (the gospel) are external to us—they come from another world and can only be apprehended through faith in the good news of God’s gift from heaven (Rom. 3:23–25). The Christian worldview alone can hold in beautiful harmony what otherwise seem to be in tension: a robust pursuit of justice, and a ready proffering of forgiveness. This is because we follow the One who is both just and justifier (v. 26).

There is, of course, a realm that is all justice and no grace, a place where forgiveness is entirely foreign. The Christian knows it by the name *hell*. Would it be too much to say that the secular agenda is creating a living hell in our modern world? If we trace out the implications of this humanistic worldview—one that operates in what Charles Taylor calls the “immanent frame,” lacking any conception of the transcendent or eternal—a living hell makes sense. After all, if there is no Judge at the end of the story, we must be the ones who wield the sword now.

Ironically, it’s the Christian’s firm belief in a literal hell in the world to come that allows us to bestow grace in the here and now. Vengeance belongs to the Lord (Deut. 32:35), and we trust that, since God will right all wrongs, we don’t have to. Instead, we can bestow the same sort of forgiving grace that we have received in the gospel. Far from needing to construct a grace-less, hellish society, the Christian lives joyfully knowing that now is the time of God’s favor and forgiveness—now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).

Compare this joy and freedom with the unrelenting anxiety that accompanies the secular worldview. A world with strict justice and no grace is fine when you are on top, but who’s to say that unforgiving fury won’t soon come

after you? That’s the real dread of secularism: with no ethical or moral guide, the conceptions of right and wrong are constantly in flux. Certain views or stances that are lauded one year are condemned the next. During her confirmation hearing for a seat on the Supreme Court in 2020, for example, Amy Coney Barrett twice used the term “sexual preference” and later had to apologize as one senator informed her that the term was extremely “offensive and outdated.” Of course, it was offensive *because* it was outdated. The LGBTQ+ community that championed the term only a few years ago had since gone on to declare it bigoted. Barrett wasn’t keeping up.

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Secularism is a safe space for no one—not even for its own. It is all justice and no grace.

Our neighbors know, by experience, increasingly less of reconciliation, and increasingly more of eradication. The church must stand firm against the culture’s corrosive influence, and she can do so most simply—but also most profoundly—by practicing forgiveness. We must point to a God who loves justice so much that he will “by no means clear the guilty,” and yet a God who is so rich in compassion and love that he would send his only Son to bear our guilt for us and declare us righteous in him (see also Exod. 34:7; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Self without Selflessness

Another major barrier to real forgiveness in today’s world is the elevated,

yet warped, understanding of the self. In the Christian conception, the self is important but certainly not ultimate. For the postmodern Westerner, however, as Justice Anthony Kennedy once wrote, “at the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence” (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey* [1992]). To put it succinctly, the self is sacred.

We are seeing this idea play out in many spheres, both public and private, but perhaps nowhere as fascinating and unsettling as in the world of transgenderism. When Hollywood actress Ellen Page transitioned to Elliot Page in December of 2020, she wrote, “I can’t begin to express how remarkable it feels to finally love who I am enough *to pursue my authentic self*” (*Buzzfeed News*, March 16, 2021, emphasis added). More recently, there has been much attention given to the story of U. Penn’s Lia Thomas, who before transition ranked as the number 462 male collegiate swimmer but now ranks as one of the top competitors in female swimming. Disheartened by the obvious unfairness of a biological male swimming against women, sixteen of Thomas’s teammates anonymously sent a letter to the university. And yet even so, they prefaced their complaint with these words: “We fully support Lia Thomas in her decision to affirm her gender identity and to transition from a man to a woman. *Lia has every right to live her life authentically*” (*USA Today*, March 3, 2022, emphasis added). These swimmers were trying to thread a difficult needle: secure what they believed to be a fair competition in their sport, but also not be found guilty of blaspheming the sacred self of secularism.

Not only is the self sacred, but it also somehow must be expressed in order to be “true”—a concept often referred to as expressive individualism. Israeli ethicist and journalist Yuval Levin defines this term as:

a desire to pursue one’s own path but also a yearning for fulfillment through the definition and articulation of

[Continued on page 16]

GOD'S PROVIDENCE COMING FULL CIRCLE

// JOANNA R. GROVE



I used to be timid of communicating with people from other places. Now I live in a remote village in the middle of Africa. God has certainly worked on me!

Learning Grace

I grew up in northern Virginia. As children, my siblings and I camped, pretended we were pioneers, read missionary biographies, and helped our dad with various house projects. I was raised in a Christian home and have been part of Grace OPC in Vienna since I was seven. I don't remember a time when I didn't believe in God or ask him to forgive my sins; however, as a shy teenager, I became legalistic—I had a narrow view of how we could live in a way that pleased God. I thought only a small range of choices of how to dress, what career to have, and where to be educated were acceptable.

When I was twenty, I took a trip to the Dominican Republic. At first, my fear of interacting with people from other places constrained me. But I quickly learned that people are people no matter their nationality or language. They laugh. They cry. They love others, feel awkward, and work toward goals. On this trip, I developed a deep curiosity about other cultures and became more comfortable talking with people from cultures other than my own. There was so much to discuss, learn, and discover. Not only that, but the Lord opened my legalistic eyes to his grace, to the freedom he gives us, and to his abundant favor toward us because of Christ—not because of anything we do or don't do. I came home with less fear and more

acceptance for those with lives different from mine.

Back home, I watched my grandparents start an English as a Second Language (ESL) program and saw people being drawn to God through it. Inspired, my twin sister, Janelle, and I started teaching ESL at a nearby church. That led to taking a course called Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, where I gained an appreciation for the Bible's depiction of God's plan for all the nations throughout redemptive history. I developed an excitement and deep appreciation for missions. After the course, Janelle and I transitioned from teaching ESL to serving in an international student ministry with Reformed University Fellowship (RUF), for which Janelle now works.

Considering Missions

Having developed friendships with Japanese and Chinese students through RUF, Janelle and I planned a trip to East Asia in 2018 to visit these friends in their homes. On the way, we visited some missionaries to better understand their work. I'm not sure I had really admitted to myself or anyone else that I was actually considering missions overseas. Even if I daydreamed as a kid about going to the mission field, I never imagined going as a single person. It was too intimidating!

While I was in East Asia, I participated in an English program where a dozen other native English speakers and I spent four weeks living in dorms with college students, teaching English classes and building relationships with the hope of opening doors for the gospel. The Lord blessed me with an open-hearted roommate and the privilege of many gospel conversations with her. While serving in this program, I kept



Visiting friends Simon and Rita at their home in a nearby village

wondering whether I should become a missionary. I was impressed with how much spiritual training I'd been given and couldn't help but think of Jesus's words in Luke 12:48: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required." I wanted to give back! I went home at the end of that summer convinced that I could live as a missionary and could live in Asia. I spent several months praying and seeking counsel about two questions: Should I do mission work? And if so, where?

I asked Douglas Clawson, the associate general secretary of OPC Foreign Missions, if there was a need for missionary associates at any of our OPC missions. He mentioned opportunities in Uganda. I struggled because I had invested time and efforts in getting to know the language and culture of people in Asia. It seemed strange to go instead to a continent where I had never been and from which I hardly knew anyone. As far as needs in Uganda, there were two mission stations, one in the city of Mbale and the other in the more rural area of Karamoja. I knew I didn't want to join the Karamoja team because I was quite sure I wasn't gifted in caring for kids and homeschooling—what was most needed there. However, the work in Mbale with a book room looked like an exciting fit for my interests, education, and specific prayers regarding a desire to serve.

Full Circle in Karamoja, Uganda

I moved to Mbale, Uganda, in May 2019. However, after three months, changes in Mbale led me to temporarily join the Karamoja team. By God's mysterious providence, I'm now loving a place I didn't think I wanted to be, finding it



Rainy season travel in Karamoja

amazingly well suited to my gifts, and enjoying many hours of helping with childcare. I laugh at how much of my work and living situation these days involve things I did or playacted as a child—everyday chores in rural Uganda do bear a resemblance to camping and pioneer life!

I am part of the support staff for the mission team in Karamoja, doing a wide variety of tasks depending on what's needed at any given time. My priorities are:

1. Supporting the missionary families with cooking, childcare, and occasionally schooling.
2. Helping with the operations and maintenance of the mission, including paying local employees, painting and maintenance projects, and shopping for supplies.
3. Being involved in outreach to the Karimojong community, including helping with ladies' Bible studies, studying the language, and visiting neighbors.

Meanwhile, I'm learning how to interact with people from a different culture, give thoughtful greetings, tell stories to an auditory culture, trap (and cook!) rats, and so much more. Even more importantly, I am learning to surrender joyfully to the Lord's providence and find closeness with the Lord.

My responsibilities will continue to shift and flex to meet the needs of mission teammates as they come and go. I expect that in a year, I'll find myself in some work that I haven't wanted to do, have been afraid of, or didn't even know existed. But I also know that God will continue in the faithful way he's been working . . . and that I'll be loving it!

Thank you for supporting your missionaries, through prayer especially. May God bless you in that ministry. I often feel the powerful effects of it.

The author is a tentmaking missionary laboring with the Uganda Mission in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda.



Serving food for guests at a women's conference

👥 What's New

// Comings/Goings

Missionaries **Mr. and Mrs. Mark C. (Carla) Van Essendelft** (Covenant URC, Pantego, NC) along with their children, Daniel, Hannah, Judah, Micah, Andrew, Keziah, and Jordan, returned to the United States from Uganda for the birth of their tenth child and a seven-month furlough beginning in April 2022. Mark Van Essendelft is a missionary deacon.

GRACE FOR PARENTS OF PRODIGALS

// ANTHONY C. PHELPS



“I will . . . be God to you and to your offspring.” (Gen. 17:7)
“The promise is for you and for your children.” (Acts 2:39)

As a father of a prodigal adult child, I often need to remind myself of the gospel I believe and the faith I confess.

1. God’s covenant promises are the only hope we have for our covenant children.

The gospel is for us and for our children. The covenant-keeping Lord has promised to be a God to us and to our children. That’s what Scripture says. He gave his Son for all our sins. Jesus alone lived a life of perfect obedience to all the law of God on our behalf. His righteousness alone guarantees our access to eternal life. God alone saves sinners. God alone saves our covenant children.

2. Christian parents and their covenant children are under the covenant of grace, not the covenant of works. If your child walks away from Christ, it is not because we didn’t “do it right” as covenant parents, thus invoking covenant curses!

This is easy to say but hard to believe, especially when your heart is breaking over your prodigal child. Our flesh is wired for the covenant of works—even though it’s a broken covenant in Adam. Even though the Last Adam has fulfilled it for us, and we are now under the covenant of grace. The covenant of works says, “Do and you will be *blessed* by God; fail to do and you are under his *curse*.” And so, our “old Adam” rears his head and either wants credit if our children are walking with the Lord, or despairs of God’s grace if they are not.

Every covenant parent feels like a failure because, in fact, we have all failed. There is only one perfect Father. He is perfectly wise, good, and righteous. He disciplines his children with loving compassion and for our good. He gave his Son even for our sinful failures as Christian parents. What we did wrong or what we failed to do does not forfeit our status as

justified children of God.

If you think your parental faithfulness saves your children, you are still thinking according to the covenant of works. If you think your parental failures have caused your children to walk away from Christ, you have forgotten the covenant of grace. God works through the means of grace. But as we employ those means by faith in his promises, we let God be God. We entrust our children to his wise providence and abounding mercies.

3. God is sovereign, and sin is real. I hear good Reformed folks imply that the right apologetics or sufficient catechesis or regular family worship will somehow make our covenant children apostasy-proof.

God sovereignly saves sinners, ordinarily through the means of grace. So we preach the gospel to the lost, trusting God to draw his elect to his Son by his Spirit. We baptize our covenant children, as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace—teaching them that by faith in Jesus, he will wash away their sins and renew them by his Spirit. We take them to public worship and have family worship. We catechize them, pray with and for them, and plead God’s covenant promises on their behalf. We use the law and the gospel as we correct and teach them. We remember that the goal of discipline is not behavior modification, but rather repentance, forgiveness of sins, and growth in grace.

We believe the biblical doctrine of original sin and know that our children are not exempted from it. But then we hear those frightening statistics about Christian kids who walk away from the faith once they leave home. We don’t want that to happen. We hear well-meaning voices in the Reformed world tell us that if we don’t want *our* kids to apostatize, we need to make sure they know “what they believe and why they believe it.” We double down on the use of means: we catechize more rigorously, send our kids to a worldview camp, increase our family devotional times, have them memorize more Scripture. We read all the latest books on how to raise

an apostasy-proof kid.

We forget his promises. We begin to superstitiously trust in the means. After all, we hear the implied promise: if we do it the right way, if we do enough, then our kids will not walk away from the faith. The covenant of works sneaks back in.

Isn't God sovereign? Isn't sin real? Isn't the Bible honest about the reality of prodigals? Isn't his grace in Christ still sufficient to save them? Yes, the answer is yes, to all of the above.

4. Christ died to save prodigals from the far country. He's the only hope we have for them. We continue to pray for our prodigals, love them, and point them to Christ.

Here's the good news about prodigals who come home. God grants them repentance and forgiveness, and he welcomes them. Jesus died for them. The Spirit alone can open their eyes to the absurdity of their rebellion against the goodness of God the Father. He teaches us to repent of our elder-brother ways: "I did the right thing; God *owes* me." Jesus saves even pharisaical sinners like us—parents who are prone to revert to the covenant of works.

Instead, believing the gospel, we can tell our prodigals that:

- We love them.
- Our home and our hearts are always open to them.
- We're sorry for the ways we failed them as Christian parents.
- Our only hope for them and us is Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.

Christ died for my failures as a Christian parent, which are more than I even know. He is my only hope as the parent of a prodigal.

I can't save myself. And I can't save my covenant children. If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. This is what we believe and confess. God grant us all grace—parents and our prodigals—to believe the gospel is still God's power to save them and us.

The author is pastor of Living Hope OPC in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Photograph of "Return of the Prodigal," Rembrandt van Rijn, Hermitage Museum, public domain.

● Out of the Mouth . . .

Adeline, my three-year-old daughter, asked, "Where is God?" Her father answered, "God is everywhere." Adeline replied, "No, he's not. He's in the Bible."

—Jennifer Harding
Doniphan, MO

Note: If you have an example of the humorous "wisdom" that can come from children, please send it to the editor.

Favorite Psalms and Hymns *Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 124* "Now Israel May Say"

Sandy Finlayson

We are living in difficult times. Every day the news brings us stories about war, the spread of viruses, political turmoil, and examples of injustice. How are we to cope with this? What should be our response? One of our responses should be to sing the psalms, and Psalm 124 is a very good one to begin with.

The version of Psalm 124 in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* has its roots in the early days of the Protestant Reformation. The tune, composed by Louis Bourgeois, appeared first in the *Genevan Psalter* of 1551. Bourgeois worked with John Calvin as congregational singing was refined and advanced in this period of church history. It is a testament to Bourgeois's gifts, that this tune has survived and been sung by Christians for more than five hundred years.

Psalm 124 presents the great truth that despite what we might think, God is in control. It gives us a clear and honest picture of the struggles we face. There are angry people who seek to overwhelm us and sweep us away. Many people are seeking to destroy the church and God's people. And yet, God is on our side.

Now Israel may say, and that in truth,
If that the Lord had not our right maintained,
If that the Lord had not with us remained,
When cruel men against us rose to strive,
We surely had been swallowed up alive. (stanza 1)

Psalm 124 reminds us of the difficulties of this life, and it also gives us the precious promise that God is with us and will ultimately not let us be defeated or destroyed.

All too often, we can be tempted to complain about our circumstances and think that no one cares about us. Instead, we should sing this psalm: a psalm that recognizes our struggles, trusts God for victory, and then praises him for what he has done.

☆ Congratulations

The **Children's Catechism** has been recited by:

- **Marguerite Korkie**, Tyler Presbyterian, Tyler, TX
- **Judith Korkie**, Tyler Presbyterian, Tyler, TX
- **Leon Korkie**, Tyler Presbyterian, Tyler, TX

WHY NOT US? WHY NOT NOW?

// CHRISTOPHER D. HARTSHORN



Chris Hartshorn baptizing a new member in 2018

If you were to ask the people I grew up with about my future, they would have voted me least likely to become a Christian. As I matured through high school and college, my life grew increasingly contrary to God and his ways.

But by the grace of God, I came to faith in my early twenties through a tract that I found in a drawer. I was living with some friends, and my life was in a horrible place. Rock bottom, as they say. But when I read the Scriptures in that tract, I cried out to God, and he saved me. Things would never be the same!

In my first couple of years as a Christian, I wandered around aimlessly until I found my way into a Calvary Chapel in Brea, California. I eventually ended up at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa under the ministry of the founding pastor, Chuck Smith.

It was at Calvary Chapel that I first learned about the importance of “simply teaching the Word of God simply” and trusting God for the results. It was at Calvary Chapel that I learned to teach and preach the whole counsel of God, from Genesis to Revelation.

I also learned about the importance of evangelism. I saw groups of people gathering and hitting the streets together to share the love of Jesus Christ with a dark and dying world. I saw friends talking to people about Jesus in all sorts of situations. I saw new people coming to church regularly because of the evangelistic influence of those that I knew. Many became followers of Christ themselves.

Finally, I learned about the importance of being aggressive and passionate about church planting. People I knew were leaving the comforts of home to go start Bible studies in other cities, states, and nations. And what was wild was that they were confident that God would bless their efforts—and most times, he did!

New York, Kansas, California

Eventually, I was sent out to start a Bible study in East Harlem, New York City, without knowing a single soul in that community. It was a challenging environment, but a wonderful one in which to learn. Along with friends from Costa Mesa, I spent a lot of time on the streets and in the community sharing the good news and inviting people to church. We saw incredible conversions and had many wonderful encounters there. But when I married my wife, Megan, and we had our first child, Josiah, we felt it was time to move on.

We then moved to Lawrence, Kansas, to begin another ministry from scratch. The culture was much different, but the need was the same: people needed Jesus Christ. My twin daughters, Tristyn and Taylor, were born there.

But as we labored in Kansas, I became increasingly convinced that we needed to be in a Reformed church. So we handed off the ministry and enrolled at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, California, in the summer of 2011.



Hartshorn (far right) at a combined service of Resurrection and Corona Presbyterian with their pastors (from left), Mark Jenkins and Andrew Canavan, and guest speaker Jonathan Cruse

The Local Church Should Be Local

There we met Mark Schroeder, from Harvest Orthodox Presbyterian Church in San Marcos, California. Along with the session, he supported our desire to plant a church in the Fullerton area. The church helped with our costs as we drove up to Orange County each week to gather our core group. We also met the regional home missionary, Dave Crum, who would often travel up to Orange County with us in our mini-van for Bible study.

The Lord blessed our labors, and three months before my graduation, we held the first worship service of what would eventually be Anaheim Hills Presbyterian Church (now Resurrection Presbyterian). I was installed the day after I graduated from seminary. Our fourth child, Luke, had been born in Escondido during seminary.

Over the years, I have increasingly become convinced that the local church should be local. I believe that we should be working diligently to plant OPC congregations in as many communities as possible. Because of that conviction, we began Bible studies in both Corona and Pasadena with people that were traveling to attend our church services in Anaheim Hills.

These Bible studies turned into core groups that eventually became mission works. We were thrilled that our members could invite people to their church they loved, without having those invitees drive to some far away city. The Lord blessed these endeavors, as well.

Please pray with us that both Corona Presbyterian and Pasadena OPC will particularize in 2022 or early 2023.

Why Not Us? Why Not Now?

Last year, the presbytery installed me as regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California, and I love my new position. I get to move around Southern California, Arizona, and eventually Hawaii to see what God might do. I am fully aware that anything that happens through me, happens because God is pleased to do the work. It's God's work, for God's glory, and for the good of his people. And my prayer is that God would use this flawed vessel to continue to see God's church grow in new locations using various methods—creative and new methods even.

My prayer is to see people coming into the OPC that no one would ever expect to come into the OPC. I want to see people who seem extremely far from the kingdom of God



A women's fellowship event at Pasadena OPC last fall

being captured and captivated by God to do his will. I want to see adult baptisms and conversions on a regular basis. I want to see our church plants praying for these things, and then expecting them to take place. I want to see our church plants planning for and thinking about planting more churches, before they even become particular congregations. How I long to see not just addition, but multiplication!

Why not? We have the greatest message the world has ever, or will ever hear: the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Further, we have a glorious Reformed faith, which is, in my mind, the clearest and truest expression of biblical Christianity. Why not us? Why not now?

I am very excited about opportunities before us in the near future. I'm excited about a Scottsdale, Arizona, church plant that will hopefully begin Sunday morning worship in May. Currently, it meets on Sunday nights with over fifty people in attendance. I'm excited about a Bible study in Laveen, Arizona, just southwest of downtown Phoenix, that is currently meeting for Friday morning Bible studies. I'm excited to get something started in coastal north county San Diego. I'm excited to see a couple of churches around Southern California coming into the OPC. I am excited about revitalization efforts with already established congregations.

I believe the future looks bright. I see many young men that God is raising up to be church planters in the OPC. I see God opening many doors around our presbytery. I expect him to do, and I'm praying for him to do, "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20 NKJV).

The author is regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California.



[Continued from page 9]

one's own identity. It is a drive both to be more like whatever you already are and also to live in society by *fully asserting* who you are. (*The Fractured Republic*, 148, emphasis added)

Do you see how this conception flies in the face of real forgiveness? Forgiveness is the exact opposite of self-assertion. It is self-denial. Forgiveness means not holding a wrong over someone; it means letting go of our rights and privileges and wants for the sake of restoring an offender. The world is preaching at us all day long that what matters most is “me, me, me”—no wonder we are starting to forget how to forgive! Forgiveness requires that we think less highly of ourselves and care more about others. It is one of the ways we take up our cross in an act of self-denial, and follow our Savior, who promises to lead us through suffering and into glory.

Again, we can take a sigh of relief at how much sweeter it is to belong to God's economy than this world's graceless recession. The center of secularism is the self. To renounce yourself therefore is to lose your center of gravity, your world spinning into chaos. Your purpose is lost. But the center of Christianity is Christ, and we are never so at home or on solid ground as when we forget ourselves and find him: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Paul tells us that as Christians we live for Christ, which is another way of saying that we live *like* Christ. What does this have to do with forgiveness? Everything: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

Glimpses of Grace

Thankfully, gospel-empowered forgiveness has at times found its way into the public eye over the last few years. Two recent examples are worth noting,

so that we would see the powerful picture of grace that forgiveness paints to the world and also be inspired to offer it to a world that has all but forgotten it exists.

The first heart-wrenching story comes from Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, when nine peaceful believers at Emanuel AME were shot to death by deranged racist Dylan Roof who attacked a midweek prayer meeting. Only two days later, at Roof's hearing, the victims' families spoke. The world was watching the church for a change. And what happened? One by one, each expressed their willingness to forgive Roof and called on him to repent and believe. Incredibly, reporter Charles C. W. Cooke for the *National Review* tweeted, “I am a non-Christian, and I must say: This is a remarkable advertisement for Christianity.”

The second story comes a few years later. There were no deaths, but many more victims. The hearing this time was for Dr. Larry Nassar, the former Olympic trainer who abused hundreds of young female athletes. The hearing included impact statements from over two hundred victims. One said to Nassar, “I know that I am going to move on and be OK . . . but this is something I will never forgive you for.” Another, age fifteen, said, “I will never forgive what you've done to me. You're a coward and a sick man. You don't deserve to see the light of day.” One victim's mother read her daughter's statement, adding her own “I hate you!” in conclusion.

Aren't these statements entirely understandable? We can hardly imagine the pain, the shame, the terror that these poor young girls faced, nor the range of emotions that flooded them as they had the opportunity to address their abuser. These reactions make sense. What was truly confounding is what came from Rachael Denhollander in her statement. She was in large measure responsible for cracking the case on Nassar and exposing his sordid system of abuse. She had become a household name at the time of the scandal and trial. Again, the world was

watching. And what did Denhollander say?

Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you. I pray you experience the soul-crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me—though I extend that to you as well. (*CNN*, January 30, 2018)

What a testimony. It wasn't as though Denhollander was expecting that Nassar be let off. She fought to see him get, in her words, the “greatest measure of justice available.” But she wasn't to be his judge—not in this life or the next. Empowered by God's grace, she chose to “love [her] enemies” (Matt. 5:44) and extend forgiveness in the sincere hope that it would be received. Only the biblical worldview can allow for such a response: one that blends justice with grace and finds real fulfillment in self-denial for the sake of Christ.

Isn't this far better than the way the world wants us to operate? Once you know the liberty of being forgiven, you will be at liberty to forgive others. As we have seen, this godless religion that has emerged in recent years lacks grace, and thus it can only bring fear and frustration. The efforts to enact perfect justice and to promote an uninhibited self will prove to be only a burden. But in this burdensome moment, believers know the blessing of being forgiven: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Ps. 32:1). We who know this blessing have an opportunity—a responsibility and indeed a privilege—to be a blessing to others. May it never be said of the church that we have forgotten how to forgive. □

The author is pastor of Community Presbyterian in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

MAY



The Bolyards (day 1)



The O'Briens (day 10)

1 Pray for **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine, the church in Ukraine, and the internally displaced. / **ETHAN & CATHERINE BOLDYARD**, Wilmington, NC. Pray for opportunity to witness to Heritage's neighborhood.

2 **JAY & ANDREA BENNETT**, Neon, KY. Pray for the assimilation of new and prospective members at Neon Reformed. / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and others preparing for the 88th General Assembly, June 8-14.

3 **NATE (KATIE) PASCHALL**, church-planting intern at Christ the King in Naples, FL. / Pray for Christian Education general secretary **DANNY OLINGER** as he directs **MTIOPC**, with Intensive Training beginning today in Glenside, PA.

4 **BILL & MARGARET SHISHKO**, Deer Park, NY. Pray that the Haven could begin capital improvements on its new worship facility. / Pray for tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG**, Nakaale, Uganda.

5 **MARK & CARLA VAN ESSEDELFT**, Nakaale, Uganda (on furlough). Pray for their son Daniel, finishing up school in Kenya and rejoining them. / Yearlong intern **GRANT (STORMIE) ALLARD** at Christ Covenant in Amarillo, TX.

6 Missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for ability, as Christians and medical practitioners, to teach the clinic staff well. / Yearlong intern **BEN (JOELLE) CAMPBELL** at Presbyterian Church of Cape Cod in West Barnstable, MA.

7 Associate missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the young men James disciplined as they return to their education in Mbale. / **MIKE (ELIZABETH) DIERCKS**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio.

8 **KEVIN & RACHEL MEDCALF**, Cumming, GA. Pray for God's blessing on the new Sunday school program. / Pray for **DAVID NAKHLA**, Diaconal Ministries administrator, and others preparing for the National Diaconal Summit, June 2-4.

9 Pray for associate missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, that the new clinic staff housing project may move smoothly to completion. / **JUDITH DINSMORE**, managing editor of *New Horizons*, and **GREGORY REYNOLDS**, editor of *Ordained Servant*.

10 **GREGORY & GINGER O'BRIEN**, Downingtown, PA. Praise the Lord for leading Christ Church to a new worship site! / Associate missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that her published health research may be beneficial for the community around Nakaale.

11 **MELAKU & MERON TAMIRAT**, Clarkston, GA. Pray that God would save and bring to worship the city's refugee families. / **ABBY HARTING**, office secretary for Christian Education, and **ANNELISA STUDLEY**, office manager.

12 Tentmaking missionary **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the opportunity and desire of literate Karimojong believers to read the Bible to others. / Active duty military chaplain **STEPHEN (LINDSEY) ROBERTS**, US Army.

13 Associate missionary **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the KEO teachers as they restart in schools after a two-year hiatus. / **JASON (CAITLIN) VARTANIAN**, church-planting intern at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, CA.

14 Pray for affiliated missionary **LINDA KARNER**, Japan. / The Committee on Diaconal Ministry asks prayer for its **REFUGEE MINISTRY SUBCOMMITTEE** as they consider how to disburse funds to aid Ukrainian refugees.

15 **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for a provisional license for Knox School of Theology to grant accredited degrees. / Yearlong intern **MARC (RUTHIE) SCATURRO** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.

MAY



The Cottas (day 20)

21 Pray for affiliated missionaries **CRAIG AND REE COULBOURNE**, Japan, as Craig takes up new duties as the regional coordinator for the MTW Japan teams. / Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**.

22 Pray for **MARK (PEGGY) SUMPTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. / **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for Salvos Por Gracia Church as they find and equip a new facility for worship.

23 **RON & CAROL BEABOUT**, McAlisterville, PA. Pray that congregants at Grace and Truth OPC would joy to partake in the life of the church. / Pray for **GREAT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS**, a joint ministry of the OPC and PCA.

24 Affiliated missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia. Pray that officials will approve a new girls' home for trafficking victims. / Yearlong intern **A. J. (CHELSEA) MILLSAPS** at Sandy Springs Pres. in Maryville, TN.

25 Affiliated missionaries **JERRY AND MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic. / Pray for **BRUCE (SUE) HOLLISTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbyteries of the Midwest & Wisconsin and Minnesota.

26 **CALEB & ERIKA SMITH**, Thousand Oaks, CA. Pray for outreach efforts at Thousand Oaks Presbyterian. / **MELISA MCGINNIS**, financial controller, and **CHARLENE TIPTON**, database administrator. / Pray for **SHORT-TERM MISSIONS STAFF** members as they identify and prepare for short-term missions opportunities.



The Hopps (day 30)

27 **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia. Pray for the men who are awaiting ordination as their churches come under increased scrutiny. / Pray for members of the **OPC COMMITTEE ON CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL**.

28 Yearlong intern **JEREMIAH (ANNA) MOONEY** at Covenant Community in Taylors, SC. / **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia. Pray for their ministry in South Korea to re-settlers from the North as they await a return to the field.

29 **CHRISTOPHER & SARA DREW**, Grand Forks, ND. Pray for Faith OPC that God's elect may be brought in. / Yearlong intern **BEN (VICTORIA) CIAVOLELLA** at Delta Oaks Presbyterian in Pittsburg, CA.

30 **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti. Pray for the security situation in Haiti and wisdom in determining the timing of their safe return to the field. / Pray that **OPC.ORG** will edify the church and help communicate its message to others.

31 Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray that the church would know the love of God through their daily sufferings. / Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**.

16 **DAVE (ELIZABETH) HOLMLUND**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son.

17 Home Missions administrative assistant **KATHARINE OLINGER**. / Pray for MTIOPC administrators **PAT CLAWSON** and **JUDY ALEXANDER** and for those at the course **DISABILITY AND THE CHURCH**, May 17-19, in Rockport, ME.

18 **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for Ben and the family as he adjusts to new duties at Farel Theological Seminary. / Yearlong intern **TAYLOR (SOPHIA) SEXTON** at Heritage Presbyterian in Royston, GA.

19 **MIKE & NAOMI SCHOUT**, Zeeland, MI. Pray Grace Fellowship would have a "one anothering" culture of care and love. / **BRADNEY & EILEEN LOPEZ**, Guayama, PR. Praise God for a new building for Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritural!

20 **MATTHEW & LOIS COTTA**, Pasadena, CA. Pray that Pasadena Presbyterian would particularize this year. / **JOHN FIKKERT**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care, and **MARK STUMPF**, OPC Loan Fund manager.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

IN MEMORIAM: MARY BIRD

Mary Bonner and John Mahaffy

The passing into glory of Mary Wolcott Bird on March 28, 2022, at 102, marks a transition in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as Mary was the last survivor of the first generation of foreign missionaries of the OPC.

Mary, born December 10, 1919, in upstate New York, graduated from Wheaton College and taught in Georgia. In 1947, she married Herbert Bird. After serving a church in Lincoln, Nebraska, they were called as missionaries to Eritrea, where they traveled with their son, David, while expecting their second, Steve, later to be joined by daughter, Ruth. They served there from 1952 until 1971. Mary was loved by the Eritrean community as well as missionary families and known for her gracious, hospitable spirit.

After Herb's death in 1976, Mary lived with Ruth and was an active member of Trinity OPC in Hatboro, Pennsylvania. She served in ministries there including Love and Stitches, partnering with Grace Haney in supporting services at a local nursing home, and playing the piano. Steve writes, "Though her death was not unexpected, it still leaves a loss. She had an unshakable faith and was eager to share it." We grieve, yet live in the hope of the resurrection, rejoicing in the fruit of many lives touched by Mary Bird.

IN MEMORIAM: BENJAMIN ALVIRA

Ross W. Graham

OP minister Benjamin Alvira, 70, died March 8. He was a passionate and effective proponent of the Reformed faith and the OPC among Spanish-speaking peoples throughout the world. Received in 1997 as a minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from the



Ben and Milca Alvira



Mary Bird with husband, Herbert, and family in Eritrea in the 1950s

PCA, where he had already planted and pastored churches in Lakeland, Tampa, and Palm Harbor, Florida, Ben labored as an evangelist in Philadelphia, and then as a church planter in New Jersey. But in 2004, he began to introduce some of his island pastor friends in Puerto Rico to members of the Presbytery of New Jersey.

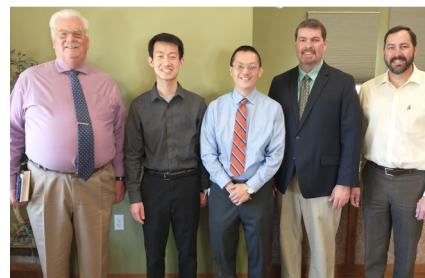
In 2005, he helped to organize a denominationally sponsored Hispanic Ministries Conference held at Immanuel OPC in Bellmawr and attended by Spanish-speaking ministers and elders from Arizona, California, Illinois, Puerto Rico, and New Jersey. And in 2008, Primera Iglesia Presbiteriana Ortodoxa, "Jesús es la Verdad," was organized and received into the Presbytery of New Jersey, and Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada del Caribe was received as a previously organized congregation, both in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Today two new mission works and another newly forming group in other parts of the island are all part of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

DEACONS FOR SOVEREIGN GRACE!

Peter J. A. Moelker

On the Lord's Day, February 27, 2022, Sovereign Grace Orthodox Presbyterian in Redlands, California, celebrated the ordination and installation of their first-ever deacons: Mr. Jonah Lay and Dr. Tim Lee. Rev. Alan Pontier of the Presbytery of Southern California participated in the laying on of hands.

Sovereign Grace was begun as a mission work of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 2001, becoming a particular congregation in 2007. Fifteen years later, the congregation is thankful to the Lord for his provision of two men to serve in the ministry of mercy.



At the installation: Alan Pontier, Jonah Lay, Tim Lee, Peter Moelker, Matt Thalmayer



At Hoadley's installation: Roy Miller, Jim Hoekstra, Philip Strong, Brett Mahlen, Bruce Hollister, Greg Hoadley, John Fikkert, John Marstall, Jody Lucero, and Ralph Pontier

HOADLEY INSTALLED IN DES MOINES, IL

On March 25, Greg Hoadley was installed as pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church in Des Moines, Iowa. Regional home missionary Bruce Hollister preached on 2 Corinthians 4:7–12: “Life Out of Death.” Philip Strong, pastor of Grace Reformed Fellowship in Lander, Wyoming, gave the charge to the pastor. John Fikkert, director of ministerial care for the OPC and ministerial advisor to Grace Reformed, gave the charge to the congregation.

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On March 25, **Wilmington Reformed OPC** in Wilmington, OH, became a particular congregation of the OPC.
- On April 1, **Covenant Reformed OPC** in West Plains, MO, became a particular congregation of the OPC.

MINISTERS

- On March 9, **Stephen J. Oharek** was deposed from the office of minister by the Presbytery of the South. He was pastor of Reformation OPC in Oviedo, FL.
- On March 5, **Jimmy S. Apodaca** was installed as pastor of Living Home OPC in Cerritos, CA. He was previously associate pastor of Providence OPC in Temecula, CA.
- On March 25, **Gregory P. Hoadley** was installed as pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian in Des Moines, IA. Hoadley was previously the pastor of Redeemer OPC in Airdrie, Alberta, Canada.
- The Presbytery of New York and New England granted the request of **Allen C. Tomlinson** to dissolve his pastoral relationship with First Church of Merrimack in Merrimack, NH, on March 28, upon his retirement.
- On April 1, **Paul A. Mourreale** was installed as pastor of Covenant Reformed

OPC in West Plains, MO. He was previously associate pastor of Sovereign Grace Reformed Church in Doniphan, MO.

- On April 1, **Patrick J. Morgan**, previously the pastor of Christ Presbyterian in Janesville, WI, was installed as teacher of the Word at Five Solas OPC in Reedsburg, WI, to serve at Heidelberg Seminary in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

MILESTONES

- Ruling elder **James A. Heemstra**, 85, died March 6. He served as Regional Home Missionary of the OPC's Presbytery of the South from 1987 until his retirement in 2006. See the tribute to him in the March issue of *New Horizons*.
- OP minister **Benjamin Alvira**, 70, died March 8. After pastoring PCA congregations in FL, he became an evangelist in the Presbytery of Philadelphia until his retirement.
- **Mary Wolcott Bird**, 102, died March 28. With her husband, OP minister Herbert S. Bird, she served as a missionary to Eritrea from 1952 to 1971.
- **Virginia S. Wisdom**, 67, died March 31. Ginny was the wife of retired OP minister and US Army chaplain Christopher Wisdom.

LETTERS

IS A NONLITERAL GENESIS THE PROBLEM?

Editor:

In *Listening to Genesis 1 and 2* (reviewed in the [March issue](#)) Cornelis Van Dam



The Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota held their ninth men's retreat on February 25–26 in Green Lake, Wisconsin. The group was blessed to have the Rev. Camden Bucey speak on OPC history and Christian identity.

argues that materialistic science influences exegetes toward nonliteral Genesis interpretations, which undermines all Scripture and leads some to apostasy. But he unintentionally causes what he wants to avoid. He misses both the rationale behind nonliteral interpretations and the real source of doubt.

Scripture has a high regard for facts when physical reality is disputed (Deut. 18:21, 22; 1 Cor. 15:14–19; our Lord in John 10:37, 38; Paul and Peter interpret Ps. 16:9, 10 nonliterally in Acts 2:29; 13:35, 36). Scripture, not materialism, leads interpreters to respect science.

Next, it is the behavior of anti-science evangelicals that induces doubt. Difficult evidence is avoided, which raises integrity concerns. When inquisitive Christians investigate, they discover that the evidence against a literal Genesis is overwhelming. So they seek clarification from the church. Once again they are told that the Christian faith depends on a narrow interpretation of Genesis. And once again, the evidence is avoided or distorted. The doubter sinks in despair.

This is unnecessary. The authors of this letter recommend familiarity with mainstream evidence from sources influenced by Reformed believers who are professional scientists. A primer: *Grand Canyon; Monument to an Ancient Earth*, Ed. Carol Hill; a classic: *The Bible, Rocks and Time* by Davis Young and Ralph Stearley (reviewed in *New Horizons* in February 2009); a blog: Naturalis Historia, thenaturalhistorian.com (by Joel Duff). Equally important, we urge building confidence in Scripture on proper foundations, firm and independent of Genesis's interpretations.

Mitch Madsen

Craig Laurie
Portland, Oregon

REVIEWS

Persistent Prayer, by Guy M. Richard. P&R, 2021. Hardcover, 160 pages, \$11.50. Reviewed by OP minister Albert J. Tricarico Jr.

I was living in Uganda in fall 2005 when the destructive forces of Hurricane Katrina ravaged so much of the US Gulf

Coast. I remember the event and its costly effects. I also remember how difficult it was to find information living in a faraway place where media access was limited. Unlike myself, Guy M. Richard remembered the event up close. He described its impact on him in the first sentences of his book, *Persistent Prayer*, one of three volumes in the Blessings of the Faith series.

For Richard, Katrina provided an occasion for learning some deep lessons about prayer. He was about to begin his first ministerial call and serve a congregation in Gulfport, Mississippi. “Looking back now,” he reports, “I see that the whole situation was a severe mercy from the Lord in so many ways. It taught me important lessons about myself, about ministry, and about the church. But, more importantly, it drove me to pray” (14).

The book is brief and accessible. It covers all the expected topics and then some. An inviting introduction is followed by four chapters and a bonus section, written under the title “Questions and Answers on Prayer.” This last (and longest) segment helped me. I found myself surprised at the list of questions, and delighted (mostly) by his answers. Here is some of what Richard offers:

Chapter one, “The Nature of Prayer,” highlights the heartfelt disposition that characterizes communication with God. “Prayer is pleading that is motivated by a need that we cannot meet ourselves and that we desperately want God to supply for us” (23). This pleading is not limited to supplication. It includes, and ought always to lead to, a pouring out of the heart in praise to the Lord (33).

In chapter two, “Prayer Works,” Richard helps us maintain positive expectation in our prayers, while submitting to the reality that God will not always respond according to our wishes. Expectant prayers are according to God’s will (45, citing 1 John 5:14–15) They align with God’s own desires and are shaped by his will as given in the Scriptures (46).

Chapter three is titled “Prayer Is Necessary.” Here Richard develops a concept

drawn from the writings of J. C. Ryle—prayer is spiritual breathing. Prayer sustains spiritual life and becomes a measure of spiritual condition (65, 76).

Richard named the fourth chapter “Growing in Prayer.” Our prayers should change over time in ways that show us that our concerns have matured. “We find ourselves praying less for those things that will only make our earthly lives easier and more comfortable and praying more for spiritual things pertaining to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ” (85).

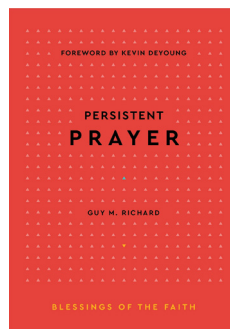
Richard answers twenty-three questions at the end. If you want to know how to harmonize God’s sovereignty with prayer, whether or not to kneel while praying, or how much time should be devoted to prayer, consult this section and discover Richard’s views.

If you ask for the author’s advice, I am sure he will warn you not to wait for a severe mercy to come before you learn to pray and grow in your prayers. Read his book now and take in its lessons. They will help you understand and practice this most important aspect of Christian living.

The Lord’s Prayer: Learning from Jesus on What, Why, and How to Pray, by Kevin DeYoung. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 128 pages, \$16.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Dale A. Van Dyke.

“Is there any activity more essential to the Christian life and yet more discouraging *in* the Christian life, than prayer?” (11). With that astute introduction, Kevin DeYoung leads us on a thoroughly enjoyable, insightful, and encouraging study of the Lord’s Prayer.

The book is a short but surprisingly detailed treatment of the topic. As with most of DeYoung’s books, the writing style is conversational and easy to read while the content is perceptive and profound. I found myself laughing out loud and warmly moved at different intervals throughout the book. Above all, it is a genuinely devotional book—written by a man who loves the Lord of the prayer and desires to grow in the practice of prayer.



The book is comprised of seven chapters, with a helpful study guide at the end. Chapter 1, “When You Pray,” addresses the *how* and *why* of prayer. We should not pray like the hypocrites or Gentiles. And we pray because “God has ordained means to accomplish his ends” (21). These are things we’ve most likely heard before. The blessing of this book is DeYoung’s ability to say them in a fresh and culturally insightful way. For instance, there is an excellent, short correction of a common misunderstanding of hypocrisy as “doing something even though you don’t feel like it.” The adroit response?

Doing what is right when you don’t feel like doing what is right is maturity. Professing one thing in public but living a different way in private is hypocrisy. (17)

Chapters 2–6 deal with the prayer itself. Once again, I was impressed by the helpful insights. In chapter 2, commenting on the importance of understanding and facing the God to whom we pray, DeYoung quotes J. I. Packer, “The vitality of prayer lies largely in the vision of God that prompts it” (33). So true. In chapter 4, dealing with “your kingdom come,” DeYoung helpfully distinguishes between the church and the kingdom and offers some relevant corrections to some contemporary confusion. For instance, to pray the second petition means

we do not seek first the advancement of people with our skin color, no matter what skin color that may be. We do not seek first the advancement of Western civilization . . . [or] the triumph of our political party or even of our nation. We seek first God’s kingdom, and we pray that his kingdom would come, whatever it may mean for our personal, tribal, and earthly kingdoms. (49)

There would be a lot more unity in the church if we understood and adopted that simple principle. Each chapter contains one or more similar gems of insight.

DeYoung closes the book with a helpful

discussion of why most English Bibles do not include the popularized conclusion of the prayer—“for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever”—but why it remains an appropriate and biblical way to pray.

I highly recommend this book. It would make for a terrific small group study, for discipleship of a new believer or for personal edification. It would also be an excellent resource for a sermon series on the topic, though a danger would be the temptation to quote it too much!

***Christ: Humbled yet Exalted*, by John Flavel (abridged by J. Stephen Yuille). Reformation Heritage, 2021. Paperback, 208 pages, \$12.00. Reviewed by OP pastor James A. La Belle.**

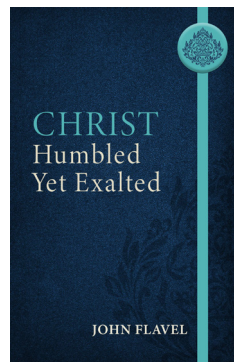
This book by Stephen Yuille is an abridgment of twenty-five sermons in one of Flavel’s most important writings, *The Fountain of Life: A Display of Christ in His Essential and Mediatorial Glory*, a treatise found in volume 1 of Flavel’s works. In typical Puritan fashion, Flavel’s treatise is a collection of sermons. This means each chapter of Yuille’s book has the structure of what you’d expect from a Puritan sermon: an orienting introduction, which leads to a doctrine drawn from the text, followed by reasons, arguments, or propositions in support of that doctrine, and then a number of applications (or inferences, as Flavel likes to call them) that flow from that doctrine. This makes Yuille’s book devotional and edifying, perfect for the morning prayer closet or Lord’s Day afternoon reading. And given that it’s an abridgment, the chapters are short enough for quick reading and yet meaty enough for plenty of meditation.

Yuille jumps into Flavel’s work near the middle. So up to this point in the work, Flavel’s sermons have covered Christ’s essential and eternal glory, the covenant of

redemption between the Father as having elected a people and the Son as volunteering to redeem them, the glory of the person of Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the elect and the nature of his role as the Mediator between God and sinful man, and then finally the threefold office by which Christ exercises that mediation and accomplishes that redemption on our behalf, namely, Prophet, Priest, and King. This is important to know because these rich elements of Flavel’s well-known work are missing in Yuille’s abridgment. So if you’re interested in these aspects of Christ’s glory, you’ll want to buy Flavel’s *Fountain of Life*—which, if you didn’t realize it, is essentially forty-two sermons on Questions 20–28 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

The beauty of Yuille’s book is that it turns our attention to the heart of Christ’s mediatorial work: his humiliation and exaltation. In other words, it treats Questions 27–28 of the Catechism, with fifteen chapters on Christ’s humiliation and five chapters on his exaltation. I’m currently doing a study for the congregation through Yuille’s book and have greatly appreciated it. Personally, I would rather read Flavel himself (and, truth be told, I *am* reading Flavel alongside Yuille), but Yuille’s treatment has the following commendable strengths. For one, it’s accessible. Many, even in our OPC congregations, are unsure of their ability to profitably digest a Puritan work.

Yuille updates the language and makes it readable for teens and adults. I can see it working extremely well for a group study because the homiletic structure affords ample applications that would facilitate wonderful discussions. Secondly, it’s on point. Yuille doesn’t sacrifice any of the essential content of Flavel’s excellent treatise. He carefully distills the golden threads of Puritan exposition and application, offering his audience the genius of yesterday in today’s parlance. And thirdly, it’s Christ-centered. The centrality of the gospel is constantly threatened today by so many peripheral concerns. We can



never have too many good books on the grand gospel of our glorious Savior. I highly recommend this book. “Thank you, Stephen.”

***Rescue Plan: Charting a Course to Restore Prisoners of Pornography and Rescue Skills: Essential Skills for Restoring the Sexually Broken*, by Deepak Reju and Jonathan D. Holmes. P&R, 2021. Paperback, 256 and 272 pages respectively, each \$13.00. Reviewed by OP pastor Carl Miller.**

In our sex-crazed world, we find the beast of sexual addiction alive and well, thriving more and more every day. Sadly, we find that sexual addiction has the same vitality in the church. The carnage of sin that has been left in its wake, the pain and destruction that it has brought to persons and relationships, is staggering.

In the companion book set of *Rescue Plan* and *Rescue Skills*, pastors Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes provide a very practical and comprehensive set of tools that equip pastors, counselors, friends, and family with foundational knowledge and skills to help rescue and restore prisoners of pornography. Though someone struggling with addiction to pornography could benefit from reading these books, the clear focus is on helping the helpers establish a rescue plan and effectively carry out the rescue operation, by the work and grace of God.

As Reju and Holmes explain in the beginning notes in each book, *Rescue Plan* provides the helper the “what, when, and why” (*Rescue Plan*, 17). It gives the theory. It explains the nature of pornography addiction and what it looks like in different stages of people’s lives. The authors conclude each chapter with practical tips laid out in four P’s—personal reflection, potential problems, a practical step, and prayer. *Rescue Skills* provides the “how.” It is a boots-in-the-mud, scalpel-to-the-heart guide as Reju and Holmes help you develop and carry out your plan, having learned more than twenty practical skills. The authors end each chapter in similar fashion with action items called “Reflect”

and “Act.”

As the groundwork on the subject is laid, Reju and Holmes begin *Rescue Plan* in the right place by presenting the darkness of sin and its effect on sex. No matter how many may be tempted to deny or minimize it, sin destroys sex. Satan loves to deceive people to believe that ultimately sex is meaningless. He loves it when people are enticed and fall into the prison of addiction and descend into slavery. Using James 1:13–15, Reju and Holmes helpfully explain the pit and pitfalls in how the cycle of addiction works. Yet, as much as we need to understand how sin destroys sex and the details of its deadly cycle, the authors rightly point us to the path out of the darkness: understanding how God intends sex and how Jesus, the great Rescuer, redeems it. Working through the early verses in 1 Corinthians 6 (as one example), the authors show how the light of the gospel shines brightly on this matter through the person and work of Jesus Christ and his rescue of his people. Springboarding from this, biblical strategies are provided for

those who struggle with a specific issue or in their station of life. Matters addressed include how one should view and effectively deal with masturbation, speaking to what is true of children or teenagers who get caught looking online, struggles in the midst of dating or courtship, single folks who struggle with sexual temptation, and married couples where one falls and the other feels betrayed.

Having a good foundation of knowledge, *Rescue Skills* is insightful in the work of restoration. Reju and Holmes teach helpers to listen, to ask good questions, and to provide effective, broad, and Word-based accountability, staying gospel-focused. How can you help one recover

after a fall? Great guidance is provided.

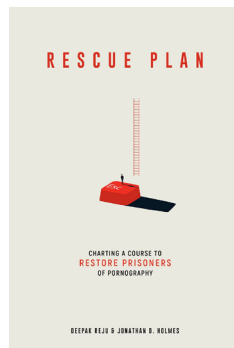
Rescue Plan and *Rescue Skills* assist Christians as they seek to be truly helpful in restoring the sexually broken for the glory and cause of Christ.

***John Calvin: For a New Reformation*, edited by Derek W. H. Thomas and John W. Tweeddale. Crossway, 2019. Hardcover, 608 pages, \$34.11 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Brian De Jong.**

In the opening chapter of the Westminster Confession, we read these wise words: “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all.” The divines recognized that some parts of Scripture are, by their very nature, clearer than other parts. Even Peter admitted that certain things in Paul’s writings were difficult to understand. The divines also realized that not every reader understands everything equally well. Some things that are crystal clear to one may be opaque to another person who reads the same passage.

What is true of Scripture is also accurate concerning a wonderful volume of essays entitled *John Calvin: For a New Reformation*, a work that was in process for years. The late Dr. R. C. Sproul contributed an afterword prior to his death in 2017.

The list of contributors reads like a “Who’s Who” of Reformed scholarship. It includes prominent theologians, like Douglas Kelly, respected church



Position Available

Associate Pastor: Little Farms Chapel, an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation, is seeking an associate pastor to serve in the areas of education and evangelism. Little Farms is located northwest of Grand Rapids, Michigan, near the city of Coopersville. We are seeking a man with a passion for training children, youth, and adults to be Christ-committed, biblically literate, culturally aware, active members of the church. For further information, email Little Farms Chapel at employment@lfcopc.org. Please apply by May 28, 2022.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS *Continued*

historians, like W. Robert Godfrey, gifted preachers, such as Steve Lawson and Joel Beeke, as well as notable academics, like Paul Helm and Cornelis Venema.

The book divides into two sections. Part 1 focuses on the life and work of John Calvin. This section includes biographical and historical information. For history lovers, these chapters will prove downright delicious. For instance, Godfrey's contribution on "Calvin and Friends" turns up new ground on numerous relationships in Calvin's life.

Part 2 pivots to the teaching of John Calvin. Chapters in this section examine Scripture, creation, providence, law, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Christian life, adversity, predestination, the church, sacraments, the preservation of the saints, and the last things. This part of the book will stimulate positive theological reflection on Calvin's broad interests. The authors carefully draw out systematic theology analysis from Calvin's *Institutes* and *Commentaries*.

Courageous readers who tackle this lengthy volume will find that all pages are not "alike plain in themselves." Some chapters are more scholarly in nature and will challenge the interest of a layman. Other chapters will prove more accessible to the casual Christian reader but could be too basic for the veteran Calvin scholar.

Likewise, not every reader will enjoy equal clarity. A new believer who understands little about the Reformation could

easily drown in these pools. The authors presuppose a certain understanding of Calvinism, making this book a true delight to those already committed to Reformed thought and practice.

There is a temptation that faces historians and theologians alike. It is the tendency to summarize, recap, and repeat what previous authors have already said. While such an approach is considered safe, it does not contribute any new light to the topic under consideration. Thankfully, these contributors resisted that temptation. They provide fresh insights and new perspectives on the life, work, and thought of "The Theologian," as Philip Melancthon called Calvin.

***The Acrostic of God: A Rhyming Theology for Kids*, by Jonathan Gibson and Timothy Brindle. New Growth Press, 2021. Hardcover, 64 pages, \$13.37 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP member Isaiah Rose, age 13.**

In *The Acrostic of God*, Jonathan Gibson and Timothy Brindle give children an alphabetical list of the titles and attributes of God written with a rhyming beat. God is described accurately and elaborately according to what the Bible teaches. It is easy to find the rhythm of each acrostic and say it out loud. I like the illustrations; they are very rich in color and really help the message

of the words. Also, the Scripture references on each page are a smart thing to add because we can use those verses to verify what the *Acrostic of God* says for ourselves. I like how there is a QR code to scan for an audio version of the book. The rap is very easy to follow along to because it is slow, and Timothy Brindle speaks clearly. Some of the words are a bit complicated. This book is intended for those aged 5–11. Younger children in that range might be a bit confused by words like "abhor" and "succumb." But maybe this provides another learning opportunity.

This book seems like it would be easy to memorize, with its rhythm and rhyme. Is it meant to be read all at once or one letter at a time, like a devotional? I like how this book makes it easy for everyone to understand what is possible to understand about God. Also, the prologue introduces the style of the book well by getting the reader used to the rhythm.

Let's read the *Acrostic of God* together to help you to make him your awesome treasure.

We'll read it, rap it, or sing it—it's fun!
Till Jesus comes back and his kingdom has come . . .

He's the Alpha and Omega, from A to Z;
his beauty and his glory we were made to see.

The closing refrain wraps up the book well by basically stating: You know who God is now, and why he deserves your praise; now get out there and praise him! Overall, I think this book was great, and that it is well worth reading more than once. I would definitely recommend this book to a friend.

