

# faith in focus

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*“I am a  
rose of  
Sharon...”*

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*Song of Songs 2:1*

## CONTENTS

How can I know which way to go? <i>Seeking God's path</i>	3
Between Me & You – <i>Pilot light</i>	5
A feminine focus – <i>In the midst of life</i>	6
Taking advantage of a willing daughter <i>The fourth in the series on Senior Living Options</i>	9
Divine guidance – <i>It's right there with you!</i>	11
World news	12
What do they do? <i>A look at two things elders do</i>	14
Book review <i>The pagan idea of "Finding the Secret Will of God"</i>	15
Church news	16
Mission in focus <i>Deaf Reformed Ministries, Prayer Points</i>	18
From the D.A.'s Office <i>Frederick Channing (1927-2002)</i>	20

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## Editorial

From church history we learn the powerful lesson of a godly life. When we read about them we can be amazed what God did through them. Whether they were believers who have become famous for what they did, or they were the countless and faceless many more who simply lived their faith where they were. In the words of Hebrews 11, verse 39, "these were commended for their faith."

Can I invite you to reflect on what it was about their lives that is commendable? You might reply, having just read Hebrews, "It's their faith." But how was that faith shown? What exactly was it they did that made them that way? Was it some inherent knowledge or an experience they once had? We know it's nothing to do with these things at all. Faith isn't taking a blind plunge into the dark. It's not depending on some illusive emotional hope inside. Faith is trusting in God's unfailing promises. It can only be God's leading by His Word and Spirit that makes us the blessed instruments in His hands.

The illustration of a map for the Christian life has been used often, especially when presenting a Bible to a couple at their marriage ceremony! It's a good picture, though, because those words are God's way for us - whether our closest relationships, or whatever else we may face in our lives.

This is why the growing desperation amongst Christians for the latest and greatest only shows a growing apart from the personal study and application of God's Word. And it often starts in pulpits as sermons expositing God's clear word for our lives become diluted down to a 'come to God and feel better' type of inspirational message. It is usually topical, and when scripture is quoted, it is often done out of context. You don't need to take your Bibles to those churches - but there's some great espresso coffee served in the Cafe at the back!

May this issue challenge you to renew your study of God's Word. But also may it help you to be able answer others who have become affected by what is really an insecure and insufficient Christianity. They may claim great things - and some of our young people can be quite enamoured by them - but when it comes to the little things we see there really is no-thing there at all. As a friend who counsels individuals and families affected by sects and cults says, "If they promise an easy way, it's the wrong way!" Even the Consumer magazine tells us, "If it looks too good to be true - it probably is!"

Following God's Will for our lives is hard, but He's gives us every resource we need to do it. Isn't that what we also learn from church history?

**"Erratum**

Please note that in my report on Synod 2002 I incorrectly stated the decision regarding the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Ltd). It should read, "after 'in camera' discussion and consideration it was decided not to recommend the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Ltd) to the churches for financial support."

*"Lord, what thou wilt,  
where thou wilt,  
and when thou wilt"*

*The last words of Richard Baxter*

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 Dordt, 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.

# How can I know which way to go?

## Seeking God's path

### Sjirk Bajema

Everyone in this world has a direction in their lives. It's very rarely that you will find anyone who will admit to not having some kind of aim. Mind you, among unbelievers, the honest ones are those who—in that moment of deep inner reflection—say something like these words in a song:

*"How can I go forward when I don't know  
which way I'm facing?  
How can I go forward when I don't know  
which way to turn?  
How can I go forward  
into something  
I'm not sure of?"*

This is the sad state of affairs of a life without saving faith; and it explains the high rate of depression and even suicide today.

But what if it were Christians who became so confused about where they ought to be going? How would it be if among us now there are those who speak in similar tones as to what their present and future is? That would be nothing less than totally devastating!

We could understand that unbelievers would be confused and lacking direction. We could even see it as logical that the further away from the gospel society goes, the more there is depression and frustration, with suicide, because there is no deeper aim or purpose in life.

But when it seems the

unbelievers have definite directions, and it's rather Christians who appear so lost and confused, well, what a turn-up for the books! Yet, that's exactly what's happening. For although we have a wealth of Bible knowledge and church history passed on down to us through the ages, it seems that more than ever the church has taken on the world's utterly useless directions!

What is occurring that has made Christians become like this? How is it happening that the patently illogical and new-age ideas become used as the way that believers ought to follow, as they are dressed up with a so-called

'Christian' costume? Why does such a book as *The Bible Code* become so quickly converted into Christian literature, turning into books called by names such as *The Handwriting of God*, or *The Signature of God*, all purporting to give accurate details about world events that have or that will happen?

### A code?

But here a little more explanation about this book, *The Bible Code*, might be helpful. The author of this book claims to have found a so-called Bible Code. This kind of code is a method of deciphering a hidden meaning, similar to

those used for communication in war. It's something that is hidden—it's a secret—until you crack the code! And once you've done that—wallah! Everything starts to make sense; it's part of this pattern.

Though with this so-called Bible Code we need to understand that the whole Bible doesn't have this code—just the first five books of Moses. So you could be a mystical Jew and believe this. (As in fact the author is, even referring at one stage quite unsympathetically to an Israeli Prime Minister, who pooh-poohed his strange idea.) Invariably that Prime Minister died, allegedly for failing to see the danger this code was telling about him. Because Yitzhak Rabin apparently could have changed history. In the words of the book, "...the Bible encodes all the probabilities and **what we do** determines the actual out-



come."

Ah, we come to real rub, don't we? This is from man, not God! This direction is no divine direction at all because in the end it's what we do what's matters. It really gives us a weak, ineffectual God, some generous spiritual presence, who gives us the way we want to go anyhow. That's really a very small picture.

How different to the true God of Scripture—the God who says to His people through David in Psalm 32, "*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.*" (v8)

### The very big picture

Instead of trying to get out of the Bible what we want to fit in with our own direction, we have to first of all let God speak for Himself. And let's be assured, God does speak for Himself—otherwise the Scriptures would not have been written, and certainly Jesus Christ would never have come to show God's self-revelation. There is no way any individual person can take up the centrepiece of this picture.

What matters is what Jesus showed to those two men on the road to Emmaus, and to His disciples, as we read in Luke 24: "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*" And when the Spirit opened their minds, they could understand this! Then they saw the huge plan of God, and their own small part.

But do we? Can we look past our own selves? Or have we, too, become as wrapped up in our own little world, as those two disciples were on their way to Emmaus.

We can say that we use the Bible. We can even show we follow things in the Bible. But for whom are we doing these things?

There was an occasion when I went to a particular church service to hear an address on a particular subject. As it happened, that address wasn't given that day. What I did hear, though, was how a woman had received God's Word for her and her husband to go and serve on the mission field in Africa. That word

she heard from the LORD was from the book of Habakkuk, which she happened to open at while she was seeking direction. In the King James version they preferred, she suddenly saw the words, "*I will call thee in the midst of the years.*" What could this prophetic word to Israel six hundred years before Christ possibly mean for her today? Well, she explained that a particular burden for her in seeking the LORD's will had been their age. She wasn't so young anymore—nearly forty, you see! And she wondered if they were meant to go at that kind of age. These words, which fell open before her, were so providential!

"In the midst of the years" meant middle-aged—exactly their age. "*In the midst of the years I will call thee*"—what more specific guidance could they have? So off they went!

This is but one example of the misinterpretation happening among believers today. It's like the story many of the man who, in seeking God's will, closed his eyes, flipped open his Bible, and stabbed his finger on the verse, "*Then Judas went out and hung himself.*" Feeling that this couldn't possibly be the Lord's guidance for him that day, he closed his eyes again, flipped open his Bible, stabbed his finger, and opening his eyes, he read, "*And you go do likewise!*"

While this might seem an extreme example, how many of us haven't talked about "putting out the fleece"? Isn't that also telling God that if he wants us to do **this**, then He has to do **that** as a confirming sign? And how much don't we secretly envy Christians who live by such faith?

But where in Judges 6 are we told that what Gideon did with that fleece was an act of faith? If we read the whole chapter it's obvious that putting out that fleece showed the exact opposite, for God had already told him that He would save Israel by His hand!

### The exactly right glasses!

This article began with noting that almost everyone has a direction, an aim, of one kind or another. Even if they don't seem to have a purpose, we could even say that their purpose is that they have

no purpose! So, if God has this **very big picture**—if the Scriptures are true in testifying about Jesus Christ, and about the essential need to be saved through Him, then we have to see that. In fact, it is so important that this purpose must be the grid through which we draw all our guidance from God through the Scripture—and anywhere else, for that matter!

What are these exactly right glasses? Think about it: They're glasses which don't make physical things into spiritual signs; they're glasses through which we are certain of things we cannot see; ah, what can they be but the glasses of faith! Now—are **you** wearing them?

How can you tell? Well, do you trust God? Is this God your Father in a personal relationship through His Son? Have you the assurance that everything is in His control and is being worked out for His glory?

Not always? That's the difficulty in our lives. That's why we would be comforted by being able to have this physical proof—whether in a so-called Bible code, the stab we have as flip open the Bible, or the symbolical laying out of the fleece. We have to acknowledge that it's not we who **find**, it's we who have been **found!** It's in the acknowledgment that it's God's **will** that we begin to see the way we're meant to go.

God's will is His eternal plan. And it's in recognising, as Ephesians 1 points out, God's plan in Jesus Christ, that we begin to see our part. As we have union with our Lord—through being adopted, redeemed, forgiven, set apart as His own by the indwelling Holy Spirit and raised up with Him to newness of life—we, the Church, individually and together, bring all the honour to Him!

### Stick to Him and you won't get lost

What it all comes down to is this: If I am not actively in fellowship with Christ, personally and communally, I am holding back the work of His Spirit in my life and in the relationships I have. Galatians 5 talks about keeping in step with the Spirit, precisely because believers can wander away from God's Word during their lives. It's this keeping in step with

the Spirit which keeps those glasses firmly in place.

But one could now ask a practical question: How do I actually keep in step with the Spirit? We have to be careful here. Don't fall into that trap of thinking it's something you have to do.

There was a young minister who visited a senior yet frail senior believer. Over a number of months he had become impressed with her witness while she had so much suffering. During one visit he asked her how he could walk those same steps to be that much closer to God: "How can I go up toward the Lord?"

The lady tut-tutted. "You do have much to learn, don't you? You see, it's not that we go up steps to come closer to the Lord. We actually go down steps and realise more and more the huge distance we are from the Lord, and how far above us He really is!"

Let me ask you now: Is Jesus becoming more of that larger and filling presence in your life? Are you giving Christ more and more glory and honour? In the words of John the Baptist, "He must become greater; I must become less". (John 3:30)

### The straight narrow way

"Ah," you could be thinking, "finally he's going to tell me which way to go. This is what I've been looking for!" But, without looking at the whole, and without looking by faith at the whole, you won't be able to see the details. If you can't see the forest for the trees, you need to step back first of all. Get your relationship right with the Lord and then you can start to live with Him too.

We should not think that when David was in the hardness of his heart from the sin he committed with Bathsheba that he was still able to live close with the Lord in other areas. In fact, this sin tore apart so much of what had been built up with the Lord, leading to a terrible split in his own family, and severely debilitating the future of Israel. In Psalm 32 David confesses this sin, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." (v3f)

Being right with the Lord is the straight and narrow way. This will mean a lifetime of asking the constant question, "Now what would Jesus want me to do?" And because we read His word, and pray to Him, and worship Him with His Body—the Church—He tells us the answer, too! You will find issues and situations that were once real hassles become less so. You will find different challenges before you, for you're growing. Just like teenagers find their physical and emotional lives are changing, with different things taking on more importance, while other things just don't seem to matter as much, if at all, so it happens to us spiritually—it grows on you! It was because of his own experience of this that David sang, "Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him" (Psalm 32:10).

Consider who Jesus said showed the best example of a person following God's will. Was there anyone He commended for putting out a big fleece to test the LORD? Quite the opposite! In Luke 19, the Master praises his servants and promotes them to the highest positions because they have been faithful with the very small things. In the same way, the apostle Paul tells Timothy that elders must first of all manage their own

household well. Let them demonstrate that God is guiding and blessing them every day, and in every way!

By the practice of faith itself, and so seeing the very big picture of the Lord, you will be shown where to go. Ask yourself: Will what I'm thinking of doing help God's big picture? Have I exercised my faith by praying about it? Do I know everything I should about it? Is there a trusted Christian friend who might advise me?

If the answer is yes, keep going with what you're doing. It's those little things which prove you can do bigger things. Then you'll find the LORD prompting and leading in His time. In the words of Hebrews 12, "...let's throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let's run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let's fix our eyes on **Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith..." (v1b-2).

Oh, that we would say more and more, with the apostle, "I have been crucified with Christ—I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal.2:20). Then, and only then, can we know which way to go, because it's not our say—it's His say that paves the way—the straight and narrow way.

## Between You and Me!

### Pilot light

#### Dick G. Vanderpyl

It was only yesterday that they took her outside in her wheelchair.

They had placed her in the soft autumn sun, and she enjoyed intensely the warmth on her wrinkly skin.

With a smile she had thought, "The light is so sweet and it is so good for my eyes to see the sunshine!" But on this rainy day, there was no chance to go outside!

Pelting rain hits the window of her room; droplets seeking each other and

then forming little streams, which rapidly slide down the window. But the tapping of the rain on her window and the drips on the glass escape her.

As God's Word tells her, "That is when the light of the sun, the moon and the stars will grow dim for you and the rain clouds will never pass away. Then your arms that have protected you will tremble, and your legs, now strong, will grow weak. Your teeth will be too few to chew your food, and your eyes too dim to see clearly. And your ears will be deaf to the noise of the street."<sup>1</sup>

It has become quiet in her life, almost deathly quiet. A feebly burning candle! For quite a considerable time, she has not been able to go to church.

Even those years when she locked the door of her house behind her—with a bag full of sweets and other surprises—to visit her children and grandchildren; all that's behind her—it's history now!

Even to go to the Hall for a cup of coffee is now too much. And a phone-call is not much good with her bad hearing!

She now goes for the little surprises: the warmth of the sun on her old skin, the taste of a piece of cake, her granddaughter carefully shaking her pillow at her back.

It's just like a waiting room, you'd think. You feel the urge to ask her, "Why are you here?" But you suspect that she'll say, "I'm waiting". A very old lady, just waiting for the door to open and the Lord to come to get her: "Come daughter, it's your turn now."

Indeed, she waits...but not for what you think! "The prophetess Anna is my example," she'll say! Anna, of whom Luke wrote that she was about 84 years of age, who served God continuously in the temple with fasting and praying, night and day, waiting for the Messiah to

come, looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem!

How it developed that way, she really does not know, but her life is increasingly a conversation with God. After all, she has the time to pray and she does take her time to pray. She also knows what to pray for.

Each time when she receives the church bulletin, her daughter reads it out for her. For a starter she begins with the well and weal of life, then anything that is important for the congregation. She prays for these!

She prays for her minister, the elders and the deacons, for strength and wisdom to lead the congregation and to serve and help those in time of need!

She prays for the sick and calls them by name: "O Lord, will you be with so and so; Lord, will you restore so and so". She prays for those who have lost dear ones and/or are burdened under psychological pressure or difficulties. She prays for the young to find the way to the Lord!

She prays for parents to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord, and also for those who are involved in the work of evangelism. She prays for the missionaries by name, and the churches on the mission-field.

She prays for unity in the church, and for those who are being persecuted.

She prays for her neighbour who fears death, and she prays for her grandchild who has left home to study in another city.

She prays for the government and all those in authority; she prays for a world in need.

Above all, she prays that God's Kingdom may come soon!

The strange thing is that her prayers are getting longer and longer. Sometimes because her thoughts do wander; but more often because one prayer calls up another need or request!

Indeed she waits, but her waiting is not an empty waiting; it's a fulfilled waiting. A waiting filled with prayer and a waiting of full expectations.

Her life's flame is a torch; her life is a continuous pilot light.

She lives with God, forward, looking not backwards. She lives, not for dying but to go to her Saviour.

*(Translated from a small booklet "Ik leef van de geef..." by Jan Mudde '97)*

<sup>1</sup> Eccl. 12:3-4a Translation: Wisdom for Modern Man,

## A feminine focus

# In the midst of life we are in death

**Sally Davey**

These words, simple and true words, come from the old Anglican Prayer Book. For centuries they were read at the graveside as loved ones buried their dead. But they were not written for the dead—they were always a reminder to the living that we do not know when our appointed time is, and that we should live as servants who are ready for our Master to come and take us home. Are our lives fit for heaven? Do our priorities show that we live for the things above—

or rather, do we live as though this life were all there is? This is also the theme of many parts of Scripture. Think of Psalm 90, which tells us to "number our days...that we may gain a heart of wisdom." In this prayer, Moses urges us to heed the fact that our years are finite, *so that* we may live in a wise and godly way. What about the reminders, everywhere in Scripture but especially in Isaiah Chapter 40, that we are but grass, which will wither—our glory is like the wild flowers in the field, which will fall and die in a day or two? What about the

parables of Jesus, many of which warned his hearers that they should be ready for their death—that living for the riches, the pleasures of this world will result in swift destruction and eternal anguish for the foolish, the unprepared? And Christians today should think of these things, too. The pleasures and glories of this world can also lure us away from living earnestly for the Saviour, and as if He were coming for us soon.

But we have prompts to help us think of such things. God uses many means—often it is the death of someone close

to us, and I'm sure many of us have felt such deaths deeply. Such tender sorrows etch indelible impressions in our hearts and our thoughts. Sometimes other things can touch us in this way—the thought of serious disease, which comes across our path these days in many ways—advertising, health warnings and the like. Alarming reminders about the need to take precautions against this or that fatal disease abound in magazines and radio and television programmes. We are hard-pressed *not* to think about them!

However, more recently, and in a more hopeful way, I was prompted to think about these things through a study our ladies' group made of the book of Revelation. Here, in this part of Scripture, are constant reminders of the certainty that we must all die, that one day we who follow Jesus will all be gathered around the throne of the Lamb, and that, whatever may have been the cause of our death—sickness, suffering, or cruel persecution—we will have all sorrow wiped away from our eyes in the glorious "foreverness" of Jesus's presence. That is the truth of it... whatever we face now, however long or short, easy or difficult our life on earth may be, we will be there, forever, in heaven with the God who loves us and with those others whom we love. And it's the truths that these pages tell that have kept many a Christian woman faithful through the centuries—those who have gone to their deaths for Christ, those who have lost little ones "before their time", and those who have spent long lives in the chaos and pain of turbulent historical events. For all of these women, Revelation provides the certain assurance that all suffering will come to an end; and that whatever happens in our lives, God is in control.

But most recently, another "prompt" has set me thinking. At our churches' synod in May, our editor gave me a little book entitled *Last Hours of Prominent Christian Women*. This little book is a collection of first-hand accounts (usually by the ministers who sat with these women as they died) of the witness of some noble Christian women of the

seventeenth century. Many of them were only in their early twenties when they died. We often tend to think that "in those days" people were more accustomed to death because it happened so often—sickness was common, people died young, they died

Lady Margaret  
Maynar  
(died June, 1682)



in their homes with all their loved ones, young and old around them.... But, I have the feeling that the presence of death doesn't necessarily help your attitude to it. Death, no matter how often you see it, is always an "outrage", as Don Carson has said. It is only in the world because of sin, and that is not how it was meant to be. What counts in our attitude to death is not how often we see it, but whether we have faith in He Who conquered it, so that we, with our loved ones, can go through it—even though in itself it is terrible. And the ladies depicted in this book, taking them one by one, had this faith. Their stories show what it is like to die in the presence of the Saviour. They are also written with the purpose of showing us how to live all our lives in the knowledge that living with death in this way is real—and possible.

In the preface of the book, the writer sketches for us a profile of the ideal Christian woman. She lives a "godly and quiet life", visiting the sick and needy, setting a gentle example of Christlikeness to her husband at home, being a frugal and wise manager of the household, teaching and encouraging her servants to love the Scriptures, speaking kindly, avoiding gossip, and devoting herself to prayer, meditation and study of the Scriptures. Such patterns, writes the author, "*may surely teach us to use this world as not abusing it, to set our affections on things above, and not on things of the earth; to make our pursuits and pleasures, our talents and learning, our thoughts and actions, our time and opportunities, subordinate to the one great purpose of life, a preparation for an eternal existence, and in so great a work ever to look unto Him for grace and assistance, without whom we can do nothing; always remembering that this world is not our home, that it is our school of probation, in which we are to be trained by habits of self-discipline and divine dispensations, for another, a better, and a glorious state of existence.*" And to that end, the author recommends the study of the last hours of godly women to those of us who are in full possession of our health, so that we may store up spiritual lessons for the time when we, in turn, face the prospect of our own death.

This is a very important thing to do, because it helps us retain a clear view of our priorities in life. Facing our death focuses our minds and hearts on those things that the Lord *most* wants to find us doing, when He returns. One wise older woman (Lady Elizabeth Brooke, who died at 82 in 1683), whose words are included in this book, observed that the "serious expectation of death" brings Christians a number of benefits. Thinking about our death in the light of biblical certainties frees us from the distressing

and unsettling fears we may have of it. We can learn the quiet assurance that comes from knowing, beyond all doubt, that death will bring us into the presence of Christ. Secondly, it helps wean our souls away from the pleasures of this world—the things that cause us to live for the here and now, the things that bring covetousness, ambition and greed. We realise that such things are so much less important—and in some cases even wrong—when we weigh them up against the life hereafter, when we will need none of them, and where we cannot take any of them! Thirdly, Lady Brooke recommends, seriously expecting death, even in the years of our prime, helps us develop patience and contentment—habits that will be of precious advantage when the time of our death does, in fact, come. We will also learn to redeem our time better when we reflect, soberly, that all our time is in God's hands, that we are accountable to Him for our use of it, and that He may draw it to a close at any moment. It helps us to develop the

habit of keeping our affairs settled—leaving nothing to be done tomorrow that can be done today. It helps us keep up our earnestness in the battle against remaining sin; it helps keep us fervent in prayer, and drives away worldly cares and distractions—because death, she reminds us, is a “solemn thing.” Finally, the expectation of death makes all our work, and the fulfilment of all our duties, sweeter, because of the everlasting rest to which death leads us.

Another woman included by the author in this book is Lady Margaret Maynard, who died in June 1682. Her husband was a senior official in the royal households of both Charles II and James II. Growing up in turbulent times, she knew little of her father, because he was banished from England due to his support of King Charles I. Instead, she was brought up by three godly bishops, whose pastoral care laid a solid spiritual foundation in her heart, and from which she never wavered. Bishop Ken, who preached at her funeral, made a number of observations about her character and spiritual habits. He remarked that those present should not weep unduly for Lady Margaret, since she now had what she had so long earnestly hoped for—she was with Christ, free from the many sufferings sickness had brought her. It had long been her habit to “number her days”, and to “fit herself for her change”, knowing that the time of its coming was uncertain. How did she do this? By

consistent habits of daily prayer, by the reading of “serious and devout” books to improve her Christian understanding; by making it her practice to care for the poor, and to bring up her children tenderly and lovingly—but with more care for their eternal welfare than for their wealth or greatness. And in all this she was humble—she talked little about what she did, and had the gift of concealing her goodness as far as she was able. And how did such a Christian lady die? As Bishop Ken reported her last days, Lady Margaret gave herself to prayer as much as she was able—even though she could not kneel, as had been her habit, she bowed her body and her heart with all her remaining strength. And that is a very practical truth: no matter how sick or weak we might be in life or in death, if our minds are conscious, we have the ability to turn our thoughts to God in prayer. And this is what she did. The life of such a lady, though doubtless a lady who still struggled daily with sin, is a witness which can help us, today, throw off the sin that entangles us, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

It is true—in the midst of life we *are* in death. And if, in the midst of life, we learn to live this truth, then at our deaths we will be able to look back, with thanks, on lives that have been fully lived.

*Note: This article is the first in another series on the lives of Christian women.*

## TEACHER VACANCY

Homeleigh Christian School invites applications for a Teacher/Principal in a Primary School commencing January 2003.

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# Taking advantage of a willing daughter

## *Part four of the series on Senior Living Options*

"Go in with a daughter? Never! You'll lose all your independence."

Who said so?

Last year, John and Pat made their second move since retirement. Their first was to a smaller house. They had felt a bit like two small pebbles rattling around in a big pot in their family home, which had been built for a three-generation family. Pat's mother had had a severe stroke a year before they were married, and as it was getting harder for her father to manage, her parents came to live with their daughter, who by then had three children. This was not an easy decision, but was the best solution for Pat's seventy-year-old father, who was remarkable in the way he carved out a new life in a new city.

So, when Elizabeth their youngest daughter, who had loved growing up with her grandparents in the house, asked

outside the home, and planned in private.

John was at first enthusiastic, but as time went by, he became more reluctant. He hated viewing or planning houses, while Pat thrived on it! Their first home, built over thirty years earlier, was now occupied, to their delight, by another Christian family of three generations. Their present town house, in a cul-de-sac of friendly fellow superannuitants, was convenient for shopping, within walking distance of the hospital, close to church, and they were happy there. Still, they would think about it.

Elizabeth and Pat began to house-hunt, but found, as had been their experience thirty years earlier, that suitable housing for three generations was almost non-existent, and that land agents would still make ridiculous and impossible suggestions. Once again, the

the start. Elizabeth and her husband were keen to have a rural outlook with room enough for a sheep or two, or a steer. As far as John was concerned, town water supply and natural gas were all-important. Wherever could you find a combination like that? But after some searching, find it they did—over an acre, the only section in a new area at the edge of the city already linked to water, gas and sewerage, and strangely enough, offered (unknown to them) for sale by a fellow church member who had not heard they were looking! They just 'happened upon it'.

A Christian building inspector who was in the process of setting up his own business as a building supervisor, asked them if he could oversee the building of their house, gaining experience and using it for advertising purposes. This gave them many advantages, and took a weight of responsibility off their shoulders.

### **The house plan**

Two storeys were considered, but the idea discarded to make it easier for the older couple. The plan was carefully prepared. The house was long and low, and provided two double bedrooms, a shower room, a good storage cupboard (lined to hold most of their books), and a lounge for them, separated by the common kitchen/dining room and ironing/linen room from the family's quarters of lounge, study, three bedrooms, bathroom, and ensuite

Visitors have been pleasantly surprised to see how 'independent' John and Pat can be. Each couple is able to do its own entertaining, live its own life, have its own study groups, its own potluck dinners or barbecues, and overnight guests. The older ones love having their grandchildren always around: a great joy, but also able to be sent 'home' when necessary.

When planning such an arrangement, there are many things to consider carefully:



Pat and John to make a similar move in with her family, it was not a new experience. They were amazed at the negative reaction of others when they mentioned the possibility of such a move. So they stopped talking about it

solution was to build their own. Now was decision time for the two. Would they, wouldn't they? At last they decided that although their second house was a joy, they would go in with their daughter.

God's blessing was evident right from

- How many rooms and what size? (Not too small!)
- Are the children's bedrooms well away from the 'oldies'?
- A good idea is instant hot water, instead of a cylinder. Two gas units were installed on the outside walls, not only because of the size of the house, but because the adults have temperature control. The one controlling Pat and John's shower room also controls the kitchen and laundry, the temperature altered as needed. The other controls the children's bathroom and their parents' ensuite, and is always set so that the children will never burn themselves.
- The house plan leaves the possibility of easily adding an extra kitchen to the 'oldies' wing if that is ever desired. It could become a self-contained flat in the future.

### Living separately yet together

- Is the in-law quite happy? Pat and John's son-in-law is a lovely Christian, who is quite prepared for the next years to remain in this region. (He is a school principal).
- John and Pat are happy to be 'built in baby-sitters', but this is not allowed to clash with their own plans; an outside baby sitter is brought in if it does.
- Cooking is shared, mainly by Elizabeth and John, who both enjoy it and are far better cooks, so the family says, than Pat, who doesn't! Pat makes up for her failings by helping with the washing and ironing. Decide early enough if this is a suitable arrangement, or does the older couple wish for separate cooking facilities?
- Visitors on either side of the family are welcome to meals, or as overnight guests.
- The children are not the grandparent's children. Parents are responsible for discipline, and the older generation, if not left in charge, must try not to interfere.
- Each one must respect the other's privacy. No interference in family disagreements!
- How much household and other help will the older couple give? They are

not 'flattering', with duty rosters! It depends on individual circumstances. For example, Pat's father grew his own patch of tomatoes, an old pleasure, and otherwise faithfully cared for Pat's mother, and looked after their own quarters. Pat did their washing, meals etc. (Her cooking was all right, really!) In the present situation, different arrangements are followed.

- Financial arrangements must be organised. Pat's father used to give her a weekly set sum for household expenses, adjusted every now and then for inflation. In the present setting, household expenses are shared: groceries in proportion to the number in the house, and power bills half each, as each use a similar amount. Rates, too, are split. A monthly accounting is undertaken on Elizabeth's computer. Small purchases on either side are ignored, as is the additional cost of visitors. Either of these methods is satisfactory.
- Telephone: each couple has its own number. This is a good arrangement, private lines and separate bills, no sorting through the toll bill charges. The monthly second line charge is about \$10 less than the first line. The move for Pat and John has been financially advantageous. Savings on rates, telephone and power bills, shared garden and household cleaning costs.
- Provision is allowed if either needs intensive care in future. Elizabeth is not a nurse. This arrangement does not preclude other necessary alternatives, nursing homes or community nurses if this ever becomes advisable. Hopefully it will not, but this must be thought out before the necessity arises.
- Also to be carefully worked out is the eventual division of the parent's assets amongst the members of the family. Of course, Pat and John contributed towards the cost of the house, and this contribution is to be taken into account in any final settling of their estate between their three children, as is Elizabeth's undertaking of care.

One cannot foresee everything. Much depends on Christian honour. In the family who bought Pat and John's first house, the wife died a year ago. Her mother and her husband still remain in the house, together with the youngest child, now in his final years at secondary school. This Christian son-in-law has accepted responsibility for his deceased wife's mother.

A sad case occurred some time ago in another country. A son-in-law and daughter moved in with the wife's mother, and after a while the mother signed over outright ownership of her house to her daughter. The daughter died, the son-in-law remarried, and he and his second wife told the mother-in-law to go. Could this ever happen in a Christian family?

It is good fun being together. During the holidays when the family was away, John really missed the two little boys bounding in and out, visiting him in bed in the morning with their books for Opa to read. Grandma had a busy time before Christmas, putting together a folder each of family stories for all their seven grandchildren. John has enjoyed putting in a strip of garden. They moved into bare paddocks, but the 1.2 acres is taking shape. John's beloved birds are breeding in the new aviary, which Alastair built. [And the steer has been given the family name of Roelof!]

There is no pressure to get everything done all at once, and it is far nicer looking at a rural scene than a fence six metres away, even if it has a nice garden, as in their previous home. Not to have to worry about safety in these days of home invasion; plenty of people in the house, burglar and smoke alarms —yes, this arrangement is working well.

If this is 'now', what a future lies ahead!

"In my Father's House are many rooms," said the Lord. (John 14:2 N.I.V.) "I am going to prepare a place for you". How beautiful beyond imagination is that promise and prospect.

Something to look forward to, wouldn't you agree?

# Divine guidance

*It is right there with you!*

## Cor Feyter

Jim is a genuinely nice Christian young man; from a faithful, stable family, never gave any trouble, worked hard at school, obedient, reliable, likeable, sensitive. In church circles, Sunday school and catechism, teachers liked having Jim in their classes. He never caused problems, was always a positive influence, always responsive: a pleasure to teach. So it was generally expected that when Jim completed secondary schooling, he would waste no time deciding what he wanted to do in life, and would then not hesitate to achieve that by equipping himself with the necessary training and development. But it didn't happen that way. Jim worked in a couple of temporary jobs and followed one or two courses, but there appeared little purpose and consistency in what he was doing. "The Lord has not yet shown me what He wants me to do," said Jim. Such a nice boy! So young still, and already so trusting and devout! And so misguided.

## The wrong idea

Jim reminds me of a story I was once told of a sailor who was the sole survivor of a shipwreck. As he was drifting on a life raft in the middle of the vast ocean, he prayed that the Lord would rescue him, and he received firm assurance that his prayer would be heard. So our sailor drifted patiently along, waiting for the Lord's promise to come true. After some time a helicopter came over, spotted him, and prepared to winch him aboard. But the sailor waved it away, shouting that the Lord was coming to rescue him. Again he drifted

along, praying constantly, until some hours later a submarine popped up not far from him. Its crew launched a raft to come and get our sailor aboard, but again he dismissed them, because he was waiting for the Lord to rescue him. Then, as he resumed his prayers, a voice from heaven answered him, "My friend, I have already sent a helicopter and a submarine to rescue you, now what else do you want me to do for you?" That sailor had a preconceived idea as to how the Lord was going to rescue him, and our friend Jim has an equally preconceived idea as to how the Lord will guide him in choosing a job.

## How God has already answered you

Because Jim already has everything he needs to decide what to do in life. The first thing he needs to do is decide what he is good at, and what he is interested in. They are almost always the same things, anyway. Each person possesses specific personal aptitudes and skills. They are gifts the Lord has given to equip us, and He expects us to use them to His glory. Then, Jim needs to decide what is available and achievable in the field he is interested in, using common sense, of which he undoubtedly possesses a generous portion, seeing that he comes from a stable family. But

he must make sure that there are areas where he can work without compromising his Christian principles. For instance, Christians should not go looking for work in casinos or pubs. The ability to weigh those factors against each other and draw conclusions from them are also gifts from the Lord. He has not given them in the same measure to all people: some are better at coming to a decision than others, but every one has those qualities in some degree. Time and again, however, you come across people who have trouble reaching decisions and appear to be waiting for a direct message from the Lord. Yet, it is a specific teaching of our churches that such direct revelations have now ceased (Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch.1 Articles 1 & 6).

## Thinking the Lord's work is especially a certain work

I suspect that apart from having difficulty in reaching decisions, there is another



problem Jim is trying to deal with. He may well have been exposed to the thinking, quite common amongst members of our churches, that if you really want to serve the Lord in life, you need to try and get into the ministry, the mission field, or at least into Christian education. If you work in those fields, you can be really effective in God's kingdom, and other areas of work are often dismissed as second rate in comparison. But isn't the whole world God's creation? Isn't all of mankind, all of society, His domain? Yes, ministers, missionaries and evangelists are needed, but this society is also desperately in need of Christian businessmen, professional people, tradesmen, public servants, managers, bosses and workers, shopkeepers, office workers etc.—you name it. We are not all called to be ministers or missionaries, but every believing Christian is called to be a disciple and a representative of our Lord and master, in whichever situation we are placed.

### Work and pray

That may not always be easy—no one said it was. You have to be constantly aware of your responsibilities that way, and you have to work at it. In a secular environment, there's the constant temptation to be pulled along by ungodly practices and attitudes all around you. It also demands constant prayer. My own father used to compare the life of a Christian to a man in a row-boat, who has two oars: one marked 'work,' the other 'pray'. If he uses only the work oar

he goes around in circles, and if he uses only the pray oar he goes around in circles the other way. Only when he uses both oars together, does he make headway. So Jim, I suggest that you'd better have a good look at the gifts the Lord has given you and decide how you can best use them in His kingdom and to His glory, and then get on with it. Don't forget to use both oars together, will you. Oh, and Jim—stop blaming the Lord for you own indecision, because that's really what you are doing, isn't it?

## World news

### A correction

There was a World news item in the May *Faith in Focus* about Prof. Douma's appeal to the GKN (Lib) synod about the events of 1967. The source was from a GKN (synodical) newspaper, which we received via an American Reformed/Presbyterian new service. According to the report, "the synod of that year suspended those 20 pastors".

It has been brought to my attention that it is most improbable that a church which has its roots in the events of 1944 where synodical bindings and suspension of office bearers, even whole consistories (Sessions), was carried out by a synod, would itself do the same in 1967.

In fact, Synod 1967 refused to accept as delegate Rev Stoep because of his writings which put in question his subscription to the three forms of unity. That and related actions led to various consistories (Sessions) suspending 20 ministers for their views, some of which were published in the so-called "open brief" (open letter).

### Canada's closed door for Presbyterians

The Canadian embassy in Ankara, Turkey, turned down an Iranian Presbyterian family's appeal in late April, closing the last known option for religious asylum for former Muslims Mahmoud and Atefeh Erfani and their three daughters. After nearly three years as refugees in central Turkey and diligently pursuing all opportunities for asylum, the Erfani family faces deportation by Turkish authorities back to Iran, where Muslims who convert to Christianity can be executed for apostasy.

After waiting more than nine months for an interview with Canadian authorities, the Erfani family was granted a mere one-hour interview April 18. "They did not speak with my wife or daughters," he said, "and they did not give us any medical or other tests." Just five days later, the Canadian Embassy issued a letter refusing permanent residence status for the Erfanis.

The letter gave no specific reason for the refusal. Church sources in Canada, however, said they believed Mrs. Erfani's health problems were most likely the determining factor. Her health is deteriorating from advancing multiple sclerosis diagnosed eight years ago. She is now in a wheelchair.

Although the Erfanis were converted and baptised 21 years ago, conditions in Mashhad deteriorated in recent years. Mashhad authorities executed a convert Christian pastor for apostasy in 1990. Then the city's two Protestant churches were closed, and three convert Christian couples were arrested, threatened and formally charged with apostasy. All three families, as well as the convert pastor

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in Tehran who baptised the Erfanis, and the local Presbyterian elder who first brought Mr. Erfani to local church services, managed to escape from Iran and obtain religious asylum in Europe and North America.

The Erfanis were evicted from their home in March 1999, moved to Tehran, and then fled to Turkey.

Mr. Erfani said he had turned the family's Turkish residence permits over to the local authorities the day they expired.

"I have nothing in my hands now," Mr. Erfani said. "Just pray that God's will be done for our family, and that we will be filled with the Holy Spirit, to bear all these problems with God's peace."

+ Barbara G. Baker, *Compass Direct*, P.O. Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799; 949-862-0314; [compassdirect@earthlink.net](mailto:compassdirect@earthlink.net); [www.compassdirect.org](http://www.compassdirect.org).

## Combatants separated in Ambon

In Ambon, the chief city of the Moluccas islands in northeast Indonesia, the civil government is struggling to attain any degree of control over the lethal conflicts between Christians and Muslims. The national government has stepped in, ordering the expulsion of the Laskar Jihad from the area and the disbandment of the Christian separatist group, the Maluku Sovereignty Front (FKM), effective May 8.

A bomb in a Christian district of Ambon April 3 resulted in angry mobs burning the governor's office. Later, Muslim mobs forced the release of the suspect in the bombing.

The leader of the Laskar Jihad paramilitary group called for abandonment of the peace agreement signed April 26, and night-time massacres in Christian villages by heavily armed men began to occur shortly after. The villagers had surrendered their arms in accord with the peace pact. The Jihad leader was arrested for agitation on May 4.

The local population is about 50-50 Muslim and Christian, with the Christians being the historic element and the Muslims more recent. Efforts by Muslim paramilitary groups in the past three years to impose Islam have led to thousands of deaths and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. A peace agreement was made in February, with minimal effect.

The southern Moluccas islands around Ambon have long been a hotbed of partisan activity. Christian separatists first raised a flag of independence there in 1950, and today the FKM is a major factor in the continuing turmoil. The FKM leader was charged with treason—though later released—and a church was burned by opponents recently over issues raised by the FKM, which is also known as the South Moluccas Republic.

+ The Barnabas Fund, United Kingdom, [info@barnabasfund.org](mailto:info@barnabasfund.org), [www.barnabasfund.org](http://www.barnabasfund.org); BBC online news, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/asia-pacific>; World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Prayer List, [rl-prayer@crossnet.org.au](mailto:rl-prayer@crossnet.org.au).

## The other side to Church growth

In Turkey, pastor Ahmet Guvener could go to jail for two to five years over his efforts to build a church for his growing congregation of Christians in Diyarbakir, a city in southeastern Turkey. He will be tried on May 22 on vague charges relating to an alleged construction permit violation.

Architectural plans for the three-storey building were approved in February 2001 by both the municipality and the Ministry of Culture. But on November 26, with only a month of work left to do, the pastor received orders to halt construction. The building has been locked ever since. A variety of complaints against the building project have been made since then by officials. However, the underlying objection voiced by the governor of Diyarbakir was over the intended use for worship by Turkish Christians.

According to a Diyarbakir city official who requested anonymity, the story was spread through the Turkish media that Mr. Guvener had applied for permission to build a home for himself, while secretly planning to turn it into a church.

"It wasn't until after the Ceviz Kabugu talk shows on TV last November raised public debate about Christian missionary activities in Turkey and articles appeared in the weekly *Aydinlik* magazine against this particular church that a problem was raised about this," the official admitted.

Both Mr. Guvener and his architect say they have clear-cut evidence that the purpose of the building has always been understood by the authorities.

The new Protestant church is located in a traditionally Christian district of Diyarbakir, just across a narrow street from the city's ancient Syrian Orthodox Church complex.

+ *Compass Direct News Flash*, 5-8-2002; [compassdirect@earthlink.net](mailto:compassdirect@earthlink.net).

## IN TOUCH

Subscriptions to the IN TOUCH magazine are available. This is an opportunity for those interested who do not have access to or have joined a Cadet and Calvinette Club (Cadets and Calvinettes will continue to be supplied through their clubs). The costs is \$12 per year for four issues.

This is a Reformed Churches of New Zealand children's magazine especially written for 8 - 15 year olds.

It is filled with stories, photographs, puzzles, Bibles studies, Cadet & Calvinette Club news, competitions, poetry, crafts, cooking and Camp News.



If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ12 (or \$AU12), with your details, to the National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe, Auckland. (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)

# What do they do...?

## A look at two things the elders do

### Wim van Noordt

A question by my daughter prompted me to write down the answer to share with others who may have had the same question. The question was, "What do you do (as elder) before the worship service in that (session) room?"

Well, what do the minister; elders and deacons do before the service? In 2 Cor.13:12 the Apostle Paul writes, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." We live in a different culture from the church to which Paul wrote. The office bearers have replaced the holy kiss with a firm (?) handshake!

Having served as an office bearer in three different congregations and two different presbyteries, I have observed that the practices vary little. The small talk before the service usually revolves around the weather, world news, sport and church news. This is, I suppose, to be expected where brothers have not seen one another for a week. However, I believe a word of caution needs to be sounded here. The conversation should not be too trivial or controversial, as we need to keep in mind that we are to meet in worship before a Holy God. Further, the minister or reader needs to be able to concentrate on the message he is to bring, and not on the latest football or cricket score! Nor should the minister be asked to comment on a difficult issue, which may seem important to the inquirer but can be dealt with at a more appropriate time.

### A recent thing

A few minutes before the worship service starts, one of the elders will lead in prayer. To many of us this seems logical—however, it may surprise you that this prayer was only introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, during the time of the 'secession'. The theologian Voetius, who is known to write extensively about 'church prayers', does not mention it in his writings. Many

ministers would proceed from the manse directly to the pulpit! It would appear that this prayer came into practice when the worship services were disturbed by the police or military during the 'secession', and the session felt a need to unite in prayer before the service.

Seeing that we now live in a country where we can worship without fear, would we not be better off to do away with it? We have after all (I assume) prepared for worship the day before, in the morning at home, and in the 'silent prayer' in church asking for a blessed service. Yet I would not like to see this prayer dispensed with, because here (session) *together* approach God's throne to ask for a blessing over the worship service which is about to commence.

This prayer should contain two petitions: for the preacher, and for the listener. For the preacher—"and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph.6:19). For the listeners—that God may open up to us "a door for the Word" (Col.4:3). The Apostle Paul also prayed in this way in 2 Thess.3:1. The basis of this prayer is *Hallowed be Thy Name*. Speak to us, grant us all your Spirit, so that we understand the preacher, and together may serve you better.

We recognize our *dependence*. We confess in this prayer our faith. The case is not: "perhaps the Lord will speak to us or perhaps he will not." No! Christ has promised us that where the Word is preached, there He is present! When we pray in this way, trusting and obeying, then this prayer does not become a mere formality. The prayer should not be too long, it is not a prayer for the needs of all Christendom. The elder does not need to pray here for things which are covered by the minister in the congregational prayer. Kuyper declared that many a preacher has been greatly strengthened by this simple and earnest prayer by an elder before the service!

### The handshake

Having come this far with my thoughts on the prayer before the service, I would also like to add one other aspect as to what happens before and after the worship service: namely, the *handshake*.

The handshake means that although the minister is not completely bound, he is also not completely free to do or say what he wants. It is the Session that has called the congregation to worship. The minister is not a speaker with an audience. It is the congregation of the Lord, who under the leadership of the session meets her Lord in Word, law and confession; in song and giving; in sacraments and blessing. The elders are to have a responsibility for the entire worship service, to listen not only for them, but also for the flock whom they know and whose needs they know.

After the service, again there is the handshake. This does not mean that the elder necessarily agreed word for word what has been said: no, it expresses only that the preacher, according to his calling, proclaimed God's Word. Only in a church where discipline has been completely eroded could there be a case where the handshake is denied. (I have witnessed a handshake denied only once—wrongly, I believe.) Would it not be better if the elder on duty would in a case of a disagreement, speak with the preacher at a more appropriate time, rather than display his displeasure in such a public way? After all, we have a plurality of elders who may have a different understanding of what was said.

I will repeat what a recent arrival in the session room says as we are about to start the service: "Have a blessed service, brothers." What a wonderful way to start our worship service, brothers and sisters!

*(Wim van Noordt is a member of the Reformed Church of Hastings)*

## Books in focus

### **The pagan idea of "Finding the Secret Will of God"**

A review of Bruce Waltke's book

John Westendorp

It all began with Gideon in Judges 6. Gideon is the 'patron saint' of all those who "put out the fleece".

You'll remember the story – Gideon was called to lead Israel into battle against the Midianites. But Gideon had some problems. Today some people might suggest that Gideon's problem was a low self-esteem. He couldn't believe that God would choose him for an important job like that. His family was an insignificant family in the tribe and he was an insignificant person within their family. Gideon asked: Why me? To make sure that God wasn't having him on, he asked God for a special test to prove that he would really lead Israel to victory against the Midianites. First he put a sheepskin outside overnight, asking God that the grass would be dry but the sheepskin wet with dew. God complied! But that wasn't enough for Gideon, so the next night he asked the Lord to do things the other way around: that the grass would be wet with dew and the sheepskin dry. Again, God did as Gideon asked.

#### **Putting out the fleece**

Today it is still fashionable in some Christian circles to speak of "putting out the fleece". Some Christian folk do that to help them to make important decisions and they use the story of Gideon to validate this practice.

Gary Vriesen, in his book *"Decision Making and the Will of God"* describes this practice this way:

*Gideon's fleece has become the basis of a practice among some Christians which is called "putting out a fleece". In essence, when you put out a fleece you say to God, "If you really want me to carry out plan A, then please make the telephone ring at 9.10pm then I will know that plan A is what you want." You can make the "fleece" anything you wish, just so long as it can serve as a "sign" to you. (p.222).*

Sometimes this "putting out the fleece" becomes quite bizarre. Someone who is unhappy in his work and who has the option of another job might say: "Lord, if the Tigers win the footy on Saturday then I'll know that you want me to change jobs."

At other times such a "putting out the fleece" seems to make a lot of sense. Someone trying to sell her car might well ask: "Lord, if someone offers me \$2000 then I'll take that as a sign that you want me to sell it."

"Putting out a fleece" is a tempting way of solving all our problems. It can seem a very spiritual and Christian way out of a dilemma. Often we struggle with which way to go when a difficult decision has to be made. So why not follow this approach?

It is not my intention to open up here the whole issue of guidance and knowing the will of God. Instead I want to touch on one specific aspect of this matter of discerning the will of God."

Eerdmans' publishing house has reprinted a book by Bruce Waltke that has the title. *"Finding the Will of God – a pagan notion?"* (2002, 187p). Waltke, who is professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando, Florida, US), opened up some new perspectives on this subject for me. Many years ago I read Gary Vriesen's book and found that a very useful contribution to the discussion. More recently Matthias Media in Sydney also put out a small paperback on the subject, *"Guidance and the voice of God"*. Bruce Waltke, however, does two things that make his work stand out.

#### **A pagan idea?**

First, Waltke asks the question whether this whole idea of learning the secret will of God is not a pagan idea. He gives us many instances and examples of pagans who lived their whole life, fearful of acting outside the will of the gods. The whole pagan idea of 'divination' is really nothing else than trying to get inside knowledge of the secret will of one's gods. These practices of divination were sternly warned against in the Law of Moses.

Under this heading of 'divination' Waltke includes things like 'casting lots', as the sailors did in the book of Jonah to find out who was to blame for the violent storm. In the ancient world priests would check out the livers of sacrificial animals to work out for their king the right moment to go into battle. In



other instances arrows would be thrown into the air and directions taken that were pointed out by the fall of the arrows. Other ways of divination, such as seeking guidance from the stars, have flowed right through into our modern era. Scripture warns against these practices because it recognises that there are spiritual powers at work in the world other than those of God.

### A sign of unbelief

What then about Gideon and his fleece? It needs to be remembered that Gideon asked for these guiding signs out of unbelief. God had already given him a powerful sign. An angel had come and spoken with him and when Gideon had brought out meat and bread, the angel had made him place it on a rock then touched it and fire had burst from the rock and burnt the food as an offering to God. Gideon's fleece is a sign of unbelief – even though God graciously answered Gideon's request to remove his doubts.

Waltke has much to say about the various steps we may follow in order to seek guidance. However, a major point he makes is that God is not hiding things from us so that we somehow have to try and find it out by Christian equivalents to 'divination'. To the contrary – the Christian faith is not a religion of secrets; it is a transparent faith. He points out that while the lot is cast in Acts 1 to find a replacement for Judas, we never read of any similar attempts to learn the secret will of God after Pentecost.

I recall once seeing in a Christian bookshop a pretty little box full of cards. This was called a 'Promise Box'. On the small cards in the box were printed a great variety of promises from Scripture. Some Christians use these for guidance by taking out a card at random and applying that to their present situation. In contrast Waltke says, *"When I wonder about which job offer to take, I don't go through a divination process to discover the hidden message of God. Instead I examine how God has called me to live my life, what my motives are, what He has given me a heart for, where I am in my walk with Christ and what God is saying to me through His Word and through His people."* He goes on to elaborate on each of these facets of Christian living.

### God has told us

That leads me to a second feature that stands out in Waltke's book. The author is far from negative. He does not just critique the "find-the-secret-will-of-God" mentality that is so common in some Christian circles. He has a very positive approach insisting that God has given us all we need to know to be able to do His will. In the process of doing so this book highlights some matters that are heart-warming for those of us who take a full-orbed, big-picture approach to the Christian life: that we live life under a sovereign God who has give us all we need to know in His Word.

Waltke is not content to tell his readers that to know what

to do in any particularly problematic situation they need to read the Bible, pray, examine their motives and consult with other Christians. All of these and more are examined in turn but are still seen as inadequate and needing the bigger picture of a faith-shaped world view.

In this respect the closing chapter begins with two crucial questions and a telling affirmation:

*"Why would a God who wants us to do His will, hide it from us? Why do Christians go through such convolute, painful efforts to know it? His will needn't be hidden or elusive, a mystery, a puzzle, an enigma. The answer we seek already lies in our theology – what we believe."*

### Knowing Him is understanding His will

The reality is that what we believe changes our character and makes us more and more Christlike, and the more we become like Him, the more we will understand His will. That isn't just a matter of accepting some propositions; it is above all living our faith out in an all-of-life way. But that is the difficult way. The easy way is to dip into a Promise Box or jab a knitting needle between the pages of the Bible. The hard way is to become Christ-like in total devotion and utter commitment to the purposes of God. But it is the latter, not the former that is our calling.

*(This is taken, by permission, from Trowel & Sword, which magazine the Rev. Westendorp edited until recently.)*

## Our churches in focus

### Wellington

So what's been happening in Wellington over the past year or so? I think it's time to let you know!

On the church family side of the things, we delight with Wim and Marianne Bos welcoming their new baby Luke, Rob & Anita Nieuwland welcoming baby Sarah, Mark & Fiona Beavan welcoming baby Jonathon, and most recently, Henk & Lisa welcoming baby Caleb. We thank the Lord for these precious gifts.

Others we've welcomed from places far and near are Craig & Shelley Liken from Christchurch, Susan Larsen from Hamilton, and a number of folks from South Africa—Andre & Ilse Bester and their two children, Andre and Lalanda Bester, Lourens & Louise Grabe and their 2 children, Gert and Sarita Smit and their three children, and the Du Plesse family. From Masterton we welcome Gerry Liebbrandt, from Nelson Jolanda van der Burg and family, Nel Boere from Silverstream, and from America Andrew Camenisch (while on *Lord of the Rings* work). Also from Holland on a brief stay for study, Theo and Jennita Salomons with their son Rick (hope to see you again

in the future!), and we also welcome Mrs Strydom and family, who have been with us for some time now.

Quite a few students have arrived on studies. Among them are Susana Vandenberg, Michelle Braam, Kirsten Dam, Rachel Kaijser, Marit van Beek, Tim Stern, Alwin Verbeek, Ilda Drent, and Richard van den Engel. A great group! We've also had a number of visitors worshipping with us, and pray they may find a home with us too.

Janice Nihoniho has moved over the ditch to sunny Nelson, and we wish her well down there.

Great news in that Irena Simeonov and Terry Wickens have become engaged! Wishing them many happy years together and the Lord's blessing in their preparations.

As you were probably aware, the Wierengas celebrated 50yrs of marriage. There were many celebrations enjoyed by all. On the Sunday, we load tested the church to see just how many we could fit in. It was the first time I've seen the choir pews up by the organ/pulpit occupied (people would have felt a little conspicuous up there, I imagine!). Every spot was filled, and it was a wonderful sight to see so many celebrating together.

We also celebrated (with a rather large cake!) the 35 years in ministry of our Rev John Goris. We thank the Lord for his continued work amongst us, and the great benefit he and his family bring to our church.

Off on sojourns/family catchups have been the Wierengas Snr (Holland), Borgers Snr (Holland), the Oosterbaans Snr (Holland), and Tineke Mosterd (Holland/Wales), the Howells Snr (Wales), the Boessenkool family (Sth Africa), Roy, Jolanda, Aimee & Joel Nugteren (Tasmania), Koops family (Holland / Greece), and the "young" Meisters (Demark). Also Bert and Bec Borger were here for a short time from Indonesia. We hope to see them safely back here again soon, and pray that all goes well over there for them in the remaining time they spend there.

John Borger suffered a serious sudden heart attack, which we thank the Lord he has recovered so well from. Jocelyn Moore suffered an illness that kept her in hospital for some time. It was eventually found to be a rare allergy, which disappeared as mysteriously as it came up (much to her relief!) Also, Joey Vorster had to undergo an appendix operation. We thank the Lord for His keeping of our folk in these times.

Sadly, Henny Verburg and Frank Ploeger (in Holland) passed away last year, both very brave and much missed. We look forward to all being reunited again one day.

Waikanae is by now well underway as a church, with the Rev Lion-Cachet and family's arrival in May. Services are currently at 6pm. I marvel at how relatively quickly this church has sprung up. God has His plans, and He works them out.

Enjoyably, the choir has been exercising its combined voice up until Easter, disbanding for the winter.

We're also planning another Holiday Bible Club which, God willing, will have had all come together and been a success by the time you read this!

That's all for now!

*Yours In Christ*

**Liz Bouda**

## New Zealand Conference on Reformation Theology

# Faith for *all* Times

*An important event to be held in three centres*

### PROTESTANT AND EVANGELICAL:

Exploring the Riches of the "Solas" of the Reformation.

This is the inaugural conference on Reformation Theology. Our aim is to present the important truths of Scripture, which were rediscovered at the time of the Reformation and which are in danger again of being neglected in our own day. We will explain why it is so important, for the salvation of the lost, that we understand that we can only be saved by **Christ alone**, though **faith alone** by **grace alone**. We will also study the importance of sourcing all our knowledge of God's will in **Scripture alone**. Each lecture will demonstrate that these reformational truths must be understood and taught by the Church today.

## SPEAKERS



### Dr. JOSEPH PIPA

Dr. Pipa is President of Greenville Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. He has served as Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary. An accomplished and frequent Conference speaker, Dr Pipa is also the author of several books including *The Lord's Day*, *William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching*, *The Root and the Branch*. Joey is married to Cissy and they have two children.

Dr. MICHAEL FLINN  
Rev. JOHN ROGERS

Dr. JOHN HAVERLAND  
Dr. PAUL ARCHBALD

## Registration Form

<i>Cost</i>	<i>No. of people</i>
<b>\$30.00</b> per person (Wellington \$15.00)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>\$10.00</b> per student	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>TOTAL</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
Name(s) .....	
Address .....	
Phone ..... Email .....	

Please pay by cheque or cash and forward to **NZCRT, PO Box, 31334 Lower Hutt**. You will receive more Conference information once your registration is received.  
**\$5.00 DISCOUNT IF YOU REGISTER BEFORE 10 SEPTEMBER**  
**Morning and afternoon Tea/Coffee provided, but meals not catered for.**

## Venues and Times

**CHRISTCHURCH** – Reformed Church of Bishopdale, 90 Highsted Rd, Christchurch. Pastors' and Church Leaders' seminar begins at 1.00pm and the full conference 3.30pm on Friday the 18th October 2002.

**WELLINGTON** – Hutt City Conference Centre, 14b Rutherford St, Lower Hutt. Pastors' and Church Leaders' seminar begins at 9.00am and the full conference 12.30pm on Wednesday the 23rd October 2002.

**AUCKLAND** – Reformed Church of North Shore, 74 Trias Rd, Totaravale, Glenfield, Auckland. Pastors' and Church Leaders' seminar begins at 1.00pm and the full conference 3.30pm on Friday the 25th October 2002.

**New Zealand Conference on Reformation Theology**  
P.O. Box 31334, Lower Hutt  
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Email: gmilne@xtra.co.nz  
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**(09) 414 6357**  
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**(04) 528 0218**  
Christchurch Ph. P. Davey  
**(03) 318 0770**

**A Conference committed to underscoring the relevance of the Scriptures to all of life**  
*"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith." Romans 1:17.*

## Missions in focus

**Janice Reid**

### Those who have ears, let them hear!

Our sense of hearing is something we often take for granted. But the fact is, a large portion of our exposure to things Christian comes by way of our ears, and those who suffer from hearing loss miss out on very significant opportunities for spiritual growth. Think of it: the preaching of the Word; the joy of lifting our voices in praise to the Lord, the inspiration of hearing other believers share about their own journeys of faith. So much of our encouragement comes by way of our hearing.

So, what's left for those who cannot hear? Deaf Reformed Ministries (DRM), based in Maryland in the United States, is very aware of the special challenges facing the deaf. Their ministry is designed with the specific aim of helping people with hearing loss to know more about the Saviour.



### Who they are

As their website says, **DRM** is a non-profit organisation, "dependent upon the generosity of those who share our vision of exposing reformation to the deaf community and to have their hearts burning with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:32)."

And that vision is: "to open the Scriptures to the deaf; to promote Reformed theology to the deaf; to warn of the danger of Easy Believism to the deaf; and to provide Bible study materials for those who are deaf."

DRM's ministry includes conferences, a quarterly magazine, videotapes in American Sign Language, pamphlets, and email networks for deaf men and women.

All of this is done by a group of dedicated volunteers, under the directorship of Kenton Hoxie. Kenton's wife, Karin, is secretary of DRM—when she's not occupied with homeschooling their six children!

Kenton says about the range of ministry resources offered

by DRM, "Remember: we are all volunteers. It's almost impossible to provide additional resources. For the deaf, it is best to meet in person and to communicate in sign language. Videotapes are the 2<sup>nd</sup> next best thing. English is difficult for many deaf people."

### "Speaking" the truth in love

For hearing people, our modern lifestyle and the individualism in society can be great temptations. How often have you heard of people who constantly church-hop as they search for the "feel-good" factor that will persuade them to stay? Or people who don't go to church at all, because "they're all hypocrites anyway," or "it doesn't do anything for me"?

Those who are deaf have similar temptations—and perhaps more so, when we consider the communication problems they face. "Speaking" in sign, and reading in English, require fluency in two almost completely different languages.

If deaf people do not have a clear understanding of Scripture, they—the same as anyone else—may fall into the all-too-common trap of antinomianism. (In their mission statement, DRM calls it "easy believism".) For this reason, DRM seeks to introduce deaf people to the treasures of Reformed literature and faith. DRM is convinced this will show deaf believers the blessing of having a correct understanding of the Gospel and the implications it has for our lives:

- We are saved only by grace, through faith in the shed blood of Christ (Eph. 2:8,9)
- When we are saved we become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17)
- We are saved in order to do good works (Eph. 2:10).

A clear understanding of these principles can help deaf (and hearing) people to know the importance of living out our faith, of showing the world Who we belong to. Reformed doctrine provides a clear and precise explanation of these truths, and for this reason DRM seeks to introduce it to those who are deaf.

### Truth hurts

In his correspondence with me, Kenton described the importance that DRM attaches to the truths of the Reformation. But he also mentioned some of the difficulties members face as they present these truths to people who prefer to think of God as the "gentle giant" in the sky, only there to meet their wants.

"Basically," Kenton said, "[people] react in different ways. Some say their hearts are set on fire like the two men in Luke 24. Others say we teach heresy and are wolves in sheep's clothing. Some simply don't respond at all. But it's worth while!"

### Standing united

Kenton asks for our prayers. He estimates that through DRM's outreach to date, 300-500 people have been exposed to the Reformed faith for the first time. And he wants this

number to grow! So, please pray for the outreach of Deaf Reformed Ministries in the United States. Pray for their conferences. Pray for effective teaching on their videotapes and in Bible studies. Pray for the heart-changing work of the Spirit, so that those who cannot hear with their ears will hear with their hearts, and grow in grace as members of the Kingdom of our Lord.

## MIF Prayer Notes

**Rev Lion-Cachet** and his family have recently arrived in New Zealand, to take up the work of home mission on the Kapiti Coast. Please pray for the family as they settle into life in New Zealand, and also for Rev Lion-Cachet as he undergoes his colloquium doctum this month, God willing.

The **Overseas Mission Board** continues to do its work of promoting mission within the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and liaising with other organisations to establish possible areas of ministry for those of our members who seek to do the Lord's work overseas. Synod appointed Mr David Waldron as an additional OMB member. Please pray for the OMB, and especially that they will find a suitable person to do the work of secretary, since Mike de Ruiter's move to Auckland has made it impossible for him to continue in this important role.

**SPROUT** is hard at work planning a Vacation Bible School (VBS) to be held in Masterton at Homeleigh Christian School, Lord willing, during the second week of the July holidays. Please pray for effective preparations for the VBS, along with a good turnout of children from the neighbourhood and a clear presentation of the Gospel during the sessions.

**Papua New Guinea** has been approved by Synod as a potential mission-field for RCNZ missionaries. Please pray for the OMB as they seek to make specific recommendations to the churches for outreach and personnel.

Please also pray for **Rev Stephen and Dorinda 't Hart** and their work in that PNG. They ask special prayer for the youth group in Port Moresby, which is weak and lacks suitable leaders. Dorinda also says, "We are in the process of calling another missionary. We know that 'the king's heart is as water in God's hands,' so we know that if this is the man that God has marked for us, he will come. Please join us in prayer!"

**Janice Reid** is on deputation trips around NZ later this month. Please pray for safe travel and effective reporting about her work for the Far East Broadcasting Company. Pray also for the planning for an upcoming workshop in Myanmar later this year.

## Country profile: **MACAU**

Macau is a tiny peninsula and two islands 64km west of Hong Kong on the coast of Guangdong province in China. It was rented by the Portuguese in 1577, and became a Portuguese colony in 1887. It reverted to Chinese rule as a special autonomous region in 1999. *OW*<sup>1</sup> notes that 7.31% of the



population claim to be Christian, with a whopping 60% having no (or "other") religious affiliation. Buddhists and Chinese religions form the other major groupings.

Macau was the starting point of Protestant missions to China. There, the

first Chinese convert was baptised, the first Chinese Bible translated and Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to the Chinese, was buried. Yet today it is one of the least-disciplined communities of Chinese in the world.

The Portuguese named Macau 'City of the Name of God',

though it was a Chinese god that gave it its present name. It has truly become the 'City of Sin.' Gambling and prostitution are major money-earners, and ruthless Triads run these 'industries'. The new government is trying to change the reputation (and the reality) of lawlessness in Macau.

### Pray for Macau:

1. There are a number of missionaries from Hong Kong and other lands, most being involved in evangelism, church planting, drug rehabilitation and Bible teaching
2. Many mainlanders work in Macau—some legally, many illegally. They work long hours with rare days off, but are more open to the gospel. Pray for those seeking to reach and disciple them.
3. Those involved in the entertainment industry. There are a few seeking to reach them. The Macau Evangelistic Band is one such.
4. The 12,000 Chinese refugees from Myanmar. There is one church among them (Baptist).
5. The Macanese are mostly nominally Catholic. There is one very small evangelical church among them, but they are largely neglected by evangelical agencies and churches.

<sup>1</sup> Information from *Operation World* CD-ROM, Copyright ©2001 Patrick Johnstone. Used with permission.

## From the D.A.'s Office

### Frederick Channing (1927 - 2002)

Frederick Channing, a former minister of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, died in Auckland on 3 May 2002. Fred was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1927 at Auckland. On June 5 1948 he married Joy Eila Grindlay, and together they raised 4 of their own children, and 4 adopted children.

Soon after the Reformed Church of Auckland was established, Fred became aware of the existence of the Reformed Church, through his contact and involvement with the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC). Fred and Joyce became the first non-Dutch speaking members of the church. In those early months, the Channing family would don headphones at worship, and listen to an English translation of the dutch service. Fred was soon elected as an elder, and became very much involved in the church's life, helping in many ways to shape the early direction of the church through it's Synods. He possessed a wonderful vision for the growing of God's church, and spent considerable time editing and printing various publications for outreach.

Fred felt led to enter the ministry, and applied to the 1959 Synod for admittance to the ministry under Article 12 of the Church Order, which exempts persons from pursuing the regular study in preparation for the



*Fred Channing – 1954*

ministry of the Word in view of their exceptional gifts, including the gift of public speaking. After examination, Synod requested that Fred continue part-time study for a further 3 years and then present himself again. The 1961 Synod allowed Fred to be a 'Licentiate' preacher for the Reformed Church of Invercargill, and in 1964, after spending a 3 month period at the RTC in Geelong, Synod 1964 sustained his examination and declared him eligible for call.

Fred had served the Reformed Church of Invercargill as a lay preacher during the years 1961 to 1964. After Synod 1964, Fred received two calls, one from Invercargill, the other from the Reformed Church of Nelson, which he accepted, and where he was ordained in Sept 1964, and where he served from 1964 to 1969. Fred helped to begin one of the first Cadet clubs in the country, while in Nelson, and was instrumental in setting up the National Cadet organisation in those early years.

Fred served as Stated Clerk for the RCNZ in the late 1950's, was also Second Clerk for a number of Synods, and was editor of the Wellington Presbytery magazine from 1964-1969.

Throughout this time Fred continued to be involved in ICCC, and became the National Secretary of the organisation in 1965. When the Synod of 1969 voted for the Reformed Churches of New Zealand to disassociate themselves from the ICCC, this created a difficulty for Fred, who then soon resigned as a minister and removed himself from membership of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and that ended his association with our churches.

Fred then ministered to a Bible Presbyterian Church in Palmerston North till 1980, and since then served other Christian congregations and Bible Colleges in the Auckland area.

## Archives Statement of Policy & Procedures

And now the final instalment of the Archives Statement of Policy and Procedures, "The Archivist's Code".

### The Archivist's Code

1. The archivists have moral obligations to society to preserve evidence on how things actually happened and to take every measure for the physical preservation of valuable records. On the other hand, they have obligations not to commit funds to the housing and care of records that have no significant or lasting value.
2. The archivists must realise that in selecting records for retention or disposal, they act as the agent of the future in determining its heritage from the past. Therefore, in so far as their intellectual attainments, experience and judgment permit, they must be ever conscious of the future's needs, making their decisions impartially without taint or ideological, political, or personal bias.
3. The archivists must be watchful in protecting the integrity of records in their custody. They must guard them against defacement, alteration or theft; they must protect them against physical damage by fire, or excessive exposure to light, damp and dryness; and they must take care to see that their evidentiary value is not impaired in the normal course of rehabilitation, arrangement, and use.
4. The archivists should endeavour to promote access to records to the fullest extent consistent with the public interest, but they should carefully observe any established policies restricting the use of records. Within the bounds of their budget and opportunities, they should work un-remittingly for the increase and diffusion of knowledge, making their documentary holdings freely known to prospective users through published finding aids and personal consultation.
5. The archivists should respond courteously and with a spirit of service to all proper requests, but they should not waste time responding in detail to frivolous or unreasonable inquiries. They should not place unnecessary obstacles in the way of those who would use the records, but rather should do whatever they can to spare their time and ease their work. Obviously, they should not idly discuss their work and findings of one researcher with another; but where duplication of research effort is apparent, they may properly inform one researcher of the work of another.
6. The archivists should not profit from any commercial exploitation of the records in their custody, nor should they withhold from others any information they have gained as a result of their archival work in order to carry out private professional research. They should, however, take every legitimate advantage of their favoured situation to develop their professional interests in historical or other research.
7. The archivists should freely pass onto their professional colleagues the results of their own or their organisation's research that add to the body of archival knowledge. Likewise, they should leave to their successors a true account of the records in their custody and of their proper organisation and arrangement.

(from "The Small Archive's Companion" by L.J. Ansell. Church Archivists' Society.)

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