

# Calling a Pastor

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**CURRENT ISSUE: CALLING A PASTOR**

**January 2019**

### *From the Editor*

In June of last year I retired from the pastorate of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church after twenty-one and a half years as its pastor; I helped to plant the church in 1997. One of my tasks during the months leading up to my retirement was to help the church, and especially the session, prepare for a transition that few in the congregation had ever been through. One of the best resources I discovered was “Guidelines for Congregations to Follow in Discovering, Evaluating and Calling a Pastor.” It is a very useful document produced by a subcommittee of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension at the request of the Forty-Third (1976) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>1</sup> As many of my generation are nearing retirement age, these resources will become increasingly important.

Among the many other fine resources that I discovered was the recent experience of the session in Syracuse, New York, in calling a pastor; this proved invaluable. Elder Jonathan Looney was kind enough to reflect on the process and finally to write the lead article in this issue, “When It Is Time to Call a New Pastor.” Our session found the most helpful book, among a number that are available, to be the one that Elder Looney reviews, Chris Brauns, *When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search*. The title tells it all.

Steve Migotsky reviews a very important new book by Maryann Wolf, *Reader, Come Home*. Wolf is the director of the Tufts Center for Reading and Language Research and explores the effect of the digital environment on the reading brain, concluding that it unsuits us for deep or close reading of substantial texts. This warning has been sounded for many decades. Witness Sven Birkerts’s 1994 book *The Gutenberg Elegies*.

I review a new anthology of classic devotional poetry by Leland Ryken in his *The Soul in Paraphrase*, a line from a George Herbert poem. This beautifully published volume is one every thoughtful Christian will want to own.

I also review Jonathan Kline’s *Keep Up Your Biblical Hebrew and Greek in Two Minutes a Day*. This third-generation linguist provides a wonderful tool for busy ministers to stay fresh in the original languages of God’s Word.

Finally, George Herbert, one of Ryken’s favorites, reminds us of the transcendent uniqueness of the Lord’s Day in his striking poem “Sunday.”

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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<sup>1</sup> <https://chmce.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Pastor-Search-Guidelines.pdf>.

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## FROM THE ARCHIVES “CALLING A PASTOR”

[http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject\\_Index\\_Vol\\_1-25.pdf](http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-25.pdf)

- “On Calling a Pastor.” (G. I. Williamson) 6:2 (Apr. 1997): 26–27.

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*Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

# Servant Work

## When it is Time to Call a New Pastor

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by Jonathan T. Looney

At the start of the session meeting one month, your long-serving pastor (and close friend), Bob, asks if you would save five minutes at the end of the meeting for him to discuss something. The rest of the meeting proceeds normally and you are getting ready to close the meeting when you remember that Bob wanted to discuss something. Bob then announces that he has decided to retire. In a moment, your world is turned upside down: it feels like you are suddenly losing both your long-time pastor and also a long-time friend. Myriad emotions swirl through your mind. And, your thoughts may go in many different directions. (What do we tell the congregation? When do we tell them? How will this affect the congregation? What will this mean for our radio ministry?)

While processing your own emotions and thoughts, the one thing that you may not clearly realize at first is that this is the start of what is, realistically, eighteen to twenty-four months of very intense work. It is very much like the pastor has just shot off the starting gun of a long marathon. Have you ever watched the Olympic marathon and seen how the runners collapse just after the finish line? That may very well be you in eighteen to twenty-four months.

Admittedly, I am somewhat exaggerating. Pastoral searches are emotionally tiring, rather than physically tiring. But we must not discount the importance or reality of emotional stress. And, furthermore, not all pastoral searches are equal. I've heard of long and exhausting pastoral searches. On the other hand, my church's recent pastoral search was on the easier side (And, I am happy to report that no one collapsed). But it is important that you have the right mindset at the start. It is better to overestimate the amount of work involved than to underestimate it and set unrealistic expectations for yourself and your church.

We had a conversation like the one I relayed above in one of our session meetings in late 2015. I didn't realize how much work was involved. I didn't even fully understand the process. What I soon discovered was that almost no one claims to be an expert at pastoral searches, simply because each of us do them so infrequently. (And, praise God for that!) I also found that there is no "standard" search process. Thankfully, we did one thing "right" through most of our search process: we sought advice from others. In the end, our search was successful, and a new pastor began his ministry in May 2017, about eighteen months after our previous pastor had announced his intention to retire.

Having had a successful search, other churches soon asked us for advice. Knowing how important advice was for us, I was happy to oblige. We did some things well that I think are critically important. We made some big mistakes that I would love to help other churches avoid. Hopefully, you will benefit from some of the things we learned.<sup>1</sup>

### **CARING FOR THE FLOCK**

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<sup>1</sup> I ended up organizing my thoughts into an unpublished pamphlet. Some of the material in this article comes from that, and I will provide a copy upon request. Like that pamphlet, this article is aimed primarily at the process of calling a pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; however, much of the information can be easily adapted to other denominations.

As an elder, your primary job is to shepherd and care for the flock of Christ. Even the process of picking a new pastor is an element of shepherding the flock; however, I will cover that later. The first thing you must do is make sure you care for the flock's immediate needs.

One of the paradoxes of a pastoral transition is that this is a time when the congregation may (probably will) need more care than usual; but it is also a time when you are missing a full-time minister who would help provide that care. This means that the workload of the session can increase quite a bit. In addition to their normal needs, the congregation will be struggling to work through the loss of their pastor. This may be even more difficult if the loss was sudden (such as an unexpected death, or a quick transition to allow the pastor to pursue ministry elsewhere), or if the pastor left in the midst of conflict. The session will need to help the congregation work through this. In some cases, this may require lots of contact and much prayer, sweat, and tears. Regardless of the circumstances, *it is important that the elders are in regular contact with the congregation* and that they work through any problems that arise.

As a side note, the time to lay the groundwork for this is before your pastor leaves. You should have a good rapport with the congregation before the pastor leaves; otherwise, you may find that they are not receptive to your counsel once he is gone. Pastoral transitions bring the importance of ruling elders to the fore. Ruling elders are the stable figures who outlast pastors. And, they have a crucial role in shepherding the flock anytime, but particularly when there is no minister to lead the work.

You must also ensure that the congregation is fed spiritually. At a minimum, this means ensuring that the Word is faithfully preached every Sunday. If the pastor taught a Sunday School class, it may also be necessary to find someone to teach that. And, there may be other ministries that need to be maintained. But, we should be absolutely clear on one thing: the session's job is to ensure the flock is shepherded and fed. Merely filling preaching and teaching slots does not fulfill this mandate.

As Reformed Christians, we believe in the centrality of the preached Word in the life of the church. It is from God's Word that we receive instruction for the Christian life. It is from God's Word that we receive comfort in time of trouble. It is from God's Word that we learn how we are to interact with each other, what a church is supposed to do, and what we are supposed to think about the events of life. In the hands of the Spirit, God's Word is the sword which pierces our soul, convicts us of our wrongdoing, and directs us to the right path. And, it is God's Word that teaches us about Jesus, the head of the church, its cornerstone, and the figure who unites us all. Your congregation needs this spiritual food all the time, but it especially needs it during pastoral transitions. And, again, the paradox of pastoral transitions is present: at the very time your congregation needs to hear God's Word preached skillfully, faithfully, and consistently, the man who provided that is no longer present to do so.

Some churches seek to fill this void through piecemeal efforts. This can certainly serve to communicate biblical truth to the congregation. But, does this inconsistency really serve to feed the people in the best possible way? I even visited one church recently that seemed to be filling the pulpit week by week. The minister who filled the pulpit had been asked to do so approximately eighteen hours earlier. His message certainly was biblical, but was this the spiritual meal the congregation needed? Without the minister learning more about the congregation, he might be hard-pressed to know the needs of the congregation. And, with only a single week to preach, he won't have the opportunity to present a series of biblical truths (or, even, a single complex truth) in an orderly way.

For these reasons (among others), *I think it is very valuable (perhaps, even critical) to have the exposition of the Word conducted by one or more regular, consistent, competent ministers.* This should be "consistent" in the sense that the same minister (or a small group of ministers) should do the bulk of the preaching. These ministers should be "competent" in handling God's word and understanding how to apply it to the lives of your flock. And, they should be

“ministers”: ideally, ordained ministers (retired ministers can do really well in these roles) with a track record of biblical preaching.<sup>2</sup>

Interim pastors (or “stated supply”) can help greatly with caring for the flock. An excellent interim pastor will quickly be able to help with some of the shepherding needs (hospital visits, crises, and, perhaps, even some counseling) while also providing consistent spiritual food for the flock each Sunday (and that spiritual food will itself be informed more and more by his understanding of the needs of the congregation). An interim pastor can also be a great blessing to the ruling elders, since he can free up the ruling elders’ time to focus on other responsibilities within the church. In coordination with the ministerial advisor,<sup>3</sup> an interim pastor can also assist with advice regarding the pastoral search.

During our recent pastoral transition, our church was blessed to go straight from our retiring pastor to an interim pastor, and then on to our new pastor, all without any gap. That meant that the people were being fed each week by a competent minister. It also meant there was great consistency in the preaching. I think it is not a coincidence that we had essentially no attrition during the transition. By contrast, I heard of another church that did have a gap between ministers and did suffer attrition.

I would suggest that you try to secure the services of a competent interim pastor as early as possible. If you need help finding one, ask for help. You can ask other ministers, your presbytery, or even the denomination. They should soon be able to provide the names of several competent interim pastors. If you do choose to get an interim pastor, make sure you keep your presbytery informed. They may not need to take action, but they need to know what is happening in the pulpits of their churches.

Finally, *you need to pray for your congregation*. You need to pray for the church as a whole, as well as the individuals within the church. As anyone who has been an elder for long knows, we are utterly incapable of impacting hearts or minds; rather, we are completely dependent on God to do that. So, where your church needs comfort, healing, strengthening, unifying, maturing, rebuking, growing, or anything else, you are dependent upon God to provide it. Take advantage of his invitation to lift your church before his throne of grace and rely on him to provide mercy and grace to help.

## FINDING THE RIGHT MAN

During our search process, our ministerial advisor (Rev. Tom Trouwborst) compared calling a pastor to finding a wife.<sup>4</sup> Although he only used the metaphor in a limited sense, I’ve come to realize it is useful more generally. Finding a pastor *is* a lot like the process for finding a wife.

One facet of dating is that there is no one standard way to do it. Likewise, there is no standard way to look for a new pastor. The exact process is informed by various considerations, such as tradition, congregational makeup and location, and the rules governing

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<sup>2</sup> Yes, ruling elders ruling elders can sometimes do a great job “preaching” or “exhorting,” depending on your view of the offices. But, my view is that during a time of pastoral transition, you should entrust your congregation to a man who has been trained to preach full time and has a track record of handling God’s Word well. Besides, your church’s ruling elders will be busy enough with other matters.

Another possibility is to use a licentiate to fill the pulpit. I think that comes with some special considerations that a session should evaluate prior to employing a licentiate as stated supply.

<sup>3</sup> A ministerial advisor is normally appointed by the presbytery at the request of the session of congregations without a pastor to provide guidance until a pastor is called (Form of Government 16.6, 17.2).

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this is probably not something that originated with Pastor Trouwborst. In fact, Chris Brauns also uses this metaphor in his book, *When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search: Biblical Principles and Practices to Guide Your Search* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2011). It is a helpful metaphor for some of the process, even if it fails to describe other parts of the process well.

the process (found in the denomination's standards, the church's bylaws, and any relevant state laws). However, this acknowledgement of variety is not to say that all choices are equally good. I do think we can agree that there are some things that are better and some that are worse. But, at minimum, because there is no standard way to look for a new pastor, sessions (and the search committees they oversee) will need to do a good job at defining the process among themselves first, and then with candidates whom they contact. Because finding a pastor is primarily a spiritual matter (rather than merely a matter of earthly employment), the session is ultimately responsible for the process. Many find it wise to use a search committee (in fact, some church's bylaws require this); however, the session is ultimately responsible for the process. Throughout the process, the session should care for its flock, its former pastor, and the candidates with which it interacts, as appropriate for each. Let's briefly consider some of the facets of pastoral "dating" that the session and search committee will need to consider.

One of the first things the session should consider is the matter of *leaving and cleaving*. By the end of this process, the congregation should have "left" the previous pastor and been able to fully embrace the new pastor. I start with this simply because this may be a process that takes many months and runs in parallel with the rest of the search process.

Wayne Mack helpfully highlights several things that "leaving" means in the context of marriage. Let me paraphrase a few of his points and reformulate them to apply to the pastoral relationship:

- You establish a new relationship with the former pastor. (It is possible to maintain a relationship.) It can even involve you asking for, and receiving, advice. But it has a new character.
- You must be more concerned about your new pastor's ideas, opinions, and practices than those of your former pastor. This probably goes without saying, but the new pastor will not be the same as the old pastor. The church shouldn't needlessly discard the good ideas of the previous pastor, but they should care about the new pastor's ideas and judge them on their own merit, rather than by comparison to the previous pastor's ideas. This also has relevance in the search process, as the church should not be looking to replace the previous pastor with an exact copy, which does not exist.
- You must eliminate any bad attitudes toward your former pastor, or you will be tied emotionally to them. Bad attitudes toward a former pastor can impact a congregation. If you harbor seriously bad attitudes, mere time and space will not heal the wounds, or, at least, not quickly heal them. The session must do its best to make sure the people and the pastor are reconciled prior to (or roughly concurrent with) his leaving, or they may find that these bad feelings continue to haunt the church for years to come—possibly, even interfering with the ability of the people to bond with their new pastor.
- You make the new pastor (together with the session) the primary source of pastoral counsel in your life.<sup>5</sup>

It is quite possible for a pastor to remain in constant contact with his former church, even worshiping with it every week; and for the congregation to "leave" him effectively. Likewise, it is possible for a pastor to move to the other side of the country and for the church to fail to "leave" him. However, just as Dr. Mack suggests that it "may make it more difficult to leave"

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Wayne A. Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999), 2–3. The paraphrasing and adaptation to the pastoral context are my own.

your parents if you start your marriage living in too close of a physical proximity to them,<sup>6</sup> it is likewise the generally accepted wisdom of the church that it is a good idea for pastors to be physically apart from their former congregation until the congregation has bonded to their new pastor. The session should discuss this with the departing pastor and develop a plan acceptable to all involved, with the goal of furthering the spiritual interests of all involved (including the departing pastor).

In addition to determining what work may be necessary to allow the congregation to leave its former pastor, it is also necessary for the search committee to *determine a “dating profile,”* which highlights any specific considerations that may impact the pastor you call. You could perhaps think of this like a personal ad: “Small, faithful church in upstate New York seeks a gifted preacher who . . .” You don’t necessarily need to use the ad; however, you should still use the information to focus your search and to think about what you will tell candidates.

It goes without saying that you will want a man skilled in handling the Word of God and able to preach. But, are there specific things that may impact the man you choose or that would impact whether a candidate might want to pastor your church? For example, if you are in a rural area, you will want a pastor who will enjoy living in a rural area. Or, perhaps, you live in an area which is generally distrustful of outsiders. Your candidates should, at least, be aware of that, as it may impact their ministry.

In developing your profile, you also need to consider whether there are any matters on which your congregation may require adherence to a doctrine narrower than that allowed by the OPC. It strikes me that in the recent past, homeschooling and views of creation have been the predominant issues on which congregations have developed strong views that may impact the choice of pastor.

Next, once you know the kind of candidate you are seeking, *you will need to find candidates.* Just as there are many ways of finding people to date, there are many ways of finding pastoral candidates. Personally, I think a good way of finding pastoral candidates is to seek recommendations from trusted advisors based on your profiles of your church and ideal candidate. These trusted advisors may come from various places: seminary professors with a good view of recent graduates; ministers who are well-connected to other ministers who may be looking to make a change; and, the denomination. The OPC’s Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension keeps a list of both ministers and seminary graduates who are looking for calls within the denomination. In fact, part of their mission is to help congregations find pastors. Take advantage of their help. We asked for their advice. They provided several names of promising candidates, and they were all right on the mark.

Once you have the names of candidates, *you can begin to “date” them.* You should probably first contact the candidates to let them know that you may be interested, to confirm their availability, and to request sample sermons. In addition to the sermons they provide, I would suggest finding their most recent sermons online and listening to one or more of those. I would suggest that an evaluation of the candidate’s preaching play an outsize role in evaluation of candidates at this early stage.

The search committee, with the guidance of the session, should then interview the most promising candidates. Thanks to modern technology, it should be easy to have a “face-to-face” interview through a free video conferencing tool. If you decide to proceed further with a candidate, you should probably later supplement this with true in-person interviews; however, technology can help make early interviews possible at a lower cost. At this point, the committee should also check references. Ideally, you should have substantive conversations with their references, and they should be people who know the person well. At this point, the committee should rank its candidates into preference order.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 2.



Then, once you have determined your most preferred candidate, *it is time to for the candidate to “meet the parents.”* My brother recently brought a girl home for dinner to meet our parents. We all knew what that meant: this relationship was serious. Knowing my brother, I’m sure he was careful not to bring the girl home prematurely, and he wouldn’t later bring home another girl without first explaining why he was no longer dating the first girl. Likewise, I would suggest that you be very careful about bringing candidates to preach at your church. Once you bring a candidate to preach, I would suggest that you only proceed with that one candidate until you’ve made a decision. If you bring multiple candidates before the congregation at the same time, you risk dividing the congregation into factions united behind different candidates, rather than uniting them in evaluating whether a single candidate is called to serve in your congregation.<sup>7</sup> You can also combine in-person interviews with these preaching visits.

Next, your congregation comes to the all-important decision of *whether they want to “propose to” (call) this candidate.* It is important to handle this with care. The congregation should unite behind this candidate, but that may require some teaching on the right standards for choosing a pastor or on biblical unity. At the same time, the search committee must ensure the candidate himself has come to the place where he will be receptive to a call. This may require some additional work (additional visits, more phone calls, etc.).

At this point, you must also work out the terms of the call. I would suggest contacting the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension for their call guidelines. I would also suggest contacting the Committee on Ministerial Care to determine whether they have any relevant input. (As this relatively new committee serves, they may begin to develop material relevant to calling pastors.) You may also want to consult what other denominations have to say.<sup>8</sup>

Once you have done this, all that is left is to ask the presbytery to install (and, if necessary, ordain) the candidate. You should prepare your congregation for this process, including appropriate statements about the helpfulness and importance of the presbytery’s oversight.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

When describing all that had to occur for a baby to be conceived, a doctor once said, “It’s a miracle anyone gets pregnant.” When I think about all that must go right for a church to survive a pastoral transition and get the right man, I think it is also a miracle that any church survives this and also chooses the right person. But, isn’t that the point? We are utterly dependent upon God’s grace to find the right person. We are utterly dependent upon God’s grace to maintain unity in the church. And, we are utterly dependent upon Christ to shepherd *his* church. So, while we should work hard in this process, let’s remember to pray and trust God that he will do what he knows is best. He knows who should pastor the church, and he will provide the right man at the right time.

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<sup>7</sup> See also “Guidelines for Congregations to Follow in Discovering, Evaluating and Calling a Pastor,” Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, n.d., accessed December 1, 2018, <https://chmce.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Pastor-Search-Guidelines.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> I have found the information provided by the Presbyterian Church in America’s Retirements & Benefits to be quite helpful. In particular, the latest version of their call guidelines is found here: [https://pcarbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Web\\_RBI\\_CallPkg.pdf](https://pcarbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Web_RBI_CallPkg.pdf) (accessed December 1, 2018). Previous versions this document have also contained a large amount of good advice (both biblical and practical).

# ServantReading

## When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search

*by Chris Brauns*

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by Jonathan T. Looney

*When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search*, by Chris Brauns. Chicago: Moody, 2011, 193 pages, \$11.99, paper.

When searching for a new pastor, churches are looking for many things. Some churches might be looking for a great CEO, a competent and organized administrator, or perhaps a dynamic leader who can inspire the people through his personality. There's nothing inherently wrong with those qualities in a minister, but are they really the most important thing?

In this short, accessible book, Chris Brauns sets forth the case for what he considers to be the most important quality churches should seek in a pastor: solid expository preaching. And, he exhorts search committees to seek their direction from God's Word. Given the context of the modern evangelical church to which Brauns is speaking, his words are important and (at least, from my perspective) most welcome.

Brauns separates his book into three parts. In the first part, he exhorts pastoral search committees to do their work in a God-centered way. He exhorts the committees to pray. He exhorts them to make the time to do their work well. He exhorts them to be Bible-centered, seeking the qualifications of their minister from Scripture such as 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9 and seeking a minister who will preach the Word. And he exhorts them to seek congregational unity in the gospel of Jesus Christ, rather than through human means.

Brauns cautions against “premises or actions that would inadvertently teach your congregation that church is a democracy in which you are seeking to discern the will of the people and to deliver accordingly” (47). This is an important lesson that even Reformed and Presbyterian churches need from time to time. And, yet, Brauns is speaking to the broader evangelical church. I am inclined to agree with him, but wonder whether his important statement will be received well by others less inclined to agree with him.

Brauns's brief paragraph on the role of the church vote is also important (46–7). Here, he clarifies exactly what churches are being asked to do when they vote to receive a minister: “recognize together the call of God on a particular pastor” and “agree corporately and pledge corporately their commitment to support and submit to their new God-given leader.” Again, these are important things a church should understand when it is preparing to call a pastor.

In Part 2, Brauns spends time explaining what qualities churches should seek when calling a pastor. He covers a variety of ground while explaining what a biblical shepherd should be, but devotes most of this section to an extended explanation of expository preaching, why it is important to hire a skilled expository preacher, and how a search committee can (and should) judge a pastor's preaching.

His definitions and explanations are accessible, and a search committee would do well to evaluate a candidate's preaching as thoroughly as he suggests. Given the book's targeting of the broader evangelical church, this is an important message, and I hope many churches will heed his call to seek faithful and high-quality preaching.

In Part 3, Brauns covers some suggested techniques for interviewing and a number of suggested lines of inquiry for interviews. Having recently been involved in a pastoral search, much of this resonated with me, either as questions that were useful to ask, or questions that we should have asked.

The book ends with ten "Frequently Asked Questions," which contained some real gems. I think this section could easily be relabeled "Miscellaneous Advice," as the author seems to delve into some matters that may not have fit easily into the rest of the book. But, some of these were quite helpful, and I wholeheartedly encourage churches to read these.

This book contains some other good nuggets, such as the important suggestion that search committees quiz pastoral candidates about Internet pornography (71–2), an acknowledgement that the process will include subjectivity and has the potential to be divisive (29), and a plea that search committees not "justify a lack of follow-through by telling one another that [they] are all very busy" (66).

As for criticisms of this book, there are a few cases where the exegesis of biblical texts didn't live up to the high standards Brauns set for himself. In one case, he says that Acts 17:12 shows that "[e]ffective leadership took place in Berea" (35). That may be true, but it seems something is missing from the line of argument to connect that conclusion to the biblical text. In another case, he explains 1 Timothy 5:17–18 as saying that people should provide for their pastors because pastors are there to serve the people. He goes on to explain, "Supporting your pastor is really about taking care of yourself. Take care of your pastor. It is in your interest to do so" (179–80). While I agree with these statements, and I think there is support in Scripture for them, I am not sure that 1 Timothy 5:17–18 (standing on its own) says exactly that. Given the context of a book which is trying to urge the importance of high-quality biblical preaching on those who may not be accustomed to that, it is disappointing to see these minor slips. Nonetheless, I understand the pressure of writing under deadlines, and I can easily forgive a few weak explanations in what is otherwise a good book.

Because this is a review for a Reformed and Presbyterian audience, it is worth mentioning how this book might be useful in that context. My opinion is that most Orthodox Presbyterian Church search committees will instinctively understand most of the content of Part 2 (on the importance of exegetical preaching and how to evaluate it) even without reading the book. However, there are some important pearls of wisdom in the rest of the book that will be quite helpful to search committees. In particular, Part 3 will be quite helpful to those new to interviewing pastoral candidates.

I appreciate Brauns's contribution to the dialog about pastoral searches. I hope many in the evangelical church will heed his exhortation to seek faithful biblical preaching.

**Jonathan T. Looney** serves as a ruling elder at Hope Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Syracuse, New York.

# ServantReading

## Reader, Come Home, *by Maryanne Wolf*

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by Stephen A. Migotsky

*Reader, Come Home*, by Maryanne Wolf. New York: HarperCollins, 2018, 260 pages, \$24.99.

In two dystopian novels, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley<sup>1</sup> and *1984* by George Orwell,<sup>2</sup> people don't read books. In *1984*, books are censored and banned by a totalitarian government in order to control what people think. In *Brave New World* books are available, but no one wants to read them, because they are all too happy in a world of groupthink. More recent books, such as *iGen*, *Proust and the Squid*, *The Shallows*, *The Digital Divide*,<sup>3</sup> have suggested a third reason people might not read books. It's not that books are banned as in *1984*, or people are too happy without books to want to read them as in *Brave New World*; now the suggestion is that most people don't have the ability to read the way people used to read. Now people have brains that are disabled and can no longer read big, important books in a deep, thoughtful way.

That is a stunning fact. The result in study after study is that the hours that we spend looking at a screen change how our brain works. There is a difference even when one reads the text of a novel on a Kindle instead of on a printed page (77). What inspired Professor Wolf to begin to research and write this book was her experience after writing *Proust and the Squid*, which was published in 2007. She describes her experience as a Rip Van Winkle one. For seven years she did research for *Proust and the Squid*. When she woke up from that book, "our entire literacy-based culture had begun its transformation into a very different, digitally based culture. I was gobsmacked" (6).

The book is written as nine letters to the reader from someone who in her own words "became consumed with how the circuitry of the reading brain would be altered by the unique characteristics of the digital medium, particularly the young" (7).

Letter One describes her Rip Van Winkle experience in depth as someone who used to read deeply and has researched the brain's activity while reading. Letter Two is an overview of current knowledge of the reading brain. Letter Three describes "the essential processes that compose deep reading—from the reader's empathic and inferential abilities to critical analysis and insight itself" (11). These first three chapters give the foundation for Letter Four, which argues that "*how and what* we now read" in digital

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<sup>1</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Modern Library, 1946).

<sup>2</sup> George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).

<sup>3</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria, 2017); Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2010); Mark Bauerlein, ed., *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2011).



media changes our ability to do “critical analysis of complex realities” (11–12, emphasis hers). This is a crucial chapter.

In the Letters Five to Eight, Professor Wolf writes of her concerns for the loss of reading’s role in the development of “intellectual, social-emotional, and ethical” traits in children (12). She has a novel solution to the print vs. digital reading dilemma. She proposes and hopes that readers can be taught to read print and digital media as if they were two different languages and readers would become bilingual and able to switch between the two media with each having its own “language” without losing any of the benefits of either “language” (12). She calls this her hope for a “biliterate” reading brain (12). This hope is merely a hope.

In her last chapter, Letter Nine, she asks us to ask ourselves if we have “the three lives of the good reader” akin to Aristotle’s three lives of a good community—“the life of knowledge and productivity, the life of entertainment and . . . leisure, and finally life of contemplation” (13). The life of contemplation is “daily threatened in our culture” (13).

She notes that Professors of English know firsthand the condition of their students’ reading and writing skills. Their most frequent observations are two. First, students are becoming increasingly impatient with the difficulty and time it takes to understand long and complex sentences, and they don’t like to respond deeply and thoughtfully to a book (92). This reality is so common that students have an abbreviation for their experience with some books—TL;DR (Too long; didn’t read) (92). A second observation is that student writing is deteriorating (92).

Consider giving yourself this test that she gave herself. Professor Wolf picked a big, dense book that was a favorite novel that she had read when she was younger. The test was to reread it now. She believed that her reading style had not changed in the intervening years, because she thought that only the time she had available to read was changed (98–99). She happily chose one of her favorite books and began to read it, and she “experienced the literary equivalent of a punch to the cortex. I could not read it” (99). Without her knowing it, her brain had changed. She could not read it!

If she—a professor, a researcher, a smart person—lost the ability to read a favorite book, because her brain changed, then what has been slowly happening to the rest of us who also read digital media, perhaps, even more than she did? Paul wrote, “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. 12:2). When your brain is unable to read deeply and meditate deeply on the Holy Scriptures, how is a pastor or any Christian going to be transformed and be able to test and fathom the deep things of God? Even one of those who create much of the digital media worries about the damage that is done by them. “Google CEO Eric Schmidt cautioned, ‘I worry that the level of interruption, the sort of overwhelming rapidity of information . . . is in fact altering cognition. It is affecting deeper thinking’” (123–24). The deep reading brain is in danger. This book explains how your brain responds to what you read and how you read.

The good news for Professor Wolf, and for us, is that she overcame her reading disability by forcing herself to read her test book in twenty-minute intervals, and she regained her deep reading ability after two weeks of concentrated training (101).

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# The Soul in Paraphrase *by Leland Ryken, ed.*

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*The Soul in Paraphrase: A Treasury of Classic Devotional Poems*, by Leland Ryken, ed. Wheaton: Crossway, 2018, 262 pages, \$35.00.

As a collector of anthologies of poetry, I recognize this slim volume as unique. Harold Bloom's *Anthology of American Religious Verse*<sup>1</sup> is loaded with excellent choices but lacks the brilliant commentary of his *The Best Poems of the English Language*.<sup>2</sup> He also covers religions other than Christianity. *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse*<sup>3</sup> covers a narrower terrain, but also lacks commentary. James Trott's *A Sacrifice of Praise*<sup>4</sup> is a more contemporary anthology covering a wide range of Christian poetry from Caedmon to the mid-twentieth century. His tome (804 pages) contains commentary with biographical sketches of the poets, like Bloom's *Best Poems*. Ryken's anthology is a study in conciseness rooted in a keenly developed taste for the best sacred poetry. Leland Ryken brings all his poetic experience as a master teacher to bear on this selection. His poetic sensibilities have enabled him to make impeccable choices.

The title is from George Herbert's poem "Prayer" (88). In a mere 262 pages, ninety-one poems comprise this superb anthology; one third of the poems (by three of fifty poets) are by Ryken's favorites. His *The Devotional Poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Milton*<sup>5</sup> is a prelude to the present book. His work on these three poets in the former volume is largely reworked here. In *The Soul in Paraphrase* Ryken uses all of the poems of the three, adding two to Herbert and three to Milton. It is not merely personal preference that lead Ryken to favor these three, but rather the high quality of their devotional poetry. Their stature among English poets is without equal, as this selection demonstrates. Harold Bloom agrees regarding Donne and Herbert, "There are only a few extraordinary devotional poets in the language, including Donne, and the Victorians Gerard Manley Hopkins and Christina Rossetti. By any standard, George Herbert is the devotional poet proper in English."<sup>6</sup>

Each poem, from Caedmon (seventh century) to Emily Brontë, is adorned with "notes on selected words" and a brief, but sagacious, commentary. Biographical notes on each poet, along with Scripture and person indexes are collected at the end of the book.

This is truly a treasury, housed in a beautifully bound hard cover edition. Gold-tooled cloth with a dust cover is rare in Christian publishing. Bound in signature with a red cloth book mark makes this a distinctive contribution to devotional poetry and will thus edify a generation of Christian readers.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom, ed., *Anthology of American Religious Verse* (New York: The Library of America, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Harold Bloom, ed., *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Frost* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Lord David Cecil, *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940).

<sup>4</sup> James Trott, *A Sacrifice of Praise: An Anthology of Christian Poetry in English from Caedmon to the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Leland Ryken, *The Devotional Poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Milton* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Bloom, *Best Poems*, 183.

# Keep Up Your Biblical Hebrew and Greek in Two Minutes a Day *compiled and edited by Jonathan G. Kline*

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Keep Up Your Biblical Hebrew in Two Minutes a Day: 365 Selections for Easy Review*, vol. 1, compiled and edited by Jonathan G. Kline. Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2017, xiv + 370 pages, \$39.95.

*Keep Up Your Biblical Greek in Two Minutes a Day: 365 Selections for Easy Review*, vol. 1, compiled and edited by Jonathan G. Kline. Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2017, xiv + 370 pages, \$39.95.

Back in the sixties I remember reading with interest the book *Europe on \$5.00 a Day*. So, Jonathan Kline's fine little volumes (there are two each for Hebrew and Greek, and one for Aramaic, which I am not reviewing) allure the busy and often overwhelmed pastor to keep fresh in his use of the biblical languages. I always reminded parents who inquired about how to do devotions with their little children to keep the lessons short and sweet. Kline has done a masterful job of doing just this for original language studies.

Each volume covers three hundred sixty-five one-page selections beginning January 1. The eight-page introduction to each volume is a very useful and important aid to getting the most out of these books. For example, Kline provides suggestions for brief (ten seconds to one minute), medium (two to five minutes), and longer (ten to twenty minute) study periods, depending on the time available to the pastor on a given day. Finally, there is a complete index of Scripture references.

Each one-page selection begins with a verse in an English version of the author's choice. Kline uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New International Bible (NIV), Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB only for the New Testament), Christian Standard Bible (CSB), and Modern Language Bible (MLB). Three Greek or Hebrew words are embedded in parentheses in the English translation; one is a new vocabulary word, and the other two are for review. The transliteration and meaning of each new word appear next, shaded in gray. Each of the review words has a reference to the day when that word was first used. Next to this is the frequency of the Greek or Hebrew word found in Westcott-Hort edition of the Greek New Testament or Michigan-Claremont-Westminster Electronic Hebrew Bible, followed by an "x." For the assistance of beginning students, just below the frequency number is a reference to the new word in Strong's concordance, beginning with an "S." Finally, the Greek or Hebrew text of the daily verse is given with the daily words highlighted in bold and "then divided into phrases or clauses, with the corresponding English phrases or clauses next to them" (vii).

At first the lack of declensions of nouns and conjugations of verbs seemed like a flaw, but then I realized that the absence of those technical grammatical features encourages simple growth in reading the original texts. Kline addresses this at the outset: "This book complements such grammatical study by enabling you to build a robust vocabulary base and by encouraging you to work with the biblical text and review morphology and syntax in a largely inductive manner" (vii). These volumes deliver what they are advertised to do and should be a serious encouragement to pastors and students seeking to build a reading knowledge of the Bible in its original languages for devotional and exegetical work. I highly recommend this unique series.

**Gregory E. Reynolds** is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

# ServantPoetry

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George Herbert (1593–1633)

## Sunday

O day most calm, most bright  
The fruit of this, the next world's bud,  
Th' endorsement of supreme delight,  
Writ by a friend, and with his blood;  
The couch of time; care's balm and bay:  
The week were dark, but for thy light:  
Thy torch doth show the way.

The other days and thou  
Make up one man; whose face thou art,  
Knocking at heaven with thy brow:  
The worky-days are the back-part;  
The burden of the week lies there,  
Making the whole to stoop and bow,  
Till thy release appear.

Man had straight forward gone  
To endless death: but thou dost pull  
And turn us round to look on one,  
Whom, if we were not very dull,  
We could not choose to look on still;  
Since there is no place so alone,  
The which he doth not fill.

Sundays the pillars are,  
On which heav'n's palace arched lies:  
The other days fill up the spare  
And hollow room with vanities.  
They are the fruitful beds and borders  
In God's rich garden: that is bare,  
Which parts their ranks and orders.

The Sundays of man's life,  
Threaded together on time's string,  
Make bracelets to adorn the wife  
Of the eternal glorious King.  
On Sunday heaven's gate stands ope;  
Blessings are plentiful and rife,  
More plentiful than hope.

This day my Saviour rose,  
And did enclose this light for his:  
That, as each beast his manger knows,  
Man might not of his fodder miss.  
Christ hath took in this piece of ground,  
And made a garden there for those  
Who want herbs for their wound.

The rest of our Creation  
Our great Redeemer did remove  
With the same shake, which at his passion  
Did th' earth and all things with it move.  
As Samson bore the doors away,  
Christ's hands, though nail'd, wrought our  
salvation,  
And did unhinge that day.

The brightness of that day  
We sullied by our foul offence:  
Wherefore that robe we cast away,  
Having a new at his expense,  
Whose drops of blood paid the full price,  
That was requir'd to make us gay,  
And fit for Paradise.

Thou art a day of mirth:  
And where the weekdays trail on ground,  
Thy flight is higher, as thy birth.  
O let me take thee at the bound,  
Leaping with thee from sev'n to sev'n,  
Till that we both, being toss'd from earth,  
Fly hand in hand to heav'n!