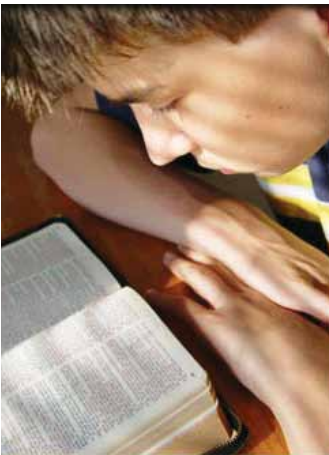


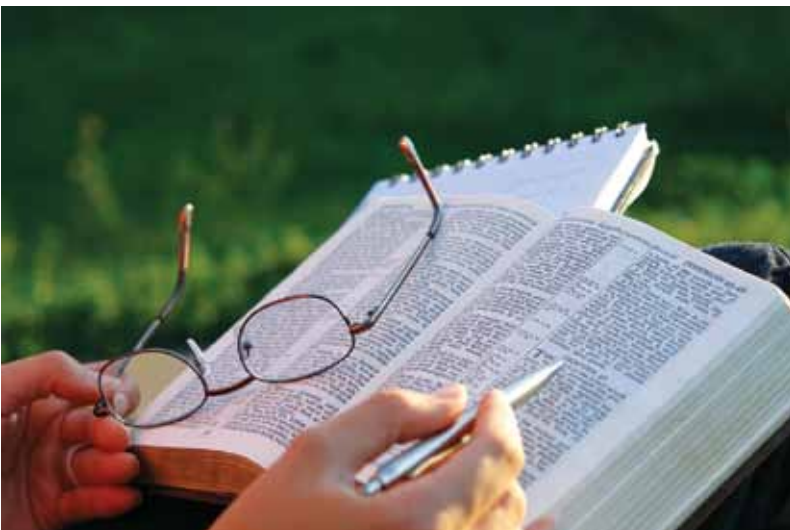
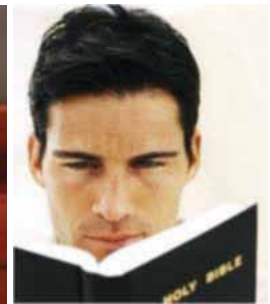
faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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David Castillo Domínguez, freepress.com



Know your Bible ...

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Editorial

I think it was Charles Spurgeon who said, "a Christian who doesn't read his Bible is like a fish out of water". Just think how long a fish can live out of water and you have a pretty good indication of what it will be like for the Christian who does not read his Bible.

It cannot be stressed enough, reading the Bible is absolutely essential to the spiritual wellbeing of the Christian. Peter the Apostle recognised that. When many of Jesus' disciples "withdrew and were not walking with him anymore", He asked "You do not want to go away also, do you?" And Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (John 6:66-68).

Those words of eternal life we have in the inscripturated words of the Bible. Beginning at Genesis and concluding at Revelation, every word is a true word of God.

Are you a Christian? Then, read it, comprehend it and LIVE.

We have a very fine selection of articles written on our theme of "Know your Bible

Mr Michael Flinn lays out some biblical teaching on the importance of knowing the word well.

Mr Nathan Ketchen provides personal encouragement on how to read the Bible.

Mr John Goris explains how study of the word of God is actually a study of the living Christ.

A variety of contributors write about their daily use of Bible reading systems.

Mrs Liana Havelaar reviews Long Story Short: Ten-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God, by Marty Machowski.

Mrs Sally Davey writes about another rare and precious quality – courage.

Mr Albert Mohler argues a strong case for heterosexual marriage.

Miss Ruth Van Dyken looks at being single in the covenant family.

In "Books in Focus" Miss Grace Van Gamera reviews Discovering God's Will, by Sinclair B. Ferguson.

Mrs Harriet Haverland graces us with news of the day in the Gleanings.

Mrs Heidi Hendrikse reports on the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Reformed Church of Masterton.

National Publishing Committee meeting

At the recent meeting of the National Publishing Committee the following decisions were made to keep in step with modern publishing practices and the current privacy laws in New Zealand.

1. In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

2. In respect to the Gleanings column; all personal details in regard to Births, Deaths, Marriages, Baptisms, Professions of Faith and Sickness are to be deleted before publishing the magazine on the RCNZ website.

"I thirst for the knowledge of the Word, but most of all
for Jesus himself, the true Word."

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

Know your Bible ... (1)

By every word of God

Michael Flinn

Introduction

The Bible is replete with encouragements and challenges to value it, read it and to make it a vital part of our lives. In Deuteronomy 6:4-8, God told his people to have his commandments on their hearts, to speak of them to and with their children, to tie them as symbols on their hands and on their foreheads. This latter image was not meant to be taken literally. To have the commands of God tied as symbols on the hands meant that the commands were to be lived out in daily life. Everything God's people did with their *hands* was to be shaped and affected by God's commands. To have the commands on the *forehead* was to *think* in accordance with God's commands. Thus, for God's people, both thought and action was to be conditioned by the Word of God.

When Joshua took God's people into the promised land, he was commanded not to let the Book of the Law depart from his mouth (Joshua 1:9). He was called to meditate upon it day and night, and to speak it to God's people. Only then would he and God's people be prosperous and successful in what they did.

Moving to the New Testament, Jesus quoted Scripture when tempted by the devil in the wilderness. "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). And in 2Peter 1:19-21, the apostle says that it must be a matter of high priority for Christians to pay attention to the word of the prophets as to a light shining in a dark place. The world is characterised as a dark, dingy and dangerous place, where people stumble around and do themselves and others immense personal harm. We need a light to guide us, and God has given this to us in his Word. And, make no mistake: this is God's Word, rather than the words of men. The men who wrote Scripture were God's instruments. They were carried

along by the Holy Spirit, so that what they wrote was not "the prophet's own interpretation". The Bible is the Word of God, not the word of man.

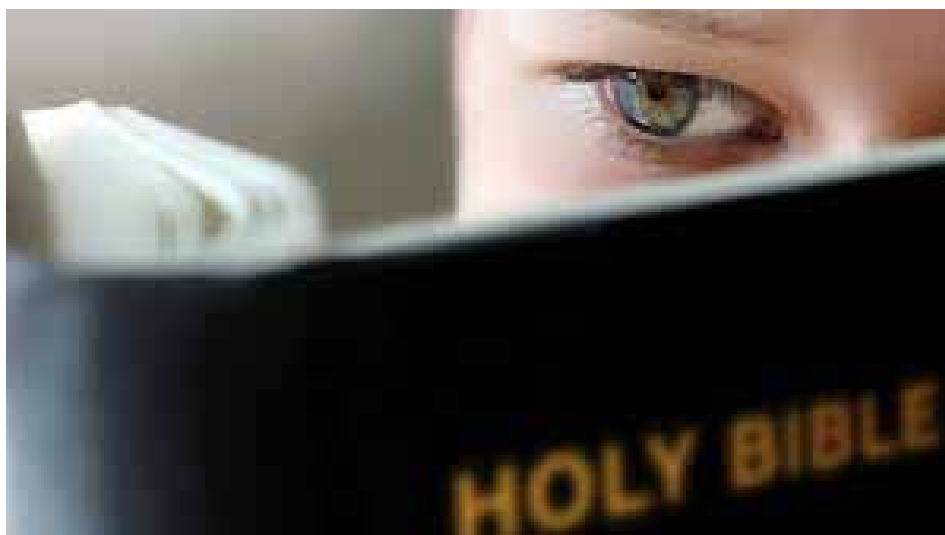
The big picture

After the creation of the world and of man in Genesis 1 and 2, we read of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Genesis 3. Then in verse 15 of Genesis 3, we have the first message of hope. Perhaps surprisingly, this promise includes the ideas of enmity and conflict. Eve and the serpent have become friends, partners in crime, as it were. They have teamed up against God. However, the Lord announces to the serpent that it will be cursed and defeated. It will crawl on its belly and eat dust all the days of its life. Moreover, God will separate Eve and the serpent. He will place enmity between them so that they are no longer comrades. This is significant. There can be no restoration of Eve to God, no

undoing the effect of the fall, unless Eve and the serpent become enemies. Notice that I have not spoken of Adam here. Of course, he is involved in this as well, but the text does not speak of him at this point. This is because the focus is on the woman, and a child that she will bear. Her offspring, or her "seed", will also be at enmity with the serpent. This is a very unusual expression. The ancient Hebrews knew full well that it was the man, not the woman, who carried the "seed". However, Genesis 3:15 specifically says that the "seed of the woman" will eventually crush the serpent's head. He will defeat him and destroy him, although not without the serpent striking his heel in the process.

Here then, is the first gospel message. It is good news because it speaks of the devil being conquered by a person called "the seed of the woman". This person would ultimately restore things to the way that they were before the

“We need to learn how to read and interpret the Bible in a Christ-centered way.”



fall, before the curse had come upon creation.

This person, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who was born of a virgin. In laying down his life on the cross, he would crush the serpent's head. Then he would rise from the grave, showing that sin, death, and the devil had no power over him. His task is nothing short of the removal of the curse and the restoration of creation to its rightful purpose (Romans 8:18-21).

This story of redemption in and through Christ and his work is one that runs right throughout the entire Bible. It is therefore called the meta-narrative of Scripture, *i.e.* the narrative or story that runs across (meta) the Bible as a whole. This story is one of redemption and deliverance, and it focuses again and again on the person and work of the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Law and prophets both point to him

they are, in fact, "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." In other words, although not physically descended from Abraham, they are in fact his spiritual descendants. God promised that Abraham would be an instrument of blessing for all peoples on earth (Genesis 12:3) and that he would become the father of many nations (Genesis 17:4), and the Gentile Galatian Christians are part of the fulfillment of these promises. They can therefore regard Abraham as their spiritual father, and, from this perspective, Abraham's history is their own.

This covenantal reality makes the Old Testament very relevant and important for us. Old Testament theologian A. A. van Ruler allegedly said that the New Testament is nothing but a commentary on the Old, and a pretty short one at that. I suspect he had his tongue firmly in his cheek when he said that. Nonetheless van Ruler alerts us to an

a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?" In other words, here is a person who says he believes in Jesus, but you would never know it by his life. As James explains, faith without works is useless (vs. 20). Even the demons believe that there is only one God (vs. 19). But they do not love and serve him. On the contrary, they shudder when they acknowledge that. True faith, genuine faith, will result in deeds of love and service to God. So if the faith is real, the works will be there to show that. If there are no works, a person's professed "faith" is empty and worthless.

When understood in context, the teaching of James is not at all in conflict with that of Paul. He also taught that we need to live in a manner that is worthy of the calling we have received (Eph. 4:1). Our old selves have been crucified with Christ in order that sin might be done away with (Romans

“It is not simply a matter of knowing about the Bible and the Bible's teaching. It is a case of knowing the truth and living it out.”

and to what he achieves. Thus, on the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection, Jesus explained to two men how all of the Scriptures concerned himself, beginning with Moses and the prophets.

We need to learn how to read and interpret the Bible in a Christ-centered way. The Old Testament is much more than ancient history. It is history, yes, but it is the history of redemption. God is working out his plan to defeat the serpent and undo the effects of the fall, and this redemptive work has Christ the redeemer at its heart.

The Covenant

Closely related to the meta-narrative of Scripture is the covenant of grace. As God's redemptive plan unfolds, he establishes a covenant, a *berith*, with Abraham and with his descendants (Genesis 17). With the coming of Christ, aspects of this covenant are significantly changed, so much so that what replaces it is called a new covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:31,32). Nonetheless, the new covenant in Christ's blood (cf. Matthew 22:20) is still part of the overall covenant of redemption. Thus, in Galatians 3:29, Paul explains to the Gentile Christians in Galatia that if they belong to Christ,

important point. *We need to be avid students of the entire Bible.* The New Testament constantly draws on, explains and completes the Old Testament. Strip the New Testament from the Old, and its foundation is gone. And if we try to interpret the New Testament without its foundation, we will likely go seriously astray in our thinking. We need to live by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God, not just the words that were written in the first century A.D.

Context, context, context

You can see that I'm emphasising this. Context is extremely important for correct interpretation. Take a text out its context, and try to understand and apply it, and we can get into serious trouble. For example, on the surface, it might appear as if James and Paul were at odds over the way in which a person is justified in the sight of God. Paul teaches repeatedly that we are justified by grace through faith, and not by works (Eph. 2:8,9 et al.). James teaches that a man is justified by what he does, and not by faith alone (James 2:24). But if we look at the surrounding verses, we can see that James is dealing with a larger issue. Verse 14 says: "What good is it my brothers, if

6:6,7). We should no longer be slaves to sin because a person who has died [to sin] has been freed from sin. Faith, when it is genuine, will result in a righteous life. James and Paul are on the same page after all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can return to the beginning of the article. As Christians, we are given a light from God to help us live in this dark, dangerous world. We neglect it at our peril. The Scriptures are there for us to read and use. What we do with our hands, and what we think with our minds, must be shaped and conditioned by Scripture.

As we read, study and apply God's Word in our lives, we need to keep in mind the overall redemptive theme, which focuses on the person and work of Christ. This meta-narrative of Scripture, together with the establishment and unfolding of the covenant of grace, make all parts of the Bible relevant and important for us. We need to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Mr Michael Flinn is one of the ministers in the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Know your Bible ... (2)

“Read the Bible like a King”

Nathan Ketchen

I came to faith in Jesus in God’s providence after a family crisis that drove us to seek a new town to live in. Our move happened when I was in my teens, a time when social concerns outweigh most of the other aspects of life. In my new school I didn’t have any friends, and so as a way of finding friends whom I could trust, I started attending the youth group meetings at the Baptist church my grandparents attended. There I met Billy (not his real name). Billy and I hit it off right from the beginning. We were fast friends with a similar sense of humour (few people appreciate puns like Billy), and we were the same age. Most of the other kids in the youth group attended the local Christian school, while Billy and I were public school kids. It was because of Billy and that youth group that I heard the gospel.

You’ll want to know more about Billy. He was born in Africa, where his parents were missionaries for a time. He won all the Bible knowledge contests we ever had in the youth group. He had seemingly memorised vast portions of the Bible. As a new kid, I looked up to him as one of the mature ones (despite his penchant for my sort of tomfoolery). We had a close friendship, and I came to rely on him as my closest brother in Christ.

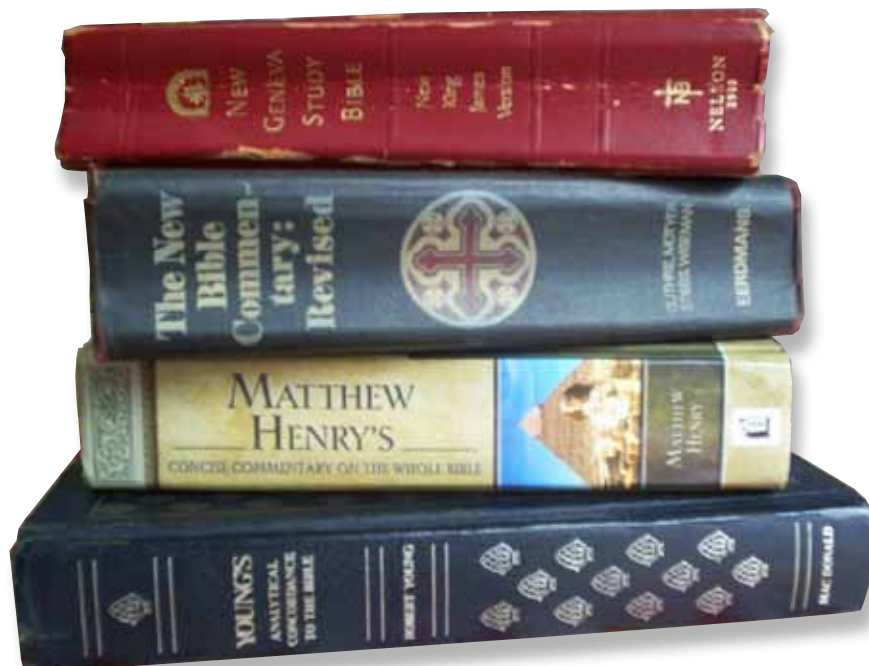
Fast forward. It is now twenty years later. I am a minister of the gospel in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Billy is a very successful accountant and an outspoken atheist. Yes, *atheist!* What happened? How does the goofy new kid grow up to be a preacher while the mature son of a missionary leaves the faith? The answer to that question is complex, but there is one area that stands out as being key to the answer. It has to do with the Bible.

Billy and I still keep in touch. One time I got to ask him what drove him away from the faith. His answer is fascinating. I thought it might be because Christians tend to be fanatics and hypocritical with so many things. While he

agreed that that was no encouragement to stay in the faith, the followers of Jesus were ultimately not what drove him away. What drove him away was that he wasn’t getting answers to hard questions. After exploring for a bit, I found that the questions he was asking are the same sort of questions I happened to be asking. Billy even remarked that he and I had both sought the answers to those questions in different directions. He doesn’t believe that the Bible has the answers to hard philosophical dilemmas like the so-called problem of evil, while I do. Billy hasn’t found the answers to all his questions, and while I haven’t necessarily found all the answers either, I *have* found, by God’s grace, eternal hope.

Billy and I approach the Bible very differently. Billy “knows” the Bible (as evidenced by those contests in high school), but not at all the same way I do. For Billy, the Bible is a book of trivia. He knows lots of seemingly obscure details about Israel’s history, along with key verses in the New Testament that emphasize various spiritual facts about salvation and the Christian life. He knows the details so well that he can go on and on about all the places where the Bible (allegedly) contradicts itself. He learned the Bible just like so many well-meaning Christian parents want their children to learn it. How many parents would be delighted if their children could recite several Bible verses from memory? Don’t parents love it when their children can

“I approached [the Bible] without questioning whether it is God’s Word. I simply assumed it is.”



summarise whole books of the Bible? For our tradition, isn't it great when a young person has the whole catechism memorised? But if it's all just a bunch of trivia, we're missing the point. Billy missed the point.

While I find the trivia interesting, I don't read the Bible to get answers for a quiz. Don't get me wrong, we ought to know the details of the Bible as much as possible, and it is good to memorize key passages along with the catechism. But it can't stop there. Billy stopped there.

What is it about the way I read the Bible that is so different from Billy? To start with, my quest to answer life's tough questions (unlike Billy's) took me

One of the greatest Reformation principles for interpreting the Bible is that Scripture interprets Scripture. The Westminster Confession of Faith states this explicitly in the first chapter. That means that when you read the Bible and have a question about what the text you just read means, the best place to go for the right interpretation is another place in the Bible that talks about the same thing.

For example, if I'm reading 2 Samuel 5, I find that David says some very odd-sounding things about blind and lame people. In verse eight, David proclaims that he hates blind and lame people, and that they are forbidden to enter the "house". Isn't that strange? Why is David

responded to the blind and lame, we can piece together what the text in 2 Samuel means. David's proclamation that forbade the lame and the blind to enter the house occurs because of God's standard of absolute perfection in His children. That perfection isn't just ethical; it has to do with every aspect of life, including the physical body. So if you're lame or blind, or you happen to be dead, you can't be part of God's family. It's impossible. You're excluded. Do you see what Jesus did? As the perfect David he takes the lame, the blind, even the dead, and equips them for life in God's family. Bartimaeus didn't just receive his sight. He received a home. He lost his old outer garment and was given the righteousness of Jesus as his covering. This man is welcome in David's "house" because Jesus made him new. That's the gospel. Whoa!

Take another example of a Biblical "coincidence". The book of Jonah is pretty weird if you think about it. Really? God prepared a great fish to swallow him and he was in the belly of the fish for three days? That seems ridiculous. What could such a weird story possibly mean? Why such bizarre detail in a story? Why would God allow a historical event such as Jonah's life seem like a made-up legend?

Then, as you read the New Testament, you see something that explains it all. Jonah shows up a few times in the gospels. He shows up twice in Matthew (chapters 12 and 16) and once in Luke (chapter 11). Jesus brings him up. It's in the context of how evil the Jews of that generation were. "It seeks a sign," Jesus says, "but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." Interesting, right?

There are some fairly obvious things you might take away from Jesus saying such things. You'll realize that Jesus died and rose on the third day, just like Jonah's time inside the fish. That isn't all there is to the sign of Jonah, though. When Jonah came out of the fish, he preached the gospel to Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital city of Syria, Israel's principle enemy at the time! Nineveh repented while Israel perished in their unrepentance. The sign of Jonah is that the one who rises on the third day will take a message of life to the enemies of Israel (specifically the Roman empire), and they will repent while the Jews perish in unrepentance.

It took some centuries, but this understanding of the sign of Jonah is an

“I read [the Bible] on its own terms, assuming its authority, sufficiency, and necessity.”

into the Bible. I approached it without questioning whether it is God's Word. I simply assumed it is. I read it on its own terms, assuming (child-like) its authority, sufficiency, and necessity. Once you start getting into the text of Scripture and reading it on its own terms, there are certain unavoidable consequences as the Spirit moves. In this article I want you to see that if you have questions about ultimate things, the Bible is satisfying beyond your dreams, even if you don't come to all the answers in your lifetime. Alas for Billy, a book of trivia could never do that.

Consider the "coincidences" in the Bible. I put this word in quotes because I know they aren't really coincidences. As Commissioner Gordon in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* said, "You're a detective now, son. You're not allowed to believe in coincidences anymore." A coincidence is an accidental correlation. The Bible doesn't have those. That means we have to read it like one of Commissioner Gordon's detectives. The Bible is the written record of God's mighty acts through history, and certain ideas get repeated. An idea that is only mentioned early in the Bible gets riffed on later on, developed, deepened, layered, concretised, and fulfilled. That is a pretty abstract idea, I know. We need a couple of examples of this to show what I mean. Buckle up.

so heartless toward disabled people? Does that mean we're supposed to keep the disabled out of the church, that we're only supposed to have physically fit members? What's going on?

The answers to our questions come in the New Testament. Jesus is the son of David, and so his attitude toward the lame and blind ought to give us a clue into what's going on with David. One of the clearest passages that deal with this is Mark 10:46ff. In that passage is one of my favourite men in the Scriptures. Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, is sitting outside of Jericho and hears that Jesus is passing by. He cries out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!!" and he won't stop yelling that phrase over and over. He made such a nuisance of himself that the disciples went over to make him stop. He got Jesus' attention, and Jesus called for Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus jumped up so fast his outer cloak fell off and he ran to Jesus. Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus is so excited he can't even put a complete sentence together in the Greek. He says, "That I may receive my sight!" Well, you probably know what happened next. Jesus healed him with a word, told him to go on his way. Bartimaeus, though, decides that "his way" can only be following Jesus, so he follows him to Jerusalem.

Now that we know how Jesus

undeniable fact. It happened. It's a historical event. Constantine's conversion to Christianity led to a cultural paradigm shift that was a long time coming. The modern church, made up primarily of non-Jews, is the sign of Jonah still working itself out in history. Whoa!

There are "coincidences" like these on about every page of the Bible. But as I wrote before, there are no coincidences with God. God put these things in the Bible on purpose. If you're paying attention to the Bible, a consequence is that these coincidences will get your attention. You'll start looking for them. You'll want to dig deeper. By God's grace that's what happened to me. Billy never had that. He might see some of the coincidences, but because he's not looking into the Bible for answers to his hard questions, he won't see the richness. "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out" (Proverbs 25:2). Billy refuses to be a king and only learned trivia.

Why is all of this so important for

our spiritual lives? Why does it matter that the more I dig into the Bible the more I'll see "coincidences"? It matters because challenges to your faith are real. Countless situations arise in our lives that cause us to question whether God knows what he's doing or not. Just think about the direction of our society in the political sphere; there is a large-scale movement away from faithfulness to God in favour of feel-good policies like "gay" marriage. That seems bad enough, but why does God allow that to go on? Do you see the temptation? If this kind of wickedness is going on without God doing anything about it, how can we be sure He's even there? Does God exist? Why should I bother following a myth?

Knowing the Bible this way will insulate you from the folly of that line of reasoning. Together with regular weekly attendance in worship, close intimacy with the Bible will give you the confidence that God is firmly in control of history (see Psalm 73). Whatever challenge might come to you with regard

to your faith, you know the Bible can't possibly be made-up. It isn't a bunch of trivia. Maybe you don't have the answer to a tough question, but because the Bible is so incomparably woven together in all of its parts, you won't be shaken or tossed around by all the winds of doctrine out there (Ephesians 4:4).

I wish I could convince Billy of this. He has lived his lifestyle his way for so long that by now leaving it would be unthinkable for him. Thankfully, convincing him isn't up to me. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. All I have to do is tell him about the Bible, pray for him, and serve him. God will do the rest if He wills. Now, go read your Bible, and let your mind run to all the places in the Bible that passage hints at. Take comfort in the beauty of the fabric of the Scriptures. You'll see.

Mr Nathan Ketchen is one of the ministers of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Know your Bible ... (3)

Know your Bible!

John Goris

The Bible is the Word of God! We do not doubt that. But what impact does that make on our daily lives? If you have read the Bible for many years, has it become *increasingly* precious to you? Or has it become less so? When you are full, you have less appetite. Your mind can be so full of other interesting things that you lose our appetite for the truth of God. We can take the Bible for granted. Of course, you still read it, you still worship, you still believe, but somewhere something has "frozen up". It has become a routine exercise.

Perhaps you should try a different approach.

What is your goal in knowing the Bible? Is it not ultimately a matter of **knowing God**? And knowing Him in a very real sense makes you want to know Him more and more. That means wanting to spend more time in His

company ... listening, speaking, marvelling, wondering

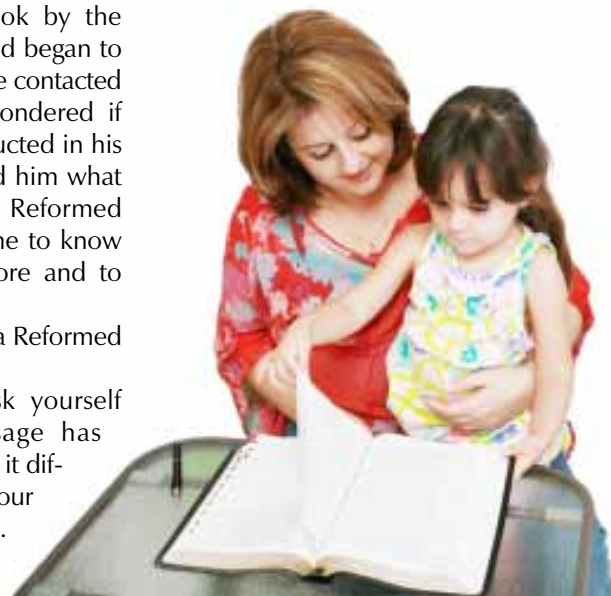
A good friend of mine grew up to be a "nominal Christian". After his conversion he took a greater interest in the Bible. Then he came across a book by the Puritan writer John Owen, and began to discover Reformed insights. He contacted a Reformed Church, and wondered if there was a Bible study conducted in his part of the city. When I asked him what made him so interested in Reformed teaching, he said, "It helps me to know God better, to love Him more and to live a more godly life".

Is that also how **you** value a Reformed understanding of Scripture?

It is a good thing to ask yourself whether the Bible's message has "rubbed off" on you, or to put it differently, "Has it transformed your character?" (Romans 12:1,2).

Let's go a step further and ask, "Is that wonderful fruit

of the Spirit observable in my life?" Is there that love, joy, peace, patience, etc.? (Gal 5:22,23). Is my heart quietly singing,



David Castillo Dominici, FreeFoto.com

*"Oh! How I fear Thee, Living God,
With deepest, tenderest fears;
And worship Thee with trembling hope
And penitential tears."*

Is it indeed?

Well then, *now* is the time to take stock, and move into action.

How to start?

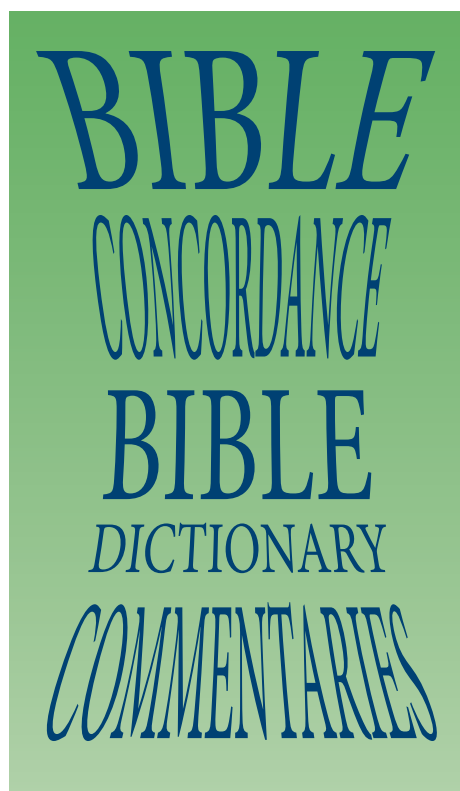
Pray that the Lord may renew your desire to come to know the Word more deeply.

Whenever you open your Bible, it is good to pray, *"Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law"* (Psalm 119:18). In fact, the whole of Psalm 119 speaks of the blessings of the Word of God. Actually, any section (group of eight verses) of this psalm can be an excellent "prayer and praise" introduction to your daily bible reading. The theme of this psalm is simply "walking the way of the Word" (www). Each section touches on the reality of life's various situations.

The next thing to remember is that *"the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14). Jesus is the Living Word. He is God's message to us! The study of the Word of God, is actually a study of the living Christ, in all the contexts of His coming and His presence in the world.

Where to start?

Remember that in reading the Word we



“The study of the Word of God, is actually a study of the living Christ, in all the contexts of His coming and His presence in the world.”

desire to meet God, and we meet Him in the Person of His Son! It is quite appropriate to start reading one of the gospels again. And from there to go on reading the book of Acts, which is actually the continuing story of Jesus as directed through the Holy Spirit. Read as much as you can manage, one chapter or half a chapter at a time. Ponder, walk along with the disciples, the crowd, listening intently. Picture, as it were, Zacchaeus climbing into a tree to get a better view of Jesus! (Luke 19).

Now, let's say you start with the gospel of John. Read the first two chapters thoughtfully, then stop to ponder 2:23-25. What does it tell you about Jesus? ... He knew all people, and he knew what made them tick. Now go back and apply that to the call of Simon Peter (John 1:42), also to Nathanael (John 1:45-51), and to the predicament at the wedding of Cana (John 2), etc. Then note the first verse after John 2:25. "... Now there was a man ... named Nicodemus ..." verse 1, and then John 4 ... "there came a woman of Samaria ..." (vs 7). Then John 5 "One man was there ..." (vs 5). Then John 6 ... "there was a crowd ..." vs 22. Jesus knew what kind of hunger they had, but were they hungry for the Living Bread?

I could go through the whole of John's gospel like that, but I shall leave that up to you. However, let me draw your attention to two more things: chapters 13-17 give you an insight into the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (our three-personed God)! And chapters 18-21 present "the Lamb that was slain", and "the Lord who was victorious".

An unfolding plan.....

The Old Testament is the build-up to the coming of Jesus. Although more difficult to understand in some parts, it is amazing how God is weaving the pattern of the promised Christ through

the developing history of the world, and in particular, Israel.

The first time we read of a sacrificial lamb in the Old Testament is in Genesis 22:7, "**Where** is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And the first time we read of a sacrificial lamb in the New Testament is in John 1:29 (the ultimate answer to Isaac's question): "**There** is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". We see the significance of that Lamb in the Old Covenant sacrifices spelled out in the book of Leviticus, a book of blood and fire, but also of reconciliation and celebration!

Then, when we follow the prophets, we get an increasingly clearer picture of the Messiah emerging through all the ups and downs of God's people. Listen to Isaiah 53 ... *A man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief ... and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all ... a lamb led to the slaughter ...*

You see, even though people do "their own thing", God is quietly working out **His own thing!** What a lesson that is for our own day!

And in the middle of your Bible you are driven to your knees, in humble prayer, only to rise to your feet in exuberant praise. That's what the book of psalms is like: worship in the midst of all your ups and downs! Read a psalm each Lord's day!

And so, is it any wonder that a man like old Simeon, full of expectation, must shout with shouts of joy, when he has seen God's promise come true in Christ: *"Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation!"* (Luke 2:29,30)

Mr John Goris is a retired pastor. He has served in congregations in Australia and New Zealand.

Know your Bible ... (4)

Bible-reading plans:

Some first-hand recommendations from those who've used them...

1. Joshua Phillips

My name is Joshua Phillips, I am 29 and I am a member of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe. I am married to Marlies Phillips and have 4 daughters – Tyla (4), Kelsey (3), Ella (2) and Indi (2 months).

In the Lord's providence I woke up one day owning my own business. My boss told me I didn't have a job unless I took over the business. I am a drain-layer, and have 2 people working for me (one of whom is my brother in law – Frederick Grosscurt).

I always struggled when it came to being consistent with my Bible reading. But one day I was talking to a non-Christian friend who asked me if I had ever read the whole Bible from front to back, and it really got me thinking that I wanted to read the whole Bible. I mentioned this to my minister, John Haverland, and he gave me a simple but effective Bible reading plan that I have found very helpful. He won't want me saying this, but you are most welcome to ring John for a copy or better still, and easier, you can google Bible reading plans, and it's one of the first ones that pop up.

The Bible reading plan that I have is just an A4 sheet of paper with all the books of the Bible on it and under every book of the Bible it has the chapters numbered. As you read a chapter you cross it off the list. I found this very helpful because it kept me motivated to keep reading my Bible regularly and consistently, because I wanted to keep crossing off the next chapter.

I used to read a small portion of Scripture and try to dwell on it and grasp something meaningfully out of the passage but I found my mind would wander too easily. Now that I read consistently at least a chapter, I find myself dwelling on passages or even just for

example thinking about God, asking questions in my mind more than before. I often do this time of reflection while driving to and from work.

I have learnt that even though it seems sometimes that you aren't learning much, you are! Often we read the Bible expecting to get an instant message or meaning from a passage; but reading the Bible is a lot like life, it's the consistent, often repetitive, daily grind that shapes us the most and shows our true character. The consistent and repetitive reading of God's word will become a good habit and if it isn't already, it will be enjoyable.

2. Berwyn Hoyt:

What convinced me to try out a personal Bible reading plan for the first time? Well, the main reason is that I read a good review on a plan called "The Bible Eater". Firstly, this particular plan allows flexibility as it is based around quarterly reading targets instead of daily reading targets. Secondly, it is a way to have some level of personal accountability: I know when I'm lagging behind. Thirdly, one thing that really appealed to me about this particular plan was that there are a few Bible books selected for reading in one single sitting, which can give a helpful overview.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is that this plan looks helpful for ministering the Word to others. It highlights certain chapters that contain keys that tie Scripture together. And more importantly, each day has both an Old and a New Testament reading. This provides a daily breadth of material and ap-

preciation of the scope of God's plan through history, and has already been helpful for ministry to others.

There are some trade-offs. I am now reading a higher volume of material personally than I was before, but the trade-off has been a reduction in how much I read together with the family to only once per day at mealtime (and it would be unwise to reduce this any further). There are also other people that I study Scripture with through the week, and for this reason I have opted to do this one-year plan in two years. Like I say, I'm just trying this out for the first time. But the signs are reasonably good so far.

Providentially, today's reading from Deuteronomy 8 said that God sometimes makes us hungry and dependent. He does this to humble us and then to feed us "to teach [us] that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (cf Matt. 4:4).

And here is the link for the plan: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/12/27/the-bible-eater-a-plan-for-feasting-on-christ-in-2013/>

3. Gary Haverland:

There are many different plans and different plans work for different people.

The plan I use is pretty simple; Start at the start and work your way through to the end!

The reason I use this approach is it generally follows the chronology of Bible events, with a few irregularities along the way. For example, Chronicles recalls many of the events in Kings; and Daniel, though placed after Ezra and Nehemiah,

records events of the Babylonian captivity that occur before the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Another reason for using this approach is that the length of Bible readings that need to be done is easily measured. In the Bible that I use I need to read 2 and a half pages each day. I try and read three pages each day as sometimes I may not read and then it means that I do not get too far behind.

It is also easy to check at the end of each month if I am still on track. If I do get behind I can catch up the reading over the following month, which is also a bit more manageable than trying to catch up in a short space of time at the end of the year, normally when things are a little hectic anyway.

Reading is a discipline and so I try and read, whether I feel like it or not. A regular reading pattern which can be monitored each month is also less likely to result in getting too far behind. One of

The wonderful aspect of reading the Bible chronologically in a year is to read the unfolding promises of God as he chooses a man, Abram, who becomes a nation to be His own people, and how in spite of their rebellion and wickedness, God preserves this people and looks forward to the coming of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. I have read the Bible many times using this approach and always enjoy going back to Genesis and reading this inspired Word of God again.

It is probably fair to point out some of the challenges using this approach also, which other reading plans do address. The first challenge is getting through the books of Leviticus and Numbers after reading the exciting stories of Genesis and Exodus. This is where you really appreciate the meaning of the word “discipline”!! The other advantage with other reading plans is that it can be beneficial to have the readings of wisdom books such as Psalms and Proverbs dispersed

Here are the basics of how it works:

Each day's reading is broken into FOUR parts: Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. You typically read a couple of chapters from the Old Testament, roughly a chapter from the New Testament, a Psalm or a portion of a Psalm, and a few verses from Proverbs. There are both positive and negative things about this arrangement.

First, here is the positive:

It doesn't get any easier than this! As long as you know what date it is today, you just open up the Bible to that date, and you know exactly what you need to read for the day. It is all laid out ready for you to read with no need to look anything up! It usually takes only about fifteen minutes a day to read! At times when I've used a checklist or chart, I've lost the little piece of paper and then not known for sure what I needed to read till I managed to either find my checklist or replaced it. Sometimes even something little like that would get me off track in my reading.

Reading from four different places in the Bible each day helps when it comes to reading through some of the more difficult parts of the Bible. I tend to get bogged down less in tough books like Ezekiel, when I am also reading in the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. I never have a day when nothing stands out to me in my reading since there is such variety in the reading for the day. That variety makes it much easier to successfully read through the Bible in a year.

Now for the negative (but not really):

Some people find it confusing to read the Bible in a “disjointed” manner like this and prefer to read straight through a book of the Bible rather than reading smaller portions each day from four different places in the Bible. If this describes you, the One Year Bible from Tyndale House Publishers is not for you.

Also, some people like to read the Bible Monday – Friday or some other schedule which includes missing at least a day here and there. The One Year Bible from Tyndale is set up to be read 365 days of the year, without fail. Of course, you can catch up on your reading if you have missed some days, but the Bible is not really arranged in such a way that is conducive to that. Other Bible reading plans may offer you more flexibility than the One Year Bible.



the dangers in aiming to read the Bible in a year is that if you do get behind it can be discouraging and one may be tempted to “give up”.

I recall reading about Martin Luther when he was a young boy of 12 years. After he read the Bible he was concerned that he had not read it once from cover to cover for every year that he was alive. Over the following years he caught up with his reading and proceeded to read the entire Bible more times than the years he had been alive. We have used a similar approach with our children to develop good Bible reading disciplines, and encouraged them to read selected books of the Bible as part of their Bible reading plan.

among the other readings and spread throughout the year. While it is a good spiritual discipline to read the Bible in a year, the more important discipline is to read the bible regularly and prayerfully as the inspired Word of God, in which He has revealed Himself and His plan of salvation for sinners.

4. Robyn Posthuma:

For the past several years I have chosen to use the One Year Bible from Tyndale House Publishers as my way to read through the Bible in a year, beginning on the 1st of January.

Finally, the One Year Bible is not intended to be your only Bible, and it is not a study Bible that you would use to prepare for Bible studies etc. So, if you only want to own one Bible that you use exclusively, the One Year Bible is not the right fit for you. This is because, since the Bible is broken up into daily readings, rather than simply starting in Genesis and ending in Revelation, it is not so easy to look up a specific verse in the One Year Bible. It can be done, (through the Index) but it isn't easy, with the One Year Bible. Because of that, the One Year Bible isn't very easy to use, for example, in church or for other study. I read it because I like to make myself more familiar with the flow and weave of Scripture. My husband and I share a One Year Bible between us which works out well as I tend to read it in the morning and he at night. I know some families who have one and just leave it on the coffee table where family members can pick it up and read the daily readings when it suits them.

I have also given a few away to friends and family as Christmas presents as it's not long until the New Year starts. My friend in Queenstown told me that it is one of the best presents anyone has ever given her and we often text each other commenting on a verse that stood out for the day – it's kind of nice knowing that on any given day we are "on the same page" so to speak – it is a definite point of connection, as it has been with my daughter who has been away in foreign lands for a number of years. We would often comment about the reading of the day!

The Tyndale One Year Bible comes in several versions including ESV, NASB, NIV, KJV etc and in hard cover, soft cover, compact and also large print. There is also now a Tyndale Online One Year Bible available free and it also has a free Complete Matthew Henry Commentary with it. In this version you can actually select which day of the year you can start reading and it sets it out for you! It is also available on iTunes for \$10.99 although you can't determine your own start date in this version. However, I really enjoy sitting by the fire on a cold winter's night with a real book in my hand! I love it!

Available from :

www.bookdepository.co.uk (free worldwide delivery!)

www.fishpond.co.nz

www.koorong.com

www.books.ccnz.org.nz

5. Sally Davey:

For a number of years now (maybe 8 or more?) I've been following the much-loved Robert Murray M'Cheyne Bible reading plan. Many Christians have used this since M'Cheyne, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, devised it in the mid-19th century. You can find it in many places online (just Google "M'Cheyne Bible reading plan"); and also well-presented and explained in *For the Love of God*, the two volumes of daily devotional by Don Carson, who in these volumes gives comment on two of the four chapters to be read each day.

Why did I begin using it? Primarily because I wanted more discipline and order in my Bible reading. For years I had assumed that reading shorter passages carefully was the way to go; and so I tried to read single books intensively. But I had no particular order in my choices – I was meandering. And I knew I was aiming at too little: if I failed to read for days or even weeks I didn't feel the weight of my sloth enough. I definitely wanted more accountability.

Secondly, I wanted to know the Bible better. There were whole regions of it – like Old Testament history – that I only knew sketchily. Sure enough, I was involved in a number of Bible study groups, and that certainly helps in getting to know Scripture; but which Bible study group you know tackles 1 Kings, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, Job or Nahum? I knew I had to read these more regularly on my own initiative.

Thirdly, I wanted to know how the Bible fits together as a whole. It is all very well to study individual books; but I wanted to understand better the thematic relationships between all the books, whatever literary genre they belonged to, and whether Old or New Testament. And I wanted to have a better grasp of the sweep of Bible history and God's redemptive purposes in all of it.

So, I decided to give M'Cheyne's plan a try. It has vastly exceeded my wildest hopes. I don't think I exaggerate to say that it's done more to increase my Bible knowledge than anything else I've done. Constantly reading big chunks of Scripture is so good for you. It keeps the big picture of the Bible always before you. You also see where an author's argument is going much better if you read whole chapters (or more) at a time. And reading through the whole Bible, year after year, you find that important ideas, teachings and details of people and events "stick" more and more.

So, finally, how does it work? You begin at the beginning of the year reading in four places – which happen to be the

beginning of four significant times in redemptive history: Genesis, Ezra, Matthew and Acts. Then you carry on reading, a chapter a day in each place. There are some slight rearrangements in the order of books to enable you to read the Psalms and the New Testament twice in the year, as well as the Old Testament once. The whole thing is laid out in charts for each month, with two chapters for the morning and two chapters for the evening – though of course you can read them at any time of the day. (I have even had my best success in keeping up by reading all four chapters in one sitting.)

I whole-heartedly recommend this Bible reading plan. It has stood the test of time and encouraged many Christians to know their Bible better. It has certainly helped me.

In these last days (God's final Word)

In these last days God's final Word
was spoken through His Son;
and those by whom His voice was
heard,
confessed: Like Him there's none!

All were amazed so frequently:
His words so pointed, clear,
were spoken with authority,
outwitting those who'd hear.

When on the mountain peak He
shone
in glory like the sun,
the Father spoke and urged them
on,
"Heed My Beloved Son!"

O Wisdom-from-on-high-come-
down,
descend on every heart
and all our words and actions
crown
to play our Kindom part!

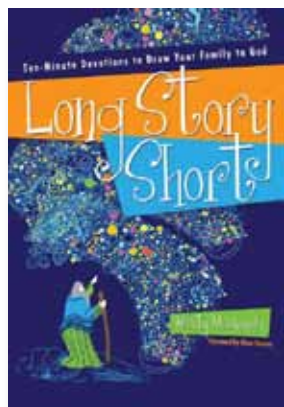
John Goris

*Words based on Heb 1:2; John 7:46;
Matt 7:28; Matt 17:5; Prov 8
Suggested tune: Bangor*

Long Story Short: Ten-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God (Old Testament)

By Marty Machowski

Reviewed by Liana Havelaar



Mums and Dads, do you long to see your children understand the wonderful plan of salvation through Christ? Is it your heart's desire to see them beginning to apply the truths of

Scripture to their lives? If so, then you probably recognise the value of good family devotional books.

Like us, you may have tried several different books. The perfect devotional book will probably remain an elusive object, but I'd like to recommend *Long Story Short* as very worthy of use.

How do these devotionals work?

The book covers the Old Testament in one and a half years, with five devotions per week. Each week contains:

- An introductory story or activity to set the scene
- Three devotions focusing on the Bible story for the week
- One devotion specifically connecting the story to Jesus
- One devotion looking at a passage from a psalm or a prophet

Each 10-15 minute daily devotion contains:

- Bible reading
- A couple of paragraphs of explanation and application
- Discussion questions
- Suggestion for prayer

That sounds pretty normal for a devotional book. So why is this book particularly worthwhile?

Well, here are some aspects I really like:

1) Gospel focus: There's a strong emphasis on how the whole Bible tells the grand story of God's plan of salvation through Christ. As Reformed people, we believe this. But I find it's not always so straightforward to trace this theme myself, let alone draw it out for my children. This book helps to show how the Old Testament story reveals God's grace in Christ.

One of the ways the author does this

is by having one devotion per week entitled "**Connect it to Jesus**". This devotion often uses a New Testament passage to explain how the week's story relates to the gospel, or how Christ fulfils a promise from the Old Testament story.

Also, the fifth devotion each week shows how verses from the psalms and the prophets teach us about God's salvation in Christ. This is a useful section, as sometimes the Messianic nature of the psalms and prophets by-passes us adults, as well as our children.

2) Discussion questions: The author includes quite a range of questions: some straight comprehension, some digging deeper into the meaning of the passage, and some application questions. Parents, be prepared, because your kids are given the opportunity to ask you questions about God's work in your lives. I've found these questions are helpful in getting me to share about my own spiritual life – something I don't naturally or easily do.

3) Age range: This devotional book is good to use with a wide age range. The book is pitched at primary school age (5-12), but younger and older children can easily be included, particularly because of the range of discussion questions. There are helpful tips at the start of the book for how to use the devotions with various ages.

Is there anything that detracts from the book?

Day 5 is a little disconnected: Although I really like the use of the psalms and the prophets to show the gospel, these devotions (on day 5 each week) are generally disconnected from that week's Bible story. It might pay to take the day 5 devotions in a block by themselves, rather than just one day per week.

Perhaps a bit front-end heavy: Genesis gets lots of coverage (and it is a foundational book!). But perhaps some of the other narrative books miss out a bit as a result.

However, Marty Machowski has done a splendid job of writing a usable, gospel-centred devotional book and I highly recommend it. If you get hooked, he's also written *Old Story New* (devotions using the New Testament) and *The Gospel Story Bible: Discovering Jesus in the Old and New Testament*.

Reformed Library for **AFRICA**

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Rev Jopie van der Linden (jopie1976@gmail.com).

The feminine virtue of courage

What epitomises courage for you? Probably some particularly brave person, or a remarkable act of bravery you've heard about, and which you can never forget. It is a quality of strength; and one we expect to find in leaders. Those to whom others look for direction are those whom danger should not daunt. They are the ones on whom the weaker will lean when troubles threaten to shake them. Dictionaries often define courage as something enabling a person to face danger or trial without fear. I like to think of it as something we can exercise *despite* our fear. In other words, having fears does not mean we cannot be brave.

I well remember the last Anne of Green Gables story, *Rilla of Ingleside*, in which Anne's two sons, Walter and Jem, go to serve in France in the First World War. Walter, a sensitive, artistic character, and more fearful by nature, is killed. Jem, a boisterous, outgoing type, is taken prisoner of war but eventually returns home to Canada. He later tells his younger sister, Rilla, that while he himself was often afraid, "Walter was never frightened once he got to the front. *Realities* never scared him – only his imagination could do that. His colonel told me that Walter was the bravest man in the regiment."¹ In the end, bravery is best judged by a person's *actions* – by what he or she does. It may not be a quality that you would guess they had, or which comes easily – but it is one that, when the moment comes, triumphs over fear.

Courage is an old English word taken from French, and ultimately from the Latin *cor* (meaning "heart"). The pattern of its use tells us that courage was seen as a quality of the heart, something that revealed inner strength. That is certainly true. Many a bold, gung-ho character has crumpled when real danger presents itself; and sometimes quiet, considered people may be more courageous. But it cannot be denied that true courage is a very important character strength.

Let us consider the effects of its absence. Giving way to fear can mean

doing what you know is wrong – compromising. You might "let things happen", because making a fuss might offend someone, make them angry, or result in your being unpopular. A lack of courage often means we cower before difficulties and trials. And so we balk at the wire, or endlessly procrastinate over the difficult, the painful and the scary.

Yet since our callings in life always involve difficulty and trial, we are going to need courage to fulfil what God has placed before us, aren't we? It will be obvious to the Christian that courage is strongly linked to faith. Christians who are very courageous are people of faith. They might look strong, but the source of their strength is God's strength – not their own.

Courage in action

How does this look in practice? We needn't go any further than the writings of John Bunyan. In his well-known story, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian comes across two characters, Timorous and Mistrust, on the Hill of Difficulty. They are fleeing from the many difficulties they had encountered in life. They even warn Christian there are lions waiting for him in the road ahead. Christian, however, is made of more faithful stuff. He replies that though they've made him afraid, there's no other course for him than to keep plugging on. If he goes back, he'll certainly be destroyed – in hell. But if he carries on and manages to reach heaven, he'll be safe. "Therefore I must press forward, in spite of risks and perils. To go back is to certainly suffer death; but to go forward, though fear of death will threaten along the way, is yet to have the prospect of everlasting life beyond. So I will definitely go forward."² It is what Christian knows he has been promised in God's Word that keeps his courage up; and thus enables him to keep going in his walk of faith. Bunyan also wrote a hymn on courage, which appears in the second part of *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is a very good description of valour, or courage:

*Who would true valour see
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather;
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avow'd intent
To be a pilgrim.*

*Who so beset him round
With dismal stories,
Do but themselves confound;
His strength the more is.
No lion can him fright;
He'll with a giant fight.
But he will have the right
To be a pilgrim.*

*No goblin nor foul fiend
Can daunt his spirit;
He knows he at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then, fancies, fly away;
He'll not fear what men say;
He'll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim.*

As Bunyan illustrated in his allegory of the Christian life, courage isn't a for-crises-only quality. It may be needed every month, or even every day! But it always helps to gaze for a while at the truly great; those who *did* meet big crises – and stood firm. So let's view some real heroines.

Women of courage

The first is Lady Jane Grey; who for a few short days was Queen of England. This was the time of the Reformation; and her succession to the throne was an immediate obstacle to the claim of Catholic Princess Mary. She and her husband were imprisoned in the Tower of London; and faced imminent execution. On the day she was to die, her husband wanted to see her, but she replied that "the tenderness of their parting would overcome the fortitude of both, and would too much unbind them from that constancy which their approaching end required of them. Our separation," she

said, “will be only for a few moments, and we shall soon regain each other in a home where our affections will be for ever united, and where death, disappointment, and misfortunes, can no longer disturb our felicity.”³ On the scaffold she spoke gently to the crowd, freely forgave her persecutors, and bowed her head to die. This is mature courage – at the age of *eighteen*.

Think of the courage of many missionaries. Among them was Betty Stam who, in December 1934, was beheaded by Chinese communists along with her husband – and had to leave her baby daughter alone in her carry-cot, entrusting her entirely to God. Think of Marianne and Jane Williams, wives of CMS missionaries to New Zealand in the 1830s. They left family and friends, all comfort and security – to bring the gospel to warring cannibals. They left knowing they would have to give birth without doctors or nurses. They often had to endure months of uncertainty while their husbands left on long trips to reach inland tribes – never knowing until their return, months later, whether they were alive or dead.

And in our situation?

These women displayed courage in great difficulty: but how about the courage we need for our sorts of situation today? Sometimes it seems as if we have everything so easy. We don’t face war, starvation, severe physical persecution and the like, do we? And yet – the more I look at history, the more I realise that God reserves to himself enough trials to test

every generation of believers. Today we still have serious, even fatal illnesses like cancer; or chronic, disfiguring conditions like arthritis. We face Alzheimers and its related suffering. We face bereavement, we face difficulties in our marriages and families. All of these test our faith, and require courage.

Bravery is needed to be a faithful Christian in all manner of situations. We all face difficulties and tests of different kinds. It takes a valiant friend, for instance, to “hang in there” with someone determined to continue in sin, year after year. It takes a courageous friend to offer a gentle rebuke, at the time it is needed. How much easier it is to say nothing! You risk your friendship, and stirring up all manner of further trouble by suggesting your friend is doing wrong, don’t you?

Bravery is also needed to be a faithful evangelist. The person who wants to be liked by everyone else at work doesn’t suggest her colleagues should live or think differently – does she? She doesn’t dare say Jesus is the way to life, or that other ways lead to death – does she? Sharing the gospel does take courage. But seriously – what do we really have to fear? And what are our fears, anyway, compared to the hope of salvation for our colleagues, classmates, neighbours and friends?

A valuable effect of courage is the encouragement it gives to those around us. We’ve touched on that already, but the encouragement is not merely for crisis situations. Think of those times when we experience some long, slow, difficult trial. These can be of many kinds.

They can come in a marriage. Or we might find ourselves chronically ill. We might become hard-up because of a redundancy, or because there is only one income and the family needs are great. Perhaps we’re mourning the loss of a child, or facing the grief of childlessness. The courage of a wife can truly encourage her husband. When one spouse is facing an ongoing trial with a brave and cheerful attitude, trusting God for the outcome, it makes it a lot easier for the other one to bear his or her load. The reverse is also true. Richard Baxter, that wise seventeenth-century pastor who gained a great deal of experience from visiting his people, had this to say:

“Many a poor man can easily bear his poverty himself, that yet is not able to bear his wife’s impatience under it. To hear her night and day complaining, and speaking distrustfully, and see her live disquietedly, is far heavier than his poverty itself. If his wife could bear it as patiently as he, it would be but light to him. Yea, in the case of suffering for righteousness’ sake [of which there was much in his day], the impatience of a wife is a greater trial to a man than all the suffering itself; and many a man that could easily have suffered the loss of his estate, or banishment, or imprisonment for Christ, hath betrayed his conscience, and yielded to sin, because his wife hath grieved him with impatience, and could not bear what he could bear. Whereas a contented, cheerful wife doth help to make a man cheerful and contented in every state.”⁴

Those are some of the good effects of facing trials with courage.

Perhaps there is no better way to end than with the words of David in Psalm 31, a lament seeking God’s help for a faithful believer worn down by troubles and beset by enemies. The psalm ends on a triumphantly trustful note with this appeal to all God’s people:

*Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
All you who wait for the LORD!*

Notes

- 1 L.M. Montgomery, *Rilla of Ingleside* (George C. Harrap & Co. Ltd, London, 1928), p. 316.
- 2 John Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress* (as edited by Barry E.Horner, 1997), p. 68.
- 3 As quoted by William M. Thayer in *The True Woman* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p. 317
- 4 Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (Selections, as prepared for the Kindle edition, quoted from the chapter entitled “The Special Duties of Wives to Husbands”).

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The case against

Civilisation is built on a strong view of (heterosexual) marriage

Al Mohler

The question of homosexual marriage presents us with an inescapable moral challenge. The words, “homosexual” and “marriage”, are inherently contradictory. The very fact that these terms are in public conflict demonstrates the radical character of the social revolutionaries who now demand the legalisation of homosexual marriage.

For at least the last 100 years, America has experienced an unprecedented season of social transformation. Now, this transformation has been extended to experimentation with the most basic institutions and principles of our common life. A conversation about “homosexual marriage” is only possible if the concept of marriage is completely redefined and severed from its historic roots.

Civilisation requires the regulation of human sexuality and relationships. No society – ancient or modern – has survived by advocating a *laissez faire* approach to sex and sexual relationships. Every society, no matter how liberal, sanctions some sexual behaviours and proscribes others. Every society establishes some form of sexual norm.

Pitirim Sorokin, the founder of sociology at Harvard University, pointed to the regulation of sexuality as the essential first mark of civilisation. According to Sorokin, civilisation is possible only when marriage is normative and sexual conduct is censured outside of the marital relationship. Furthermore, Sorokin traced the rise and fall of civilisations and concluded that the weakening of marriage was a first sign of civilisational collapse.

We should note that Sorokin made these arguments long before anything like homosexual marriage had been openly discussed. Sorokin’s insight was the realisation that civilisation requires men to take responsibility for their offspring. This was possible, he was convinced, only when marriage was held to be the unconditional expectation for sexual activity and procreation. Once

individuals – especially males – are freed for sexual behaviour outside of marriage, civilisational collapse becomes an inevitability. The weakening of marriage – even on heterosexual terms – has already brought a harvest of disaster to mothers and children abandoned in the name of sexual liberation.

The regulation of sexuality is thus a primary responsibility of any civilisation. In their review of Western civilisation, Will and Ariel Durant noted that sex is “a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints”. The primary restraint has always been the institution of marriage itself – an institution that is inescapably heterosexual and

mosexual marriage and the legalisation of same-sex relationships. The “molecule” of marriage has always defined human relatedness, and this most venerable institution is rooted in its inherent heterosexuality.

The family has undergone transformations throughout time, but at the core of any enduring family structure stands the integrity of marriage as an institution and the stability of marriage as an expectation both within and without the marital unit. Marriage is always both a private and a public matter, and in Western cultures, it has stood as both a civil and religious institution. As such, it has been recognised as inherently and

“A government that would claim the right to redefine marriage in this way demonstrates an arrogance that would cause Rome to blush and Babylon to quiver.”

based in the monogamous union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. In postmodern America, the fires of sex are increasingly unbanked and uncooled.

In a very real sense, marriage becomes the civilisational DNA of our social genetic structure. Beyond this, marriage serves as the basic molecular structure for human social organisation. Though the family is extended through children and other bonds of kinship, the basic “molecule” of human society is marriage. This molecular reality implies that the structure cannot be changed without destroying the molecule – and the organism – itself.

This is precisely the challenge we now face on the issue of what is called ho-

indisputably heterosexual.

The unique role of marriage in civilisation is rightly attributed to the social value any culture must place on stable long-term monogamous pairings of men and women. The institution of marriage has been invested with both rights and responsibilities directly tied to the social importance of long-term commitment.

The heterosexual union of a man and a woman in monogamous marriage is the rightful context for procreation. When reproduction is severed from marriage, the society reaps the breakdown of both kinship and parental responsibility. Put most simply, even secular historians are aware that marriage is what explains why a father

remains committed to the care of his own children. Societies that devalue marriage provide an automatic incentive for young males to act irresponsibly, fathering children without ever assuming responsibility as father.

Marriage is indispensable for the successful nurture and raising of children. Both boys and girls define themselves and establish their own identity and expectations based upon their observation of both father and mother, husband and wife – male and female.

The extension of the family through other kinship relations links one marriage to another, with the entire family finding its identity and security in the integrity

ens or weakens the institution of marriage. Just as the tax code discriminates in favour of homeowners (because the government rationally sees homeownership as a common social interest), a set of financial and legal incentives is directed towards a social preference for marriage. In the same way, even as the law protects corporations in order to encourage financial activity, the government also favours marriage (and thus married couples) in order to encourage procreation, childrearing, and cultural stability.

Nevertheless, government does not have the right to reorder this most basic institution of human organisation. Marriage predates the establishment of

Marriage has already been weakened to the point of dire social peril. The acceptance of “no-fault” divorce laws, the ethic of sexual liberation, and even the rise of new reproductive technologies have weakened the foundation and superstructure of marriage to the point that this most basic molecule is hanging together by a thread. The redefinition of marriage in order to accommodate same-sex relationships would not mean the mere transformation of marriage but its dissolution. The very concept of marriage cannot survive such a denial of its inherent meaning and historic structure.

Of course, I speak as a Christian theologian. Based upon divine revelation, I believe and teach that God created man and woman in His image, created us as male and female to His glory, and gave us the institution of marriage for our health, our happiness, and our holiness. Furthermore, based upon this same revelation – the Holy Scriptures – I am absolutely bound to declare the inherent sinfulness of all sexual activity outside of the marital bond. Procreation, reproduction, child-rearing, and other essential rights and functions are divinely invested in the institution of marriage. Thus, to tamper with this divinely established institution is to risk not only social peril but divine judgment.

Nevertheless, even those who do not share my Christian commitment must recognise the cultural wisdom and historic knowledge that points to the primacy of marriage and the disaster which will befall a society that would weaken – much less destroy – this most precious institution. The historic wisdom of human happiness and moral knowledge points to the centrality of marriage. A review of history proves its necessity to civilisation itself. Marriage is a given – and is therefore not infinitely negotiable. Marriage cannot be severed from heterosexuality without dissolving into meaninglessness. Social experimentation must meet some limitation – and the controversy over same-sex marriage presents us with that limitation.

Homosexual couples cannot fulfil the functions of marriage. They cannot procreate. Severed from even the possibility of natural procreation, their relationship is inescapably unnatural. Rather than reinforcing heterosexual responsibility and sanctioning heterosexual monogamy, same-sex sexual pairings undermine the very notion of a sexual norm. Acceptance of homosexual marriage flies in the face of both biblical revelation and

“The choice before us is not between two visions of marriage – but between marriage and madness.”

of those marital bonds. The breaking of these bonds leads to social dissolution as well as massive economic, legal, and psychological ills. The integrity of marriage is essential for children to know the security necessary for their own self-identity and sense of belonging.

The central function of marriage has been reflected in law, custom, and an entire set of practices deeply embedded in the structures of society. These range from implications in the tax code to various legal supports and cultural expectations extended to the married couple. Society invests both rights and responsibilities in the institution of marriage and by its various incentives and disincentives, points towards a cultural expectation. When that expectation is something other than marriage, problems immediately arise.

In its own interest, the government must value stability and reward the healthy raising of children and fulfilment of parental responsibility. To this end, the government does discriminate in order to reward and to support marriage as the centrepiece of self-government and the commonweal.

Government has within its power the ability to institutionalise its own expectation in the form of laws, regulations, and a cultural approach that either strength-

ens, and any governmental authority that would presume to redefine marriage apart from its inherently heterosexual nature will do so at great peril. Furthermore, advances toward legal recognition of same-sex relationships have been propelled by the action of courts, rather than legislatures. This is another example of the “judicial usurpation of politics” that threatens the integrity of democracy itself. A government that would claim the right to redefine marriage in this way demonstrates an arrogance that would cause Rome to blush and Babylon to quiver.

Inevitably, once marriage is redefined as something other than a heterosexual pair, there is nothing to stop further redefinition but sheer arbitrariness.

Once marriage is no longer “one thing”, but now “another thing” as well, there is nothing to stop marriage from becoming virtually “everything”. Put simply, if marriage can be redefined so as to allow same-sex pairings, there is nothing in the logic of this transformation that could justify discrimination against those who would transform marriage in other ways. Why just two people? If the consent of all partners is all that is requisite, why do we have laws against incest, polygamy, or any number of other alternative arrangements?

millennia of accumulated moral wisdom. This nation stands at a dramatic moment of decision. Our stewardship of this question – our decision on the question of same-sex marriage – will determine the future state of our society, the

moral status of our culture, the health and well being of our children, and the inheritance we leave to the world. The choice before us is not between two visions of marriage – but between marriage and madness.

Mr Albert Mohler is president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville Kentucky.

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Single in the covenant family

Ruth Van Dyken

TV has a way of taking the clichéd traits of a community or people and putting them into pre-packaged, pre-digested stories that somehow define “reality.” I was thinking about Reformed singles and how they might play out on the silver screen. It would be a serial drama, of course, and they would call it “Fishers of Men.”

It opens with WDCX tunes blaring out of a clock radio. A frowzy Ima Luiken flails an arm towards the alarm clock but knocks over a two-foot tower of Lori Wick novels (opium for the romance-starved mind). One lands on a stack of E-harmony profile printouts. She stumbles into the kitchen, pours a cup of chocolate milk, slathers chocolate hazelnut spread onto toast, brews some specialty cocoa-flavoured coffee. Then reaches for a Reese’s cup.

Last night’s weariness is writ large across her 30-something year old face, puffy eyes telling eloquently of a friend’s wedding. Ima is glad for the bride’s sake – after all, Cheryl managed to snag a man just before officially joining the “Leftover’s Club.” But although Ima scoped out every unringed black suit at the reception, and although she dove desperately for that throw-away bouquet, the familiar old chorus “you’re next!” still had a hopeless ring to it.

But that was last night; today is Sunday. And Ima has a plan: new heels, new dress, 10lbs lost thanks to Herbal Magic and a new church. Just visiting, of course. Because maybe, just maybe she’ll meet the man of her dreams at this church. And then her life will begin.

So that’s it: a quick look at the anomaly within our churches that we call a “single.” Ima Luiken (pronounced “I’m a-lookin”) is over the top, of course. All that chocolate, for instance. But I’ve

laughed a lot – and admittedly scowled a little – over the stereotype, because it’s not always so far from how some picture the life of a Christian single. After speaking with many unmarried folk in our community, I’d like to humbly lay out a few myths our community tends to hold and then hopefully offer a little feedback. My guess is that we don’t realise these little prejudices are there, but simply allow them to loiter unchallenged in our subconscious.

Myth 1: “Dear Lord, please be with the sick, lonely and singles.” A dear friend had a good chuckle over that one – singleness is not a disease. In fact, it’s not even an identity. God defines Christians as beloved children, as warriors for Christ, complete in Him, as a part of Christ’s beautiful bride-to-be. But He never pegs our identity to what we are not.

Myth 2: Single and desperate. Like Paul, Ruth and Rahab, God writes a different story for each one of His children. His timing is not ours. If someone is un-

married, it often means God hasn’t sent the right one yet or they have intentionally chosen celibacy. This also explains why unmarried friends do not jump at the suggestion, “Hey she’s still single – you should like her!” (Though that might have worked in the days of Benjamin!)

Some of the jokes floating about – calling an organised group of young adults the “Last Chance Dating Club,” for instance – might be good for a laugh, but may also play into this rather arrogant assumption. On the flip side, meeting people at inter-church functions is both good and natural – would we rather our singles frequented the bars instead?

Myth 3: Single friends won’t care about our mile-a-minute, toddler-spun lives. Please DO share Becky’s potty-training victories, the challenges of packing four kids and lunches off to school, your fears for Johnny’s ADHD, the clownish antics of Josh, or the romantic candle-lit dinner your honey surprised you with last week.

Chances are, your single friends are



looking forward to having their own kids and will vicariously enjoy yours. They'll benefit from the knowledge, entering marriage and parenthood with eyes wide-open to the joys and challenges. They might even have a few outside-of-the-box ideas to contribute. (For singles who are bored by news from the homefront, a gentle push might be in order to start this give and take.) It goes both ways – please also listen and show interest in the adventures of single life, however far removed they might be from your own.

Myth 4: It would be awkward to have a single over; it's like adding a third wheel to my bicycle! In his book *This Momentary Marriage*, John Piper makes a bold claim that “the relationships in Christ are more permanent, and more precious, than relationships in families.” He urges Christians – as singles and families – to work together as single families, sharing fellowship and hospitality together.

While growing up, we kids looked forward to the weekly dinner with a beloved uncle. He always brought tummy-aching laughter, whipped cream wars and piggy-back rides that could accommodate up to three kids at once. However Unc's back felt when he left, I know how his heart felt. The joy at being together was tangible – something even a seven-year-old kid could sense.

Piper describes this hospitality as a two-way street, with singles also showing hospitality to married couples and families. “That may feel odd,” he says. “But the oddness of it in this world may make it a greater witness to a truth that goes beyond this world.”

Myth 5: Life begins at marriage. Piper makes an even bolder claim that “the family of God grows not by propagation through sexual intercourse, but by regeneration through faith in Christ.” These are strong words, especially for a community that jokes about “Dutch evangelism” through large families.

Whether we agree or disagree, one need look no farther than Paul and other heroes of the faith to see that there are unique opportunities to serve Christ and live a fulfilled life, whether married or not so. We are complete in Him.

This is my – our – plea. We don't take our ideas of home-making from *Desperate Housewives*. Let's not take our ideas of singleness from Bridget Jones or Ima Luiken.

Miss Ruth Van Dyken is a member with Immanuel ORC (a United Reformed Church) in Jordan Station, Ontario. She works for the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (CCBR – a prolife organisation), and is an aunt to 11 fantastic nieces and nephews.

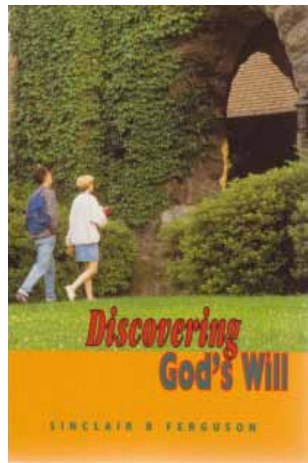
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Book in focus

Discovering God's Will

By Sinclair B. Ferguson

Reviewed by: Grace Van Gameren



“Will you take up the cross daily and follow Me?”

Lord, I want to follow You but where do You want me to go? I know that your ways are best but I can't seem to break my sinful habits. How do I follow You when I don't know which way You are going? There was a time in my life, when such questions were swirling around in my head, and I wished God would just write me a letter and tell me exactly what to do. Now you might say to me,

“Silly Grace, God already wrote you that letter: the Bible”. To which I would respond, “Yes, but how does the Bible tell me exactly how to live today and what choices I should make right now?” And if you so happen to be holding a copy of *Discovering God's Will*, by Sinclair Ferguson, you might hand it to me without a word and simply a mischievous grin.

Discovering God's Will begins by explaining the importance of knowing God. How can we follow the Shepherd if we don't know who He is? How do we trust the Shepherd if we do not understand His loving heart? When we know who God is we will also begin to learn His purpose for life. Ferguson writes, “God, His glory and His presence form the destiny of the Christian.”

In the second chapter, Ferguson gives us guidelines that apply to all God's people through all of time. These can be found in God's commandments, principles that must live in our hearts and illustrations of God's people living out His will in practical ways. Ferguson explains that when we come to know God, His ways and His commands through the Scripture, “an instinct is created in us by which we know the will of the Lord for our lives.”

The book becomes very practical in Chapter 5, where the author uses direction from Paul's letters to the Corinthians to lay out 6 questions for us: 1) Is it lawful? 2) Is it beneficial to me? 3) Is it enslaving? 4) Is it consistent with Christ's Lordship? 5) Is it helpful to others? 6) Is it consistent with Biblical example? These questions can help guide us in the unique situations we find ourselves in.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Ferguson gives some valuable direction on how to seek God's will when considering our calling in life and in making decisions about marriage. When deciding on an occupation the author gives us direction on how to consider our gifts, the needs around us as well as our God-given desires. Ferguson teaches about marriage by describing it as “the bonding of two needy sinners in order to make a partnership which is substantially greater than either of them alone”. In both our callings and in marriage we are taught how to glorify God in reflecting His image in our choices.

Now that I've finished reading this book some new thoughts may begin to swirl around in my head: “Finally, I won't have to wait so long for direction! I know what questions to ask about my choices and how to pick the right

pathway. I have practical steps to take and I'm learning more and more about who God is and what purposes He has made for His children." And once again you might give me a wise and knowing smile, "Slow down my young whipper-snapper, your job hasn't quite finished

yet. Knowing God is something that you must continue to do all of your life, you still have much to discover. Secondly, there will be times that God puts you through the painful process of waiting. 'God is concerned with our personal, spiritual and emotional development.

That is why He so often takes His time with us, in order to fit us for the work His has planned.'" "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." (Psalm 27:14)

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Wanganui: Please keep Albert Couperus and family in prayer especially considering the heavy workload at Mid America Reformed Seminary already underway in this second semester with an emphasis on the task of preaching.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Bishopdale: The building project is now steaming ahead with interior linings going on and finishing trades now in progress. Lord willing, the building work should be completed in time with our first worship service taking place on Good Friday (29 March). With this in mind we will be holding what is hoped will be the final working bee before the church opens. Seat Sponsorship: As the building project is very quickly drawing to a close, a need for at least 60 more chairs is necessary to provide sufficient seating for our current number of regular worshippers. Fire regulations stipulate chairs must lock together, so we cannot fill our shortfall with surplus chairs located in the church building as they do not comply. There is no funding set aside for purchasing extra chairs and the congregation is invited to 'sponsor' a chair or any number of chairs. The chairs cost \$75 each, but if your donation is made before the 31 March, 1/3rd can be claimed back through a charitable rebate effectively reducing your cost to \$50.

Pukekohe: The Building Committee met with the Session to discuss the plans for

a new church building on our current site. There was unanimous agreement to call a special congregational meeting to discuss and vote on a motion put to the congregation to approve the entire building project. Further information on this will be available to all communicants with details of the plans, projected costs and funding.

Wellington: Renovation Project Update – Progress on the renovation has been steady with the planning stage of the project nearing the end. Application for the revised Resource Consent for the project was approved. Construction drawings, Specifications, Tender Agreements and Building Consent Documents have been completed and the tender process will now proceed. It's a little too early to estimate the start date on construction however we will keep you posted as we work toward it. Project Management Team.

Oamaru: A lengthy discussion was held regarding the future of the church. It was noted that the congregation needs to be fully involved in the ongoing discussions regarding finances, make-up of session, and calling another minister as Rev Bruce Hoyt moves toward retirement so that with the full support of the congregation we can request Presbytery's approval for institution in due time.

MISSIONS

Wanganui: Do You Enjoy Writing? The voice of the Martyrs (VOM) is an international mission founded in 1967 by Richard Wurmbbrand, author of 'Tortured for Christ' who spent 14 years in a communist prison. It is a non-profitable interdenominational organisation with a vision to aid Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith in Christ. This organisation works for those who are persecuted and in prison

because they work as pastors, mission workers, evangelists in countries where there is no freedom of religion. VOM works in countries such as North Korea, Muslim states, Africa, Asia and China to support churches and families widowed and isolated from spouses who are imprisoned and often tortured. VOM also provides practical help like; Food, medicine, clothing, generators, pumps, safe homes, Bibles, legal help etc. to persecuted Christians. Do you enjoy writing? You can use this gift to minister to Christians who have been imprisoned for their faith by writing them a letter. Writing to prisoners is an important ministry. For the last two years I have been involved in a small writers group and would like to start a group in our church. I'm plan-

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ning to come together once a month. Everyone is most welcome to come, I also would encourage the older youth to consider if this is something for them to be involved in. *Bep de Jonge*

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

Bishopdale: Amazingly we are now entering our sixth year. Kids Club is a spin off from Crafty Kids Club which provides the opportunity to maintain contact with these kids and to continue to teach them the good news of the Gospel. Every Thursday in term time we walk 20-30 high energy youngsters back to Church from Cotswold School, provide a healthy afternoon tea and run a games/craft and Bible teaching programme until 5pm (when hopefully, parents pick them up.) It can be hard work at times, but there are lots of benefits. For example, the chance to build relationships with kids and their parents, the chance to help kids develop new skills and most importantly the opportunity to model God's love and teach His requirements to them and their parents. We are *always* in need of leaders; at present none of us can be sick on a Thursday. We need people who can either commit to helping weekly or for a certain period of time. We also need some folk who could be on a 'panic list' to be phoned to come in when a leader is ill. Young men/older men...in fact males generally are desperately needed. If we don't have men helping the number of boys fall away. No

special qualifications are needed other than a love of kids and the awesome God who made them.

North Shore: A barbeque has been organised and the parents of the children attending mainly music have been invited. We will hold it in the Trias Rd (Rewi Alley) reserve near the playground area. It was decided to hold it here as a trial and perhaps in about 4 weeks hold another one and this time invite all the community to come as a way of being a witness to the valley.

North Shore: LABS – Language Assisted Bible Study. Advertising has started and we have had enquires. This is a new venture and we don't know what to expect. We have seen the Bucklands Beach LABS working and they have given us great support and ideas. The enquiries we have had range from people with little English to one that has good English but wants more help. The courses are aimed at those with some English but want improvement. So please pray for this new venture, that God will bless it and watch over the final preparations and for all those involved. If interested please contact Martyn.

Wainuiomata: Holiday Bible Club 2013! – Plans are already underway for the next Holiday Bible Club! Please keep 30th April – 3rd May free as a tentative date for holding the HBC.

CAMPS & CONFERENCES

Youth Group Labour Weekend Camp:

The Mainland Regional Youth Committee (MRYC) hosted the annual camp. The theme for our studies this year was Guidance – Determining God's will for the Maze of Life, which were led by Pastor Daniel Wilson from the Nelson congregation. It was held in an exciting new venue, the YMCA Wainui Heights just before Akaroa.


Easter Convention 2013: The 19th Hamilton Easter Convention was held on the 29th and 30th March 2013, DV. Our speaker this year was Dr. Phillip Scheepers, currently lecturer in Missions and Church History at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Victoria. The theme of his presentation was: *Seeking the Glory of God Among the Nations (Studies in the Book of Acts)*.

South Island Young Adults Camp 2013: Are you 18+? We are looking to host the Inaugural South Island Young Adult Camp (YAC) this year over winter. The purpose of this get together is to enable those, 18+ singles, couples even younger families of the church to better get to know each other and be encouraged in a time of Christian fellowship. It will be held over a weekend somewhere in and around Christchurch, there will be a speaker leading worship and study as well as more informal times to get to know each other and enjoy Christian fellowship. We are currently in the planning stage exploring the interest in such a camp. If you would be keen to attend, have any suggestions or want to be involved in the organisation of the camp please email: rcnzyac@gmail.com We look forward to hearing from you!!

CLASSES & COURSES

Avondale: The reformed family of churches have always stressed that we are saved by *grace alone*. What does it mean to confess that salvation is wholly by the grace of God? Is man not a responsible human being and do we not have the power to choose or reject God? Doesn't the teaching of God's sovereign grace lead to presumption that we are saved regardless of faith in Christ, carelessness in living the Christian life, and indifference to the call of the gospel? You are invited to come next Lord's Day to adult education as we are joined by the senior catechism class to immerse ourselves in the study of God's amazing grace, every Lord's Day at 9:15 am.

Christchurch: The Case for Kids is a fourteen 30 minute video teaching tool to help instruct our children in righteous-



*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."
Prov 1:7*

Teaching Principal and/or Teacher

The Silverstream Christian School is a Christian school set up to provide Christian education to our covenant children. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed faith. We believe this Reformed faith to be the most accurate expression of biblical Christianity. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith and to Reformed Christian education. This is an exciting opportunity to be part of a vibrant covenant community, and we look forward to your application. If you have any questions or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact us. Please forward your C.V. with 3 referees to:

Contact details:
Dirk den Harder
Email: dirk39@xtra.co.nz Ph +64 4 528 8066

ness. Paul & Tedd Tripp speak on topics such as : What Is a Family?; Getting to the Heart of Behaviour; Teaching Toddlers to be Under Authority; Parents, Meet Your Teens; Helping Kids See God's Glory. We will condense the presentation into seven one hour viewings and discussions for convenience.

Christchurch: A new men's Bible study will use Kevin DeYoung's book, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness*. As the subtitle indicates, this book is written to "fill a gap" between gospel passion and the pursuit of godliness. Kevin DeYoung is concerned by a lack of holiness among contemporary evangelicals, especially among younger ones and those disdainful of legalism and religion. This book attempts to correct this imbalance and calls evangelicals back to one of the great aims of our salvation – that we increasingly look like Jesus.

Christchurch: At Family Camp we discussed sharing our faith and having a story to tell about our faith in Jesus. A formal presentation of the XEE training will be presented over the Easter Weekend. Mark the days on your calendar and plan to attend.

Dunedin: We are planning to run a Christianity Explored course at the church. This is a seven-session course "intended to give unbelievers time to think about the big questions of life, and to explore the life of the person at the heart of the Christian faith – Jesus Christ." It's a great opportunity to bring along unbelieving friends or family to hear the truth of the gospel. We would challenge you to pray for people that you could invite to this relaxed, easy-to-understand course.

Masterton: Kids Club – This year we would like to introduce a Kids Club for children (0-12 yrs) after the morning service. This is new, and the idea is that the children meet at room 1 (downstairs classroom) straight after the service and have their drink. Then we will have a discussion with some simple questions, some singing and an activity. This will take up about 30 minutes. We hope through these activities the children will have a better recall about the sermon and learn through the discussions. They also learn new Sunday school songs and other spiritual songs that we can also possibly sing at the rest homes, and the fellowship and unity among our children.

North Shore: Walk the Talk – This year we are planning to kick-start off some

practical training sessions on a variety of different topics. We are beginning this with a series on how to run Bible-studies and manage groups for different functions. Whether you have wanted to run a Bible-study but don't know where to start or you have been members of studies or committees for years and always suspected it could run more smoothly – this is your opportunity to learn! This will be largely practical and discussion based. Our intention is to equip you for the tasks God has given you or may lead you into in the future.

Pukekohe: Reformed Distinctives: – The seminar series for the whole congregation for this first term will focus on what is distinctive about the Reformed Faith and the Reformed Churches. No doubt you have been asked, probably more than

once, "What does 'Reformed' mean?" or, "What does your church believe?" or, "How is your church different from other churches?" This series of four seminars will answer these questions. This is intended for all members of the church and is in place of the evening district Bible Studies, the Youth Bible Study and the Senior Catechism class.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Palmerston North: Recipe Book Fundraiser – The senior social group have put together a recipe book, "Favourite Recipes", for the rest of the church as a building fund project. There is no set charge on this book. The cost of producing this book has been covered, all that we ask is that a donation towards the church building fund be made.

DO YOU

have a special needs child or adult?

ARE YOU

interested in helping special needs people within the RCNZ?

DO YOU

have expertise in the area of disability or special needs?

CAN YOU

commit to financially supporting a Home for special needs adults?

ARE YOU

able to provide some form of employment for Christian special needs adults?

If you can answer "YES" to any of the above questions, we would like to hear from YOU!

The RCNZ Care Services Committee has commenced planning for the future care of members of the RCNZ who have special needs and who are no longer able to be cared for by their parents or family.

Please contact the Secretary of the Committee, Herman de Jonge via email – dejonge@xtra.co.nz if you are able to assist in any way.

Reformed Church 25th Celebration

Masterton was well and truly “Revving it up” the weekend they celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Reformed Church of Masterton. Firstly, no less than 5 Reverends were present on the day; the Rev. Bruce Hoyt who served our congregation from 1982 until 1994, the Rev. Paul Archbald [1995- 2001], the Rev. Ed Rademaker [2002-2003], as well as our present Pastor, the Rev. Peter Kloosterman [2005], and our own home-grown Vicar [now Rev] JanErik

Stolte [serving in Dunedin]

Secondly, months of ‘revved up’ preparation went into organising this event, untold emails flew around in cyberspace, billets were organized, food prepared, games set out, the Homeleigh building spruced up, the hall decorated, you name it; the committee did an excellent job.

When Judy Durant still lived in Masterton, she had a plaque on her kitchen wall which read, ‘a mother never cuts

tie apron strings-she just lengthens them’. And this seemed to be the case for the large numbers of visitors and members who joined the festivities. Past and present members came together for a weekend of celebration, thanksgiving, reminiscing and fun. Like bees returning to the hive, about 150 adults and children turned up for the afternoon session; a fun time with games such as the ever favourite egg and spoon race, pass the jellybean from spoon to spoon [with the spoon in your mouth mind you], a quiz, and a game where you had to get in and out of a t-shirt while holding hands. Both young and old had fun participating and when not playing games, people had a wonderful time, eating, drinking and catching up with brothers and sisters in the Lord.

In the evening, it was almost like a wedding feast, from the colour theme [green and silver] to the decorations, the anniversary booklet, bookmark, commemorative painted stones, beautifully set tables, very elegant food and drink, with friendly and attentive waitresses and waiter, an excellent Master of Ceremonies, and above all a relaxed but great program to contribute to a wonderful evening.

Greetings were read from other congregations, as well as from past members [also displayed on the notice board]. A timeline was taped to the wall with interesting happenings in the life of the Masterton Reformed Church, and photos were screened on a power point presentation.

As our first Pastor, the Rev Hoyt, gave a report on the history and reminisced about the blessings and trials in past years. Masterton was started by three main families, who were all represented on the day; The Akkermans, the Bartletts and the Snoeijers. In fact, our very own Lynn Fisher [nee Snoeijer] was ‘the oldest member’ of our congregation present that night, having been in Masterton since the age of two. And boy did she get some ribbing on that in the next few weeks from Derek Cressy [all jealousy I suppose as he only joined in 1983].

In 1971 these families shifted to the Wairarapa and began home services, while having their membership in Silverstream. In 1982, the Rev. Bruce Hoyt



Mr Hoyt speaking at the celebrations.

was called from the States and later installed as teaching elder of the now home mission congregation. Other families started to join, for work reasons or because they wanted to be part of the home mission, making the numbers swell. Finally in 1987 Masterton became an official congregation, and today we have approx.130 members worshipping each Sunday. The Lord is near unto all that call upon Him in truth.

In his speech the Rev. Paul Archbald brought greetings from Silverstream with a jovial, "Hi from Mum!" He encouraged us from Philippians 2:2, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." In a style that only Paul can deliver, he recalled some hilarious episodes of his time in ministry in Masterton.

Pastor Peter Kloosterman's speech focussed more on the present, as we have been blessed to have him as our Teaching Elder since August 2005. Ephesians 4:15-16 reminds us that Christ, who is the head, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. And so it is Christ who has built the Church, which fitted with what the MC said at the opening of the evening when he read from Matthew 16:13-19, but particularly verse 18b, "upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." No church made or maintained with human hands will survive; God only can make it stand. To Him be all praise and glory for His rich blessings.

Throughout the evening, videos were played of the past. One such event was of the Kloeg family playing their brass band as fundraiser for the Homeleigh Christian school. "When the Red Red Robin goes Bob Bob Bobbin along" brought smiles to many people's faces, especially watching Caleb [then 2] complete with his thumb in his mouth, keeping perfect time with his samba balls. The Kloeg family then replayed the song in real life, although Caleb didn't suck his thumb anymore!

Another video was of the Choir, somewhere in the early 80's by the looks of the hairstyles and clothing, singing "Tis not that I did choose Thee, for Lord that could not be". Bruce Hoyt then called the members of that choir to the front to sing this song again, which sounded lovely and clear, and was a nice impromptu performance.

Masterton is a special congregation, as witnessed by many. There have been difficult times in our congregation, as in all congregations. Times of testing, in which we have turned to the Lord for His Sovereign grace and peace. Times of joy, in which we praised God for His mercies and goodness. People expressed and gave thanks for the unity, character, warmth and hospitality of the congregation and its members. Margaret Haverland commented that many people have come from many different location and have gone out into all of New Zealand [and beyond]. A bit of research on my part showed that Christians with backgrounds from no less than 27 different nationalities and denominations have been members or

long term visitors of the Reformed Church of Masterton: New Zealanders of both Maori and Pakeha descend, Pakistan, Australian, Canadian, American, Dutch, South African, Korean, Fijian, Thai, English, Czech Republic, Gereformeerd

Synodaal, Nederlands Hervormd, Gereformeerd Vrijgemaakt, Christelijk Gereformeerd, Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland, Mormon, Hindu, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist, OPC, Buddhist, New Converts, Reformed {RCNZ, RCA,}, ARP {USA},



There was opportunity for some outside games.



The Kloeg family providing some entertainment.



The three wise men – pastors Bruce Hoyt, Paul Archbald and Peter Kloosterman.

and I fear that I may have missed some. In any case, truly the community of the saints, and a blessing to see that though we are geographically and theologically vastly diverse, we serve the same Master and Saviour, fellowship in the bond of Christ's love and that His Word is preached from our pulpit faithfully each Lord's Day.

Bruce Hoyt wrote this paragraph at the institution on 13 December 1987 and it is our prayer for the Reformed Church of Masterton today, "May the Lord cause you to prosper in His service so that His Church may continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ through the faithful preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and the patient exercise of discipline. And may His Church continue to increase in this place and throughout the world through the conversion of sinners by the proclamation of the Gospel." Amen to that!

Heidi Hendrikse

Masterton, January 2013



Mrs Jane Snoeijer (l) and Mrs Martha Akkerman (r) were some of the founding members of the Masterton Church.



Mr B Hoyt and Mr E Rademaker spoungame.



An impromptu performance by previous choir members.