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# faith in FOCUS

Volume 51/7, August 2024

## *Hospitality —*

## ENTERTAINING *Angels?*



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## Published monthly for the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

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### Production:

Distribution: M. and D. van der Zwaag  
Design and Layout: Matrix Typography  
Printed by: Flying Colours

**Distribution for Australia:** S Bolhuis  
Email: SebastianB@HarleyDykstra.com.au  
Ph: 0419 043 116

### Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication. Church and family notices are free, subject to sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

### The Secretary:

Wilma Reinders  
Email: [wilmajreinders@gmail.com](mailto:wilmajreinders@gmail.com)

### Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)  
Bulk Rate: \$40.00  
Overseas: \$60.00  
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40.00

# Editorial

Oh no! ... not the H word! If you are not quite on the same page, the H word is HOSPITALITY!

It is always good to have a discussion on this topic, because from experience, there is not only a lack of understanding, but a lack of desire and practice for giving hospitality – to strangers and to the brethren.

In the ancient world this practice was important to the point of being obligatory: to admit a traveller into your home and provide him with food and lodging for the night, etc. You read about this regularly in the Old Testament. It was essential to do this at that time for the safety and well-being of the traveller. The Greek term is used frequently in the New Testament for the reception of travelling evangelists, teachers, and prophets. Honouring a representative of God in this way is the same as honouring God Himself. And we often do this too don't we when there are visiting delegates for presbytery or synodical meetings?

Not to steal the impact of our contributors, but when this subject comes up, I immediately think of Abraham and the very special visit he had by three men. In the opening verse of Genesis 18 it makes known that the LORD, the covenant God, appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. When he sees them, he immediately offers them hospitality, which they are happy to accept. All manner of preparations are made for their visit and Abraham makes himself completely at their disposal.

As we read further, we read about the two men who go down to Sodom and the passage in ch 19:1 identifies them as angels. Lot, who is sitting in the gate of the city, rises to meet them and offers them hospitality and a place to stay for the night. Imagine that. Abraham and even Lot offered these strangers hospitality. In Hebrews 13:2 it says – “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it”, and in Romans 12:13 it says, “Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality”.

The point is not that we would expect to entertain angels, but that we would be willing to practice hospitality to a variety of people who come our way.

I read a book review of *The Gospel Comes with a Doorkey* by Rosaria Butterfield, in which (I think) she wrote about an single elderly, old grumpy neighbour to whom they extended hospitality and friendship, even though the seemingly unpleasant man just wanted to be left alone. Then there is the story of her own experience of receiving hospitality: when she was still in unbelief and hostile to the gospel, she was invited to the home of a RPC pastor and his family and friends for dinner. In her own mind she felt like she was the enemy, very much out of place in this gathering! However, they showed her Christian love by opening their home to her and giving her the gospel. Through that hospitality, the extension of love, she too became a believer in the LORD.

Many thanks to our contributors for taking the time to provide us with some important perspectives on this subject. May the LORD be well served. *S.D.G.*

Featured in this issue:

Mr Nathaniel Rademaker writes on Christian hospitality.

Mrs Harriet Haverland provides some very helpful practical advice.

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The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand 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 New Zealand. 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.

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NATHANIEL RADEMAKER

# Christian Hospitality

I grew up knowing that my Grandparents had a strong Christian faith, and they were a fantastic witness to me of how a Christian should live. I found out they were very involved in the work of Wycliffe here in NZ for over 40 years. Many missionaries in NZ on deputation and furlough would often stay at my Grandparents' house for days, sometimes even a week. Their home was open to everyone.

At my wedding, my Grandad gave a speech. He said, "I pray that your home would always have an open door, for family and friends, to strangers you don't even know. That your home might always be joyful and the love of the Lord present in your house! That others might experience God's love through you and

rejoice in Him as well!" Thus, I was determined to do the same.

In Hebrews 13, the author spells out for us how Jesus Christ's saving work should impact the way we live our lives. Knowledge of and belief in Jesus' saving work done once and for all time, should motivate Christians to 'live out' the Gospel.

Remember the two greatest commandments of God: love God and love your neighbour. I read somewhere that these two commands are the two beams of the cross of Christ! One beam is vertical, showing us our restored relationship with God; the other is horizontal, whereby Christ in His work on the cross restores our relationship with our fellow man.

While our relationship with God is

of primary importance, it also forms the basis for our relationship with our fellow man. If you neglect the work of Christ which restores your relationship with your fellow man, you stand condemned before God. You can't have one without the other. As Alexander Strauch emphasized, "Christ's followers must be marked not only by total devotion to God but also sacrificial service to neighbour."<sup>1</sup>

Hebrews 13:1 says, "Let brotherly love continue." How? Verse 2 calls you to show brotherly love to others through hospitality.

### Why should we be hospitable?

Jesus Christ in Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not neglect hospitality!" This command is based on the work of Jesus Christ and



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is something you must do as a Christian.

It's not that you need to do this to be saved. Jesus Christ has already died on the cross for your sins, you are already a part of God's family. Now, you are called to show hospitality precisely because you are part of God's family!

It's based on the command to love your neighbour and so it's part of your life of holiness as a believer.

Sadly, it seems to me that hospitality is an almost forgotten Christian virtue in the modern lifestyle of many in the Reformed Church today. We live in big cities where traffic is an issue, we have busy work schedules, precious little time with our families, and so, it is understandable that hospitality has become particularly challenging in the Church today. However, these might be challenges to hospitality, but you cannot allow them to become an insurmountable obstacle to your Christian hospitality. Don't use these things as excuses for ignoring the call of Christ to be hospitable!

Hospitality is meant to be a blessing to the Church. Hospitality provides natural opportunities to strengthen the bonds of unity amongst brothers and sisters in Christ within the Church. Hospitality is also a tool for evangelizing those who are not Christians.

In the early Church, hospitality was very important and a vital part of the work of spreading the Gospel. In fact, "during the first two centuries, nearly all of the Christian Churches across the Roman Empire were characterized by loving, Christian hospitality."<sup>2</sup>

For many today, welcoming someone into your home is a fairly foreign concept. To include others who are not part of the immediate family is often perceived to be too difficult. However, the author of Hebrews calls all Christians in every time and place to be hospitable!

How are you doing in this regard? Is your home marked by hospitality?

The Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 4:9-10 also reminds us to, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

All we have belongs to the Lord, and we are to be good stewards of what we have. These two verses directly link hospitality with the stewardship of our God-given gifts! Do you believe that? Because if you do, you will use what God has given you in His service.

Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 13:13 that faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is love! Love of God is shown through love of neighbour.

This is not just a call to be nice to your neighbour and then keep them at arm's length. No! The greatest act of love that you can show anyone is to welcome them into your most sacred place: your home! Into the heart, the hub of your busy lives and show them who you are in Jesus Christ!

Brothers and sisters, you might be thinking of the cost of having people over every week. It's more food than you have budgeted for; or maybe that it's more time taken away from you when you could be resting, and so on. But whatever you're thinking, the benefits far outweigh the cost!

Through hospitality you cultivate fellowship, friendship, and deeper, meaningful relationships with your brothers and sisters in the Church. Having believers and unbelievers over will encourage them in their faith or encourage them to come to faith!

Christian hospitality fans the flames of Christian love in powerful ways. Eating with another Christian in particular displays one of the most solemn bonds of brotherhood. Eating together in our homes is a beautiful sign of Christian unity, displaying the love of the brethren and the peace of God.

To put this command positively, "remember to show hospitality." You are to be intentional in your hospitality. Even if you know it's your duty to be hospitable, don't forget to do it! Get into a good habit of it. Don't let your feelings dictate whether or not you practice it, otherwise you won't! You might be tired, you might feel overwhelmed at the thought of how much work is involved, or whatever you are thinking about having people over; hospitality is an attitude, more than it is an action.

The action of hosting someone flows from your attitude of love. Once you begin, continue to do it! One drop of water does not make a stream, so too, showing hospitality once or twice does not make you hospitable.

Loving your brothers and sisters in Christ by showing them hospitality does exactly what Jesus prays for in John 17:20-21&23, "I do not ask for these only, but also for all those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they may also be in Us, so

that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” It builds unity within the Church, locally, and all over the world!

Hospitality is crucial to the strengthening of the bond between brothers and sisters in Christ and it’s vitally necessary for the work of evangelism. Hospitality is the most effective way to share the gospel with relatives, friends and neighbours. If you are not currently practicing hospitality on a regular basis, you are robbing yourself and others of the joy of Christian living!

Why is hospitality one of the greatest evangelistic tools of our day?

Hebrews 11 shows us the connection that we have with our forefathers in the faith and the legacy they leave to future generations of faith, including us. So too, we have families that we’re a part of where we also pass on our legacy to the next generation.

As I mentioned in the introduction, my Grandparents left me a legacy of hospitality. My parents also, always endeavored to have a family over each Sunday for lunch and at times for dinner as well. This is my heritage, these are my fathers in the family and in the faith, and I want to pass on that legacy to my children as well.

Is this a similar witness to what you have had growing up? If yes, then praise the Lord for faithful generations in your family! If you don’t have this legacy in your family history, then hear the Word of God, and make this the heritage for you and your family. That future generations in your line would point to you as their first faithful example of hospitality! Start the new pattern for your household as you seek to express God’s love for others.

In this society we don’t know what families are, or what they should look like anymore. We have a generation of Kiwis who don’t know what a family truly is and how it should function. Many are single mums or dads, who came from a broken home themselves. So, bring them in! Show them how a loving Christian family can and should function.

One thing that many people comment on when they come to a Reformed Church is their amazement that within the Reformed Churches there are families, teenagers, grandparents, all worshipping in the same church! It blows them away, because as the church becomes more like the culture around us, even within churches, the family breaks down. This leads to poor practices in the Church, a lack of living out the love of Christ, a

lack of self-sacrificial love. Don’t think this can’t happen in our Churches.

Hospitality is the best way to cultivate a strong community within the church, where we truly become a “church family!” It is this bond of love that often draws others to find out what is different about this church. As we are bound together by love and being part of each other’s lives, we as a church are stronger in our witness to the community around us. That’s why you should express God’s love for others through your hospitality!

### **Who are we to show hospitality to?**

To strangers? Here in Hebrews 13:2 the term ‘stranger’ is closely tied to the term ‘brotherly love’ in verse one. So, what does this mean then? Who is the stranger?

This passage mainly has other believers in view, fellow Christians, but the term ‘stranger,’ can mean anyone you don’t know! The question is the same as asking, “Who is my neighbor that I am to love?” (Luke 10:29) The answer to that is: everyone the Lord brings into your life, whether Christian or not!

Rosaria Butterfield, the author of the book, ‘The Gospel comes with a House Key,’ points out that the purpose of hospitality is to make a stranger a friend, and then to make that friend a family member!

Verse 2 goes on to say, through hospitality “some have entertained angels without knowing it!” Will you actually host Angels?

Well, hosting angels is not the point of this statement. We see in Hebrews 2:16 that Christ didn’t come into this world to help angels, but rather, He came to help mankind. The author of Hebrews simply calls us to be imitators of Christ in our love for other people.

Why are angels mentioned then? Well, this is a possible result of showing hospitality, but it’s not the reason for showing hospitality. Saying that some have unwittingly hosted angels is an encouragement to show hospitality! It lends excitement and weight to the blessing of hospitality.

How many of us see a new person in church and get excited about the prospect of inviting them over? Or, to make it more personal, would you, when you see someone new in church, get excited about having them over for lunch? Would the thought of having them over even enter your mind?

Do you see what the author of Hebrews is doing? He says, “What if that person is an angel? And by hosting them, you’re hosting an angel unawares!” Now it’s exciting to think about hosting strangers, isn’t it?

You are to show hospitality out of love, so it’s better to think of someone as being an angel, and to treat them with the same honour as if they were an angel, rather than risk treating them unworthily!

In the Old Testament, angels literally and physically were hosted. Just think of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18. Three strangers come to Abraham, and he jumps up and gives them water and food and rest. These men are angels, in fact one of them is the Pre-incarnate Jesus Christ! Abraham entertained his future descendant, his Saviour, without knowing it! We are encouraged to do the same as Abraham, our father in the faith.

Remember what Jesus Christ says in Matthew 25:40, “What you did for the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me.” It shouldn’t matter whether or not someone is an angel, love should compel you, and excite you to invite them over! So what are you waiting for? Get hospitality happening in the church.

Don’t fall into the trap of just being hospitable to the people you normally and more naturally gravitate towards. Have everyone over: visitors to the church, families in the church that you have had little or nothing to do with, everyone! Don’t neglect any part of the body of Christ. Because the test of the genuineness of God’s love in your life, is expressed by showing hospitality to all.

May the Lord stir in us this excitement to proclaim His love and His Word in this way. Entertaining angels unaware! Start with one act of hospitality and then plan the next one to begin or carry on this new pattern, this Christian legacy.

May God’s love to us in Christ be the impetus for us to share the bounty we all enjoy! May that love then abound in us and through us as we seek to be a congregation of faithful servants in His Kingdom!

1 Alexander Strauch, *Love or Die: Christ’s Wake-Up Call to the Church*, p. 13.

2 Alexander Strauch, *Love or Die: Christ’s Wake-Up Call to the Church*, p. 7.

*Mr Nathaniel Rademaker is the minister in the Whanganui Reformed Church.*



HARRIET HAVERLAND

# Hospitality

**HOSPITALITY IS KNOWN AS ENTERTAINING AND WELCOMING IN GUESTS OR VISITORS. IT IS A GENUINE WAY TO SHOW LOVE FOR OTHERS!**

Hospitality is a word that is often mentioned in Christian circles. It is a subject studied in Bible Studies and is preached from our pulpits. Many books on Christian living will have a chapter devoted to it. With all of this emphasis you would think we would be great at hospitality, that there wouldn't even be a need for this as a subject in *Faith in Focus*, and yet that is not the case. Why? Because many of us struggle with being hospitable for a variety of reasons, such as feeling under-prepared or worrying about the state of our homes. I will address some of these issues later in the article.

I have been blessed with very good examples of hospitality from my mother and my grandmother. I am mentioning the women as they were both solo parents for 10 and 16 years respectively and the task mainly fell on them. My mother told how my grandmother, when living in Geelong, would invite single theological students over on the Sunday. They had very little money but the guests

always received a great meal and the family ate meager rations for the rest of the week.

As I was growing up it was a normal Saturday event to make sure the lawns were mowed, the washing and housecleaning done and the food prepared so that we could have guests on Sunday. This was self imposed but a strong sense of rest on the Sabbath was ingrained in my family. My mother and stepfather continued to show hospitality right up to the week they both went into care.

"God's two greatest commandments are to love God and love others. To love everyone equally is a true sign of our love for God and our desire to live Christ-like. Hospitality is known as entertaining and welcoming in guests or visitors. It is a genuine way to show love for others! Jesus tells us in Matthew 25:40 that whatever we do for the least of people, we do for him."<sup>1</sup>

When I think of how we as a church can show hospitality there are two areas in which we can do this. One is in the way we meet and greet visitors both before and after church. The other is the one we mostly associate with the word hospitality and that is having people in our homes.

**How do we do when visitors come to our church?** Are we good at talking to new people? The answer is often a resounding no. Most churches have a few people whom everyone considers the outgoing friendly ones and we are inclined to leave it to them. That leaves them with the greater burden when it could easily be shared. And if those people happen to be absent one Sunday, who is going to welcome the visitors?

**How good are we at interacting with those we don't know in our churches?** When our children were in our home



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we asked them to speak to someone outside their age group at church every Sunday. We would ask them to identify that person and what they had learned when they got home. Now all of our adult children are good at speaking to different age groups. We made sure we did the same. Wouldn't it be great if every family in the church did this and if we as adults spoke to someone we didn't know well. The church would be a much friendlier place. If you don't feel secure doing that, grab a friend and talk to people together. That can make the conversation flow more easily.

### **We should show hospitality in our homes**

Below are some of the reasons and or excuses we use for not showing hospitality, and some possible solutions or attitude changes that could take place.

**1. I haven't got anything ready for guests:** In our homes most people have microwaves and freezers. It is possible and maybe even necessary to keep a couple of extra loaves of bread in the freezer. Frozen sausage rolls, pizza bases, wraps, sliced ham and sausages can all be stored there. Stocking up on a few packets of biscuits, cakes, or slices, not to mention nuts and chips are all good standbys. What all of this is doing is making sure we are prepared for a quick meal when having guests. Then we can easily invite people at short notice.

**2. The people have food allergies and I don't know what to do about it:** As someone with food allergies myself I am very conscious of this and always ask guests beforehand if they have any food intolerances. It never ceases to amaze me how many do. We all probably know the gluten, dairy, egg and nut allergies, but I have also met people who are allergic to strawberries, tomatoes, sunflower oil, soy, sugar, onions and pork, to name just a few. So what do you do?

My favourite go-to is having wraps or bread. I always have 'normal' wraps/bread, and gluten free ones on hand. I have gluten free cut meat in the freezer. You can have boiled eggs, canned beetroot and pineapple, lettuce, tomatoes and carrots etc. I serve them in separate bowls, and people can eat what they want. Put the sauces on the table. People will know if they can use them.



*Image by Pexels*

The same is true for dinner. Cook potatoes or rice. Most meats are okay as long as you don't marinate them with the wrong ingredients. Gluten free sausages are readily available. Cooked chicken is a safe meat to use for virtually everyone. And if your visitor is a vegan they can still have the vegetables, wraps, potatoes and/or rice. The supermarkets also have plenty of biscuits that cover most food intolerances. Most of us with allergies will bring something along to tide us over, but showing that level of love is very much appreciated. It is just lovely that someone will open their home to us.

If you know the person you are having over has coeliac disease (which is an autoimmune disease), any cross contamination with gluten products will cause them to become ill. This can seem daunting. Give all your chopping boards an extra good clean and put baking paper down on top of them before chopping the vegetables or cutting bread etc, then no crumbs will go onto your gluten free foods. Do not put any allergy friendly foods on the same plate as other foods that contain gluten. It is not difficult, but it does require a level of awareness that you may not be familiar with.

**3. I have my family around every Sunday:** I remember years ago talking to a couple who mentioned the obligatory visit to the parents every Sunday when they lived in the Netherlands and they

**LOOK OUT FOR THE NEEDS OF OTHERS, LOVE PEOPLE AND CARE ABOUT THEM, AND YOU WILL BE SURPRISED HOW MUCH YOU ARE BLESSED IN THE PROCESS. AND DO IT ALL BECAUSE YOU LOVE GOD AND WANT TO SERVE HIM AND FOLLOW WHAT HE HAS ASKED YOU TO DO.**



felt that it was a real bind. Yet I know families in our churches doing the very same thing. Though I understand families wanting to get together, (we love our family times), why must it always be every Sunday. Why not keep a Sunday for people who are not your family or not your friends? Or why not bring other people into your family group. Leaving all those without family connections out of our homes is not showing love.



Image by Pexels

**4. My house is a mess and I haven't cleaned it:**

As someone who has been in a lot of homes believe me when I say my first interest when I come into your home is not the state of the carpets or how tidy it is. It is the fact that you were willing to have us in. John and I have been in the homes of people who are hoarders and untidy, whose homes have a different cleanliness standard and those whose homes could grace a *House and Gardens Magazine*. Yet when we leave it is the friendliness of the people and the conversations we have with them that we discuss. Once you sit down and engage in conversation that becomes the lasting impression. A certain level of untidiness can actually make people feel more relaxed.

**5. My home isn't big enough:** If your visitors can find a chair or a bit of floor to sit on then your home is adequate. I would encourage you to avoid comparisons with other people. That can hinder your ability to be hospitable.

**6. I'm too tired to have people over:** I am sure most of us have that, probably more often than we would like. Hospitality doesn't just have to occur on a Sunday. Can you find a suitable time in your busy lives to have a person or couple over? Some people we know even do breakfast. A morning or afternoon tea is a reasonably stress free way to have guests. If you are a working couple, how about using your Saturday or a week night?

**7. I'm no good at conversation and I don't know what we will talk about, as mentioned in the first point:**

My question in response is, "Who are you more concerned about, yourself or other people"? The Bible has a lot to say about loving other people. Love others like we love ourselves. If that is the case

then we should be willing to put ourselves out for other people so that they will feel well taken care of, because at the end of the day that is how we would like to be treated. If you're interacting with people well on a Sunday it will make this conversation far easier.

If you really struggle why not get two couples or families over to encourage conversation. As a couple we encouraged our children when they were young to ask questions beginning with the 5W's and 1H word: Who, what, when, where, why and how. If you struggle with conversation these are the words that can help you.

There are no end of subjects to talk about; hobbies, work, families, history, spiritual journey, the economy, sports, weekend recreation, holidays, the Sunday sermon and our churches to name a few.

**Love Each Other:** If you have ever watched a cooking or baking show they will often talk about the magic ingredient when cooking, which is love. Sounds kind of weird doesn't it. Yet I have realized they were on to something because it is better to eat very simple fare served with love in an untidy home, than to have a five course meal served grudgingly in a beautiful house. "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace".<sup>2</sup>

So to summarise, be prepared, look out for the needs of others, love people and care about them, and you will be surprised how much you are blessed in the process. And do it all because you love God and want to serve him and follow what he has asked you to do.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/hospitality-bible-verses/>

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 4:9-10 ESV

*Harriet Haverland – a member of the Pukekohe Reformed Church*



D. G. VANDERPYL

# Last "Letter from New Zealand"

This will be my last letter from across the Tasman with news and other sundry items. I have been writing this column for almost twenty years and am getting close to the three score and ten years.

Time to "let go" and let someone else gather the news to pass on to the readers of *Trowel & Sword*.

My involvement with the magazine goes right back to its beginnings when the first copies were printed in Auckland, which immediately drained our funds at the time and the hat was passed round to complete Volume 1 on the duplicator. It had no counter and we took turns to count aloud as we turned the handle. Those good old days! But that, like so many other things is now history and its memory will evaporate into thin air as the workers of the first hour will slowly fade away.

*Trowel & Sword* has now become more a Reformed Churches of Australia magazine, I think. In the meantime the New Zealand churches have a well-established and popular denominational magazine *Faith in Focus*, being read by a large majority of our membership. Early this year it will celebrate its 20th birthday.

On the whole 1994 has been a stable year with little movement among the churches' pastors.

Wellington Presbytery experienced some internal changes with Rev. Ed Rademaker leaving Wainuiomata and settling in Foxton near Palmerston North. Rev. Bruce Hoyt, of Masterton, accepted the call from Hastings after the departure of Rev. Jack Sawyer to his homeland in the United States. The Masterton bulletin quoted the appointment of one of their office bearers to be present at the installation in Hastings of their pastor. He was charged to convey to the Hastings Church that they are no longer angry for

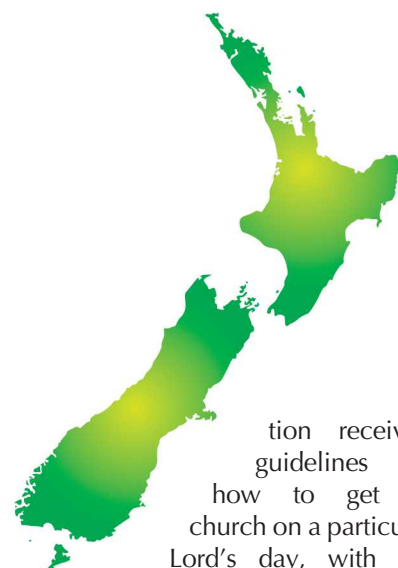
the fact that they now have their minister.

From overseas I received information that Rev. Richard J. Venema, once on loan from the Christian Reformed Churches of North America to our churches during the late 'fifties and early sixties, has joined the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the United States as a testimony to his children, his grandchildren, the many people that he pastored in New Zealand and in five large CRC congregations. A faithful witness on the national level required this separation from the Christian Reformed Churches rather than going independent. His wife passed away in November after a long battle with cancer.

After spending 26 years in church planting in the Philippines, Alex and Renona Munro took the difficult decision to leave the Philippines for the Ukraine and join a church planting team in the Odessa district near the Black Sea. They have seen this as God's continuing call for the closing ten years of their active ministry. It will be a new and maybe refreshing challenge in a different culture, language, climate, and mission situation. They are at present in America for their orientation and basic Russian language study. Our prayers will follow them; they have a warm place in the hearts of our churches' membership.

Synod 1992 granted the provisional use of the *Book of Worship* and appointed a committee to study this Hymnal. One session, in comparing it with our current Psalter Hymnal noted: a poorer selection of psalms, a larger number of hymns but with an imbalance in subject matter, the number of hymns given to Christmas and the incarnation far outweigh the sections on the ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, an increased sentimentalism in hymns, increased number of hymns with spurious theology (Armenian content, pre- and post-millennial etc.), degendering of nouns, e.g. "Good Christian friends rejoice..." and poor modernisations affecting poetry.

Last November the Wellington congrega-



tion received guidelines on how to get to church on a particular Lord's day, with the secular world claiming the roads for an (inter?)national racing car event. The congregation was urged to leave earlier than usual. While the worship services were still held at the appointed times, Sunday school and Catechism classes were cancelled. I assume the youngsters did not get the day off to watch the racing cars whiz by.

I read somewhere that the Sumerians who lived in the cradle of civilisation, between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers (modern Iraq), round about 4,500 B.C., many of whom were scientists, mathematicians and astronomers, also invented writing. Apparently this was their greatest contribution to civilisation. I for one am thankful for that great invention, next to the (steering) wheel and hope to benefit from it for quite some time, if the Lord wills it so!

**Dick G. Vanderpyl**

With this last hoorah, we say farewell to the *Letters from New Zealand*, which were penned by Dick G. Vanderpyl a much loved gentleman of our federation. He wrote about the comings and goings, events of interest and some lighthearted trivia in regard to the RCNZ's years from 1976-1995. The letters were originally published in the *Trowel & Sword*, which actually had its beginnings in the *Land of the Long White Cloud*.

I know that many of our readers enjoyed and appreciated Dicks' unique style of reporting things, and there were

also a few detractors, but that's the way it goes. I for one enjoyed scanning, proof reading and occasionally correcting the text and discovering things about the church that I have adopted since leaving

Australia. There were times when some of the letters were abridged because of the mundane nature of the topics.

I would like to express my thanks to our churches archivist Mr Leen Vandenberg

for trusting me with this document for such an extended period of time. I will be sending it back to you in a somewhat used condition, but in good repair.

**Ed.**

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## Meditations on Genesis 1-3

PETER HOLTVLÜWER

# Meet your Maker

## Synopsis

Where does one go to meet God? What can we learn about God from the first verse of the Bible? These questions and more will be unfolded in the meditation *Meet your Maker*.

*Meditation Text:*

Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

*Suggested Reading:*

Job 38:1–18; John 1:1–5

Have you met God? Maybe you know him and meet him all the time. But maybe you don't know him and wonder: if I wanted to meet God, to get to know him, where would I go?

You could go for a walk in nature or take an outdoor adventure and see what his hands have made. You certainly can catch sight of his glory and power and majesty in the sweeping meadows and towering mountains, in the thick forests and shimmering lakes, in the frozen landscapes and burning desert sands, in the glittering night sky and vast ocean depths. You can marvel at his wisdom and skill on display in the immense variety and wonder of wildlife. Who is not impressed by such things? If we are often amazed at what humans can make, how much more when we observe the works of the Maker of humans? It is good to

wander among the Creator's works and get to know him there.

But there is another place we can go to meet God, a place where he shows himself to us in much greater depth and detail. That place is the Bible. The Bible is God's book, one long love-letter to his people, to those who wish to meet him, know him and love him. True, it is written by ordinary men but each writer was inspired by God's Spirit to teach us about our Creator and Saviour, and also about ourselves and our need to be saved.

### In the Beginning

God's very first words to us come through the pen of Moses: “In the beginning God created...”. The grammar here is particular and revealing. It does not say, “In a beginning” but in “*the* beginning” – the definitive beginning, the very start of God's creative work. It also does not say, “When God began to create the heavens and the earth” as if we have to go to verse 2 to understand what it is that God created. Rather, verse 1 is a very simple, complete, and independent sentence, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (full stop). The apostle John echoes these words as he opens his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word [=Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the word was God” (John 1:1).

So what is God telling us in Genesis 1:1? He is describing the opening act of his creating work which is that he called

forth the heavens and the earth and instantly they sprang into being. As verse 2 says, they were “without form and void” but they were there when a moment before they were not. How did he do this? Genesis 1:1 does not say but Psalm 33 does: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.” And speaking of the earth David adds, “For he spoke and it came to be” (Ps 33:6, 9). The Lord also stated in the 4th Commandment that the entire heavens and the earth “and all that is in them” were created in the span of six days (Ex 20:11). Put it all together and we get this: according to Scripture verse 1 describes God's first act on Day 1.

### Only God

What is the relevance of this? For one, there are no billions of years here, either in verse 1 or between verses 1 and 2 or anywhere else in this whole creation account. There is also no matter, no stuff, no anything except God himself prior to “the beginning.” Since this is the very start of everything outside of God, then it must be that this was the moment when matter was created out of nothing at the command of the Almighty.

This is quite different from what evolutionists teach. They believe that matter, some mysterious unformed substance, has always existed and that at some point in the ancient past different parts of this matter mixed together by chance, generating a great deal of heat. This hot mixture then started expanding



and over billions of years formed all the countless things that make up the universe we know today.

Have you ever noticed how some people are so sure they know exactly what happened billions of years ago, how this earth came to be, when no person yet existed? I mean, we humans can't figure out how the pyramids of Egypt were built or why the ancients etched enormous designs in Peru's Nazca Desert, figures that can only be seen from high up in the sky. We don't even know who killed JFK! So what kind of arrogance must it be for humans to confidently assert what took place before time began when not a single one of us was there?

But there was someone there – God the Creator! And what does he say to those who make up theories? He said it to Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?" (Job 38:4–5). Man can never be in a position to tell God how he did his creating work! Only God can reveal that to us as he does in Genesis 1 and affirms in Hebrews 11:3, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." Only God "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4:17). My friends, meet your Maker, your matchless Creator! Who can even remotely compare to him?

### Before the Beginning

"In the beginning God..." Isn't that a curious way to begin the Bible? It's almost as if we've missed a chapter. Moses introduces God as the main character without any back-story. He does not try to explain God's origins, how he exists, or who he is exactly. There is no philosophical inquiry. Nor is there any proof offered for God's existence like so many demand today. All we find is a simple, profound statement of fact: in the beginning God.

It's a key point to keep in mind when we speak with our neighbours about the gospel. The Bible never tries to prove that God exists. It simply confesses it. In the past some theologians and apologists have tried to use reason and logic to prove the existence of God but that's an unfruitful path to follow. After all, if God has not given us such proof in the Bible, how do we ever think we'll find it?

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that we should cast aside all reasoned arguments for God's existence. The Lord has also given us a mind with the ability to think and reason. And our neighbours often respect sound reasoning. God's existence and activity certainly are reasonable and logical but in the end they are not *provable*. Accepting that God exists is a matter of faith, not science. It's not a matter of winning the *argument* but it's always a matter of winning the *heart*, and that's something only God's Spirit can bring about through the word.

"In the beginning God" – that means this: God simply was. He existed at the time of the beginning which must mean that God existed also *before* the beginning. God himself has no beginning. He is before all things and above all things. He is eternal and transcendent, that is, timeless and boundless in his presence. Psalm 90:2 elaborates on this: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." We humans are mere creatures, bound within time, confined to one place at one moment, but our God has no such restrictions. He is outside of the limits of time and space, outside of the limits of the laws of nature, for he existed before they did and in fact he created them.

### Creator and Creatures

That is clear from the next words in verse 1 which say that "God created the heavens and the earth." Creation is something different and apart from the Creator. We have to realize that our Maker stands in a class all his own!

How different this is from those who think that God is part and parcel of creation itself! You see this strongly in the environmental movement where "Mother Earth" reigns supreme. The earth and nature are not to be harmed in any way for we derive our life from the earth. She is god. And when we die we simply rejoin nature. The spirit of god, they say, is found within all things – whether it's a rock, a tree, or a chimpanzee!

Don't we see this idea in pop culture today too? When *Stars Wars* talks about "the Force" being with you, what is that but the impersonal god who controls things behind the scenes? Or think of how Thanos is told in *Avengers: Infinity War* that "the universe has judged you. You asked it for a prize and it told you no." Suddenly the "universe" is a living

thing, the omnipotent god in the background. Yet the Bible teaches something totally different: the Creator is separate and distinct from all of creation. He is above it and over it as Ruler Supreme.

And that's a good thing too, isn't it? What purpose would life have if all we do is live as humans today only to be joined with nature tomorrow? And what comfort could we find in all the striving of life where we battle the effects of sin in ourselves and in the natural world around us? What help is there if nature itself is God, an impersonal divine force?

How refreshing and encouraging to know that the Creator is a very personal Being who is beyond creation and that he allows us to call him *our* God! He calls sinners like you and me to place our trust in the Word, his Son Jesus Christ, whom he sent to pay the price for our sins. In Christ our Maker provides all the help and all the comfort we need in this life of sorrow and struggle until he comes to bring us into the new heavens and earth!

My friend, if your God can call into being things which never existed before, and if he sacrificed his Son for you, is there anything your God cannot do to help you in your hour of need? His power and love are beyond measure so turn to him in faith and rest securely in his fatherly hand.

*Peter H. Holtvliwer is minister of Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church, editor of the devotional Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms and editor in chief of Clarion the magazine of the Canadian Reformed Churches.*

*First printed in The Outlook, a magazine dedicated to the exposition and defence of the Reformed Faith.*

*Used with permission.*

Our sister church, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have been supporting mission work in Papua New Guinea since the 1980s. The sending church, the FRC Southern River relies on the support of co-operating churches from both the Canadian Reformed and the RCNZ to ensure this work can continue.

The Southern River Mission Board has generously provided us their missionary's perspective on the work done in PNG, in the hope that we may grow to appreciate the work that our partners in the mission work are also involved in.

# Overview of Reformed Ministries

PASTOR R. DE JONGE  
(MISSIONARY)

Reformed mission work began in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the 1980s, but it has significantly increased since 2000. In the past 20 years, several missionaries have been sent from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, all working together in PNG under the umbrella of "Reformed Ministries."

Currently, two families are working at the Reformed Churches Bible College (RCBC) in Port Moresby, one supported by Canada and the other by New Zealand. They will soon be joined by Pastor Tim Slaa, another missionary, supported by Australia, who will live at the RCBC but focus on church planting. Three families live in Ukaruampa, Eastern Highlands, and focus on church planting in Eastern Highlands and Morobe provinces.

In 2019, Reformed Ministries, with the approval of the supporting mission boards, developed a 10-year plan for their work in PNG. This plan included the following mission and vision:

**Mission:** *Our mission is to encourage, assist, and equip the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea to (1) grow in maturity and (2) spread the Reformed faith.*

**Vision:** *"30/30:" By 2030, we plan to have 5 instituted churches, 10 church plants, and 15 national pastors.*

In addition to this mission and vision, they adopted an operational and working strategic plan that they pray and work earnestly to complete. They hold yearly

conferences to discuss their progress, make plans for the next year, and offer prayer and encouragement for each other. Currently, there are two instituted churches, five church plants, and five national pastors. Their goals were and remain lofty, and the results are in the hands of the Lord, but Reformed Ministries and their boards continue to pray that the Lord of the harvest will bless their labours (Matt 9:38).

## Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea

As stated in their mission statement, Reformed Ministries works with the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea. Here is a brief synopsis of each of the churches and church plants:

In the Port Moresby and Central Province region, there are four churches: one instituted church and three church plants.

**Bethel Reformed Church of Beretete** is a small but stable congregation that is served by Pastor Nawai, who was ordained in 2016. In 2023, in its 30<sup>th</sup> year of existence, the Beretete congregation was instituted. This congregation is well-grounded in the truth of the Reformed confession and is growing in their desire to reach out to their neighbouring communities with the gospel.

**Covenant Reformed Church of 9-Mile** is one of the larger RCPNG congregations, served by Pastor Aisi Kosa since his ordination in 2016. In recent years, this congregation has swelled in size and recently constructed a new church building to accommodate for these numbers and the fact that they are running a small school on the property as well.

**Immanuel Reformed Church of East**





*Installation of Pastor Pol and Pastor DeJonge, Living Waters Reformed Church, Lae 2022.*

**Boroko** is a very small congregation tucked away in a settlement in the East Boroko area of Port Moresby. In recent years there has been growth in membership, leadership, and commitment in recent years, and the congregation is highly motivated to continue worshipping in their settlement and reaching out to their neighbours with the Word of God.

**Veifa'a Reformed Church** is a small village congregation 4 hours drive from Port Moresby. Pastor Paul Ame has served the congregation since his ordination in 2020. Although the congregation is small, they have amazingly produced three of the five pastors of the RCPNG. Like the Immanuel Reformed Church, Veifa'a has been challenged by its small size, yet by the Lord's grace, the faithful presence and preaching of their pastor is proving to be a blessing for the congregation and providing much-needed leadership and stability.

There are three RCPNG churches (one instituted, two church plants) in Morobe and Eastern Highlands. Mountains separate this region from Port Moresby, but the Highlands Highway connects all three of these churches and offers a gateway further into the highly populated Highlands region.

**The Living Water Reformed Church in Lae** is served by Pastor Isidore Aufa. Pastor Isidore was ordained in 2017, and the church instituted in 2019. Even though they struggle in many ways; they are in a rough neighbourhood and many members live day-to-day by selling garden food, they remain one of the largest and strongest RCPNG churches.

**The Logos Reformed in Wantun** is served by Pastor Tony O. Aufa, also ordained in 2017. Wantun is a younger church and newer to Reformed faith and

life. As a village church, their life is much different than Lae's. Despite challenges related to being cash-poor and new to the Reformed faith, they are growing in maturity, having recently appointed three new candidate leaders in the church.

**The Hila Reformed Church** is the youngest of all the RCPNG congregations. They started holding worship services in 2020. Although very young, it is a very dynamic congregation. They have a solid

core of committed members and visitors coming to worship weekly. There is also much interest in Reformed doctrine in the area, thanks to the active and vocal witness of our members and the frequent outreaches that have happened at local markets over the past several years.

#### **Zeal for Outreach**

The desire to impact their communities with the truth of God's Word is very strong in the RCPNG congregations and pastors. Pastors will go on multi-day

preaching expeditions, congregation members will hike for hours to reach neighbouring villages, and whole congregations will walk into nearby settlements to share the good news.

As missionaries, we also exert a lot of effort in outreach. Much of this is done in the areas of our local congregations, and we urge people to go and worship with them on Sundays. A significant amount is also done in areas where we believe there is potential for a Reformed Church in the future. The more we do outreach, the more people learn to value and trust the message that we are bringing, and the more we receive invitations to preach in local villages, help local pastors to preach and reach their communities effectively, and get queried about the potential of starting a Reformed church in a certain area. While we cannot fulfill all these requests, we do what we can and are encouraged by the way the Lord opens doors for Christ-centered preaching and Reformed church planting.

**To be continued ...**



*Pastor Ryan DeJonge and family have been in PNG since 2016*



IAN KOENS

# Didache: How boring!

*The Didache is a teaching manual, real old, like. The word Didache itself is Greek and, strictly speaking, should have a little thing (like this: ‘) right on top of the last letter. My computer can’t do this or, perhaps, I can’t make my computer do this. Anyhow, Didache means ‘teaching’. Inneresting, innit? Yeah, as I said, Didache is Greek, but the Didache was really written in Koine Greek. Now, I don’t know what that is (maybe sump’tn to do with money...), but it sounds special, doesn’t it? Didactic (that’s a derivative of didache, yeah, really!) means ‘teaching’ (but I already wrote that) and another word is ‘instruct’. Now, isn’t that something! Yeah, the stuff we don’t know, eh?*

*It’s inneresting, too, I reckon.*

‘Real boring more like it’, I hear you say. Maybe so, but it’s still the wrong question to ask. ‘Is it important?’ might have been better and the answer to that would have been in the affirmative. In fact, it was more important than (perhaps) you realise, much more; it might have been part of the Canon – the Bible itself!

For a start, quite a few church practices can be traced back to the Didache. In fact, it reads more like the oldest surviving Church Order – which, in part, it is. It was written some time during the 100’s and was also known as the ‘Teachings of the Lord by the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles’. However, it is generally accepted that none of the Apostles had anything to do with writing it. Most likely the authors were the next generation leaders, known as the Apostolic Fathers. Since long titles are out of vogue, we’ll stick to *Didache*.

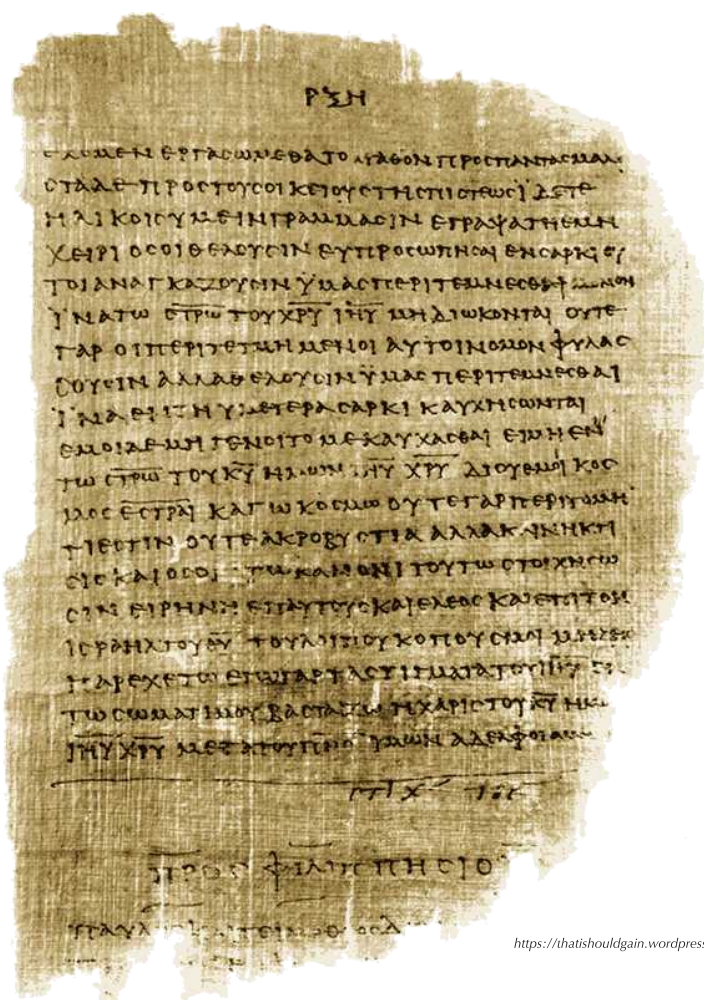
The Didache was so important that serious consideration was given for its inclusion in the Canon – the Bible itself! While this never happened – and we see this as God’s guidance – the Didache did become a final authority on many matters. Most scholars agree that part of the *Apostolic Constitution* – another obscure document, written in the 300s, was solely based on the Didache. This document formed the basis of many practices common in the church for many years.

We also must point out that some counselled caution when using the Didache while a few rejected its authority altogether.

## Some document!

Why is it then that in our churches – and we do have many serious readers, don’t we? – only few people know the word, and even less its contents? Has it lost its relevance? No, it simply got lost.

For some seven-hundred years it was an important part of the ecclesiastical world but got lost soon after that. Hard to



<https://thatishouldgain.wordpress.com/>



believe, yes, but no historian disputes this.

It wasn't until a thousand years later that it reappeared. In 1873 the *Metropolitan of the Eastern Church* in Constantinople found an ancient manuscript containing, and the publication the Didache caused quite a sensation. Not so much for practical reasons – the affairs of the church were well established – but rather for its rarity and historical insights.

### What's in it?

The Didache has an orderly structure – naturally so – and contains four section and sixteen chapters. Section I (chapters 1 to 6) deals with the Two Ways: good and evil. Section II (chapters 7 to 10) are directions for worship, while the third section (chapters 11 to 15) contains the ways of conducting congregational affairs. The final section (chapter 16) focusses on things that must take place before the Last Days. Here are some details and extracts.

### Section I

The basis for this part is Deuteronomy 30:15 where it speaks about the two ways: life and good verses death and evil. The much-disputed Letter of Barnabas also busies itself with The Way of Light and the Way of the Black One. Since the text of the latter is similar to this section of the Didache, some scholars even go as far as accusing Barnabas of copying while others hold the reverse view.

At the same time, Section I is a teaching manual intended to prepare converts for baptism. Leaning heavily on the Sermon on the Mount, much of the material deals with the ethics of Christian life.

### Section II - Baptism

Chapter 7 immerses the reader straight into Baptism. It's interesting to note, and especially for those involved in mission work, that the Didache presupposes a period of instruction before Baptism should take place. It needs to be remembered that most baptisms were administered to adults and the sacrament was a Profession of Faith at the same time. For that reason, it's common sense to require the catechumen to have some essential knowledge of what he is about to profess. The Didache is quite prescriptive on this sacrament.

*Baptise into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in running (living) water. If you have no running water, baptise in other water*

*and if you cannot use cold (river temperature), then in warm. If you have neither, pour water on the head three times.*

### Section II - Lord's Supper

This section also says something about the sacrament of Holy Supper, known as the Eucharist. The Didache makes a distinction between the 'Agape meal' (love feast) and the Eucharist proper. The Eucharist was only restricted to those who had been baptised. This sacrament was supposed to take place every Day of the Lord:

*On the Lord's own day, gather together and break bread and give thanks after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure. Let not the one who has a quarrel with his comrade meet with you until they are reconciled so that your sacrifice may not be defiled.*

### Section II - Fasting

Fasting was a taken-for-granted prerequisite for Baptism:

*before baptism you must order the one who is to be baptised to fast for one or two days beforehand.*

It then goes on to say something about fasting in general:

*Your fasts must not be on the same day with the hypocrites for they fast on Monday and Thursday, but you must fast on Wednesday and Friday.*

Try as I did, no further light can be shed on this rather curious statement.

### Section II - Prayer

Finally, some instructions on private prayers at home are given.

*Do not pray like the hypocrites, but pray this as the Lord commanded in His Gospel: 'Our Father who is in heaven...' (and what follows). Three times a day pray thus.*

Interesting to see that, already then, they were encouraged into this (good family) habit. Whether it was done at mealtimes is uncertain. With some justification we may ask whether instructions like these may have led to ritualism.

### Section III

This deals with life in general. It speaks of mutual care and oversight within the

Christian community. Since hotels, caravan parks and motels were not as prolific as today, hospitality is stressed, and unity is held up as an essential characteristic of the Christian Church.

The offices are also set out: apostle, prophet and teacher plus bishop (another word for elder) and deacon. The first three are roaming clerics while the last two are connected to an established church. When the Didache was written, there were many roaming preachers (some genuine, others for gain – some even claimed to be the Messiah) and, for that reason, claimed food and lodging.

The Didache gives tips on how to distinguish false prophets from true ones. Quote:

*'An apostle from the Lord shall stay one day, and, if need be, the next also, but if he stays three, he is a false prophet. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet. A prophet that orders a meal in the Spirit shall not eat of it, otherwise he is a false prophet.'*

What to make of that...?

Echoing Scripture, the Didache gives instruction on the selection of those worthy of the offices.

*Elect for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek and not covetous, and true and approved: for they also minister unto you the ministry of the prophets and teachers, therefore despise them not: for these are they which are honoured of you with the prophets and teachers.*

### Section IV

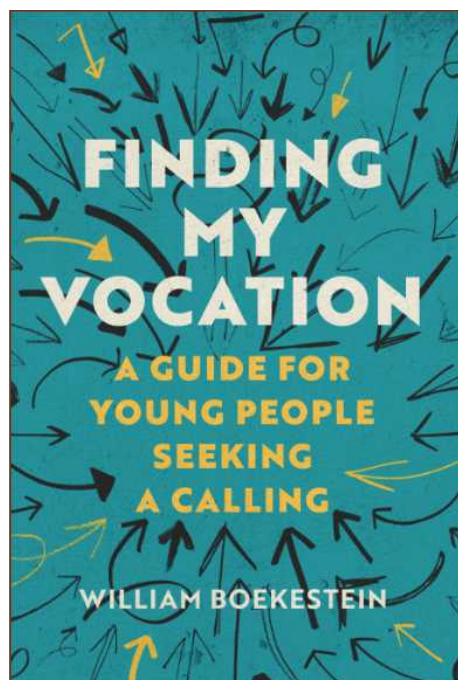
In keeping with the Bible itself, the Didache reflects that Christ's return is expected soon. This term is taken as *if not in our lifetime, then surely soon after*. Notice that nothing much has changed and we also hear these words? Many of the details of Section IV are in keeping with the Book of Revelation.

### Conclusion

This then was a little on the Didache, a snapshot of life in the early church. Here's hoping you caught its reflection.

*Mr Ian Koens is a member of the Free Reformed Church in Bunbury, Western Australia. He is an avid student and writer of church history.*

*Used with permission.*



### ***Finding My Vocation: A Guide for Young People Seeking a Calling***

By William Boekestein

Reformed Free Publishing Association

**Reviewed by Zani Button**

We live in a time where our young people are being told they can be anything they want to be, and that the careers they will have one day, may not yet exist. This leaves us with the question: “How can you figure out what you are supposed to do, and then do it well?”

William Boekestein’s book about vocation aims to provide Biblical and practical advice to young people contemplating their futures, and their future vocations.

It is very helpfully divided into four sections, and each section includes real-life examples to put into focus the theory:

- Pondering Vocation
- Preparing For Your Vocation
- Practicing Vocation
- Questions About Vocation.

### **Pondering Vocation**

This part of the book grounds our understanding of what a vocation is through a Christian and biblical world view. Quoting John Stott, Boekestein explains:

“Work is a consequence of creation” therefore “work isn’t a curse but a calling, our echo to God’s goodness.”

As Christians it can be difficult to navigate the world’s ideas of what work should be, and this chapter is vital in laying the foundation with a Biblical perspective. (This reviewer found her own views challenged, and encouraged, after 15 years in her chosen vocation.) The section concludes with how our calling can lead to conversions, an encouraging look at how we can witness in our workplace.

### **Preparing for your Vocation**

This is perhaps the most practical section of the book, with advice for what to do while you wait to be old enough to decide on your vocation.

I could not say it any better than the author: “This means that your vocational training has everything to do with your life as a student. The young person who says or otherwise demonstrates that he doesn’t care about school, demeans the doctrine of calling. You don’t have to be a top-tier scholar. But you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior (2 Peter 3:18).”

He also suggests that you can work on gaining skills that are valuable to develop even before entering the workforce. In brief, these are: “learn to speak well, learn to solve problems, learn to work with a team, and develop manual or mechanical skills.” Boekestein elaborates on these, supporting them with correlating Scripture.

### **Practicing Vocation**

This section is particularly helpful in looking to the future. Boekestein discusses the importance of working well, but also resting well. The concept of ‘hustle culture’ is one our young people are very familiar with, and the author makes it clear that God has ordained our rest too. Finally, there is a chapter on managing money wisely. Financial literacy for our young Christians is vital as the world would have them see wealth in a vastly different way.

### **Questions about Vocation**

New Zealand readers may find this section a bit more American with a discus-

sion about joining the military service and mention of college (rather than university). However, the advice remains sound and the section on being called to the ministry is an important read for every young person.

The author also seeks to keep our youths’ hearts guarded and safe and speaks about some of the dangers they need to keep in mind when entering the work force. Underpinning it all, is the reminder that: “If you aren’t godly at work, then you aren’t godly at all.”

This book would be an asset, not only to teenagers, but also to their parents to help guide and council their future pathways. The biblical arguments are sound and encouraging. The author understands that times have changed but that the fundamental truths have not, consequently, the book feels very suited for young people today. Overall, the encouragement to be a godly worker in a sinful world is inspiring and I look forward to using this book with my children when the time comes.

### LETTERS OF JOHN NEWTON



# I would wish for a thousand hands and eyes, and feet, and tongues!

September 10, 1760

Dear Madam,

The best *advice* I can send, or the best *wish* I call for you, is that you may have an abiding and experimental sense of those words of the apostle, "LOOKING UNTO JESUS!" The *duty*, the *privilege*, the *safety* and the unspeakable *happiness* of a believer, are all comprised in that one sentence!

Let us first pray that the eyes of our understanding may be opened and strengthened; and then let us fix our whole gaze upon Him! But how are we to behold Him? I answer, in the looking-glass of His written Word! There He is represented to us in a variety of views. The wicked world can see no loveliness in the portraiture He has given of Himself; yet, blessed be God, there are those who can "behold His glory as the

glory of the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth!" And while they behold it, they find themselves, changed into His image, by the transforming influence of His Spirit.

In vain we use our reasonings, and arguments, and resolutions, to beat down our corruptions and to silence our fears. A believing view of Jesus is the only effectual means!

When heavy trials in life are appointed us, and we are called to give up, or perhaps to pluck out a right eye – it is an easy matter for another to say, "Be comforted;" but this is totally useless. Only a believing view of Jesus will sustain us!

When:

we can fix our thoughts upon Him, as submitting, for our sakes, to drink our whole bitter cup of the wrath of God to the very dregs; and

we consider, that He who thus suffered in our nature, who knows and sympathizes with all our weakness, is now the Supreme Disposer of all that concerns us, and we further consider, He numbers the very hairs of our heads, appoints every trial we meet with in number, weight, and measure, and will allow nothing to befall us but what shall contribute to our real good – this view, I say, is *the sure remedy for every disease*, and powerfully reconciles us unto every affliction.

Again, we are afraid of being swallowed up by our many restless *enemies*; and are weary of our long pilgrimage through such a thorny, tedious, barren wilderness. *A sight of Jesus*, as Stephen saw Him, crowned with glory, yet noticing all the sufferings of His poor servants, ready to receive them to Himself and make them partakers of His everlasting joy – this will raise the spirits, and restore strength; this will animate us to hold on and to hold out! *This will do it – and nothing but this can!*

*Looking unto Jesus* will melt the soul into love and gratitude; and those who greatly *love*, and are greatly *obliged*, find *obedience* to Jesus to be easy. *When Jesus is upon our thoughts*, then we can ask the Apostle's question with befitting disdain, "What! Shall I continue in sin – that grace may abound? God forbid! What! Shall I sin against my Lord, my Love, my Friend – who once died for my sins, and now lives and reigns on my behalf; who supports, and leads, and guides, and feeds me every day? God forbid! No! Rather *I would wish for a thousand hands and eyes, and feet, and tongues*, for ten thousand lives – that I might devote them all to His service!"

"Looking unto Jesus – the author and finisher of our faith!" Hebrews 12:2



# The love of the present world

BY DONNY FRIEDERICHSEN

Neil Postman warned in the foreword to *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that it is not what we hate that will ruin us but rather what we love. The far more dangerous situation is a culture that seeks out pleasure and ease at all costs, even when that cost is their freedom. This is the danger into which Paul's fellow worker Demas fell.

Demas was a co-laborer on Paul's missionary journeys. He was first mentioned alongside Luke in Colossians (Col. 4:14). He was also mentioned in Philemon along with Mark, Aristarchus, and Luke (Philem. 24). Demas worked faithfully with Paul through his missionary journeys and even into his first imprisonment. But along the way, Demas was overcome by the enticements of the world.

Near the end of what was likely Paul's last letter, he wrote some of the saddest verses in the Bible: "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:9–10). Demas abandoned Paul. In Paul's great hour of need, Demas left him in the lurch. He ditched Paul and rejected Christ. The reason was not a fear of persecution but rather a love of this world. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones commented,

*When the devil fails to destroy us by means of his military or secular power, or his false religions, he comes to us in this most pleasant and seductive manner, and perhaps suggests that we are working too hard or that we are being over strict or that we are really going too far and rushing to extremes.*

Demas lifted up the creature higher than the Creator. His eyes and heart

became enamored of the beauty of another. This false god slipped in quietly, slowly diverting his gaze from Christ to the things of the world. It was probably subtle, but soon enough Demas had submitted to a false god.

Far too often, the church tries to harbor both the love of Christ and the love of the world in its heart. These are mutually exclusive. Like Demas, we attempt to embrace both, but when difficulties arise, our true love will remain. The love of this world is a flattering mistress who promises true happiness but leaves only regret and death.

The Puritan Richard Sibbes offers this advice: "Labor to know the world, that you may detest it." Enjoy the good things for what they are. They are not wrong in and of themselves. But see that in comparison to the beauty of Christ, they are vapid and meaningless. Learn to be content with Christ in all situations (Phil. 4:11). A love for the world cannot lodge with a love for Christ. Realize that you, like Demas, are far more likely to be ruined by a love of pleasure than a fear of pain. Do not love what ruins, but rather love Him who gives abundant life (John 10:10).

*Rev. Donny Friederichsen is senior pastor of Lakeside Presbyterian Church in Southlake, Tex.*

*First published in Tabletalk Magazine, an outreach of Ligonier, December 2021 | Vol.45 | No.12*

# Will man rob God?

BY R.C. SPROUL

In the last book of the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophet Malachi. He raised a provocative question: "Will man rob God?" This is somewhat startling because it suggests something that on the surface would appear to be impossible. How could anybody rob God of anything? Does it mean that we storm the ramparts of heaven and break into the inner sanctum of the divine treasury and help ourselves to things that God alone possesses? Such a thing is manifestly impossible. The strongest robber in the world could never scale the heights of heaven and defile the possessions of an omnipotent God, and so the very idea of robbing God seems absurd. Yet God gives answer to this question immediately dispelling any absurdity connected with it. He explains pointedly how indeed it is possible for human creatures to be guilty of theft against God. He answers his question, "Will man rob God?" saying, "Yet you are robbing me." The Israelite response is: "How have we robbed you?" To which God replies, "In your tithes and contributions" (3:8). God announces that to withhold the full measure of the tithe that He requires from His people is to be guilty of robbing God Himself. Because of this, He pronounces a curse upon the whole nation and commands them afresh to bring to Him all of the tithe.

When we think of tithing in Old Testament categories, we understand that the requirement involves returning to God the first fruits of one's prosperity. We are required to give ten percent of our gross annual income or gain. If a shepherd's flock produced ten new lambs, the requirement was that one of those lambs be offered to God. This offering is from the top. It is not an offering that is given after other expenses are met

or after other taxes have been paid.

Recently, I read an article that gave an astonishing statistic that I find difficult to believe is accurate. It declared that of all of the people in America who identify themselves as evangelical Christians, only four percent of them return a tithe to God. If that statistic is accurate, it means that ninety-six percent of professing evangelical Christians regularly, systematically, habitually, and impenitently rob God of what belongs to Him. It also means that ninety-six percent of us are for this reason exposing ourselves to a divine curse upon our lives. Whether this percentage is accurate, one thing is certain — it is clear that the overwhelming majority of professing evangelical Christians do not tithe.

This immediately raises the question: “Why?” How is it possible that somebody who has given his life to Christ can withhold their financial gifts from Him? I have heard many excuses or explanations for this. The most common is the assertion that the tithe is part of the Old Testament law that has passed away with the coming of the New Testament. This statement is made routinely in spite of the complete lack of New Testament evidence for it. Nowhere in the New Testament does it teach us that the principle of the tithe has been abrogated. The New Testament does teach us, however, that the new covenant is superior to the old covenant. It is a covenant that gives more blessings to us than the old covenant did. It is a covenant that with its manifold blessings imposes greater responsibilities than the Old Testament did. If anything, the structure of the new covenant requires a greater commitment to financial stewardship before God than that which was required in the old covenant. That is to say, the starting point of Christian giving is the tithe. The tithe is not an ideal that only a few people reach but rather should be the base minimum from which we progress.

Church history also bears witness that

many in the early church did not consider the tithe as having been abrogated in the new covenant. One of the earliest (turn of the second century) extrabiblical documents that survives to this day is the book of the *Didache*. The *Didache* gives practical instruction for Christian living. In the *Didache*, the principle of the giving of the first fruits or the tithe is mentioned as a basic responsibility for every Christian.

A second argument that people give to avoid the tithe is that they “cannot afford it.” What that statement really means is that they cannot pay their tithe and pay all the other expenses they have incurred. Again, in their minds the tithe is the last resort in the budget. Their giving to God is something that is at the bottom of their list of priorities. It’s a weak argument before God to say, “Lord, I didn’t tithe because I couldn’t afford it” — especially when we consider that the poorest among us has a higher standard of living than ninety-nine percent of the people who have ever walked on the face of the earth.

There are many more excuses that people give to avoid this responsibility, yet the New Testament tells us: “Let the thief no longer steal” (Eph. 2:28a). If we have been guilty of stealing from God in the past by withholding our tithe from Him, that behavior must cease immediately and give way to a resolution to begin tithing at once, no matter what it costs. It’s an interesting phenomenon in the life of the church, that people who in 1960 gave a dollar to the offering plate every week, still give that same dollar today. Everything else in their living costs has been adjusted to inflation except their giving. We also have to remind ourselves that if we give gifts to God, we cannot call them tithes if these gifts fall beneath the level of ten percent.

One of the sad realities of failure to tithe is that in so doing we not only are guilty of robbing God, but we also rob ourselves of the joy of giving and of the blessings that follow from it. I have yet to

meet a person who tithes who has expressed to me regret for being one who tithes. On the contrary, I hear from them not a sense of judgment towards those who don’t give but rather a sense of compassion toward them. Frequently, I hear tithers saying, “People who don’t tithe just don’t know what they’re missing.” It is a cliché and a truism that you can’t out-give God. That statement has become a cliché because it is so true. In the text in Malachi, we find something exceedingly rare coming from the lips of God. Here God challenges His people to put Him to a test: “Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need” (3:10). Have you put God to that test? Have you tried Him to see if He will not open heaven itself and empty His own treasuries upon you? We need to stop robbing Him and thus receive from Him the blessing that He promises.

*Dr. R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) was founder of Ligonier Ministries, first minister of preaching and teaching at Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla., first president of Reformation Bible College, and executive editor of Tabletalk magazine. His radio program, Renewing Your Mind, is still broadcast daily on hundreds of radio stations around the world and can also be heard online. He was author of more than one hundred books, including The Holiness of God, Chosen by God, and Everyone’s a Theologian. He was recognized throughout the world for his articulate defense of the inerrancy of Scripture and the need for God’s people to stand with conviction upon His Word.*

*First published in Tabletalk Magazine, an outreach of Ligonier, August 2009*

**One of the sad realities of failure to tithe is that in so doing we not only are guilty of robbing God, but we also rob ourselves of the joy of giving and of the blessings that follow from it.**

# Help WASH away the misery of Neglected Tropical Diseases in the world's poorest places...

**“Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham...” – Genesis 26:18**

Living in New Zealand, most of us are fortunate to have a constant supply of clean water to use for our everyday living. But that's not the case in many of the world's poorest places. Around the world there are millions and millions of people who do not have access to clean water.

With generous support from kind people like you, Christian Blind Mission (**cbm**) continues the fight against Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), such as River Blindness which has shown incredible success over many years in Nigeria. Alongside the successful delivery of parasite-killing medication, which breaks the lifecycle of parasites that cause NTDs, **cbm's** Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project focuses on clean water and good sanitation to prevent NTDs from taking hold again.

**Good health and clean water go hand in hand. So, having access to clean water from well-maintained boreholes, helps free children and adults from contracting NTDs such as River Blindness and elephantiasis.**

It also means men, women, and children no longer have to spend hours walking to gather muddied and contaminated water.



Clean water helps keep people healthy. And healthy people are more likely to be able to access education, have better livelihoods, and have a far greater chance of breaking the cycle of poverty and disability.

The major success factor of **cbm's** WASH programme is to provide clean water through fixing broken boreholes, also making them accessible for people with disabilities.

Clean water from boreholes is vital to a community, but many existing boreholes have ceased to function for various reasons. They are often found broken and in need of repair due to their age. The only place to get water is from an open well or a river where there is great risk of contamination and pollution, and a greater risk of contracting NTDs.

But thankfully, this is where your loving kindness comes into the picture.

*As we celebrate World Humanitarian Day on 19 August, and having recently visited Nigeria, I ask for you to prayerfully consider making a special gift to help ensure clean water, and good sanitation and hygiene practices are accessible to communities, including people with disabilities. This will help prevent children and adults in local villages losing their sight due to River Blindness.*

**With support from generous people like you, new or refurbished boreholes will provide communities with a centrally located source of clean water.**

The addition of wheelchair ramps will make the task of gathering water safer and more accessible to people with disabilities.

Right now, there are children, adults and whole communities in great need of clean water in places like Nigeria... and your generous support can change that.

By sending your gift, you selflessly make it possible for clean water to be made available to local communities, and you will also be helping to set up WASH Clubs and install handwashing stations at primary schools.



When I was in Nigeria, I visited a small community and their school where a WASH Club has been set up. The children were excited to have access to clean drinking water, and to learn about improving their personal sanitation and hygiene practices.

The children happily demonstrated their new hand-washing skills, and showed me how to wash my hands using soap and 'tippy-taps'. These 'tippy-taps' were filled with fresh clean water from the refurbished community borehole, and constructed from low-cost recycled materials.

Whilst in the area, I also spoke with people in the community who were trained by **cbm's** partner to repair wells. One of them was Chetachi, who could not walk unaided, and had a friend carrying his tools.

"Before there was no clean water and now, this is no longer an issue," he said, with a beaming smile.

Chetachi is trained by **cbm's** partner to maintain borehole pumps, and repair them when broken.

Because of this training, Chetachi, and other people with disabilities, now have jobs and feel valued and included in the community.

I spoke with other people in the community who now have access to clean water from their newly refurbished borehole. They spoke of their gratitude to generous people like you:

**"We are so grateful to people in New Zealand who support us through cbm. Our children will not suffer like their grandparents did, because of their generosity."**

Whilst this community is now thriving, right now in other villages in Nigeria there are many children and adults in desperate need of clean water... but your generous support can help change that.

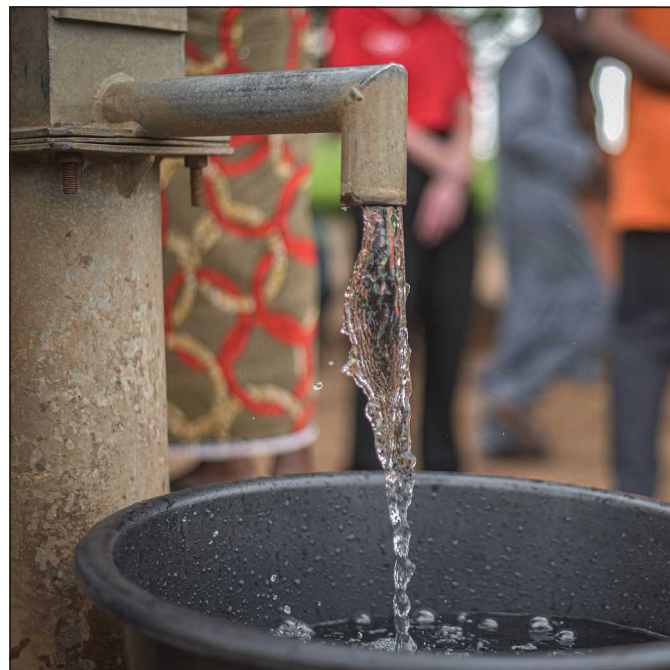
It will help provide new or refurbished boreholes so communities can have a centrally located source of clean water, with the addition of wheelchair ramps to make the task of gathering water safer and more accessible for people with disabilities.

I have seen first-hand what WASH does for a community. It is life-changing for all, but especially for people with disabilities who often cannot access clean water due to their disability.

We thank God – especially for your faithful support of people with disabilities. But we are also deeply concerned that right now there are so many children and adults who cannot access clean water in the world's poorest places.

Please will you help provide them with clean water to WASH away the misery of NTDs that can have lifelong health and economic consequences?

Lastly, I want to leave you with a quote from **cbm's** WASH partner. It's a wonderful testament to the faithful giving of generous people like you.



The Director said to me: "Many charities want to come in at the end when we are winning the battle against NTDs. But **cbm** has been there from the start."

My challenge to you is, let's continue the incredible progress made over many years to combat NTDs. Please prayerfully consider sending a gift today by phoning 0800 77 22 64 or on **cbm's** website [www.cbmnz.org.nz/wash](http://www.cbmnz.org.nz/wash).

With your generous support, let's WASH away the misery of NTDs!

Thank you for your kind and caring heart. May God bless you.



**Murray Sheard, CEO cbm New Zealand**

Murray joined **cbm** in August 2018. Before, he worked in overseas development and anti-corruption in over 10 countries as well as in the line of social enterprise and governance, and at Tearfund. He lectured philosophy and ethics at the University of Auckland and trained business people in ethics.

Murray is married to Joy and they have two young sons, Finn and Jamie. He was born in Wellington and grew up in Thames. From there, he has lived and worked across the world, including a year within the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Friends with disabilities taught him a lot about the reality of their lives, and the difficulties they face.





Murray Sheard (CEO, cbm NZ)  
visiting a WASH club in Nigeria.

## Please help provide clean water...

**cbm's** Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project aims to build on the incredible progress made over many years to combat Neglected Tropical Diseases such as River Blindness.

The programme also provides education to primary schools, including setting up WASH Clubs and installing hand-washing stations.

Clean water from boreholes is vital to a community, but many existing boreholes are often found broken and in need of repair due to age. The addition of wheelchair ramps make the task of gathering water more accessible to people with disabilities.

Please will you prayerfully consider sending a gift today, to help WASH away the misery of Neglected Tropical Diseases in the world's poorest places.



To learn more about Christian Blind Mission NZ (**cbm**), scan the QR code using your mobile phone camera or go to [www.cbmnz.org.nz/wash](http://www.cbmnz.org.nz/wash)

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