

NEW HORIZONS

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IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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THE THRILL OF DESECRATION



CARL R. TRUEMAN

Until recently, one of the unquestioned assumptions about the modern world was the fact that it is *disenchanted*. This term refers to the idea that in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, the rise of bureaucracy, and the increasing mastery of nature that technology seemed to deliver, the world became a less magical place. Where our medieval ancestors lived in a world that they felt was permeated by the supernatural, we live in a world where everything can be reduced to an algorithm or a technique. The desire of Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, that children learn "facts, facts, facts," exemplifies this attitude. Where once the stars above spoke of mysteries too profound to fathom and of a God whose power and glory has set them in order, now we just see masses of gas undergoing a prosaic chemical process, randomly distributed in otherwise empty, meaningless space.

There is a lot of truth to the notion of disenchantment. We do experience the world today in a manner that often lacks mystery, where the meaning of life is tied to consumption, and where a sense of the holy is lacking. But as a broad account of what is occurring in our society, disenchantment has clear limitations. To put it bluntly, modern

man is not merely disenchanted man, though that captures something of the truth of his condition. Modern man is also desecrated man. His condition is one of active, exhilarating contravention of the sacred.

To take an example, there is a sense in which abortion is abortion, the unwarranted killing of an innocent. Yet there is still a significant difference at least in attitude between a society that argues it should be "safe, legal, and rare" and one where women are encouraged to "shout" their abortions, to take an exultant pride in killing their unborn children, and even to wear T-shirts bragging about it.

What category should we use to think about this? I would suggest that of *desecration*. This has the advantage over *disenchantment* because it captures something of the intentionally exultant nature of so much that is currently occurring. It is not simply that the social processes of late modernity are erasing what it means to be human. We are positively delighting in its destruction.

In a sense, of course, there is nothing in principle here that is novel or innovative. In Genesis, human beings, made in the image of God, intentionally eat from the fruit of the tree in direct contravention of God's instructions. That involves the desecration of God's image. Yet I would argue that while the principle of desecration lies at the heart of the reality of sin from the very start, today our capacity for desecration is considerably more powerful.

LIMITS AND ENDS, AND FREEDOM

To explain what I mean, it is first useful to reflect upon two aspects of human nature in the state of creation: we are creatures of limits and of ends; and we are to respect and pursue these freely.

The limits and ends of being human are set forth in God's instructions to Adam and Eve. They are to reproduce and to subdue the earth and to obey God. They also have limits: they are not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Elsewhere in Scripture, these ends and limits are elaborated in the wake of the fall via God's law. To be fully human is to respect these.

The second aspect is our freedom, something critical to being human. A brief comparison to animals helps clarify this point. Foxes, for example, kill chickens. But place a chicken in the presence of a human being and the outcome is not typically predictable in advance: will the person kill it and eat it, release it into the wild, or keep it for producing eggs? With a fox, there is no such doubt.

Unlike other creatures, therefore, we are free. Further, created in God's image, we act freely in a way that carries moral significance. The fox never asks whether killing the chicken is a good thing because it is for him a purely

instinctive matter. For us, our treatment of the chicken can take into account a whole host of other factors—who owns the chicken? what future consequences would killing it carry?—that shape our behavior toward it. And in Genesis, these factors are reflected in that notion of limits and ends. We have limits to observe and ends to pursue because we are made in God’s image, and we have to choose to do so. Failure in this regard renders us less than human in the biblical sense; it involves desecration of the image of God.

Of course, desecration is exhilarating. Breaking through the limits and creating our own ends gives us the feeling of being gods ourselves. As it is God who determines reality, so our usurping of that task brings a godlike high. Augustine articulates this powerfully in Book 2 of his *Confessions* when he describes his intense pleasure as a youth in stealing pears—bitter, inedible pears—from a neighbor’s garden. It made him feel like God. A less well-known but perhaps more striking analysis is the description Dostoevsky gives of a fellow inmate during his time in a Siberian prison. Today we would use the term “serial killer” for such a person. Dostoevsky was fascinated by the inmate’s apparent need to kill, and he drew the following conclusion:

The first man he killed was an oppressor, an enemy; that is a crime, but understandable; he had a reason; but then he kills not an enemy but the first man he meets, kills him for fun, for a rude word, for a glance, for a trifle. . . . It’s as if the man is drunk, as if he’s in a feverish delirium. *As if, having leaped over a line that was sacred to him, he begins to admire the fact that nothing is holy for him anymore; as if he feels an urge to leap over all legality and authority at once, and to revel in the most boundless and unbridled freedom, to revel in this thrill of horror, which it is impossible for him not to feel.* (Notes from a Dead House, translated by Pevear and Volokhonsky, 119 [emphasis added])

What Dostoevsky describes here—that thrill that come from crossing a sacred line that must then be repeated again and again—captures the psychology of sin: the desecration of the divine image, while utterly self-destructive, generates a high. We do it freely, it makes us feel like gods ourselves, and we do it again and again. Desecration, in short, is fun and addictive.

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

We live at a time when acts of desecration are, in a sense, reaching unprecedented heights of presumption. If we think of the image of God as involving limits and ends, then the less we think of ourselves as defined by limits and ends, the more scope we have for making desecration a

practical reality in every aspect of our lives. At the heart of this lies the impact of technology.

For Adam and Eve, there was a limited scope for desecration. They could have rejected the ends God had set before them: they could have refused, for example, to subdue the earth or to procreate. They chose to eat the fruit and this was followed in short order by expulsion from the garden and life in a creation now laboring under the curse. Desecration of the image led to swift and unpleasant consequences.

Modern technology, however, has created a very different world. Now we have more and more tools that encourage us to imagine that we can overcome our limits or ends with impunity. Technology tilts us toward seeing any given limit or end as merely a technical problem that can be overcome. Where Adam and Eve faced immediate consequences, technology allows us to think that the consequences of our actions can be endlessly deferred or solved by the application of some technique. We have even come to believe that the human body is just so much play dough over which we can exert technical mastery. Born a man but feel you are a woman? We have drugs and surgical procedures that can deal with that. Contracted a disease through irresponsible sexual behavior? Here is an antibiotic.

Then there is the realm of transhumanism. While this is a singular term for a plurality of philosophies, it points to something all of such have in common: an impatience with human limitations, be they physical or intellectual, and a dislike of the idea that to be human is to have a certain intrinsic end or teleology. Transgenderism is one good example. While many see it as part of the LGBTQ+ issue, it is more than that—it is a denial that human beings have given ends. Take the question of the hour: what is a woman? This is only hard to answer if the normative telos of womanhood—a body normatively tailored towards reproduction—is regarded as oppressive or problematic. That, of course, is not new: both liberal and radical feminisms have been arguing that since at least the time of Simone De Beauvoir. What is new is that technology now promises to be able to solve the problem once and for all.

Ours is an age of desecration. The old natural limits to our rebellion—for example, the limits of our physical bodies—no longer seem as solid and authoritative as they once did. And so the ecstasy of desecration today acknowledges few, if any, practical limits. Lewis rightly noted that man in modernity is being abolished. And we delight in that abolition because it is desecration. **NH**

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GLORY LOST, GLORY REGAINED: THE IMAGE OF GOD



STEPHEN J. TRACEY

We are made in the image of God, after his likeness. This is a foundational truth, giving dignity and worth to every human being, yet strangely there is some recurring confusion as to precisely what is meant by “image of God.” Pause your reading now and jot down what you think it means to be made in the image of God. You might be surprised. Perhaps you will suggest it means rationality and intellect; perhaps dominion over the creatures; perhaps our capacity for relationships, or spiritual relationship. Does your definition maintain the dignity and worth of every human being?

We don’t always get this right. Let me give you an example, a horrible example. You can skip to the next paragraph if you want. In *Table Talk*, Martin Luther is reported as suggesting that a boy with a severe disability be suffocated. Asked why, he replied, “Because I think he is

simply a mass of flesh without a soul” (*Works*, 54:396–397). Luther had more to learn.

OP pastor George Hammond wrestled with this question about his late daughter, Rebecca. His book is titled *It Has Not Yet Appeared What We Shall Be*. His subtitle gets to the point: *A Reconsideration of the Image of God in Light of Those with Severe Cognitive Disabilities* (P&R, 2017). Listen to the cry of his heart:

One day while I was watching Rebecca play by herself (the only way she plays) a thought occurred to me that filled me with horror: My daughter does not bear the image of God. The thought was abhorrent to me; every fiber of my being told me that my conclusion must be false. But there was no denying my theological grid. (2)

It’s that theological grid we want to examine, a grid that puts cognitive ability and image of God into tension. The tension lies in other areas too; instead of cognitive ability, read “autism and the image of God”—or “dementia,” or “acquired brain injury,” or “personality change.”

Generally, there are three approaches to the doctrine of the image of God. First, that the image of God is something substantive in humanity, a godlike quality, usually thought of in terms of qualities that distinguish us from animals (rationality, communication, will). Second, that it is something about the function of humanity (dominion over the earth). Third, that it is something relational (our ability to form relationships). Now do you see why Pastor Hammond’s question was painful and cut him to the core of his being? Here are his own words:

If the *imago Dei* is to be found substantively in those things which separate us from the animals such as language and intellect; if it is to be found functionally in the ability to exert dominion over the environment and other creatures; or if it was to be found relationally in creating and maintaining intricate human relationships, then it was evident that Rebecca’s life did not fit these criteria. (2–3)

This is a painful reflection on the question, “Is my child made in the image of God or not?” It is a theological question, too: “Did we lose all or part of the image of God in the fall into sin?” It is also an honest question on what it means to be human: “Is there a point where we would say someone is not fully human?” Sadly, like Luther, there are some who say just that. But it will not do. To be made in the image of God is tied to the glory of God. We all fall short of the glory of God, but we do not cease to be human.

IMAGE, BROAD AND NARROW

Some theologians make a distinction between the image of God in a “broad” sense and the image of God in a “narrow” sense. This may be helpful. G. C. Berkouwer comments,

The broader sense of the image is used to stress the idea that man, despite his fall into sin and corruption, was not bestialized or demonized, but remained man . . . The narrow sense of the image is used to stress the idea that man lost his communion with God—his religious knowledge, righteousness and holiness, his conformity to God’s will. (*Man: The Image of God*, 38)

The image in that narrow sense—religious knowledge, righteousness and holiness, our conformity to God’s will—has been lost, though this is restored in Christ. We still bear the image of God in that broader sense—we are still human—yet the broader sense has also been affected by sin. There is sweat, toil, pain, and finally death. Sinful man is still man. We bear the image in a broad sense, though vandalized.

It is to fallen, sinful humans that God forbids murder because we are made in the image of God (Gen. 9:4–6). It is to fallen, sinful human beings that God says in James 3:8–9, “No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”

THE WHOLE PERSON AS IMAGE

While this is helpful, it still does not give us a clear idea of what it means to be made in the image of God. So, let’s turn to the traditional Reformed view of the image of God. It is well-stated in five points by Herman Bavinck in his *Reformed Dogmatics* (see vol. 2, especially “The Whole Person as the Image of God,” 554–562). Bavinck asserts that “a human being does not *bear* or *have* the image of God, but . . . he or she *is* the image of God.”

First, that we have a soul, every one of us. There is no soul-less human. “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Gen. 2:7). Bavinck says, “The breath of life is the principle of life; the living soul is the essence of man” (555).

Second, that we have certain faculties: heart, mind, and will. These are abilities of the human that are images of the faculties of God. Says Bavinck, “Precisely because man is so wonderfully and richly endowed and organized, he can be conformed to and enjoy God in the fullest manner—from all sides, as it were, in all God’s virtues and per-



fections” (557). We were made for communion with God.

Third, that we possess certain virtues: knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Bavinck reminds us that

Man was not created as a neutral being with morally indifferent powers and potentialities, but immediately made physically and ethically mature, with knowledge in the mind, righteousness in the will, holiness in the heart. Goodness, for a human being, consists in moral perfection, in complete harmony with the law of God, in holy and perfect being, like God himself (Lev. 19:2; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 5:48; 22:37; Eph. 5:1; 1 Pet. 1:15–16). (557–58)

Fourth, the body, as your soul-carrier, is part of the image of God. This is unexpected. Bavinck states various cautions, but asserts,

[The body] is so integrally and essentially a part of our humanity that, though violently torn from the soul by sin, it will be reunited with it in the resurrection of the dead. . . . It is always the same soul that peers through the eyes, thinks through the brain, grasps with the hands, and walks with the feet. . . . Now, this body, which is so intimately bound up with the soul, also belongs to the image of God. (559)

Fifth, dwelling in paradise is part of the image of God. Finally, Bavinck says, “also belonging to this image is man’s habitation in paradise (Gen. 2:8–15). Holiness and blessedness belong together; every human conscience witnesses to the fact that there is a connection between virtue and happiness” (561). Living in Eden, as a Garden-Temple, is part of the image of God.

Here is Bavinck's conclusion, "Nothing in humanity is excluded from God's image; it stretches as far as our humanity does and constitutes our humanness" (561).

IMAGE AND GLORY

Meredith Kline provides us with more insight. He argues that "a survey of all the Scriptural data would disclose that consistently the image of God is identified in terms of a glory like that of the Glory-Spirit" (*Kingdom Prologue*, 44). Though not all agree, this refreshing insight does not abandon the traditional Reformed view but adds a whole other dimension to it. Linking the image of God in man to the Glory-Spirit hovering over the creation, Kline connects several biblical themes and pushes us to consider "that the biblical exposition of the image of God is consistently in terms of a glory like the Glory of God" (*Westminster Theological Journal* 39, 267).

We are creatures, made by God, but as image-bearers we were glorious creatures. Above all other earthly things, we enjoyed the glory of communion with God. And image as glory seems to hint that we were designed to rise higher into glory. The opposite of "dying, you shall die" (Gen. 2:17), is "living, you shall live." As created, humanity had a glorious function, like that of God, a dominion over the earth. As created, we were a glorious reflection of the holiness, righteousness, and truth of God. And Kline argues that even our bodies, as a kind of glory-likeness, reflected the "theophanic and incarnate Glory" (268). Now, as Peter says of Paul, there are some things hard to understand in Kline, but the thought of image and glory as "twin models in the Bible for expressing man's likeness to the divine Original" (268) is deeply stimulating and encouraging.

As created in the garden we were crowned with glory and honor. We were already like God when Satan tempted us to be like God. As fallen into sin we are destitute of that glory of God. Adam is become Ichabod. Though still human, we are effectively naked and ashamed before God. Kline says, "Fallen man is a naked image" (269).

But thanks be to God, there is good news for us in our indignity; the Lord of Glory has come and laid down his life for us. As redeemed in Christ, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). Our redemption in Christ is the beginning of the restoration of glory.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

What, then, are some of the implications of such a glory-image? Pastor Hammond reached this conclusion about

his beloved Rebecca: "My daughter does not bear the image of God. She is the image of God, as I am. Her brokenness now reminds me that I am broken. It has not yet appeared what we shall be" (*It Has Not Yet Appeared*, 231). Image always stretches us on to glory. I am sure there are many implications, but here are four to consider.

The glory-image of God is a doctrine that pushes us to love. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). As Calvin explains, "It is a false boast when anyone says that he loves God but neglects his image which is before his eyes" (Commentary on 1 John 4:19–21).

The glory-image of God is a doctrine that pushes us to evangelism. Jesus prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). This desire that others may see the glory of God moves us to take the gospel to all.

The glory-image of God is a doctrine that pushes us to unity within the church. Jesus will not keep that glory to himself: "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (John 17:22).

The glory-image of God is a doctrine that makes us long for heaven when all shall be made new. Kline says, "The Glory-Spirit was present at the beginning of creation as a sign of the *telos* of creation" (*WTJ*, 257). It is no accident, then, that Paul speaks of our resurrection state as a *spiritual* body: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44). What is here perishable, marked by dishonor, and weak, shall, at the resurrection, be raised imperishable, *in glory*, and power. Even our body will be raised as a body fit for the realm of the Holy Spirit. In the end, "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49). The image of the man of heaven is glory.

Glory indeed. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. **NH**

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THE HABITS OF THE HEART



A. CRAIG TROXEL

How do people change? Is it from the outside in or from the inside out? Or is it both? To think of it in biblical terms, how does sanctification take place? Do we become holy by our habits or by our hearts? Or is it both?

A bundle of recent books has contended that being intentional about our habits can have a significant impact for good in our daily lives. These books are complemented by a cluster of Christian authors who have proposed that such insights are cordial to a biblical view of change. A worthy and popular representative of this latter group is James K. A. Smith, author of *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*.

THE POWER OF HABIT

Smith's essential thesis is that certain practices provide the primary catalyst for change in a Christian's life. We should think of these everyday habits as rituals or "liturgies." These liturgies are shaping us, for good or for ill. For example, a casual stroll in the mall, he posits, inevitably nurtures a consumeristic outlook, whereas observing the Lord's Supper beside other worshippers encourages a desire to participate in the body of Christ. For Smith, the power of such habits is rooted in their repetition, whether it's driving a car, playing baseball, or practicing a musical instrument. As liturgies, they are fashioning the supple clay of our inner, worshiping self. They change us from the outside in, whether we think about them or not, because this whole process happens on a subconscious level. As Smith puts it, "The way to the heart is through the body." This is how the heart changes.

Smith believes the heart is essentially about desiring, not thinking. Christian discipleship since the Reformation (Protestant discipleship in particular), in his view, has been dominated by an approach that puts far too much emphasis on the intellect. This, he concludes, is a stunted view of who we are. It makes us nothing but "brains-on-a-stick." For Smith, a more holistic approach is needed, one that sees the connection between our embodied liturgies and our desiring hearts. The gateway for that connection is the imagination. The imagination indicates how the heart is governed by what takes place "under the hood": by unconscious, intuitive, and pre-intellectual activity. Since the imagination is deeper than the intellect, it wants rituals, not books. It craves stories and poems, not a lecture. It is shaped by practicing, not catechizing. Since the center of imagination for Smith is love, this proves that we are lovers more than we are thinkers. Discipleship then is about what is "erotic," not about acquiring information. Love is what shapes our knowledge, not the other way round. Love is not something we think about. It grows from the imagination. We love that we may know. Since all of life is liturgy, according to Smith, what we love is shaped by our habits. It is through various "Spirit-infused" or "Spirit-empowered" practices that the Word "seeps" into our hearts. After all, the heart for him is our "subconscious orientation to the world."

There is truth in what Smith and others say. It is important to be intentional about our practices, even those that are mundane. Being thoughtless about them will bring hard consequences. One can see this profoundly with the impact of modern media. The field of media ecology, which marches forward under the banner of Marshall McLuhan's phrase, "the medium is the message,"

has laid bare manifold ways that modern technology has imposed itself on humanity. For example, the smartphone—the crown jewel of modern electronic technology—has come at a heavy cost. As the pawn of social media, it has inflicted great damage. Spending hours before any screen is a habit that profoundly shapes a person, and its pernicious impact is, in part, unobserved. It's not just the content. It's the medium. The admonition to use media with greater care is welcomed, as is the sober reminder that change encompasses everything we think, say, and do. All our practices are of great interest to us. What issue, then, could one possibly have with what Smith is saying?

THE HABITS OF THE HEART

It's not so much what Smith says. It's what he does not say. It's what he does not say about the heart and what he does not say about how we are sanctified. To begin with, Smith focuses on the desires of the heart as if this is all that the heart does. What the Bible describes is much more than that. It is true that one of the heart's functions is what we *love* (or, what we desire, want, seek, crave, yearn for, and feel). But the heart also encompasses what we *know* (our intellect, knowledge, ideas, meditation, imagination) and what we *choose* (our volition, the ability to resist or submit). The heart is a cooperative network of these three: the mind, the desires, and the will.

Ironically, the one function of the heart that Smith wants to minimize is the principal thing that the Bible claims is true of the heart: it thinks. A few examples will have to suffice. The heart is enlightened with *knowledge* (Eph. 1:17–18). “Out of the heart come evil *thoughts*” (Matt. 15:19). The heart is where we *know* that the LORD is God (Jer. 24:7). Asking God to “search my heart” is asking him to “know my *thoughts*” (Ps. 139:23). God saw that “every intention of the *thoughts*” of man's heart was evil (Gen. 6:5). The Word of God is a sword that discerns “the *thoughts* and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). The parables of Christ exposed the hardness of people's hearts, which cannot *understand* (Matt. 13:15). English versions of the Bible will often translate “heart” with words like “understanding,” “sense,” or “mind”—particularly in the wisdom genre of the Bible (e.g., Prov. 6:32; 12:8; 28:26). To pit the heart against thinking is simply not tenable according to Scripture.

An example of this is seen in how Smith focuses upon the imagination as the supposed centerpiece of the heart. He offers no scriptural proof for this view. As a matter of fact, in Scripture the imagination is simply a function of



the mind. For example, Ephesians 3:20 is rightly translated either as “more than all we ask or *imagine*” (NIV) or “more abundantly than all that we ask or *think*” (ESV). The imagination reflects the heart's ability to reflect, remember, and meditate (Ps. 19:14). As is true in all our thinking, the imagination does not operate independently of the heart's desires or will. The three are in league. We are not capable of reasoning without passion or motivation. This is true whether our heart is hardened by sin or regenerated by grace. Impure desires give rise to impure thoughts, just as a renewed heart sees more clearly (Rom. 1:21–22; Matt. 13:16). Yet Smith treats the imagination as if it were something uncontaminated by sin. Any Christian striving to “keep the heart with all diligence” knows the challenge of restraining our roaming thoughts that want to break free and wander off into the forbidden pastures of self-indulgence and fantasy. The false prophets of Ezekiel's day went wrong because they spoke “out of their own imagination [heart]” (Ezek. 13:2, 17 NIV). Every aspect of our heart's thinking (and imagining), desiring, and choosing is entangled with sin, just as every aspect of our heart is renewed by grace.

Furthermore, Smith's view of the heart means that he inevitably passes over a core aspect of the Bible's teaching on sanctification. When Paul completes his long exposition of the gospel in Romans, what is the first thing he addresses? How Christians change.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1–2)

Notice that Paul urges an embodied view of sanctification. It concerns the body as well as the inner person. He implies the “outside-in” change that comes by presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice. But then Paul explicitly emphasizes the “inside-out” change that arises through the transformation of the believer’s mind. A Christian’s sanctification is impossible without this inner change. The essence of this change comes by God’s Word and Spirit which dwell *within* us (Westminster Confession of Faith 13.1).

Smith often attaches the Spirit to “Spirit-ended” practices. But God attaches the Spirit to his Word and his truth. Both the “Spirit of truth” and the truth of Christ are ministered to his disciples (John 16:13–14). In other words, God’s Word is vital to the consecration of our thinking. Smith says we do not need a book. The Bible is a book. And its words are life. Scripture purifies the heart (Rom. 10:8), and by it our mind is constantly “being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10). How can one “grow in the grace *and* knowledge” of Christ (2 Pet. 3:18) without engaging God’s Word with the mind or without meditating upon it day and night (Ps. 1:2)?

For us to change, it is true that “the way to the heart is through the body,” as Smith says. But for sanctifying change, the way to the heart is by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. They are no less vital for our sanctification than for our regeneration. We are “born again . . . through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23), and we enter the kingdom of God by being “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). In the same way, we look for God’s gracious promise to “bring . . . to completion” the “good work” that he began *in* us (Phil. 1:6). As Christ prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). This is the hope of all those who believe in Christ.

SUPERNATURAL FAITH

All this serves to accent the indispensable role of faith in sanctification. The very nature of God’s work in transforming our hearts assumes what is the lifeblood of Christianity: supernaturalism. The spiritual blessings that we

lay hold of by faith are not from this world. It is an “alien word” that enters us and reforms us. It is the Spirit of God who indwells us and transforms us. The change that befits the kingdom of God is one born of a transcendent power that comes to dethrone the power of sin and the evil one. It comes to signal the beauty of an eternal holiness. Such truths invigorate our faith in Christ. Every saving benefit of Christ can only be received by faith, and there is no spiritual blessing received without it—whether for justification or for sanctification.

And yet this faith is noticeably absent from the discussions of spiritual habits. But this makes perfect sense if it is true that liturgies shape us, whether we think about them or not. Practices do not require faith. Biblical sanctification does. Faith is essential for the change that takes place from the inside out. We do change by caring about our habits, but we become holy by the supernatural and transformative work of God’s Spirit and Word in our hearts.

It is good to watch how we can be changed from the outside-in. It is better for the “inner self” to be renewed day by day. Better for the inside than the outside of the cup to be clean. Better to choose “the good portion” by sitting quietly at the Lord’s feet, listening to his teaching, and believing, than to be anxious about the habit of serving. **NH**

The author is an OP minister and professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California.

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF ADDICTION



JAMES H. BERRY

Every man's inordinate affection will be his great affliction" (Augustine). We are what we love.¹ Where our treasure is, there our heart is also. Love is many things, but most certainly pleasure is a necessary element. How can a man say he loves his wife yet does not take pleasure in her? "Greater love has no one" than that demonstrated by Jesus, who "lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus suffered immense pain for his people. "Suffering is love!" one may argue and argue correctly in the appropriate context. However, it was "for the joy . . . set before him [that he] endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). Joy is not flavorless. Joy is not bland. Joy is, well, for lack of a better word—enjoyable!

THE GIFTS

Inherent to our being is both a capacity and drive for pleasure. This is not a bug in the system, but a design feature. We are created in such a way that we seek out experiences that are pleasurable. This was true before the fall, as evidenced by Adam's ecstatic exclamation upon being presented the most beautiful creature he had ever seen: "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). He was filled with desire for her, and this was good.

Try this thought experiment on for size—God could have created a green Adam with chlorophyll skin that

provided all his life-sustaining energy through photosynthesis. He could have created adamic skin capable of osmosis such that all the water he required was simply perfused from the dewy air. God could have made asexual reproduction the natural way to make baby Adams. Perish the thought! Adam's natural appetites are our appetites, and these are wondrous. As Christians, we should not let the epicures have all the fun. We should celebrate and marvel over the gift of pleasure that our gracious Father has given us. Sing songs from the rooftops in exultation. Paint masterpieces that capture a glimpse of this glorious gift. Woo your wife. Seduce your husband. Create an exceedingly flavorful dish that leaves guests longing for more. Laugh loud, hard, and often—especially at the ridiculousness in the world (particularly your own). Pity our brothers who don't get it. Ruffle their hair and invite them to the party. Enjoy.

Do all the above, but not in the spirit of Walt Whitman who celebrated this carnality for carnality's sake. He had no god other than himself and wrote songs of worship to his god. Rather, do so in humble recognition that pleasure is a gift from our triune God. This is a gift that proceeds from the joyful nature of God in three persons, forever experiencing the pleasure of one another. Indeed, this pleasure is so powerful and abundant that it bursts forth into the formation of creatures to share this experience with perpetual praise.

GIFTS BEFORE GIVER

Concupiscence is a theological word worth considering as we wrestle with the pleasure-seeking feature of our nature. The word means a state of fervent longing and is derived from the Latin: *con* meaning "with" and *cupere*, "to desire." From the beginning, man was made with desire. But our desire-seeking compass became bent in the fall. Tragically, Eve recognized the forbidden fruit was desirable to the eye and succumbed to the temptation. She gave the prohibited portent to Adam, who also took a bite. Darkness, pain, and fear entered the world. Hell invaded paradise. Every earthly pleasure is now tainted with a touch of evil. Sex, food, and drink can kill us. Like the sons of Eli, our hedonistic hungers may drive us from God.² Dear God, were this not so! But it is. We must grapple with it. The Thirty-Nine Articles state that "concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin."

When our affections are rightly ordered, feeling good should be good enough. The problem lies in the fact our affections are never perfectly ordered. Our hearts are full of corrupted concupiscence. We give ourselves too freely to the dopamine-delivering experiences of this world

unmoored from God. We set all manner of earthly gifts before and apart from the Gift-Giver. Like the bovine-worshiping Israelites dancing at the base of Sinai, we believe the lie that God cannot satisfy the way our idols do.

We all fall into this trap. Some of us do so often and long enough that we develop a clinically diagnosable addictive disorder. Some of us are born with brains that makes it more likely we'll become addicted to drugs or alcohol: the rush is greater and more tempting. Some of us experienced such horrific trauma in our developing years that when we tried marijuana at a young age, the nightmares stopped, and so we kept smoking. Some of us were prescribed a pain pill for a toothache, and all of the pain in our life melted away for a few glorious hours, so we kept popping them even after the prescription ran out. Some of us drank a beer at a high school kegger and realized that our crippling anxiety dissipated, so we kept downing them.

For some of us, the sorrow of this life was simply too much to bear, and we took solace in a bottle, like Noah after discovering his dry new world was far from paradise. Much of our longing is not only to feel good, but to feel the absence of pain. This reflects the world's brokenness and the waiting for our Redeemer to make all things new. Addiction is a profoundly tangible expression of man's tragic and repeated attempts to assuage this longing.

PRIDE: INTOXICATING AND ADDICTIVE

None of us should look down our nose at those who find themselves on the severe end of the addiction spectrum. If we are honest with ourselves, we should know the odiousness of our own nose. Pride is intoxicating, and we in Reformed circles tend to be particularly susceptible to its reinforcing properties. It feels good to be right, and it feels good to judge others who are not. It is painful to examine our own heart. Examining the heart of our neighbor is much more palatable, and if we are honest, shamefully enjoyable. The destructive nature of addiction to heroin is obvious. The destructive nature of pride is subtle, but no less destructive.

Jesus reserves his sharpest criticisms and warnings for the proud. He did not come for the healthy, but for the sick. While I cannot commend the theology found in Alcoholic Anonymous or Narcotic Anonymous meetings, I am jealous for the humility and vulnerability found therein. There are no masks. Pretense has been purged. These folks recognize their own powerlessness and the thousand ways they could not perfect themselves. They come together as equals in the expertise of failure and a hope that something greater than themselves can restore

them to sanity. Seems to me that the church can strive to be more like this. Should any institution be more humble than the church? More willing to admit fault? More eager to serve?

Should any institution be more joyful? God calls us to know a pleasure that would shame the vilest of today's popular purveyors of pedestrian pleasure. We are invited to enjoy the intoxicating, primordial pleasure that existed prior to creation and is sustained through all eternity. One need look no further than the Song of Songs, where we peek behind the curtain of God's most intimate bridal chamber to witness an ecstatic display of sensual delight between two lovers. Images of immense pleasure abound: tongues tasting honey, fingers dripping myrrh, noses breathing apple blossoms, eyes spying rounded thighs, ears longing for the lover's voice. "Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!" is the holy refrain that centers this most holy of songs. Astoundingly, God paints a picture on the palate of our five senses to describe the intimate relationship between his Son and his people.

THE JOY OF THE LORD

God calls us to lose ourselves in the pleasure of his Son. Our chief end is to enjoy him. We were made for this. We hold forth a promise of greater pleasure than anything the world can offer. In this world, life is love, but also longing—longing for the object of our greatest affection and for the deliverance from pain. We long for our Bridegroom. The church is the only place, the only people, wherein our Creator chooses to make his earthly home. Here is found the only real and eternal hope to satisfy our longings.

While we wait, we are called to be Christ to one another as a body in mutual sacrifice, genuine vulnerability, and infectious joy. As we gather regularly for worship, our affections are properly ordered and our hearts are shaped according to God's love. We are trained to desire rightly. Our Bridegroom speaks his words of love to us. May the doors of our churches be open wide to the sick and full of broken, yet joy-filled believers beckoning, "Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!" **NH**

The author is an OP elder and professor and chair of psychiatry at West Virginia University's Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute.

Notes

1. See James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Brazos Press, 2016).
2. The sons of Eli in 1 Samuel are perfect case examples of humanity's postlapsarian posture toward God, others, and ourselves.

GOOD EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR PASTOR'S SABBATICAL

BRETT A. MCNEILL



Brett A. McNeill

Over the past few years, more and more OP congregations have granted sabbaticals to their pastors. This is encouraging. The Committee on Ministerial Care has been advocating for more consideration of sabbaticals. On our website, opccmc.org, we have some helpful resources for sessions and congregations about why sabbaticals are important. But once a congregation grants a sabbatical, the question still remains: what should a congregation expect its pastor to do on his sabbatical? Expectations matter because the pastor wants to honor the church that gave him the sabbatical.

REST

First and foremost, a sabbatical, as the name implies, is a *rest*. It's a rest from ordinary labors as a pastor—both study and all the emotionally taxing labors of shepherding. Burn-out is far more common among pastors than most other professions because of the emotionally intense nature of the work. If your pastor doesn't rest, he's not doing what he was charged to do. Rest doesn't just mean sitting around. If your pastor is anything like me, he can't just sit still. He may need to find a hobby or activity that he enjoys that allows him time to rest from the mental labors of ministry. The first month or more of his sabbatical may simply be a time of pulling back and decompressing. I strongly recommend that you encourage him not to attend your own church over sabbatical. It's just too hard to disengage from the needs of the congregation while being physically present. He needs to learn to slow down and be still.

REFLECTION

Rest naturally gives way to a time of *reflection*. Once he's had time to disengage, your pastor will be able to start taking an honest look at his last several years of ministry and at *his own spiritual condition*. It's easy for a pastor to hide in the messiness of others and avoid his own. A sabbatical is one of the few opportunities he will have to look at his own heart and life without the background noise of others'

needs vying for his time and attention. You don't want him to waste this time. In both my sabbaticals, the Lord revealed areas of pride that I have had to take to the cross. That process has been (excruciatingly) painful. But it has been wonderful as well. We need to heed Isaiah's warning about how easy it can be to honor God with our lips, but be far from him with our hearts (29:13).

REENTRY

The final stage is preparing for *reentry* into ministry. This doesn't mean preparing to jump in right where he left off. Rather, your pastor should humbly consider what the Lord might want him to do differently when he comes back. The sabbatical is meant for healing and growth. After my first sabbatical, my schedule changed. I decided to have slower, more reflective mornings. I prioritized time with people over time in my study. After my second sabbatical, it became clear to me that I needed to listen more and speak less. I started to see how I wanted my preaching and counseling to better connect the rich theology we confess with our lips to our hearts. This clarity of purpose was a result of the time that my congregation gave me to slow down.

These three stages—rest, reflection, reentry—aren't neat, one-month increments. They are simply the natural progression that time away from the stresses of ministry allows us to walk through as we reflect on the wonderful calling we've been privileged to receive as pastors. My prayer for OP churches is not just that they will grant their pastor regular sabbaticals, but that he will benefit from these times of rest so that he might better serve the congregation.

The author is pastor of Reformation Presbyterian in Olympia, Washington.

REVIEW: GAFFIN'S WORD AND SPIRIT

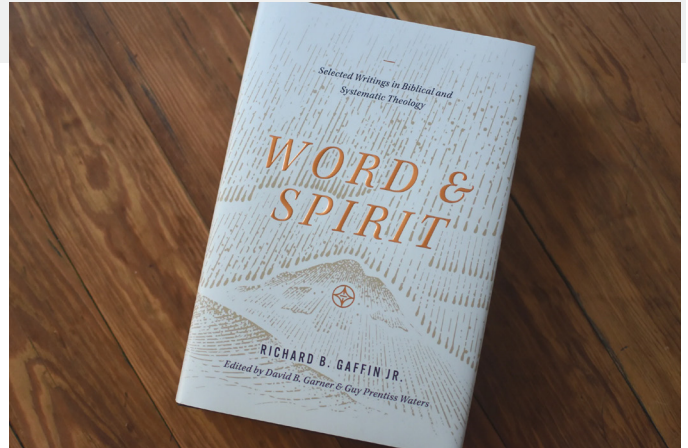
ROBERT R. DRAKE

Two hundred pages into this tome consisting of the collected articles by Dr. Richard Gaffin (P&R 2023), I had three enduring impressions.

First, compared to Gaffin, I am an inexact and impatient thinker who takes giant steps to get from A to E, while he is a meticulous and patient thinker who works his way to a conclusion through scholarly small steps. His careful advance didn't invoke boredom. On the contrary, it brought conviction to this reader. Gaffin is so patient and generous when writing about those who disagree with him. He is so careful not to misrepresent, not to exaggerate, but instead even to appreciate some aspects of their presentations before identifying his points of difference. That attitude is found consistently in writings spanning decades, making this collection an unintended modeling of Gaffin's central life thesis: union with Christ and all his benefits. I should have been prepared for the impact of his example after reading the foreword by his sons, Richard and Steven. The man's sons, the members of his family who lived with him, testified to his character! I've never before seen such a foreword.

ESCHATOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

Second, I had the impression that this collection of articles was rather like reading the Psalms. By that, I mean the Psalms have a certain amount of repetition. David, and the other psalmists, didn't just dust off an old psalm when facing a new situation. They spoke out of what they knew to be true and applied what they knew to the new danger, the new concern. Likewise, in these articles, Gaffin addresses different audiences, through different publications, from the core of his wonderment over the eschatological fulfillment in Christ. We hear many times the structural importance of Hebrews 1:1–2 and 1 Corinthians 15:45. We hear again quotes from Vos about the church as a covenant rather than a school and that revelation is a function of redemption. Gaffin frequently repeats his own insistence that all exegesis ought to be biblical theological. (The way I'd phrase it is that a text ought not to be treated as an



isolated snapshot but rather a frame in a movie heading toward a grand climax.) Read as a whole, the repetition is not tiring but more like a series of ongoing conversations in which we anticipate and enjoy a rephrasing and an elaboration on themes we have previously heard, in order to throw more light on a present subject.

The way in which Geerhardus Vos is revered illustrates both Gaffin's humility and his creativity. He lectured and wrote as if the sole genius was Vos, and Gaffin was but his pupil—as if Vos was Dr. Johnson and Gaffin only his Boswell. Gaffin was self-effacing, pointing us to the greater Vos and through him to the greater Christ. He made it seem as if all he ever did could be called but footnotes to Vos. However, the very fact that this volume was put together indicates that Richard Gaffin has not been simply a disciple or a parrot of a past dignitary. He has made insightful contributions to the study of biblical theology that his own humility has been unable to acknowledge fully. To me, Dick Gaffin represents those sheep in Matthew 25 who when recognized by their Shepherd-King say, “When saw we thee . . .” I can just hear Gaffin saying, “It was Vos, not me. It was Christ through Vos, not me.” The sheep never really appreciate what they have done. It is the Shepherd, and through him, we the other sheep, who can do the appreciating.

LEARNING ABOUT CHRIST HIMSELF

The third impression I had was how much I am like the men on the road to Emmaus who heard Jesus say, “Oh,

foolish ones and slow of heart.” I’d be embarrassed to say that at my advanced age I’m still learning, were it not for the words of Jesus that every scribe of the kingdom is like one who brings out of his treasure chest things both old and new. It amazes me how a few simple sentences from a Gaffin article expresses so succinctly what I have struggled to say in the past. For instance, in explaining that the very doctrine of justification itself is the gateway into an eschatological appreciation of the New Testament, Gaffin wrote: “The Reformation doctrine of justification recaptures the eschatological heart of the gospel. . . . The Reformers grasped that the verdict, belonging to the end of history, has been brought forward and already pronounced on believers” (629).

I am also profoundly grateful for Gaffin’s clear and needed exposition of Philippians 3 about the relationship between resurrection power and conformity to the sufferings of Christ. Again, he has said so succinctly what I have been bumbling around to express to the people I have served. Of course, there were also a few topics I wish he would have expanded upon more. That whole Colossians 1:24 message about filling up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ reminds me that I am still “slow of heart” and could have used another conversation or two about it.

In this collection, we see that Richard Gaffin is not to be regarded as a remarkable combination of allegiance to Calvin, the Westminster Standards, Vos, and the Apostle Paul. Instead, we see that Gaffin is to be regarded as one who has demonstrated that Paul (and the New Testament as a whole) is, indeed, the foundation for Calvin, Westminster, and Vos. One does not come away from this collection of articles thinking, I now know something more about the theology of Richard Gaffin. Instead, one comes away convinced that one knows more about the Christ who has revealed himself through his Spirit in the writings of Paul. I can think of no higher praise for an author.

It’s wonderful to have all these articles gathered together in one volume, but I certainly hope that doesn’t mean Richard Gaffin will stop writing.

The author is a retired PCA minister.

Word and Spirit: Selected Writings in Biblical and Systematic Theology by Richard B. Gaffin Jr., edited by David B. Garner and Guy Prentiss Waters. Westminster Seminary Press, 2023. Hardcover, 800 pages, \$35.99.

ON READING OLD BOOKS

“It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between.”
—C. S. Lewis

***A Grief Observed* (1961)**

by C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis is possibly the most beloved Christian author of the twentieth century. Many of us delighted, some as children, to read his stories of myth and legend. However, the book I am recommending to you has nothing of fable or fairytale. It is real and raw, at times excruciatingly so. I recommend it with certain caveats. First, if you are amid grief over a recent devastating loss, you may want to take time before reading this book. It is not for the faint-hearted. It is painful to read, as his on-edge emotions stir those of the reader. Second, many of the theological aberrations evangelicals have cataloged in Lewis are present, even on the face of the page. If you approach this book to teach you theology, you will be disappointed. All of that aside, the authenticity of Lewis’s struggle with God while in the throes of grief is profoundly compelling and true.

The book is entitled *A Grief Observed*. It flows from the pen of a man gripped with sorrow following the death of his wife. It is his real-time journal of that agonizing journey.

His opening paragraph reads, “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.”

Lewis had become comfortable in his faith, yet with the loss of his wife, he finds himself overwhelmed. Heaven seems so distant, as does God. This is a stark reminder that though we live hungering for the age to come, we are very much immersed in this life. Perhaps Lewis’s journey through his trial can help all of us see our own, and how the Lord will never let go of us either.

—Lacy Andrews

OUT OF THE MOUTH . . .

My daughter, Ellie (6), asked, “Can I draw God?” I responded, “God is a Spirit and has not a body like man.” Ellie: “I’ll just draw a head, then.”

—Greta Street
Lewisburg, PA

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

GOD'S MEANDERING PROVIDENCE

JAMES T. HOEKSTRA

God's providence sometimes unfolds in a straight line. At other times, it meanders. My preparation for the job of regional home missionary (RHM) for the newly formed Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota has been more of the latter.

When I was in seminary, one of my professors, who had been particularly helpful to me, encouraged me to go to another denomination's Church Planting Assessment Center. While the evaluators were helpful in several respects, one man was especially critical of me and pressed home that I should never go into church planting. They were looking for someone with a charismatic and dynamic personality to help attract people to a potential church plant—and that wasn't me. For years I avoided church planting, turning down multiple opportunities.

Yet the Lord was working in his "offhanded" providence. During my time as assistant pastor in Oostburg, Wisconsin, with Pastor Jim Bosgraf, I caught some of the infectious fervor for missions and evangelism. I was elected to the home missions committee of the presbytery—a group that works to support, coordinate, and guide church-planting efforts in the area. When I moved a year later to Texas, the Presbytery of the Southwest chose me for their home missions committee. As a committee, we assisted with several church plants, and I was able to learn secondhand by working closely with the RHM and potential groups. During those years I was formed and influenced by RHMs and home missions secretaries.

WISCONSIN TO MINNESOTA

God was not done refining me. A few years into my ministry in Austin, Texas, I went through a difficult struggle with depression and sought to leave the ministry. But God had different plans. No matter how hard I tried, he kept closing doors, until an opportunity to ease back into ministry came—serving as assistant to the pastor for my friend Neil Tolsma at Falls Presbyterian Church in Menomonee, Wisconsin.

I came with a job description that included starting a Bible study in the southern suburbs. I began meeting



Jim and Bonnie Hoekstra

with families in December 2000. It was clear that this was more than a study. They wanted to plant a church! God had clearly called me to plant it. And what really amazed me was how he had prepared me for this work. By God's grace, the New Berlin work particularized in October 2007. The joyous high of seeing that church become its own work was followed by deep disappointment when the next church I worked to plant, Mercy OPC in Cedarburg, Wisconsin, closed after several years and difficult finances.

The meandering path continued. God moved us to Minnesota where I have served on the home missions committee for the Presbytery of the Midwest for eleven years. God established another work here in Anoka, Minnesota, and I settled down at Immanuel OPC to serve out my remaining years of ministry. But again, God had different plans: I was asked to consider being an RHM for the new Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The Heidelberg Catechism question 28 asks, "How does this knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?" The answer has guided Christians for centuries, and my life and ministry have been living proof of its wisdom: "We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father."

The author is newly called as regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota.

MIRRORING HEAVEN'S JOY IN HOME MISSIONS WORK

Andrew J. Miller

You can hardly read Luke 15 without acknowledging that central to the whole chapter and each of its parables is that God's people should celebrate the lost being found. Whereas the Pharisees and scribes grumbled about Jesus being among sinners (15:2), Jesus invited them to "rejoice with me" (15:6, 9–10). Earth should mirror heaven, where there is joy "over one sinner who repents." Celebration befits such a spiritual resurrection (15:32). The language Jesus uses elsewhere in the parable of the talents is "enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21, 23). This is a great challenge for all of us: will we share the joy of our God, loving what he loves, celebrating what he celebrates?

As C. S. Lewis famously observed, we settle for such lesser "joys." This is one of the realizations God used in my own life as a teenager—that the things I had been living for were empty and ultimately unsatisfying. They were "rubbish" (a dung heap) compared to "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:8).

Though now, sadly, I still sometimes think too highly of the dung heap of sin, by God's grace I have glimpsed his beauty (Ps. 27) and tasted the joy of my master (1 Pet. 2:3). The Holy Spirit is at work in me and all Christ's blood-bought people that we might more and more reflect him and share his joy. Speaking of the believer's joy in Jesus, 1 Peter 1:8 says: "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory."

Cutting a much longer story short, this reality of sharing our master's joy has sustained my pastoral ministry in its most difficult moments and is why I'm thankful to serve in a new role as regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. RHM's have long Sundays of getting up and leaving home in the dark and returning in the dark after a day of preaching and teaching, but the joy set before them of feeding Christ's hungry sheep makes it no sacrifice. Church planting is the multiplication of gospel outposts, and we believe the gospel is powerful (Rom. 1:16). More personally, it provides for those who are "sheep without a shepherd," perhaps even "harassed and helpless" (Matt. 9:36).

It was a joy for me to assist in the planting of OP churches in, among other places, Yorktown, Virginia, and Richmond, Virginia, while I pastored in that state

from 2012–2023. One of my pastoral mentors, Steve Doe, instilled in me a zeal for home missions, and I was able to learn from him when he served as RHM in the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic from 2012–2019. It was also a joy to serve as chairman for the presbytery's home missions committee and to work together with Charles Biggs as we brought him on as RHM in 2022. It was hard to say goodbye to the congregation in Fredericksburg, Virginia, to take this new call last October, but when the Lord calls, we can't say, "Please send someone else" (Exod. 4:13), but must rather, by the Holy Spirit, respond "Here I am! Send me" (Isa. 6:8), despite the blessings we leave behind.

To borrow the words of a pastor friend, sometimes I feel like a "cracked pot" and unworthy of the blessing of this calling; but I suppose that is exactly the point of God using "jars of clay": it is "to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7). So, relying on the God who raises the dead, I look forward to seeing Christ build his church in central Pennsylvania.

The author is newly called as regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania.



The Miller family

HOME MISSIONS TODAY

To subscribe to the biweekly newsletter of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, email ophomemissions@opc.org or visit chmce.org.

CONVICTED BY THE GREAT COMMISSION

NATHANIEL L. BLOECHL

We had just concluded our weekly academic board meeting in a room saturated with the aroma of coffee on another not-so-rainy rainy season afternoon. The Knox Theological College dean, Professor Okuch, and I had stuck around to finish some tasks. With time, our conversation turned from committees to the first class I was teaching at Knox. I had caught the vision—training Reformed pastors to be sent out all over Uganda and East Africa—and I was thrilled to be a small part of it. As he heard me out, Okuch’s expression turned serious. “Nathan,” he asked, “would you pray with your wife about teaching here long term?”

It took me a few moments to process his words. I told Okuch that I had never considered it and wasn’t sure I was the right man for the job. Of course, as a missionary intern not yet ordained, I also knew that such a possibility would have to wait until I had further training and experience myself. Not dissuaded, Okuch replied, “Nathan, you have seen the need for pastoral training here. You have seen how poorly equipped the pastors are—if equipped at all.” When I nodded, he continued. “But the need is greater than you know. We not only need to train men to be pastors, we need to train East Africans to be Reformed professors, so that they can train native pastors. There is no such program in this part of Africa; we don’t have that resource for pastors and teachers here, and we need your help. Please at least talk to Elisabeth and pray together about it.”

THE POWER TO SAVE

Let’s take a step back. How did I—a farm boy from rural Wisconsin—end up in Uganda talking with a professor from South Sudan about training pastors? It started with another conversation years earlier on two shiny metal chairs in a university commons. Across from me sat the man who was discipling me through a college parachurch ministry. Using his practiced art of persuasion in service to Christ, he pressed me, saying, “I know you have obligations to help your dad during the summer harvest. But our

Dinner with Okuch and his wife, Rebecca, and the Jacksons



short-term mission to Russia falls right between the first and second crop-haying seasons. Why not try out overseas missions and see how it goes?”

God used that month in Pyatigorsk, Russia, to change the trajectory of my life. Not only did I love the experience, but, when the excitement wore off, I realized God had deeply convicted me—heart and mind—of Christ’s commission to the church to go to all nations with the gospel. At that time, I was so zealous for this command that I thought all who were able must go! This zeal carried me through two years of missionary service in Kyiv, Ukraine. There, my theology was refined through the school of hard knocks.

In Kyiv, I was practically beating my head against my apartment floor in prayer, trying to wrench my atheist friends into the kingdom. Dismayed by my failure to

Nathaniel with a translator



produce a single disciple, I found myself confused about the nature of discipleship and prayer. I happened upon a book by Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts!* Bridges helped me to realize that it was not my prayers or relationships that brought disciples into the kingdom but God himself who brought them. Reading verse after verse

from the Old and New Testaments, I finally understood I was powerless to convert anyone. That power belongs to God alone. This shook my whole understanding of the Great Commission and left me with more questions. Upon returning to the United States, I knew God's command in Matthew 28 had not changed, but I was disoriented about how that worked through the church. Little did I know that our heavenly Father was preparing me to marry a woman from the OPC.

Elisabeth teaching Sunday School in Mbale



LEARNING FROM A RICH TRADITION

While we were dating, I kept asking Elisabeth, “Would you be willing to come back with me to Ukraine?” Recently returned from a fruitful but rigorous service term in Tanzania, Elisabeth said, “I want to go where God is calling you.” When I started attending an OPC church after our marriage, I saw church and missions done in a way I had never seen. The month I became a member, Elisabeth and I agreed that we still had a desire to serve in a foreign context. We found our church’s foreign missions bulletin board and, procuring a stack of prayer cards with names and faces, figured the next step would be to email the contact at the bottom of the poster.

After one conversation with Douglas Clawson, now general secretary, it was clear that our next step was seminary. By the following fall semester, I was enrolled at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and my wife and I, along with our eight-week-old daughter, found ourselves settling into Griffith, Indiana. It soon felt like I had entered a human-sized hamster wheel that was going way too fast for my feet. Much of what I had been taught from the Scripture to that point had been good, but I was unprepared for the biblical depth and discipline required of a pastor. I was building, from scratch, theological hooks to hang new truths I had never encountered in my read-the-Bible-in-a-year plan.

After those first years of scrambling, by God’s grace, I found my footing (just in time to welcome our second child—a son). I was now drinking deeply from our rich Reformed and Presbyterian heritage. As I neared graduation, we reached out to Douglas again, inquiring about a yearlong internship overseas. There was a need for help in Uganda, and soon. Ten months and one more son later, we were on the plane headed for Mbale, Uganda.

WE DON'T GO ALONE

While the above answers *how* we wound up in Uganda, it does not answer the *why*. Why are we in Uganda? Why do my wife and I keep pursuing foreign missions? Why did we pack up our three kids and move here for a year to help believers like Okuch seek lost souls?

The answer is that we are convicted of the Great Commission, especially its outworking in the foreign context, and we believe God will provide the grace we need to follow his command to go. How do we know? It was no mistake that our Lord hemmed in the command the way he did: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. . . . And behold, I am with you always, even until the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20). As the church sends missionaries, it is not done infallibly or even without much fumbling and sin. Yet, as the church sends, and as the sent go, they don’t go alone. Missionaries only go where Christ is going, in his name and ultimate authority. This is true of both home and foreign missions.

So, if you are a pastor, elder, deacon, PhD, teacher, layperson, or, not least, a mission-minded mom, would you pray about going? To be sure, many must stay so others may go. However, we cannot support anyone if no one goes. As Professor Okuch so clearly said, the need is great. Therefore, let each of us pray as we humbly consider the command. Is Christ calling you to go far for the hopeless, just as he came far for you when you had no hope?

The author is a missionary intern serving the OPC Uganda Mission in Mbale, Uganda.

WHAT'S NEW

Associate missionaries **Mr. and Mrs. Christopher J. (Chloe) Verdick** (New Life Presbyterian Church [PCA], La Mesa, CA) and their children, Carmel, Zion, and Olive, returned for a six-month furlough to the United States from Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda, in April 2024.

After completing three terms of missionary service, the **Rev. and Mrs. Mark E. (Jeni) Richline** returned to the United States in late May from Montevideo, Uruguay, where Mark labored as a missionary evangelist from 2011–2024.

Mr. and Mrs. Lucas J. (Erica) Payson (Providence PCA, Fort Wayne, IN) were appointed missionary associates to Montevideo, Uruguay, for a six-month term beginning in June 2024.

JUN 2024 PRAYER CALENDAR



Boardwalk Chapel volunteers (day 5)



The Jacksons (day 6)

1 **Mark & Jeni Richline**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for their transition back to the United States after twelve years of service in Uruguay. / **Tyler & Kara Jackson**, New Castle, IN. Pray that the Lord would raise up officers to serve Redemption Life Bible Church.

2 **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast. / Pray for **Danny Olinger**, director of MTIOPC.

3 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for continued growth, wisdom, and unity in the Salvos por Gracia congregation. / Summer intern **Zac (Caroline) Reeves** at Trinity OPC, Capistrano Beach, CA.

4 **Micah & Eileen Bickford**, Farmington, ME. Pray that Grace Reformed Presbyterian would grow spiritually and numerically. / Pray for missionary associates **Lucas & Erica Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay, as they arrive on the field and begin their six-month term of service.

5 Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah Montgomery**. / Pray that those attending **The Boardwalk Chapel School of Evangelism** this week would grow in boldness to proclaim the gospel.

6 Pray for **Charles & Connie Jackson**, Mbale, Uganda, as they return to the United States for medical leave this summer. / **Judith Dinsmore**, managing editor of *New Horizons*.

7 Pray that missionary associates **Nathan & Elisabeth Bloechl**, Mbale, Uganda, would be a solid support to All Nations Church and Knox School of Theology as they finish their term. / **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic.

8 **Mark & Lorie Wheat**, Sugar Land, TX. Pray that new visitors and members would be welcomed and edified at Good Shepherd OPC. / Summer intern **Jeremy (Hannah) Chong** at Covenant OPC, Orland Park, IL.

9 Missionary associates **Josh & Danielle Grimsley**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Lord would provide missionary evangelists for Mbale and Karamoja. / Pray for stated clerk **Hank Belfield** and **Char Tipton** as they prepare for General Assembly (June 19–25).

10 **Nate & Amy Jeffries**, West Norriton, PA. Pray that Good News OPC's Muslim neighbors would find salvation in Christ. / Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the young men whose gifts are being developed for church leadership.

11 **John & Katie Terrell**, Dorr, MI. Pray for the evangelistic hospitality of Living Hope OPC's members. / **The Committee on Diaconal Ministries** asks for prayer for peace in these CFM and MTMC fields: South Sudan, Ukraine, Haiti, and Northeast India.

12 Missionary associate **Jed Homan**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the sponsored Karimojong students, some graduating and others starting new terms. / Summer intern **Jonathan (Elyssa) Vos** at Redemption OPC in Gainesville, FL.

13 Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for confidence for the community health team in sharing Bible verses with their health presentations. / **Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary of the Miami Valley for the Presbytery of Ohio.

14 **John Paul & Corinne Holloway**, Manassas, VA. Pray that Acacia Reformed OPC would grow in unity

and service to the Lord. / Pray that the *Ruling Elder Podcast* blesses listeners.

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15 Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick** (on furlough), Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for their encouragement as they visit congregations in Oregon and California. / Summer intern **Daniel (Anna) Karlson** at Apple Valley OPC, Apple Valley, WI.

.....
16 **John & Grace Jee**, Columbia, MD. Praise God for Word of Life's new worship space. / **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for their family as they prepare to move to Uganda.

.....
17 Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / Summer intern **Clifton (Bre) Foster** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.

.....
18 Affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik** (on furlough), Czech Republic. Pray for their planning as they visit churches and family in the United States this summer. / **John Fikkert**, director of the Committee on Ministerial Care.

.....
19 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** as he reports to GA this week. / **Corey & Andrea Paige**, Kyle, TX. Pray for the new members of Hays County OPC.

.....
20 **Mark & Celeste Jenkins**, Placentia, CA. Praise God for the enthusiastic, servant-minded members of Resurrection Presbyterian Church. / Summer intern **Eddie (Hillary)**

Mercado at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, CA.

.....
21 Pray for **retired missionaries** Cal & Edie Cummings, Mary Lou Son, and Brian & Dorothy Wingard. / Financial controller **Melisa McGinnis**.

.....
22 **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / **Mr. & Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray that they would not be discouraged or lonely without a team physically on the field.

.....
23 **Dan & Stacy Halley**, Tampa, FL. Pray for wisdom as Bay Haven Presbyterian considers the constraints of their current meeting facility. / Pray for **Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura's** (Guayama, Puerto Rico) Vacation Bible School and the short-term missions team assisting them this week.

.....
24 **Mr. & Mrs. M.** (on furlough), Asia. Pray for the church that she may be a witness to God's faithfulness even under persecution. / Summer intern **Sam (Annie) Phillips** at Resurrection OPC in State College, PA.

.....
25 **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Mbale, Uganda, and Haiti. Pray for the development of new friendships with neighbors, church members, and coworkers. / Home Missions administrative assistant **Allison Groot**.

.....
26 **David & Ashleigh Schexnayder**, Scottsdale, AZ. Pray for the outreach efforts of Providence OPC. / Pray for the **OPC Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel**.



The Hartshorns (day 22)

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27 Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray that the Lord would grant the church leaders in La Gonâve physical strength to carry on their work. / Summer intern **Dane (Olivia) Bothun** at First OPC in South Holland, IL.

.....
28 **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. / Pray for believers imprisoned for their faith in **East Africa**, that the Lord would grant daily health and hope.

.....
29 **Nate & Anna Strom**, Sheboygan, WI. Pray that Breakwater Church would effectively reach the lost in their community. / Pray for the **English for Kids Bible Camp** taking place this week in St. Georges, Quebec, Canada.

.....
30 **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, L'viv, Ukraine. Praise God for newly ordained Pastor Vasyl and his wife, Vika, and pray for their service to the L'viv church. / Summer intern **Juhan Song** at Cornerstone OPC in Ambler, PA.



The Stroms (day 29)



Leonard Coppes
c. 1984

NEWS

IN MEMORIAM: LEONARD J. COPPES

Archibald Allison

Dr. Leonard J. Coppes entered the presence of God on April 10, 2024, at the age of eighty-four. He married Diana Torell in 1963 and was blessed with four children. Working full-time, he studied at Bethel College in St. Paul, where he learned Reformed doctrine. Ordained a Baptist minister in 1963, he earned a ThD in Old Testament under Dr. Edward J. Young at Westminster Seminary. He finished classes for a doctorate in Semitic Languages at Dropsie University (1966–1970) while also teaching at Pinebrook Junior College. Meeting with Al Martin and others trying to organize Reformed Baptist churches, he became a Presbyterian when one of the men declared that no man would ever rule over him.

He pastored Calvary OPC in Harrisville, Pennsylvania, from 1971–1982; Park Hill Presbyterian in Denver, Colorado, from 1982–1987; and Providence OPC in Denver from 1987–2011; and served on the Committee on Diaconal Ministries from 1973–2006. He trained many men to serve as ministers, elders, and deacons, touched many lives, was a friend to ministers and their families, had an open house every Sunday, and wrote many books, including *Who Will Lead Us?*, *Whatever Happened to Biblical Tongues*, *Are Five Points Enough?* *Ten Points of Calvinism*, and *Daddy, May I Take Communion?*

SCATURRO INSTALLED AT WINNER, SD

On April 25, Marc Scaturro was installed as pastor of Winner OPC in Winner, South Dakota. OP pastor Archibald Allison led the service and delivered the charge to the congregation; OP pastor Andrew Smyth preached; and URC pastor Caleb Castro delivered the pastoral charge.

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On March 15, **Old Stockbridge OPC** in Gresham, WI, closed its doors.

MINISTERS

- On April 5, **Andrew M. Farr**, previously pastor of First OPC in Portland, OR, was installed as an evangelist of the Presbytery of the Northwest to serve as church planting pastor of Klamath Falls Reformed Church in Klamath Falls, OR.
- On April 5, the Presbytery of the Southeast divested **Michael T. Spangler** of his ministerial office without censure.
- On April 19, **Brendan David Westerfield** was ordained and installed as a pastor at Redeemer OPC in Beavercreek, OH.
- On April 25, **Marc R. Scaturro** was installed as a pastor at Winner OPC in Winner, SD.
- On April 30, The Presbytery of New Jersey dissolved at his request the call of **Christopher I. Byrd** as an evangelist of Grace OPC in Westfield, NJ.

MILESTONES

- Retired OP minister **Albert Walter Steever Jr.**, 83, died on March 26.
- Retired OP minister **Dr. Leonard John Coppes**, 84, died on April 10.



At the installation of Andrew Farr (center)



At the installation of Marc Scaturro (center)

- Retired OP minister **William O. Slack II**, 73, died on April 21.
- **Dr. Grietje S. Rietkerk**, 86, retired OP missionary medical doctor who served in Eritrea, Sudan, Pakistan, and Kenya, died on April 28.

LETTERS

SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS

Editor:

When I opened my mailbox this morning, I looked into faces that have been etched in my mind for fifty years: Omar and Anna. Thank you for your kind remembrance of those events and Anna's background ("The OPC's First Martyr," May).

You conclude with Tertullian's well-reclaimed line: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Debbie and I have reflected on this for fifty years. A martyr is someone who dies because of their faith, a death because they refuse to choose life over faith. As you quoted, Anna's heart was "to work amongst people who lack the care they so very much need." Anna and Debbie were soldiers for the King. Soldiers die. There were others who suffered for their role. They were soldiers for the King like Anna. Soldiers in the line of action often have shorter or more painful lives. While Tertullian's line is true, it might rather have been said, "The sacrifice of the faithful is the nurture of the church." Christ showed the way: not martyrdom, but sacrifice. Anna loved much and sacrificed much. It is not so much the death but the life that matters. Your article painted that picture of Anna.

Karl Dortzbach
Baltimore, MD

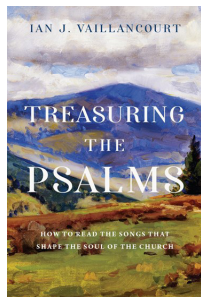
REVIEWS

Treasuring the Psalms by Ian J. Vaillancourt. IVP Academic, 2023. Paperback, 240 pages, \$28.00. Reviewed by OP minister Larry E. Wilson.

In *Treasuring the Psalms*, Ian J. Vaillancourt encourages readers to use the book of Psalms as a valuable treasure. "This book

was not written with the goal of giving readers all the answers; it was written with the goal of equipping them to dig deeply in the bottomless gold (or treasure!) mine of the Psalms on their own" (213). Dr. Vaillancourt, an associate professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Heritage Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario, makes this book accessible to all, regardless of Hebrew knowledge or academic background. For those with deeper interest, he offers extensive footnotes and online appendices. The book is written clearly and offers discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

Vaillancourt begins by emphasizing the significance of two key terms in the Psalms: *YHWH* (God's covenant name) and *hesed* (God's loyal covenant love). He also highlights three critical insights: the Psalms as a book of praises (*Tehillim*), as a microcosm of the entire Bible (Martin Luther), and as an "anatomy of all the parts of the soul" (John Calvin). The body of the book is then structured around three main sections that guide readers in how to read the Psalms (1) canonically, (2) christologically, and (3) personally/corporately.



The first section proves to be especially enlightening. Vaillancourt underscores the importance of not only the Spirit-inspired superscriptions but also the Spirit-inspired placement of each psalm within the five books of the Psalter. This approach thrillingly unveils the messianic character of the entire Psalter, challenging the common belief that only a handful of psalms are "messianic." The second section reinforces this as it explains how to read each psalm in terms of its fulfillment in Christ. In the third, Vaillancourt guides believers on how to appropriate the

psalms as their own in Christ. He illustrates this with sample psalms of lament, thanksgiving, and praise.

Treasuring the Psalms could be strengthened in some areas. Are some of his terms possibly confusing (e.g., "direct application")? Does he overstress the discontinuity between the old and new covenants at points (e.g., his treatment of the imprecatory psalms)? Does he under-stress the devotion to and prayers for Zion (the church) that permeate the Psalter? Still, his explanation of what he means by his terms is clear. His discussion of the Psalms is overall helpful and gospel saturated. He makes so many good points.

There's a growing and valuable conversation about why and how to read/pray/sing the Psalms Christianly. Vaillancourt's book serves as a very helpful contribution.

Thoughts on Public Prayer, by Samuel Miller. **Banner of Truth**, 2022. Hardcover, 216 pages, \$16.20. Reviewed by OP pastor Mike Myers.

Banner of Truth performed a kind service to the church by reprinting this little work by Samuel Miller (1769–1850). His objective was to enhance and strengthen the ministrations of prayer in the church's public worship and gatherings. Readers will not only find practical instruction on prayer but also rich historical analysis of worship in the life of the church since the days of the apostles.

Miller affirmed prayer was not merely "divinely prescribed, but an unspeakably important ordinance" (6). If ministers must carefully consider how to speak *of God to*

POSITION AVAILABLE

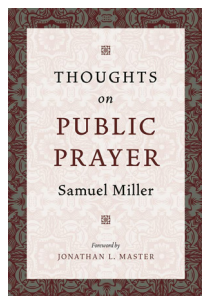
Pastor: Harvest OPC in San Marcos, California, is actively seeking a senior pastor to serve its 100-plus member congregation. Pastoral strengths would include preaching, leading worship, counseling, evangelism, and shepherding. Interested candidates should send an MIF (or similar) to HarvestPSC@gmail.com. For more information, visit HOPC.org.

the congregation, they must also prepare to speak to God for the congregation. To do this, he describes the need to cultivate both the grace and gift of prayer. The grace of prayer is rooted in the sincere piety of the heart; the gift refers to the ability to offer prayers audibly in a manner that edifies the congregation.

Some may find the historical section of chapter 2 and the liturgical debates in chapter 3 laborious, but there is value in wading through the arguments of the past, if only to appreciate the clarity of biblical wisdom. A major theme is the place and usefulness of reading form prayers. While warning against excesses and ceremonialism, Miller does not disallow or condemn the practice outright. In fact, he acknowledges the richness that some of these forms contain and the help they can be in cultivating the gift of prayer. He objects primarily to the *exclusive* or *required* use of them in the church. He warmly commends free or extemporaneous prayer, but cautions against the liability of careless public supplications.

Chapters 4 and 5 outline various common faults of public prayer and qualities of good public prayer, respectively. Both chapters are full of good advice and occasionally humorous anecdotes. He concludes the book with practical aids in growing in holy ability and quality in this important aspect of the church's life.

Miller humbly presented this book "to the *younger* ministers . . . and to the candidates for the sacred office *alone*" (xiv).



It is the reviewer's opinion that the scope of usefulness is broader than originally intended. Every Christian with an interest in praying beyond the private sphere will find sound wisdom and help in these pages.

***Taming the Fingers: Heavenly Wisdom for Social Media*, by Jeff Johnson. Reformation Heritage, 2023. Paperback, 88 pages, \$7.50. Reviewed by OP member and Video and Social Media Coordinator Kerri Ann Cruse.**

If you have decided to be present on social media, have you taken the time to think through how you will conduct yourself on these platforms? We tend to change how we speak and what we share when we find ourselves face-to-face with a screen instead of another image-bearer. People who are seemingly meek and gracious in person become biting, vindictive, and cruel once they log online. What can we do to ensure that is not true of us?

Jeff Johnson helps us apply the truths and wisdom of the Scripture, mainly the Proverbs, to our tweets, comments, and status updates in *Taming the Fingers*. The purpose of this book is to help us think carefully about how biblical principles of communication should guide us in our use of social media. Johnson does this by having us think through five key questions (each given its own chapter): Am I controlled? Am I calm? Am I careful? Am I compassionate? Am I conscientious?

An obvious issue on social media is how we interact with others on political, social, or biblical issues. There are some on

the internet who do not have an unpublished thought regarding these matters. Johnson reminds us that it is "a fool [who] vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds back" (see Prov. 29:11). And while we are permitted to argue, "don't mistake rudeness for boldness" (16). Particularly when it comes to hot-button topics and controversial subjects, we must ask ourselves: Am I controlled?

If you only use social media to post updates about your own life, you may not feel like these reflections apply to you. However, in the chapter "Am I Compassionate?" Johnson reminds us of Proverbs 27:2—"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips"—and of the temptation of "scratching our itch for self-glory" (44). Is your selfie at the soup kitchen showing how thankful you are to serve, or are you virtue signaling?

I agree with Johnson that it can be "beneficial for a pastor to be on social media since it can keep him informed of what society and the people in the pews see as the pressing issues of the day" (27). But the few "minutes" you spend here or there on social media can be taking away from the effectiveness of your in-person ministry. Further, there are numerous examples of pastors bringing disrepute upon their churches and their Lord through untamed behavior online.

Are you reflecting Christ in what you type, share, and post? This short book will help you discern the answer. I highly commend this work to all Christians, but especially Christian leaders.

