

NEW HORIZONS

≡ *in the* ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ≡

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// by Michael Allen

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On March 31, Tyler Jackson was received by the Presbytery of Ohio from the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly to serve Redemption Life Bible Church, the new mission work of the Presbytery of Ohio in New Castle, Indiana. Dr. Lane Tipton preached the sermon and Rev. Aaron Mize of Houston, Texas, gave the charge. Jackson is pictured here (center) with Mize, Tipton, and members of the presbytery.



YOUR HEAVENLY MINDSET



A. CRAIG TROXEL // Arthur Kuschke, OPC minister and long-standing librarian at Westminster Theological Seminary (1945–1979), now in the presence of the Lord, once said to me, “When will we learn to see ourselves as God sees us?” Taking God’s viewpoint, namely a heavenly one, makes a world of a difference. It puts

everything, including ourselves, into perspective, which is what Paul encourages us to do in Colossians 3:1–4:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Your Mindset

To “set your mind” (one word in the Greek) refers to the disposition and the trajectory of our thinking. Our thoughts are not a mere collection of random ideas. They tend to run in a certain direction, being driven by the desires and the will of our heart. We point our mind toward the things we love and chose. As Richard Sibbes put

it, “What the heart liketh best, the mind studieth most.”¹ Our thinking is laden with an agenda, ambitiously motivated and committed to a certain course of thought. Other passages in the New Testament, which use the same word, confirm this understanding.

Paul writes in Romans 8:5–6:

For those who live according to the flesh *set their minds* on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit *set their minds* on the things of the Spirit. For to *set the mind* on the flesh is death, but to *set the mind* on the Spirit is life and peace.

The two opposing courses of life diverge according to the two contrasting mindsets. Philippians 2:5 states, “*Have this mind* among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” The church should share the same mindset, which framed Christ’s obedience and suffering unto death. When Christ spoke to

his disciples of his imminent suffering and death in Jerusalem, Peter would not have it: “Never!” To which Christ responded, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not *setting your mind* on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Matt. 16:23). Christ was not addressing a random thought. He was rebuking the entire orientation of Peter’s thinking, which rose up in hostility to the things of God. Christ named it for what it was. The agenda behind such words, even if unwittingly, fell in league with the devil and represented the same temptation and hindrance that Christ had faced in the desert. It was the same fundamental mindset.

These examples indicate that our mindset is more than having thoughts. It is about the course of our thinking and ultimately the direction of our lives. Paul says that the direction of our mindset should track with the “things that are above.”

Your Heavenly Mindset

Notice how Paul refers to “the things that are above” instead of simply stating “the things that are *in heaven*,” even though heaven is what he clearly has in view. Neither does he say to set your mind on the future that awaits us, or on “eternal life,” or “the glory that is to be revealed to us”—phrases that Paul uses elsewhere (Rom. 2:7; 6:22; 8:18). What is Paul doing? It would appear that he intends something more than what you and I tend to think of when it comes to heaven. We probably think of heaven primarily, if not exclusively, as a future reality. But here Paul speaks of heaven as a present reality. Heaven is more than the life to come. It is the life we have now. For all who are raised with Christ and seated with him, the core reality of life is above. But what does this mean, practically?

British theologian Harry Blamires poses an interesting question. Is it possible, he asks, that the only difference between a Christian and a secularist is that the Christian believes there is a life to follow and the secularist does not? But when it comes to daily life, the Christian thinks of it and talks about it in exactly the same way as the secularist does—as only material and natural.² If you and I regard heaven as only a life in the future, and not one in the present, then our thinking has become untouched by the supernatural. If that is so, then Geerhardus Vos is correct: like Esau, we have sold our “heavenly birthright” for “a mess of earthly pottage.”³

To be sure, Scripture does encourage us to think of our future life in heaven and how that future glory should impact the way we live here and now (Rom. 8:17–18; Col. 1:4–5; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 Tim. 6:17–19; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:6–7). John Calvin in book three of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Richard Baxter in *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, and John Owen in *Spiritual-Mindedness* discuss meditating on the future life as an important aspect of being heavenly-minded. But that does not take in all of Paul’s emphasis here in Colossians (nor all of

what Calvin, Baxter, and Owen think). The heavenly mindset that Colossians 3 urges us to maintain is one that sees heaven as the life we have right now. Heaven is not just our life in the world to come. It is our life today in the world above.

This is true because of where Christ *is*, not just where he will be. Christ is seated at the right hand of God, and from his position of supremacy he rules and directs all things for the sake of his church, which he is building (Eph. 1:22). And yet, his kingdom “is not of this world” (John 18:36). In

If you and I regard heaven as only a life in the future, and not one in the present, then our thinking has become untouched by the supernatural.

other words, the church’s head, its center, its charter, its security are all derived from the right hand of majesty in the world above. Everything in your life should be seen from this vantage point. Your source of power, the measure of your priorities, the meaning of your life, the joy in your heart, the disposition of all that you think, desire, and will—all of these derive from where Christ is. Your life is more oriented by heaven than anything on earth. Heaven is more real than earth.⁴ It is not just your future rest; it is your present help.

Paul is not alone in regarding this mindset as the way to frame your life. John the Baptist understood that

everything he had, including his ministry, was given “from heaven.” Christ is the one “from above,” and his ministry must rise in superiority (John 3:31). In a similar vein, Christ asked the religious authorities, “The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” (Matt 21:25). Its power can be traced to its source.⁵ When the prodigal son repented of his sin, he saw his life from God’s perspective: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you” (Luke 15:18). His heavenly-mindedness put first things first. When the seventy disciples returned and told Christ that even demons submitted to them, Christ said he “saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Demons were cast out, just as Satan was previously cast out of heaven. They bowed before the power of heaven, which was exerting itself upon the kingdom of darkness. Moreover, Christ told them rather to “rejoice” that their names, which “are written in heaven,” cannot be removed, as Satan was (verse 20).

Hebrews 11 describes faith as that which apprehends the unseen realities of the world above: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).⁶ With regard to our forefathers and foremothers listed in Hebrews 11, faith indicates their heavenly mindset.⁷ This same mindset provided the flame that ignited the ministries of the Old Testament prophets, fueled by their visions of heaven. Isaiah was shown “the Lord sitting upon a throne” surrounded by the worshiping seraphim (Isa. 6:1–3). Ezekiel beheld the living creatures and wheels within wheels when “the heavens were opened,” and he “saw visions of God” (Ezek. 1:1–21). Daniel revealed God’s interpretation of the kings’ dreams and the handwriting on the wall (Dan. 2:36–45; 4:19–27; 5:17–28). Each of these prophets had a foot in the world unseen and a foot in the world seen.⁸ Their calling was to take what they saw and heard in the world above and proclaim it in the world below. They were to help God’s people see themselves as God saw them.

Your Daily Mindset

A heavenly mindset impacts the way we walk as Christians in our daily lives. We are opposed all around. Besides our own sin and the world, we have a living enemy, whose power and subtlety is unequaled among all creatures. His subordinates are considerable, whether of the unseen rulers and authorities or of the multitude of lying spirits in the mouths of false teachers. The Christian, armed with a heavenly mindset, understands that he or she is presently engaged in a great spiritual conflict. While Scripture comforts us with the final victory that Christ will win when he comes in glory, it also warns us of the spiritual dangers that confront us before he returns.

The Bible's most explicit passage regarding the nature of spiritual warfare, Ephesians 6:10–20, affirms this. We are exhorted to put on the armor of God in order to take our stand against the enemy. Why?

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (v. 12)

Do you see how Paul puts it? He wrote, “this *present* darkness.” The spiritual rulers and cosmic powers that oppose us are a *present* danger. We do not prepare for a battle in the distant future. We fight against the kingdom of darkness in this life. The entire universe is split right down the middle between two spiritual forces that are in conflict.⁹ This battle is always raging. These kingdoms are always striving. The casualties are always rising. Every day we contend for Christ—for his kingdom, his people, his name, and his glory against a present enemy. Every day we put on our armor of truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, and salvation and the sword of the Spirit; all of which we put on with prayer.

Prayer is both the *proof* and the *virality* of a heavenly mindset. Prayer proves that we truly see our life through

the eyes of faith. It is the spiritual habit of an alert believer, who sees as they should—and seeks the things above as they should. Prayer shows that you are awake. It is no accident that prayer is often placed side by side with the exhortation to “be alert,” “stay awake,” or “watch out” (Matt. 26:41; Luke 21:36; Eph. 6:18; see also 1 Pet. 4:7). Neglecting prayer suggests earthly-mindedness. Practicing prayer manifests heavenly-mindedness.

But prayer is also a means of grace by which God helps us to adopt a heavenly mindset and to see as God sees. Prayer is the lifeblood of faith, as it longs for the refreshment that comes from communing with God in his grace and truth. Our life is “hidden” in Christ (Col. 3:3), and in prayer we seize upon the things that are hidden above with him. Things hidden are unseen. Things hidden are secure. It is so in our union with Christ. That bond is sometimes veiled by sin, doubts, the voices of the world, suffering, or prayerlessness. But it is not hidden from the eyes of faith. Prayer lays hold—even if feebly—of the benefits of being united to an exalted Savior, who has all things at his disposal.

Having Died to Sin's Power, Including Its Mindset

It is in prayer that we act upon our faith and confront the temptation to retreat into a secular mindset with its unbelief. As we make known to God our anxious concerns, his peace guards our hearts and nurtures a mind that is set upon Christ. The Spirit testifies to our spirit that we have died to sin's reigning power over us, including its mindset. Our lives no longer find meaning nor direction from the earthly things we once loved and did. We have died to such things with Christ, and we have been raised with Christ to walk in forgiveness, acceptance, holiness, faith, and power. Prayer looks to that power for a life set on a trajectory toward our heavenly home. Prayer is not just a sweet respite from the busyness of the world. It also renews us and encourages

us to see as God sees. The most quietly whispered prayer takes its stand on the rock of Christ. All the spiritual forces of the present darkness oppose Christ, but they cannot withstand our exalted King, nor can they separate us from the love that binds us to him. Prayer brings these spiritual realities into focus.

Every Lord's Day, our worship of God through prayer, along with the rest of the means of grace, offers a preview of our heavenly home. The reading and preaching of God's Word lifts up our hearts to things above. The Lord's Supper offers a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb. But the singing of God's people in public worship (which John Calvin regarded as sung prayers) uniquely anticipates the corporate worship of angels and glorified men and women in the immediate presence of God. Those corporate prayers of song are received in heaven now, as a sweet fragrance before God's throne in honor of the one in whose name they are offered. The Lord's Day is not just a foretaste of heaven; it is a taste of the heavenly powers that prevail upon our hearts right now. We gather in God's presence by faith, and God gathers in our presence by his Spirit. He who is our eternal life is our existing life. We do not see him now. But we love him, believe in him, and rejoice in him. It is our mindset. We are learning to see ourselves as God sees us. □

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

Notes

1. Richard Sibbes, *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 1.87.
2. Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Servant Ministries, 1978), 69–70.
3. Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 119.
4. Paul S. Minear, *To Heal and to Reveal* (Crossroad, 1976), 48.
5. Minear, 37.
6. Vos, 104.
7. Vos, 108.
8. My friend Zach Keele suggested this train of thought to me.
9. Blamires, 86.

JOHN OWEN ON SPIRITUAL-MINDEDNESS



MICHAEL ALLEN // Religion—even Christian religion—can become fixated upon earthly hopes, personal and public, that we already desire on other grounds. Jesus and the gospel can easily become instruments or means to gaining what we otherwise want or value. There is the potential of drifting into something more

subtle than overt anti-religiosity, and that's to stumble toward a religious instrumentalism. How might Reformed churches be equipped and alerted to such drift? We are wise to consider ways in which even religion can be secularized; wiser still to attend to those pathways where Scripture instills in us means of maintaining spiritual attentiveness. In both regards, we do well to glean from the order and passion of the Puritan John Owen's classic account regarding "The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually-Minded" (in *Sin and Grace* [Banner of Truth Trust, 1965], 263–497).

In that text, Owen not only attested the significance of the spiritual but the very way in which the God who is Spirit had turned, in grace and of his freedom, to bless us with all that which he possesses in and of himself. Out of his fullness he has filled us (Eph. 1:23). Because he fills us, we are called to find our very being and our every blessing where he is, in the heavens (Rom. 8:6; Col. 3:1).

Owen observed "the present importunity of the world to impose itself on the minds of men, and the various ways of insinuation whereby it possesseth and

filleteth them" (263–264). Whereas Paul commended God's being as that from whom all are filled (Eph. 1:23; 3:19), Owen saw a climate whereby the world insinuates its capacity to fill or satisfy. In speaking of imposition and even importunity, Owen speaks to its pressure (especially subliminally). The claims of the world, however, do not sit well with our design, so the words of Paul remind us that only the spiritually-minded experience life and peace (Rom. 8:6). Owen begins by speaking to the necessity of this mindset: "To be spiritually minded is the great distinguishing character of true believers from all unregenerate persons." Indeed, "where any are spiritually minded, there, and there alone, is life and peace" (271). His text will trace out the nature of this celestial claim upon our minds and our very lives.

Three Duties of the Spiritually-Minded

What does it mean to be spiritually-minded? Owen answers:

Three things may be distinguished in the great duty of being spiritually minded . . .

- (1) the actual exercise of the mind, in its thoughts, meditations, and desires, about things spiritual and heavenly;
- (2) The inclination, disposition, and frame of the mind, in all its affections, whereby it adheres and cleaves unto spiritual things;
- (3) A complacency of mind, from that gust, relish, and savour, which it finds in spiritual things, from their suitability unto its constitution, inclinations, and desires. (270)

Owen views thoughts as manifesting and molding affections. "Ordinarily voluntary thoughts are the best measure and indication of the frame of our minds" (275, where he is drawing on Ps. 23). Thus, a first evidence of being spiritually-minded comes when one's inward promptings are unto heavenly realities, occurring not only when suggested by external forces but also by personal intuition. When one intuitively turns to heavenly matters, then one has internalized heavenly affections in a significant way. "The second evidence that our thoughts of spiritual things do proceed from an internal fountain of sanctified light and affections, or that they are acts

or fruits of our being spiritually minded, is, that they abound in us, that our minds are filled with them” (298). In order to gauge the intuitiveness and extent of spiritual-mindedness, he suggests that Psalm 119 may be used as a canon for self-examination (301). In so doing, the Puritan divine suggests that we look not only at our thoughts or meditations but also at our joyous delights so to assess their spiritual caliber. Affection, not mere thought, is the aim whereby life and peace are enjoyed in Christ.

To sum up thus far, “Spiritual affections, whereby the soul adheres unto spiritual things, taking in such a savour and relish of them as wherein it finds rest and satisfaction, is the peculiar spring and substance of our being spiritually minded” (395). We are not left to this duty alone, but God commits himself to our cause as Father and Redeemer. So Owen says: “I shall consider and propose some of those arguments and motives which God is pleased to make use of to call off our affections from the desirable things of this world” (397). Before spiritual-mindedness is duty, it is grace.

God’s Grace Inlaid

Six facets of divine beneficence receive exposition:

First, he hath, in all manner of instances, poured contempt on the things of this world, in comparison of things spiritual and heavenly. . . . Secondly, God hath added unto their vanity by shortening the lives of men, reducing their continuance in this world unto so short and uncertain a season as it is impossible they should take any solid satisfaction in what they enjoy here below. . . . Thirdly, God hath openly and fully declared the danger that is in these things, as unto their enjoyment and use. . . . Fourthly, things are so ordered in the holy, wise dispensation of God’s providence, that it requires much spiritual wisdom to distinguish between the use and the abuse of these things, between a lawful care about them and an inordinate cleaving unto them. . . . Fifthly, God makes

a hedge against the excess of the affections of men rational and, any way enlightened unto the things of this world, by suffering the generality of men to carry the use of them, and to be carried by the abuse of them, into actings so filthy, so abominable, so ridiculous, as reason itself cannot but abhor. . . . Lastly, to close this matter, and to show us what we are to expect in case we set our affections on things here below, and they have thereby a predominant interest in our hearts, God hath positively determined and declared that if it be so, he will have nothing to do with us. (397–410)

Expounding Paul’s teaching that sanctification is unto the “whole spirit and soul and body” (1 Thess. 5:23), Owen seeks to distinguish and thus highlight the breadth and variety of grace given to draw us from the darkness into God’s glorious light. Grace is the “principle,” so that God’s action serves as the ontological and ethical prompt. Various verbs are employed to speak of the gravity of this divine action: “changed, renewed, and inlaid.” And the character of the grace inlaid is confessed to be both “spiritual and supernatural,” noting that we are beyond the need for mere physical supplement or mental reorientation. We demand a truly transformative and renovating work—resurrection, mind you—of our very affections. A root canal is necessary rather than a mere crown placed atop the moral or spiritual status quo.

A Christological Inflection

This “spiritual and supernatural” prompt really does intrude so as to form “our affections,” so that we really do exist and act as human subjects. Owen calls his readers to consider God and all things in God. His account of God’s grace and our duty to be spiritually-minded should be read alongside his other text, “Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ, in His Person, Office, and Grace: With the Differences Between Faith and Sight; Applied Unto the Use of Them that Believe” (in *The Glory of Christ* [Banner of Truth Trust,

1955], 273–415). A Christological inflection flavors that treatise, although both texts point to meditation upon the glory of God in and of himself (“in his person”), in his works (“in his . . . office”), and of his benefits (“in his . . . Grace”). Indeed, the span of spiritual-mindedness flows epistemologically from its ontological character, for Owen elsewhere notes that our benefits are all enjoyed by way of beholding him:

For if our future blessedness shall consist in being where he is, and beholding of his glory, what better preparation can there be for it than in a constant previous contemplation of that glory in the revelation that is made in the Gospel, unto this very end, that by a view of it we may be gradually transformed into the same glory. (*The Glory of Christ*, 274)

Being spiritually-minded and viewing the glorious Christ is not to be myopic, then, but to view all things in a transfigured light. It is no narrow icon, but the discipline of having one’s whole imagination recast.

The story of modern theology has sadly been one of functionalizing doctrine, tailoring it to deliver some this-worldly benefit, whether that’s the cleansing of the conscience or a sense of a meaningfulness in the psyche—the revolutionary impulse or the institutional order of the body politic. While this activist impulse may seem most overt among liberals, it can take hold in seemingly traditional settings too. We too need to avoid being secularized. We also need to pursue spiritual-mindedness. And amid the tyranny of the urgent, the force of felt needs, and the glitz of the market, no one else is going to summon us to look upward. Hopefully John Owen’s wisdom, and his lead in listening well to that theme taught in Holy Scripture, helps prompt us afresh. □

Michael Allen is professor of systematic theology and academic dean at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, FL. This article excerpts from and expands upon his book, Grounded in Heaven (Eerdmans).

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME



CHARLES B. WILLIAMS // At the close of every Lord's Day, the minister is afforded the tremendous privilege of pronouncing the benediction of our triune God on his assembled people: "May the LORD bless you, and keep you . . ." What beneficence! What boon! What bounty! to become the recipients of the divine favor and

protection of the Maker and Redeemer of heaven and earth!

But then Monday comes, and once more we find ourselves engulfed in a seemingly endless wave of tragedies, both personal and corporate: an ailing father, a failed engagement, a divided congregation, a people in turmoil. Have the blessings failed? Has God forsaken his people?

Many of us recognize that divine favor is not materialistic, for the Scriptures never promise a life of influence, ease, or pleasure. At the same time, the sorrows we endure can so overwhelm us that we are left feeling confused and helpless. Bearing under the fury of a world that hates us from without, and the terrors of a conscience awakened to the depth of our own sin from within, such circumstances leave us utterly humiliated and exposed to our own inadequacy. And we ask: where is the blessing?

It is within this context that our Savior addresses his own, a people wounded and wearied under the weight of their estate of sin and misery. Matthew recounts to us those glad tidings Christ has brought as he pronounces

the inauguration of the long-awaited kingdom, the blessings conferred upon the recipients of that kingdom, and the mode in which such blessings come as we await its consummation.

A Conflict of Kingdoms

The opening chapters of Matthew's gospel narrate the irruption of the heavenly dawn into the earthly realm of sin and darkness. Against the backdrop of yet another mock Pharaoh comes one greater than Moses, the virgin-born Davidic Son, upon whose shoulders rest the government of an ever-increasing, unshakable kingdom (Isa. 9:6–7).

For sure, the nation had long awaited a deliverer, but their expectations were too small, too earthly. As Jesus travels from town to town, heralding the kingdom's arrival, the people expect a political Messiah who will expel the Roman legions from their midst, not the demonic hordes. They hold to delusions of grandeur—of earthly power and prosperity—not spiritual liberation. The citizens want a theonomic revolution and festal buffets, while the rulers want only parlor tricks and magic

shows. Yet Jesus's message of the kingdom, summarized in the Sermon on the Mount, proclaims, not simply a better kingdom, but a different *kind* of kingdom. As Daniel portended, and as Luther recognized at Heidelberg in April 1518, the difference between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of men was not a difference between dwarves and giants, but between light and dark. It was a difference not simply of size, but of kind. It was the difference between heaven and earth. And as this heavenly kingdom has irrupted into the earthly plane, it operates according to a different set of principles. The Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1–12) describe what life as a citizen of heaven looks like here on earth, as that light shatters and scatters the darkness. These blessings take on a particular form, upending Israel's, and our, expectations.

The Blessings of the Heavenly Kingdom

When we consider the Beatitudes, we must first recognize what they are *not*. They are not natural dispositions. The great nineteenth century novelists—

Hugo, Dickens, and Tolstoy—wrote of the poor, almost as if poverty itself was an unqualified virtue. Today, others do the same, but with respect to particular personality traits. Our Savior, however, does neither. He does not pronounce favor on a particular economic class; nor is he declaring that God's grace is restricted solely to the morbid, the introvert, or the blissfully naive. Rather, the blessings of the kingdom befall those who have been subjugated by grace and reconciled through the mediation of the Son.

Likewise, the Beatitudes are not commands: they are blessings. That is, in fact, what *beatitude* means: blessedness, happiness, or joy. Yet how many of us treat the Beatitudes as if they were some sort of meritorious prerequisite to obtaining the blessing? To read Christ's blessings as imperatives is to divest the Beatitudes of their power: they render the blessings contingent upon one's own moral striving rather than God's gratuitous favor. Note that the only commands found in the Beatitudes are not given until the very end, and they are this: "rejoice and be glad" (v. 12). In other words, the blessings Christ pronounces are glad tidings given to lift burdens, not to impose new hardships.

But if these are neither natural dispositions nor moral imperatives, what are they? They are what Christ calls them—blessings, freely bestowed on a particular people, the citizens of heaven. We see this in the "bookends" of the Beatitudes. In these verses, Christ pronounces a series of benedictions. But note the promise attending the first (v. 3) and last (v. 10) of these blessings: ". . . for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." As these blessings bookend the whole of the Beatitudes, so should we see the totality of these blessings as the gift of the heavenly kingdom.

Furthermore, we ought to recognize that it is an unbroken blessing. In other words, the blessings are not restricted simply to the "latter half" of each beatitude. The whole matter is a blessing. Our Savior does not say, "Blessed *shall be*," but "Blessed *are* the

poor in spirit." He does not simply say, "theirs *will be*," but "theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven." Yet how can we say that poverty of spirit, mourning, humiliation, spiritual hunger, or persecution are blessings? To have our lives derailed in the affairs of providence, to feel our own spiritual inadequacy, to suffer burnout, sickness, and grief—none of these *feel* like a blessing. From an earthly vantage point, they are the exact opposite of divine blessedness. Why, then, does our Savior pronounce such a blessing upon his own?

In these blessings, we find the description of the citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20–21), and with it, a heavenly pattern, for it marks the man who recognizes that this world cannot truly satisfy and reminds us that true blessedness is not found in the fading pleasures of all that this fading world offers. And it is here that we see the greatest blessing of all: that this pattern makes us ready for heaven, by molding us into the image of the King of this heavenly kingdom.

The King of This Kingdom

Without fail, each of the eight blessings follow the same pattern. The first half of each describes the citizen of heaven in this life on earth. And although each blessing is marked by humiliation, despite the fact that they are all attended by suffering, each blessing finds its resolution in a state of exaltation and glory. Such is the pattern of the heavenly blessing: it is a cruciform pattern, a pattern of *suffering unto glory*. Poverty gives way to heavenly reward; the hungry are satisfied; the merciful receive mercy; the humiliated inherit, not only heaven, but earth as well.

The blessings our Savior pronounces upon the citizens of his kingdom contain the promise that he has come to redeem us; and in redeeming us, he has come to make us look more like himself. The great blessing of the kingdom consists in this: that as Christ has ascended on high, he has poured out upon his church his Holy Spirit, who forges us through the crucible of affliction to make us look like the dearly beloved of

the Father. Just as the King of heaven had nowhere to lay his head; just as he was dependent upon the Spirit to provide him with his daily needs; just as he mourned the sin of the nation and man's present plight; just as he wept over the grave of his own friends; even as he was ever merciful, and ever pure in heart; even as he came to make peace, yet was slandered, persecuted, and slain, so, too, are the citizens of heaven molded into the same pattern, with the mark of the King branded on our very souls. Jesus pronounces you blessed, because he is at work to wean you off of this world and shape you for the world to come.

Preparing for Heaven

Perhaps we fail to grasp the nature of these blessings because we, like Israel in Christ's day, are too earthly-minded. What we need is a reinvigorated, thoroughgoing heavenly-mindedness, to remind us that we are but pilgrims and strangers passing through this earthly wilderness. How can a life bookended by poverty and persecution ever be counted blessed? It is because the blessings take the shape of a cross. It seems so foolish to the outside world. But such are the blessings of the topsy-turvy kingdom: that in being conformed to Jesus's death in this life, we might be made ready for the resurrection unto life in the world to come. We may at present be under a cross, but we are not under a curse; nor does that cross mark the end. For there will come a day when the suffering will give way to glory, on the Day when the Kingdom is consummated, and the cross is exchanged for a crown.

In the interim, we continue to count ourselves blessed, for Christ calls us blessed; that though afflicted in every way, we are not crushed; though perplexed, we are not driven to despair; though persecuted, we are not forsaken; though struck down, we are not destroyed: for we bear in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Christ may also be manifested in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:7–10). □

The author is an OP minister.

SEEDS OF HOPE IN UKRAINE



JAMIE DEAN // When an Armenian living in Ukraine decided to practice his English on a couple of Americans he heard speaking on a street corner years ago, he had no idea the encounter would change the course of his life. He discovered his conversational English was awkward, but the Americans invited him to keep practicing in a

class that used the Bible as a textbook. The Americans were missionaries, and the Lord used the class to draw George to saving faith in Christ.

George recently recalled those early days of faith from the upstairs room of a house in the southern port city of Odessa, where he serves his congregation as a pastor in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine (EPCU).

The denomination of twelve churches is the fruit of decades of missionary and Ukrainian efforts that often began with simple, evangelistic conversations with men like George in the years after the fall of the Soviet Union.

OPC missionary Heero Hacquebord arrived in Ukraine nearly three decades ago, and he still serves alongside several of the original members of the MTW team in the country. (MTW is the missionary agency of the Presbyterian Church in America.) The team evangelized, disciplined, worked to plant churches, and helped lay the groundwork for a seminary and the EPCU, a denomination now led almost entirely by Ukrainian pastors.

In March, a small contingent from

the OPC visited the work in Ukraine, a year after Russia's invasion of the Eastern European nation sparked the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II and upended life for millions in the country.

We saw firsthand how EPCU churches have distributed diaconal relief through the Crates for Ukraine project that many OPC congregations have contributed to over the last year. And we heard about Hacquebord's bigger hopes for the effort: He's praying the simple crates might become seeds for planting churches, as they build contacts across the country for the denomination.

The denomination that began with the seeds of street evangelism and outreach classes is now full of first-generation Christians and pastors like George. As those believers raise a new generation of covenant children, they also continue to reach out to others still hungry for the good news of Christ in a sinful and weary world.

The Kindness of God

George doesn't have to go far to reach the weary. On the first floor of his

home in Odessa, a sitting room is filled with supplies of medicine and hygiene products the pastor helps distribute through the church. On the morning we visited, George had just returned from a short trip to nearby hot zones, where he had been translating for a Christian paramedic training churches on how to administer first aid.

Upstairs, George's wife sat with two women as they recounted their plight as refugees of war. One of the women fled to Odessa last year when Russian strikes hit her hometown and occupation seemed likely. She longs to return but doesn't know if it will be possible.

The other woman fled her home during a Russian incursion in eastern Ukraine nearly ten years ago. After weeks of sheltering, she escaped on a train, without knowing where the train was headed. She found herself in Odessa, and she's stayed ever since, including during the threats to the city over the last year.

The young woman teared up when she recounted her mother's death, her father's abandonment, her war experience, and her struggles as a single mother.

She doesn't have a church home, but George's wife has been reaching out to her and other single moms in the area. "I can't go back home," she said. "But I have found some kind people here."

For both George and his wife, the kindness of missionaries and church members led to their own introduction to the gospel in the years after the fall of the Soviet Union, and it still informs their approach to ministry in the church George pastors.

These days, pastoring in war zones requires a mixture of the regular duties of preaching, teaching, and counseling, while also tackling unexpected tasks like making sure elderly congregants have clean drinking water and the medicines they need when supplies run scarce.

It's a routine that's become familiar to another pastor from a town nearby.

Grace Under Fire

Andre is a Ukrainian pastor from Mykolaiv, a city a couple of hours east of Odessa. The city suffered heavy bombardment at the outbreak of the war, and Russian missile strikes destroyed major pipelines for drinking water. At one point, the town's mayor urged everyone who wanted to survive to leave. Pastor Andre stayed.

He recounted the early days of the war during our visit to Pastor George's church in Odessa, where he also picked up medical supplies to take back to a city still struggling under the weight of war-time conditions.

When Mykolaiv came under attack, Andre and his brother raced to evacuate his wife, children, and other members of the church seeking to escape. But not everyone fled. Some were determined not to leave their homes. Others felt like they couldn't: Many elderly Ukrainians remained in their villages and towns, unable to imagine piecing together lives as refugees somewhere else.

While Ukrainian laws prohibit most men ages eighteen to sixty from leaving the country during this war, Andre fell under an exception: he and his wife have four children. Any Ukrainian man with three or more children is al-

lowed to travel abroad. Still, Andre stayed. He gives a simple reason: "I am a pastor."

These days, he and his brother still make the rounds in a large passenger van, checking on church members and making trips to villages where little relief has arrived from the outside.

The pastor talks about the Lord with those he visits and says he encourages them with the ministry of the church: "I specifically tell the people that the church from all over the world is helping you right now."

Thirty years ago, he couldn't have imagined a life as a pastor. After the Soviet Union's collapse, Andre searched for something to believe. He read portions of the New Testament, and he tried in vain to keep the Ten Commandments on his own.

When he met members of the MTW team through an English club, he began learning about a concept he didn't understand: Grace. Andre said the elders in the Presbyterian church he attended pressed him with the truth of repentance and faith in Christ. Over time he realized the good news of the gospel. "It's a gift," he said. "It's a gift."

Andre holds out that gift to others through his ministry to his own congregation now, preaching on Sundays to those who remain, and holding online prayer meetings with members taking refuge in other cities or countries.

He grows quiet for a few moments when he considers what the Lord has taught him over the last year. "In times like these, you realize what's important," he says. "It's not your house. It's not your money. It's not your documents. . . . It's the people God has called you to. It's your family and it's your church."

Pastor George nods in agreement and says he's also been freshly reminded of the urgency of sharing the gospel, whatever the circumstances. "It's so important to bring the gospel and to do



Pastor George, far right, with members of the OP team

what Jesus said . . . to make disciples and build God's kingdom," he says. "You never know what's going to happen tomorrow."

After a prayer and a warm farewell, Pastor Andre and his brother head downstairs and climb back into their van to reach Mykolaiv before dark.

Light in the Darkness

First-generation Christians aren't a thing of the distant past. In L'viv, the western Ukrainian city where OP missionary Heero Hacquebord pastors Holy Trinity Reformed Church (another EPCU congregation), a young man named Ruslan is the point man for the Crates for Ukraine project.

He grew up in a Greek Catholic church, but he met an MTW missionary through campus ministry and started attending the L'viv church a couple of years ago. "It changed my life," he says.

Ruslan now aspires to ministry himself and said he's deeply encouraged by how many gospel conversations he's had with people on the receiving end of the Crates for Ukraine. They keep calling him back, and he joins Hacquebord in hoping these new contacts might lead to more conversions—and more churches across Ukraine.

"It's incredible to see how God uses such an evil thing as war to build his church, to prepare soil for his seeds," Ruslan said. "And it's not the end yet—He'll work more." □

The author is communications coordinator for the OPC.

A NEW CHURCH IN YORKTOWN, VA

// MATTHEW P. WALKER



All five branches of the military—and a new OP plant—can be found on the Virginia Peninsula

There's a dull roar coming from just beyond the trees. The sound is getting louder. The windows are rattling, and we can't hear each other talk. And there they are—two fighter jets sweep by, banking left, dull gray against the blue sky. Welcome to Yorktown.

Those fighter jets are almost daily reminders of what struck me most when we moved to the Peninsula, the southeastern corner of Virginia: the large military presence in this area. All five branches of the military are here. It's hard to miss the warships anchored in the distance, but there are human reminders as well. If you took a walk down our street, for instance, you'd see license plates from around the country.

Our own congregation is no exception. We're small right now, with attendance in the high twenties or low thirties most Sundays. But if you came on the right day, you could meet current or former Coast Guard, Air Force, Army, and Navy service members, all in one visit!

But our area of Virginia is much more than military bases. It has a distinct beauty. Dense greenery alternates with wide open views across the water. This area also has a rich history, from Jamestown to Williamsburg to Yorktown to Civil War battlefields, and it has an ethnically and culturally di-

verse population. But most importantly, for our congregation and now for us, the Peninsula is home. This is where God has planted us, Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church, to worship him and to witness to the world around us.

A New Church Near "God's Lane"

If you came to visit the Peninsula, you'd see churches, lots of churches! One road in the area was nicknamed "God's Lane" because of the number of churches along it. If there are so many churches, why us? Why Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church? We thank God for the good churches that he has planted here on the Peninsula. But there is a need for more churches, especially consistently Reformed ones. In our area alone, there are over half a million people, and just three PCA churches. And over half of the population doesn't affiliate with an evangelical or mainline church.

The need for an Orthodox Presbyterian church on the Peninsula was recognized years ago by a number of ministers in Virginia. These men began consistently praying for God to open a door, and they were later joined in prayer by the recently planted Reformation Presbyterian Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia. God answered these prayers, and Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church began meeting for worship in early 2019 under the oversight of Reformation Presbyterian Church.

Challenges and Blessings

Like many mission works, Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church has had its challenges. We've met in a school, a hotel, various churches, and now a dance studio. We've had people come and go—many because they moved away from the area.

But in the midst of challenges, God has consistently blessed this work. God



Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church

has given the seed group great unity, and we've had the blessing of the wisdom of the ministers and elders on the commission overseeing the work.

What I've heard many times, though, is that the greatest blessing has been the love and support of the OPC. The love of the denomination and the presbytery for our little church plant has been a blessing and a witness. Faithful ministers every week, financial support, and constant prayers for us have encouraged the congregation and shown the blessings of being a part of the OPC.

The greatest challenge in the life of the congregation was finding a pastor, and for this they earnestly fasted and prayed. Their mother church, Reformation Presbyterian Church, called me in 2022 to be the organizing pastor of Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church. Both my wife, Hyojung, and I have been involved in home and foreign missions before, and the opportunity to serve in a church plant was both challenging and appealing. I finished my internship at Westminster OPC in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, and was ordained and installed in November 2022, four years to the day after the first Bible study was held here.

A Sunday Morning Visit

If you worshiped with us this Sunday, you might immediately notice the building—tutus for sale in the entrance, gymnastics equipment in the corner, and mirrors along the walls. But you'd also quickly discover the joys of our congregation. We have young families, older couples, and singles of all ages. God has greatly blessed us with a healthy mix of people. If you stayed for fellowship after the service, you'd also quickly discover that we're a friendly congregation from a variety of backgrounds. But I hope that what would stand out most from your visit would be that we are a church that is committed to God's Word, God's worship, and God's people. We want to worship God together in his way, and we want to learn and apply God's Word in our own lives and in the life of the church.

What's our church like? Well, the answer to that question also takes more time to figure out. As I've gotten to know the congregation better, what has stood out to me is our members' serious, mature faith in action. There is a desire for shepherding and mutual accountability, there is an understanding of God's truth deepened by experience, and there is a joy to be together worshipping God.

The beginning of my ministry here has been focused on laying a strong foundation for our continued work together.

Home Missions Today

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by subscribing at CHMCE.org or scanning this QR code.



A recent fellowship dinner

Preaching through Colossians, teaching an adult Sunday school class on our identity and distinctives as a church, and pastoral visits have all been a part. The congregation is helping to build this foundation in many ways, too, including starting a children's Sunday school, planning and participating in more fellowship opportunities, and making prayer for each other, the wider church, and our community more central to our life together.

A New Phase

Even as we work to strengthen this foundation, it feels like we are transitioning into a new phase together. We anticipate adding an evening service in the fall, and we are exploring other ministry opportunities like Bible studies, prayer meetings, and additional fellowship events. But an increasing focus in the life of the church is outreach and evangelism. God has been reminding us of how many people around us need Jesus Christ, need God's Word in its fullness, and need his church. And he's been giving us opportunities to invite others and share the gospel. Pray for a genuine love for God and for the lost that causes us to speak boldly, for opportunities to invite others to grow in their faith with us, and for God to bring conversions and to continue to sustain and grow his church here in Yorktown.

We are thankful for the many ways you have already partnered with us, even at a distance, and we look forward to God's work here in and through Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church.

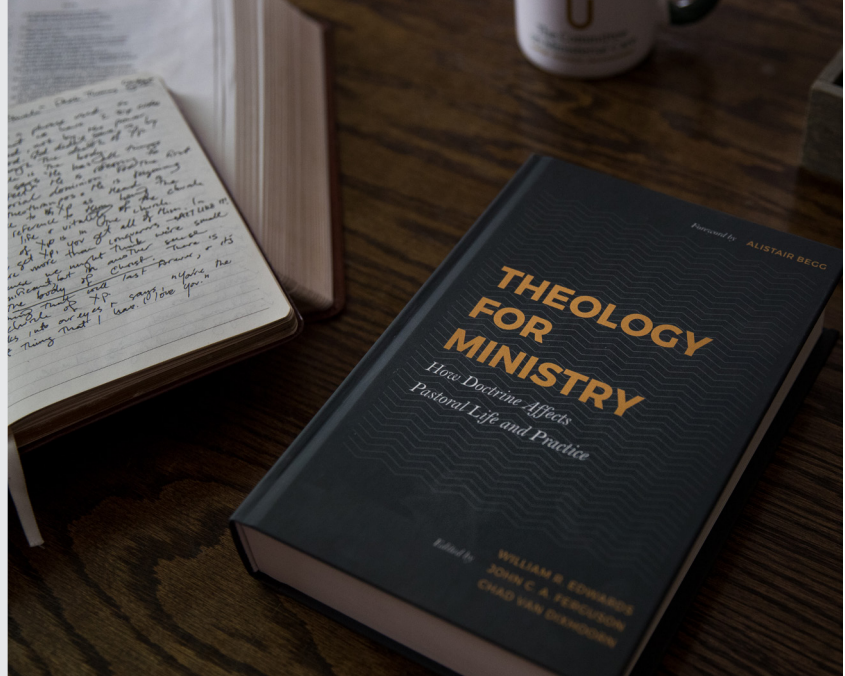
The author is church planter of Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church in Yorktown, Virginia.



Hyojung and Matthew Walker

REVIEW: FEASTING ON *THEOLOGY FOR MINISTRY*

// DANIEL P. CLIFFORD



At a well-provisioned church dinner, members happily load up their plates as they move through the line. Reading *Theology for Ministry* provides a similar experience for theology lovers. Those who journey through this book will enjoy exploring a rich array of doctrinal themes.

This volume contains a collection of articles in honor of Sinclair Ferguson, a well-loved Presbyterian pastor, theologian, author, and seminary professor. In keeping with Ferguson’s legacy as a minister-theologian, the themes of the pieces roughly track with the chapter headings of the Westminster Confession, with each article also drawing out implications for pastoral ministry. This Festschrift therefore functions as a compendium of Reformed theology and, to a lesser degree, a commentary on the Confession and a pastoral handbook.

The twenty-five contributors to this volume share Ferguson’s commitment to Reformed theology and ordained ministry, which is not surprising since many of them were his colleagues or students. This common frame of reference gives the work a high degree of conceptual coherence, while the diverse personalities and interests of the authors bring a pleasing variety of approach.

Noteworthy Contributions

Most of the articles address a doctrinal topic *generally*, seeking to explain its overall meaning while also drawing out its significance. The volume contains many examples of writers who took this general approach with precision, insight, and practical usefulness. The constraints of this review only allow a few to be mentioned, however. Ligon Duncan’s article, “Adoption” (chapter 13), is a devotional delight that sets

forth with warmth and clarity the privileges of being received into God’s family. William Edwards’s article, “Sanctification” (chapter 14), helpfully explores the mysterious nature of the Christian’s quest for holiness. Edwards argues that believers can only make progress through participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, as opposed to self-generated victories in which crude sins get replaced with more refined forms of self-centeredness—an insight worth pondering. Joel Beeke’s article, “Assurance of Faith” (chapter 17), sheds light on the delicate topic of assurance by contrasting it with a presumptuous “easy believism” on the one hand and a clenched “hard believism” on the other. Beeke also distinguishes between the



Sinclair Ferguson

grounds for salvation and the grounds of assurance, which he also helpfully unpacks. Numerous other articles explain their respective topics in an engaging way that connects theology to the life of the church. If space allowed, we could note appreciatively the contributions of Venema, Wolfe, and many others.

Some of the contributors chose to investigate a narrower aspect of their topic rather than treating it generally. Notable examples include Lane Tipton’s article, “The Person of Christ” (chapter 8), which explores how Christ’s divine immutability grounds the telos of his redemptive work, the uniting of heaven and earth. Tipton explains how Christ undertakes his

redemptive role as the second Adam; he concludes by arguing that true heavenly-mindedness means anticipating joining with Christ in the heavenly glory he has inherited through his exaltation. This provides a helpful specificity to the duty of seeking “the things that are above, where Christ is” (Col. 3:1). Philip Ross makes a thought-provoking contribution to his topic, “The Law of God” (chapter 18). Ross asserts that the Westminster Confession presents the moral law as fixed rather than further evolving in the New Testament. Ross also argues

that only a stable conception of the moral law can preserve coherence in law as well as theology generally (e.g., by providing a fixed significance for the atonement). Ross then uses this principle to explore case studies regarding whether head coverings and tithing are normative for New Testament believers. Ross's article will probably affect the thinking of many readers. Michael Horton's article, "Eschatology" (chapter 25), explores how man's purpose is to be rightly related to God and to the creation, per God's original, covenantal design. Horton argues that reconciliation through Christ involves ethical restoration in which people's embodied relationship to God and neighbor are restored in keeping with God's original aim. Horton draws the conclusion that in our identity-confused age, ministers should teach the true nature of human identity as established at creation and fully restored by Christ in the new creation. Readers eager to engage with more technical or complex thought will enjoy these specialized articles.

In the final chapter of the book, Chad Van Dixhoorn presents a brief biography of Ferguson's life from childhood to the present, outlining his conversion, education, and ministry. This chapter provides an encouraging record of how Ferguson was providentially prepared for a ministry that impacted many others.

A Valuable Resource

This book will provide a resource for pastors, giving them new ways to express theological truth in their preaching and teaching. Pastors may choose to work through this volume in a devotional mode to refresh their doctrinal knowledge and ministerial values. Those training for the pastoral ministry will find it useful to solidify and expand their knowledge. Church members who wish to learn more about theology will find a resource in this book. Church librarians should consider adding it to their collection, since it is a reference that will remain useful for many years to come.

Those who read this volume will notice the contributors' respect and affection for Ferguson. Certainly this stems not just from his intellectual talent but his willingness to invest in so many others. As a student sitting under Dr. Ferguson, I remember how, when he finished answering a question in class, he would continue to look at his questioner, gauging the level of comprehension while also allowing a chance for a follow-up. It was clear that he cared about those in his classes. Ferguson's willingness to build into the lives of others—students, congregants, colleagues, and readers of his books—has left a residue of benefit and appreciation that is reflected in *Theology for Ministry*.

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

Theology for Ministry: How Doctrine Affects Pastoral Life and Practice, edited by William R. Edwards, John C. A. Ferguson, and Chad B. Van Dixhoorn. P&R, 2022. Hardcover, 680 pages, \$25.99.

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

INSTITUTES OF ELENCTIC THEOLOGY (1679–1685)

BY FRANCIS TURRETIN

One of my favorite theological books is Francis Turretin's (1623–1687) *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Turretin's family immigrated from Italy to Geneva in 1592. He was educated at the academy in Geneva and other institutions. Upon the completion of his studies, he served as pastor of two different congregations and as professor of theology in Geneva until his death. Turretin's *Institutes* are the fruits of his labors as a theology professor.

Turretin's *Institutes* are the theological work of both a pastor and professor. In our own day, many take a pragmatic approach to ministry and think less theological training is better. Yet deep, strong currents of rich theological knowledge flow through Turretin's *Institutes* and show us that he was a highly knowledgeable pastor. The doctrines he taught in the classroom were the same ones he preached from the pulpit, though readers should not think that his *Institutes* are a reflection of the style of his preaching. His sermons read like sermons. Turretin's *Institutes* are *elenctic*—they are written to *refute* the chief critics of the Reformed faith. Turretin employs an academic method in his work that states a clear question with a response, explains the state of the history of the question, explores scriptural and theological authorities, and then provides an exegetically informed theological response to the question.

Reader beware: Turretin's writing style is dense, but it is incredibly rich and rewarding. I encourage people to consume Turretin in small bites. In our day and age, Turretin's long arguments may feel like climbing a verbal Mount Everest. But reading him is well worth the effort and time. In fact, if I could only choose one *Institutes* to take to a desert island, I would choose Turretin over Calvin!

—J. V. Fesko

Out of the Mouth . . .

My two-year-old was sitting on my lap during worship, observing the Lord's Supper. The minister lifted the white cloth from the elements and opened the silver lid of the wine tray. With wide eyes and a gasp of awe, my toddler whispered, "Coffee."

—Hyojung Walker
Yorktown, VA

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

WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR IDENTITY?

// TINA M. DEJONG



The author (front left) with her students

Where do you find stability and peace in a world that is constantly changing? This is one of the questions I often ponder as I work with missionary kids and live internationally. Being surrounded by a core group of Christians can make it easy to quickly answer, “in Christ alone.” But to mentally and emotionally walk through daily life trusting that Christ is indeed the all-sovereign, all-powerful Lord reigning over every detail of life is difficult.

Stability in Christ in Daily Life

Life is constantly in motion, changing. In the last few weeks of an academic year, we work to balance listening to students’ excited stories, giving hugs when they are emotionally overwhelmed, stopping stories to be able to complete homework, adjusting vacation times, rearranging study locations, checking to make sure proper records are kept for entrance into a new school next fall, and remembering that even though academics are important, it is essential to keep Christ at the center.

There is also the need to help a teen learn about the structure of an atom and how to graph parabolas—all while her parents are selling their possessions in anticipation of mov-

ing—only to, while we’re working, change our study location due to unexpected power issues. In the next moment, we are helping a young boy trying to find answers to his questions when the adults in his life are busy and he does not speak the language of most people around him. While all of this change and flux transpires, these children’s parents are trying to nurture their kids in the Lord, answer numerous requests from people in need, work to get a home set up in another country, dispense with things they no longer need in this country, and spend quality time with friends to say “good-bye.”

Then, news comes of two sudden deaths, and amidst the shock we rearrange schedules for back-to-back funerals.

In all these changing situations the only place we can find stability and peace is in Christ alone. The only place we find comfort that surpasses all understanding when friends leave is in Christ alone. The only one who is stable when everything seems to be changing is Christ alone.

Trusting in Christ in Relationships

For those living in international communities, it is common to have people regularly enter and exit our lives. Having grown up in a small rural area, I had come to expect that when someone said “good-bye,” they meant, “after a time, I’ll see you again.” However, living internationally, frequently means saying good-bye to dear friends, with the knowledge that you may never see them again on this earth. There is a sense of emptiness and sadness that comes with separation from those we love. We must adjust daily living routines. It’s emotionally exhausting.

Then there is a nervous anticipation to see who the Lord will bring into your life next. Trying to build relationships is difficult while the question, “how long will you be in my life?” lingers in the back of one’s mind. How much time and energy can I really put into this relationship, when



Playing games outside for P.E.

I might be hurt by separation in the near future? Does this person really care when they only plan to be here for a short time? Maybe, since I might not have much time with them, I should spend as much time with them as possible to learn, absorb, and enjoy what I can. These are all questions that adults living in volatile situations struggle with daily, and ones that many missionary kids face at a young age. It can become easy to try and hide, attempting to protect one's own emotional and mental stability—to grow numb and withdrawn from others' company.

Similarly, for my local Ugandan friends who have watched many foreigners leave and never return, there is even less incentive to try and build close relationships with new foreigners, as this has never been a permanent home for any of the ones who came before.

Yet we were created for community and to fully thrive as children of God. Whether a missionary or missionary kid (or not), we need the whole body of the church. That vulnerability, however, must start with having our identity rooted in who God is and, with that understanding, to then see whom he created us to be: part of a body that loves and serves the whole.

Being Comforted in Christ Despite Loss of Earthly Comforts

For foreigners, relationships with local Ugandans are sometimes challenging because they are looking for money—they will do or say what gets them the most shillings in their pockets rather than speaking from the heart out of a desire for a relationship. This has reminded me of how often I go to the Lord asking for the things I want instead of seeking him for who he is.

I also see the identity struggle play out in various ways as a teacher. During P.E., for example, a child may be laughing and running as she plays a game with friends. As the game goes on, however, she gets tired, accidentally trips and falls, and cries out in angry frustration, "He pushed me!" This is a teaching moment to show how often, in our drive to be the great-



Tina with her language teacher, Loupe, and three of Loupe's children, (left to right) Loduk, Sagi, and Lomuria

est, it can feel as though others wronged us, when really we were the ones not fully aware of our surroundings or personal weaknesses. We become angry, frustrated, and disappointed, because we did not get what we wanted. The pain is real, but relief does not come from getting what we want or being the greatest. Rather, it comes from relinquishing all for the sake of Christ. When I know my identity comes from the all-wise, perfect Creator, comforts of this world take a back seat to quality time with him. I can thrive in the fact that he is all I will ever need.

In Christ Alone

I love working with missionary kids and living internationally! Not because it is easy, nor because it is always fun, but because the Lord uses it all to keep the question "where do you find your identity?" at the forefront of daily life. Amid all the change, the Lord often uses his church members to lovingly point out biblical promises of perfect peace in Christ alone. As we go to the Scriptures, we come to know and trust that God is our all-wise, all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, just, compassionate, faithful, sovereign King, who gives us a humble confidence to be able to walk with him through this life he called us to.

The author is a tentmaking missionary in Uganda.



A game night in Mbale with ladies connected to the mission

👥 What's New

// Comings/Goings

The Rev. and Mrs. H. James (Esther) Folkerts (Faith URC, Telkwa, BC, Canada) completed their missionary service with the OPC Uganda Mission in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda, and returned to Canada along with their children Natalie, Joel, Corianna, Benjamin, Elyse, Jenna, and Henry, at the end of May 2023.

IN THE BUSINESS OF MAKING DISCIPLES

// ROBERT S. ARENDALE

God's great aim in the hearts and lives of his people is that they would reflect the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28–29). The divine project is one of shaping and refining the people of God more into the image of God. In other words, God is in the business of making disciples. How does such disciple making happen? First and foremost, God calls sinners and sovereignly regenerates hearts—he powerfully raises those dead in sin to life in Christ. His sheep hear his voice, and they follow him. They are united to him by faith (John 15:1–5). Moreover, the Bible also teaches that God uses means to accomplish his great purposes. That is, Christian growth and the Christian life does not happen in a vacuum. In Colossians 1:24–29, we are given a clear blueprint for discipleship and insight into the means the Lord uses to do his great shaping and molding work. There are three things to note.

In the Church

First, where does discipleship happen? It happens in the church. The context for the Apostle Paul's words in verses 24–29 is the local church. Not only is the letter itself written to the local church (1:2), but also Paul refers to his sufferings “for the sake of [Christ's] body, that is, the church” (v. 24). Colossians 1:24–29 could be seen as a personal reflection or commentary on the Great Commission. The “making disciples” of Matthew 28:19–20 happens by means of the “going” and the “baptizing” and the “teaching” of the church. One cannot and will not grow as a disciple outside of and apart from the body of Christ, the church.

Through His Word

Second, how does the Lord grow his disciples? Through his Word (see Matt. 28:20; again, disciples are made through “teaching” all that Christ commanded).

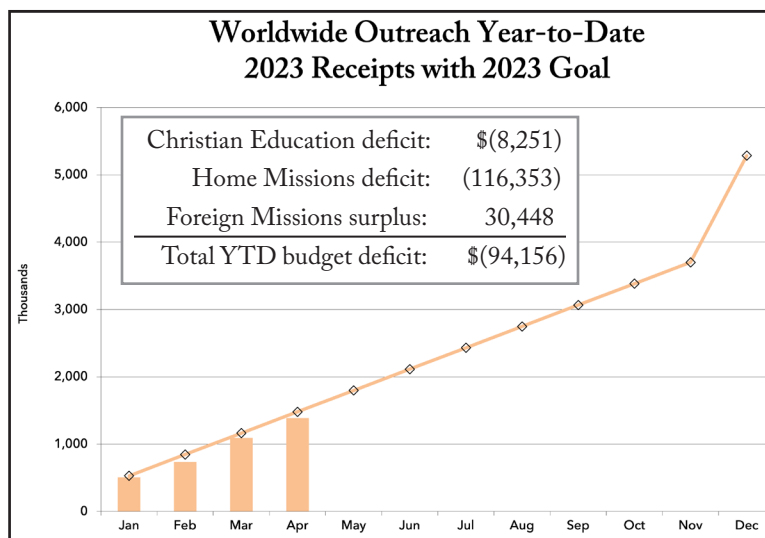
Paul was called as a minister to “make the word of God fully known” (Col. 1:25). And in a gloriously clear and simple exclamation, Paul states, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom” (v. 28). The Word is effectual because it is not just any word; it is the Word of and about Christ. In the written word, we meet and are confronted with the living Word. Yes, the Word of God in general is powerful and effective, but God uses the preaching of his Word in a special way to accomplish his ends. Thus, Paul references the “proclamation” of Christ (also see 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13). And picking up from the previous point, one will not grow as a disciple outside of the church, because it is *in* the church where one submits to and is confronted by the proclamation of the life-giving Word of God!

With the Goal of Maturity

Third, what is the goal of ministry and discipleship in the church? Christian maturity. Paul writes, “Him we proclaim . . . that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). The Lord does not leave us where we are. He is at work, using the chisel of his Word, cutting away all that does not reflect the image of his Son (Acts 20:32; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). We are works in progress. But there is progress indeed by God's grace! Children mature, and so also must “babes in Christ” mature. But such babes—indeed all believers—only mature as we are nourished in the church on the Word.

Brothers and sisters, may we long to be nourished on the Word of God! May we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! And may we pray for and support the gospel ministry through the Orthodox Presbyterian Church!

The author is pastor of Redeemer OPC in Dayton, Ohio.



JUNE



The Verdicks (day 10)



The O'Briens (day 13)

1 **STEPHEN & CATALINA PAYSON**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for interested attendees for a new Bible study. / **CARL & STACEY MILLER**, New Braunfels, TX. Pray God strengthens and encourages the young people of Heritage.

2 Pray for **MIKE (ELIZABETH) DIERCKS**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Yearlong intern **CHRISTIAN (HANNA) REPP** at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, CA.

3 **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for an increase in elders for Salvos Por Gracia. / Summer intern **CLIFTON (BREANA) FOSTER** at Community Presbyterian in Kalamazoo, MI.

4 **MATT & HYOJUNG WALKER**, Yorktown, VA. Pray the saints would be edified by Peninsula Reformed. / **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti. Pray for La Gonave church when supply chains are disrupted.

5 **ETHAN & CATHERINE BOLYARD**, Wilmington, NC. Pray for Heritage OPC's Christian education classes. / Summer intern **CHRISTIAN (MEGAN) RYAN** at Resurrection OPC in Oshkosh, WI.

6 Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Give thanks for the saints joyfully serving through ongoing hardships. / Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**.

7 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **DOUGLAS CLAWSON** as he reports to General Assembly. / Yearlong interns **RICHY (NEVA) BRASHER** at Escondido OPC in Escondido, CA, and **JACOB (LINDSAY) CASH** at Redeemer in Beaver Creek, OH.

8 **JAY & ANDREA BENNETT**, Neon, KY. Pray for prospective members of Neon Reformed. / Pray for the work of stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** during General Assembly in Palos Heights, IL, and for all commissioners in their deliberations.

9 **MR. AND MRS. F., ASIA**. Pray for their fruitful witness to students and fellow co-workers as they finish the semester. / **OPC COMMITTEE ON CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL**.

10 **DAVE (ELIZABETH) HOLMLUND**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / Associate missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the Nakaale church to grow in numbers and spiritual maturity.

11 **BILL & MARGARET SHISHKO**, Com-mack, NY. Pray individuals and families visit and join The Haven. / Pray **THE REFORMED DEACON** podcast reaches and encourages far and wide.

12 **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for training of ministers and church officers for the Reformed church in Quebec. / **MARK LOWREY**, executive director of Great Commission Publications.

13 Affiliated missionaries **JERRY & MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic. Pray for fruit from summer outreach events. / **GREGORY & GINGER O'BRIEN**, Downingtown, PA. Pray the Lord brings people to himself at Christ Church.

14 **MELAKU & MERON TAMIRAT**, Clarkston, GA. Pray Redeemer Mercy Ministry finds success in outreach efforts. / **DANNY OLINGER**, general secretary for Christian Education and editor of *New Horizons*.

15 **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for rest visiting friends and family in US. / Pray **THE RULING ELDER** podcast blesses those who listen.

JUNE



The Sumpters (day 16)

16 Pray for **MARK (PEGGY) SUMPTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. / Pray for affiliated missionaries **CRAIG & REE COULBOURNE** and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan.

17 **MIKE & NAOMI SCHOUT**, Zeeland, MI. Pray members of Grace Fellowship grow in hospitality and generosity. / Pray for those in **SHORT-TERM MISSIONS** this summer.

18 Pray for God's comfort for families of imprisoned pastors in **EAST AFRICA**. / Yearlong interns **COREY (ANDREA) PAIGE** at South Austin Presbyterian in Austin, TX, and **ZACHARY JOHNSON** at Immanuel OPC in Bellmawr, NJ.

19 Tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG**, Nakaale, Uganda. Give thanks for the visiting pastors and helpers encouraging the Uganda Mission. / Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**.

20 **BRADNEY & EILEEN LOPEZ**, Guayama, PR. Pray for evangelism efforts of Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura. / The **SHILOH INSTITUTE** this week in Jefferson, NH, as attendees explore OP pastoral ministry.

21 Pray tentmaking missionary **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda, finds stability in the Lord during times of transition. / Yearlong intern **JOHN (ERIN) NYMANN** at Reformation Presbyterian in Virginia Beach, VA.

22 **MATTHEW & LOIS COTTA**, Pasadena, CA. Pray Pasadena OPC continues in faithful ministry. / **MR. AND MRS. M., ASIA**. Pray for their oldest son, John, who is preparing to start college this fall.

23 **CALEB & ERIKA SMITH**, Thousand Oaks, CA. Pray the Lord raises up elders and deacons at Thousand Oaks OPC / Summer intern **DAVID MYHREN** at Covenant OPC in Vandalia, OH.

24 Associate missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the team as they serve without a missionary evangelist in Karamoja. / **CHRISTOPHER & SARA DREW**, Grand Forks, ND. Pray the Lord provides officers for Faith OPC.

25 **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for preparations for a yearlong missionary intern in Mbale. / **BRUCE (SUE) HOLLISTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbyteries of the Midwest and of WI & MN.

26 Summer intern **ANDREW (RACHEL) BECHAM** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA. / **DAVID NAKHLA**, Disaster Response Coordinator. Pray the Lord protects our brothers and sisters on the East Coast during hurricane season.



The Jacksons (day 25)

27 Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son. / Yearlong intern **DOMINIC (MARTHA) SILLA** at Living Hope OPC in Allentown, PA.

28 **PAUL & SARAH MOURREALE**, West Plains, MO. Pray the saints of Covenant Reformed would continually be conformed to Christ's image. / Pray for drought relief for the **ETHIOPIAN REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**.

29 Home Missions administrative assistant **ALLISON GROOT**. / Summer intern **TRENTON (ALICIA) HORDYK** at Living Hope OPC in Beamsville, ON, CA.

30 Affiliated missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia, Pray for strength in health struggles and recovery from surgery. / Summer intern **JEREMY (HANNAH) CHONG** at Mومence OPC in Mومence, IL.

NEWS, VIEWS & REVIEWS

IN MEMORIAM: GERALD I. WILLIAMSON

On April 12, 2023, the Reverend Gerald I. Williamson, age 97, died and entered into the presence of God. Born in 1925 in Des Moines, Iowa, he married Doris Short on May 3, 1944. In seventy-three years of marriage, they were blessed with three daughters and numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren.

It was while touring with a band as a professional saxophone player, after his service in World War II, that Williamson was converted. Following his start in gospel ministry in the United Presbyterian Church, he was called as the organizing



G. I. Williamson with wife, Doris, and children

pastor of Grace OPC in Fall River, Massachusetts. In 1963 he accepted a call to labor in the Reformed Church in New Zealand, during which time he authored *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and *The Shorter Catechism for Study Classes*. He returned to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1984 when he became pastor of Bethel OPC in Carson, North Dakota.

In 1992, he became the first editor of *Ordained Servant*, a position that he held for the next fourteen years. He also served in the 1990s and 2000s as an instructor for the Westminster Standards course for the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC and a theological editor for Great Commission Publications.



Members and friends of the presbytery of New Jersey at the particularization of *Sola Escritura* and installation of elders, deacons, and pastor Bradney Lopez (center)

SOLA ESCRITURA PARTICULARIZED

On April 19, Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura, formerly a mission work of the Presbytery of New Jersey, became a particular congregation in the OPC. Evangelist Rev. Bradney Lopez was installed as pastor; Jonathan Layana and José L. Vásquez were ordained and installed as elders; and four deacons were ordained and installed: Luis A. Díaz, Alberto Pagán, Christian González, and Khadmiel N. Feliciano.

Rev. Tom Church preached the message, and Rev. John Vroegindewey gave the charge to the deacons and the congregation. Rev. Todd E. Smith gave the

charge to the elders and the congregation, and Rev. Richard Ellis to the pastor and the congregation. Voces de la Gracia Choir from Reformada del Caribe OPC in San Juan sang two hymns.

IN MEMORIAM: ROLLIN P. KELLER

Calvin Keller

On March 31, the Lord called Rollin Paul Keller home to glory. He was born on October 21, 1934, in Los Angeles and earned a masters of divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1961. He was



Rollin P. Keller

ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of New Jersey on June 29, 1962, and served as pastor of Good Shepherd OPC in Neptune, New Jersey; Emmanuel OPC in Wilmington, Delaware; Grace OPC in Modesto, California; and Grace OPC in Carson, California, from which he retired in 2003.

Keller was married to Barbara Piper, who preceded him in death. They had four sons: Philip, Calvin, Paul, and Jonathan. Then two more children were added through foster care: Robert and Donna became part of the family for life.

Before Keller died, he spoke of his great joy by quoting from the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:8, "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." His son Calvin testifies to the fruit of Keller's ministry: it was under his preaching that Calvin was called to faith and now shares the same privilege to preach Christ inside the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The full extent of the fruit of Keller's labors will be known only in glory.

FIFTY YEARS IN SHEBOYGAN

On April 28–30, Grace OPC in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with a banquet and talk, “Growing Up in Christ,” by its first pastor, John R. Hilbelink. Current pastor Brian L. De Jong told the local newspaper, “As we look back on the past fifty years, we see God’s hand upholding our church. His lovingkindness to our congregation has been great, and we are worshipping Him for that grace and favor.”



Grace OPC remembered its history and celebrated the Lord's goodness



Ping-pong at Green Lake retreat

MEN'S RETREAT IN GREEN LAKE

Bill Muether

The Tenth Annual Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota Men's Retreat occurred on Feb. 24–25 in Green Lake, Wisconsin. The theme, “Everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus,” with talks by Rev. Bob Holda, focused on Colossians 3:17 and the questions: Do we strive to be Christ-like? Are we obedient to Scripture with dependence upon the Lord Jesus in our ability to act? Do we pursue the glory of the Lord?

UPDATE**CHURCHES**

- On April 19, **Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura**, formerly a mission work of the Presbytery of New Jersey, became a particular congregation in the OPC.

MINISTERS

- On April 18, **Kelle C. Craft** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Calvary OPC in Volga, SD.
- On April 19, **Andrew W. Smyth** was or-

daind as a minister and installed as pastor of Westminster OPC in Hamill, SD.

- On April 19, **Bradney Lopez**, formally the evangelist, was installed as pastor of Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura.

- On April 21, **John A. Carter** was installed by the Presbytery of the Midwest to the office of teacher, as a minister of the Word laboring at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

- On April 28, **Chris J. Barnard** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Grace OPC in Hanover Park, IL.

MILESTONES

- Retired OP pastor **G. I. Williamson**, 97, died April 12. He served more than seventy years as a minister and authored several books.

LETTERS

Editor:

I am writing to express my grave concern about the review of *Bully Pulpit* (May 2023). The reviewer praises Michael Kruger's discussion of the tactics of a “bully pastor”; specifically, the “tactic” of insisting upon proper procedure. The great problem with this is that the innocent, as well as the guilty, will insist on proper procedure. Presbyterianism has recognized that proper procedure protects everybody involved—the one bringing a charge, the one being charged, and all the parties that hear and adjudicate a charge. Of course sinners will use any tactic they can to avoid justice, but it is very dangerous to point to a legitimate tactic and tie that tactic to sin.

At best, the observation that bullies will use any tactic they can is vacuous: sinners sin. In reality, the observation is used as a form of bullying in itself—guilt by association. Guilt by association is a fallacy and a violation of the ninth commandment. It is surely not praiseworthy, and praising it is surely not wisdom.

Tony Monaghan
Charlottesville, VA

REVIEWS

Old Made New: A Guide to the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, by **Greg Lanier**. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 176 pages, \$17.99. Reviewed by OP pastor **Jeremiah A. Dickinson**.

I would love to have been with the disciples on the road to Emmaus when Jesus interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” they asked in wonder (Luke 24:32). Jesus went on to do the same for his apostles, and they have given to us what they received from him. The New Testament (NT) is simply following Christ's lead, interpreting to us from the Old Testament (OT) the things concerning himself.

In *Old Made New*, Greg Lanier provides some tools to help Christians better understand and delight in the OT, especially as it is used in the NT. The NT authors tell us that the OT is written for us (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11) and show that in practice by their use of the OT with over three hundred quotations or allusions (Lanier gives over four hundred in an appendix).

The tools that Lanier provides are helpful and clear, and they equip believers to profit from the NT's use of the OT. He avoids overcomplicating interpretation, while still providing an approach that lets Scripture speak for itself in its depth and variety, continuity and discontinuity. First, identify the passage: is the NT citing, quoting, or alluding to the OT? Second, double-click on the OT: zoom in on the OT passage to explore the broader context. Third, listen to the remix: how

is the NT author applying and using the OT text in light of Christ?

Lanier doesn't simply hand us these tools and say, "Here, use these!" He shows us how to use them. Never one to leave something uncharted (as his students affectionately know), he gives examples with clear and helpful charts throughout the book. He traces the NT use of the OT in the last three chapters (2–4). Chapter 3 shows how the "NT gospel is the OT gospel, remixed in Christ" (63). The reader will especially benefit from how the NT uses the OT to understand the history of salvation and its application to believers. Chapter 3 also traces how the NT uses the OT to understand and explain the person and work of Jesus Christ. Chapter 4 shows how the NT authors went to the OT to understand the identity, mission, and conduct of the church today.

The strength of this book is that it follows the "reading strategy offered to us by Jesus and the apostles" (136). We may not be able to walk with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, but we have the God-breathed Scriptures, and by the help of the Holy Spirit, our hearts too can burn within us as we open the OT in light of the NT. Lanier helps us do that. He not only gives us fish but teaches us how to fish. This is an accessible and realistically reproducible guide that will be fruitful on the first read and as an ongoing resource.

***The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, by Guy Prentiss Waters. Crossway, 2022. Paperback, 160 pages, \$17.99. Reviewed by OP minister Roger W. Schmurr.**

Persons who view the Sabbath basically as time to get in an afternoon nap should consider shortening their rest to read this book. For professor Waters demonstrates convincingly that our weekly Sabbath points us beyond rest to

"the goal to which God's people are moving" (31).

The author begins with creation, at the end of which God rested and set the pattern of rest and work for all people. But in doing so, God invited Adam and Eve to enter into his rest—to enjoy what the Sabbath envisioned. To substantiate this claim, Waters guides us through the history of redemption revealed in the Law, the Prophets, the Gospels, and the New Creation (as taught in Acts through Revelation).

The fourth commandment is a replication of the work-rest pattern set at creation. The Sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic covenant just as circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. God's people were to keep the Sabbath holy in large part by worship as Leviticus explains. They were to reflect on the covenant blessings God had granted them already but which Adam had lost as our representative. Deuteronomy later explains that the Sabbath reminds Israel specifically of their redemption from Egypt. The connection between creation, redemption, and Sabbath was coming into focus.

The prophets were God's prosecuting attorneys calling Israel to repentance and blessing. For instance, early in Isaiah's prophecy he warned people laden with iniquity about their vain offerings and prayers on the Sabbath. But Isaiah comforts God's people with a description of his Servant who will bear their iniquities. That will enable God's people from all nations to keep the Sabbath by joyfully participating in his house of prayer. The Sabbath reminds God's people of the forgiveness God gives because of the work of his Servant

Jesus who assures the blessings to which the Sabbath points. Isaiah concludes with beautiful descriptions of life in the new heaven and earth. Waters misses the heavy irony of the reference to abandoning "your pleasure" on the Sabbath in Isaiah 58. The context refers to the daily sins of worshipers not to the proper pleasures of daily living—to injustices rather than to croquet.

The Gospels record Jesus worshiping on the Sabbath, declaring the Sabbath is for humans' benefit, showing mercy on the day and, most importantly, rising from the dead on the new Sabbath, the Lord's Day. His healing of a blind man on the Sabbath showed not only mercy in restoring physical sight but also in giving spiritual sight; the man began to worship. Jesus demonstrated that the aim of the Sabbath was to "engage [persons] in the holy resting of worshiping their Creator and Redeemer."



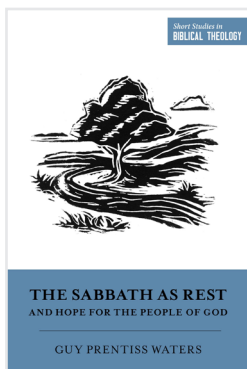
Positions Available

Executive Director: Great Commission Publications (GCP) is seeking a candidate, preferably ordained or ordainable in The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) or the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), to be its next Executive Director. A successful candidate should have experience in publishing and education and will possess a demonstrated ability in administration and personnel management. Compensation will be competitive based on the experience of the candidate. To apply, please contact the secretary of the Board of Great Commission Publications, Archibald Allison, at allison.1@opc.org. The deadline for applications for this position is June 30, 2023.

Part-Time Pastor: Faith OPC in rural, southeastern Pennsylvania is looking for a part-time pastor for preaching, teaching, and visitation. A small congregation looking to grow, Faith OPC seeks a man of God whose sermons are God-centered and Bible-based and who tends to his flock. For more information, visit www.faithopc.net or contact Wendy at wmdibast@verizon.net.

NEWS, VIEWS & REVIEWS *Continued*

The apostle Paul sees in Jesus’s resurrection the new creation, because it marks the beginning of the age to come, the final expression of the Sabbath. Our weekly observance of the Sabbath points us to that final Sabbath. The apostle John worshiped on the Lord’s Day, the day Jesus laid claim to because his resurrection was on the first day of the week. Redemptive history, Sabbath meaning, good reading.



***The Epistle to the Romans*, by John Murray. Westminster Seminary Press, 2022. Hardcover, 688 pages, \$29.99. Reviewed by OP minister and professor Ryan M. McGraw.**

Why reprint an “old” commentary on Romans, appearing in two volumes in 1959 and 1965? Focusing on current exegetical and linguistic issues, commentaries can notoriously feel “out-of-date” rather quickly, though the Word of God abides forever (Isa. 40:8). Such books have their use, but exegetical and interpretive trends frequently go out of style. Additionally, the author of this reprint specialized in systematic theology rather than New Testament.

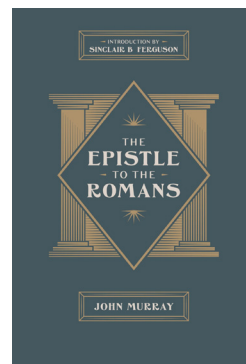
Yet John Murray, professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1930–1966, has here given the church a modern theological classic. Transcending the passing issues of the time, Murray wrote this volume as a

theologian who prized and practiced solid biblical exegesis as the ground of true theology. The result is that his commentary combines detailed attention to the Greek text of Romans with sound theological insight in a way that gives readers the best of systematic and biblical theology, presenting “the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16 NKJV). In short, this work is a theological masterpiece that may be Murray’s best work.

As expected, Murray draws readers into Paul’s masterpiece chapter by chapter and verse by verse. However, with good reason, Romans has served as the scaffolding of major theological systems, notably Philip Melancthon’s *Loci Communes* and John Calvin’s *Institutes*. Covering most major biblical doctrines, with Christ’s gospel as a focal point, Romans is a natural model for theologians like Murray to follow. In distinction from many commentary writers, Murray did not shy away from making theological evaluations along the way. This is why his treatments of key issues, like natural revelation (ch. 1), human depravity (chs. 2–3), Christ’s atonement (ch. 3), justification by faith (ch. 4), the imputation of Adam’s sin (ch. 5), sanctification in union with Christ (chs. 6–7), glorification (ch. 8), election and reprobation (ch. 9), the future conversion of the Jews (ch. 11), and Christian living (chs. 12–16), have a timeless quality. Readers familiar with Murray’s writings will notice immediately the substantial overlap between such topics and the focused attention of his writing career. While most commentaries today seg-

regate exegesis from theology, and then both from God’s message to the church and equipping pastors to preach, Murray’s commentary does all these things together, making his work an enduring treasure for the church.

One example will suffice from his comments on Paul’s moving doxology in Romans 11:33–36. Murray treated the exegetical options in the Greek text, including Paul’s citation of the Septuagint, without losing Paul’s flow of thought in context (428–431). Yet he balanced his exposition with profound theological insights, such as the fact that while we cannot comprehend God, we can apprehend him (428), the distinction between God’s knowledge and wisdom (429), the independence of God’s decrees and their execution in providence (430), God’s self-sufficient sovereignty and independence (431), and God as the source, agent of direction, and “last end” of all things (431). He concluded appropriately that “to him must not only all glory be ascribed; to him all



glory will redound” (431). This is exegetical, doxological theology at its best.

As Sinclair Ferguson writes in the new introduction, “Professor Murray’s approach to commentary writing transcends developments in technical scholarship, and therefore this volume remains his gift to the church for all generations” (xv). While it may sound strange to commend reading a commentary as simply a good book, readers will find Murray on Romans gripping and useful, both for grasping theology and for preaching the Word.