

faith in FOCUS

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PARENTING in the TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



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Editorial

I heard it said from someone eminently wiser than I, that a parent would need to invest 20 years of effort in raising each child. That means my wife and I have expended approximately 140 years of energy in the upbringing of our seven children.

When we got to the point where some children were leaving home, it dawned on me that as my children were going through phases in their lives, we also were going through phases in how we responded to them. Not all the children were going through the same phases at the same time, and so as parents, we were constantly phasing in and phasing out, all the time! Is it any wonder that parenting is the hardest task in the world?

I remember when I got conned into running a "Growing Kids God's Way" course, it dawned on me that no one teaches you how to raise children. Just because Christian couples are embarking on having children, that doesn't make them experts in how to raise them. I know for sure that my parents never taught me that stuff and I am confident that their parents didn't teach them, either.

It seems to me that each generation learns as they go. Some try to emulate their parents before them. Not always a recipe for success! And taking on the nonsensical ideas of individuals such as Benjamin Spock has proven to be the undoing of many well-intentioned parents.

Thankfully, the Lord in His wisdom has given us His word and directs us to teach our children to fear/reverence Him above all, to walk in obedience to His commandments out of thankfulness and love and to depend on His grace to fulfil His calling in us.

There are people in the wider Christian community with exceptional insight into biblical parenting who have produced some very good books for all parents, as a tool in the very important calling of raising a godly seed, who will praise the Lord and be a blessing in the world.

Our lead articles come from Messrs Russell Moore and Kevin DeYoung, both prolific writers and contributors on the internet. Other articles are short reviews from members in our churches of books they found particularly insightful in their mission as parents.

Mr Russell Moore brings eschatology and parenting together.

Mr Kevin DeYoung writes whimsically about his parenting experience.

A variety of parents review some very worthwhile books to help in the battle of parenting.

Mrs Sally Davey considers one of the hindrances to conversation.

Overshadowed by Glory is this year's Christmas meditation by Mr Stephen J. Tracey, a pastor in the OPCUSA.

We consider some amusing and some not so amusing snippets by the late D. G. Vanderpyl.

Helpful pointers for visiting the elderly.

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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.

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

The Eschatology of Parenting

Russell Moore

Yesterday I helped a toddler clean up a 44 ounce cup of Coke Zero he'd spilled everywhere (yes, it was mine; and no, there were not 44 ounces left remaining in it when he found it). I answered forty questions about whether Jesus made Lego blocks (so stay tuned for my new sermon series on "The Logos and the Legos"). And I disciplined a tantrum thrower and a sulker.

All of that was about the end times.

When we think of Christian eschatology, we tend to think first of prophecy charts or apocalyptic novels, but nothing is more eschatological than parenting.

A parent disciplining a child, for instance, communicates to the child the discipline and judgment of God in ways deeper and more resonant than any Sunday school lesson (Heb 12:5-11). A parent who will not discipline a child for disobedience, or who is inconsistent in doing so, is teaching that child not to expect consequences for behavior.



Photo by Rhone on Unsplash

Parents who spend time with their children, especially at meals, demonstrate something of the harmony they want their children to long for beyond this life. It's a longing to eat at another Father's table in the kingdom of Christ.

In short, a parent who will not discipline is denying the doctrine of hell.

At the same time, a parent who disciplines in anger or with harshness teaches a judgment of God that is capricious and unjust. An abusive parent, worst of all, ingrains in a child's mind a picture of God as a ruthless devil who cannot be trusted to judge justly.

Parental discipleship and discipline ought always to have repentance and restoration in view, picturing a God who is both just and the justifier (Rom 3:26). Discipline should be swift and fair with quick reconciliation between parent and child. Long periods of "time out" do not communicate the discipline of God; they communicate the isolation and exile of hell.

Parents who spend time with their children, especially at meals, demonstrate something of the harmony they want their children to long for beyond this life. It's a longing to eat at another Father's table in the kingdom of Christ.

Moreover, we should teach children to respect and acknowledge authority, attributes necessary for citizens of a democracy for a short time, yes,

but more necessary for subjects of a kingdom forever. Teaching children to refer to adults as "Mr. Smith" or "Mrs. Jones" or "Pastor Doe" and to say "sir" and "ma'am" (or the culturally equivalent signifiers of authority) is about more than politeness. It is training children to recognize proper hierarchy and authority when the veil is lifted and we see face to face.

Those of you who are parents probably grow weary and discouraged sometimes. I know I do. It seems as though you're not "getting through" sometimes, that your children aren't responding the way you thought they would. Keep hugging. Keep kissing. Keep chastising. Keep teaching. This is a long-term project. You've got a long-term project in front of you. And there's a lot at stake.

After all, parenting isn't about behavior modification. It's about Christian eschatology.

Russell Moore is president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

December 10, 2008

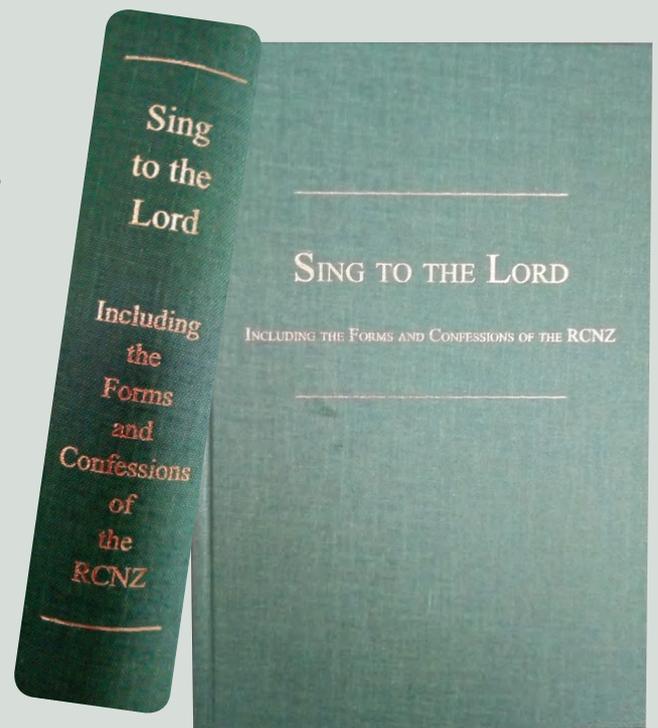
SING TO THE LORD

More information on the newly printed Sing to the Lord book

- It is a smaller book with somewhat smaller dimensions and weighing more than 200gms less than the larger book, making it easier to hold.
- It includes the RCNZ confessions, forms, and church order.
- It has thumb tabs to help locate the indexes, confessions, and forms.
- Though the paper is slightly thinner, it is still opaque enough for clarity.
- The cost is **\$15**, plus postage when applicable.

The books will be available from your local church or by contacting:

Stuart Williams at stu@faanz.co.nz



Parenting 001

Kevin DeYoung

Does it seem like parenting has gotten more complicated? I mean, as far as I can tell, back in the day parents basically tried to feed their kids, clothe them, and keep them away from explosives. Now our kids have to sleep on their backs (no wait, their tummies; no never mind, their backs), while listening to Baby Mozart surrounded by scenes of Starry, Starry Night. They have to be in piano lessons before they are five and can't leave the car seat until they're about five foot six.

It's all so involved. There are so many rules and expectations. Kids can't even eat sugar anymore. My parents were

solid as a rock but we still had a cupboard populated with cereal royalty like Captain Crunch and Count Chocula. In our house the pebbles were fruity and the charms were lucky. The breakfast bowl was a place for marshmallows, not dried camping fruit. Our milk was 2%. And sometimes, if we needed to take the edge off a rough morning, we'd tempt fate and chug a little Vitamin D.

Trial by error

I don't consider myself a particularly good parent. I was asked to speak a few years ago at some church's conference. They wanted me to talk about parenting. I said I didn't have much to say so

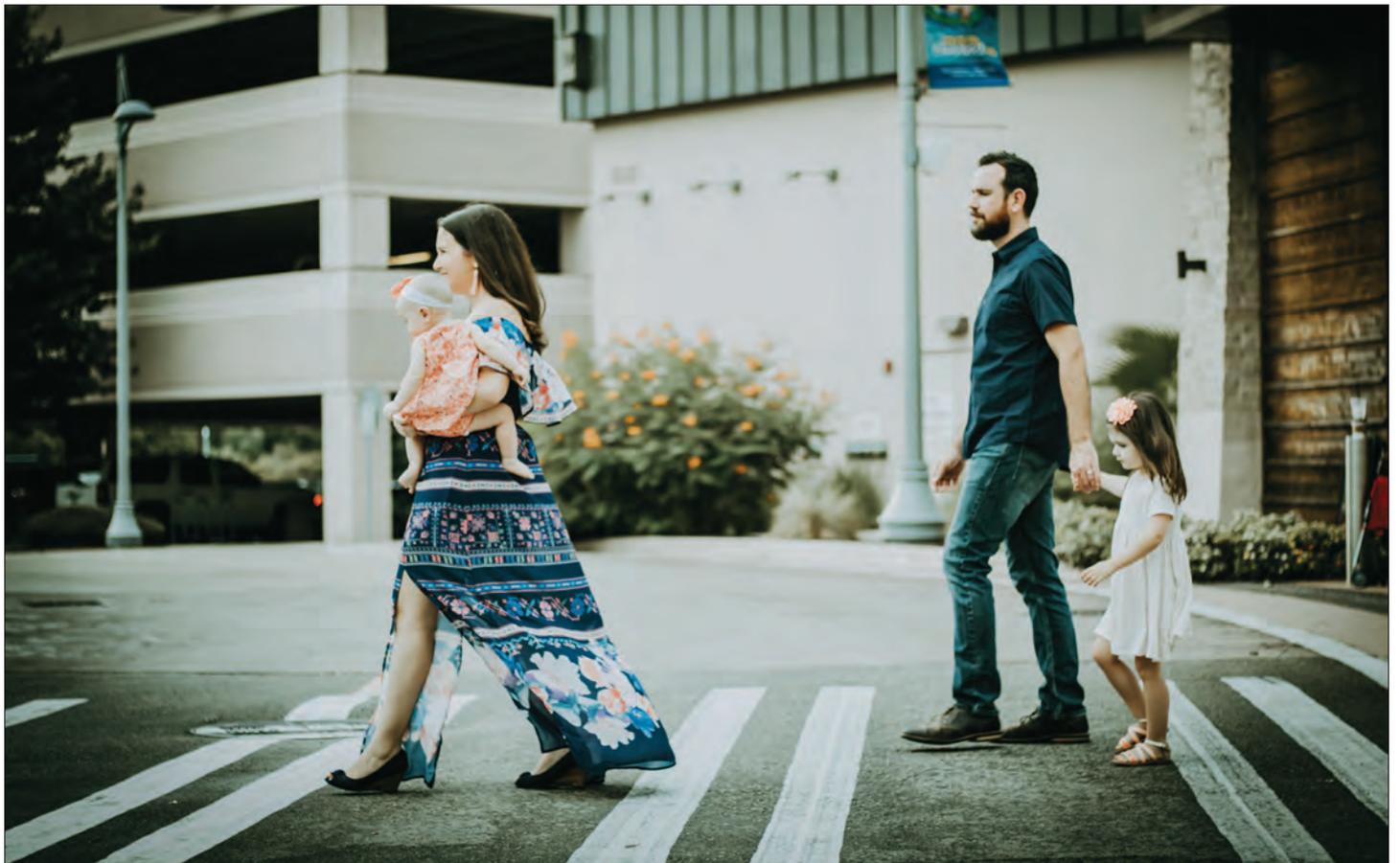


Photo by Christin Hume on Unsplash

I want to grow as a parent in patience and wisdom and consistency. But I also know that I can't change my kids' hearts. I am responsible for my heart and must be responsible to teach them the way of the Lord.

they should ask someone else (which they did). My kids are probably not as crazy as they seem to me (at least that's what I keep telling myself anyway), but if I ever write a book on parenting I'm going to call it *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*.

There are already scores of books on parenting, many of them quite good. I've read several of them and have learned much. I really do believe in gospel-powered parenting and shepherding my child's heart. I want conversations like this:

Me: What's the matter son?

Child: I want that toy and he won't give it to me!

Me: Why do you want the toy?

Child: Because it will be fun to play with.

Me: Do you think he is having fun playing with the toy right now?

Child: Yes.

Me: Would it make him sad to take the toy away?

Child: I guess so.

Me: And do you like to make your brother sad?

Child: No.

Me: You know, Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves. That means loving your brother the way he would want to be loved. Since Jesus loves us so much, we have every reason to love others – even your brother. Would you like to love him by letting him play with the toy for awhile?

Child: Yes I would daddy.

I try that. Really I do. But here's what actually happens:

Me: What's the matter son?

Child: I want that toy and he won't give it to me!

Me: Why do you want the toy?

Child: I don't know.

Me: What's going on in your heart when you desire that toy?

Child: I don't know.

Me: Think about it son. Use your brain. Don't you know something?

Child: I guess I just want the toy.

Me: Obviously. But why?

Child: I don't know.

Me: Fine. [Mental note: abandon "why" questions and skip straight to leading questions.] Do you think he is having fun playing with the toy right now?

Child: No.

Me: Really?! He's not having fun? Then why does he want that toy in the first place?

Child: Because he's mean.

Me: Have you ever considered that maybe you are being mean by trying to rip the toy from his quivering little hands?

Child: I don't know.

Me: What do you know?

Child: I don't know!

Me: Never mind. [I wonder how my brilliant child can know absolutely nothing at this moment.] Well, I think taking the toy from him will make your brother sad. Do you like to make him sad?

Child: I don't know.

Me: [Audible sigh.]

Child: He makes me sad all the time!

Me: Well, I'm getting sad right now with your attitude! [Pause, think, what would Paul Tripp do? Thinking ... thinking ... man, I can't stop thinking of that mustache. This isn't working. Let's just go right to the Jesus part.] You know, Jesus wants us to love each other.

Child: I don't know.

Me: I didn't ask you a question!

Child: [Pause.] Can I have some fruit snacks?

Me: No, you can't have fruit snacks. We are talking about the gospel. Jesus loves us and died for us. He wants you to love your brother too.

Child: So?

Me: So give him the toy back!

Then I lunge for the toy and the child runs away. I tell him to come back here this instant and threaten to throw the toy in the trash. I recommit myself to turning down speaking engagements on parenting.

Growing what you can

I want to grow as a parent in patience and wisdom and consistency. But I also know that I can't change my kids' hearts. I am responsible for my heart and must be responsible to teach them the way of the Lord. But nothin' guarantees nothin'. I'm just trying to be faithful, and then repent for all the times I'm not.

I have four kids and besides the Lord's grace, I'm banking on the fact that there really are just a few non-negotiables in parenting. There are plenty of ways to screw up our kids, but whether they color during church, for example, is not one of them. There is not a straight line from doodling in the service as a toddler to doing meth as a teenager. Could it be that beyond the basics of godly parenting, that most of the other

techniques and convictions are nibbling around the edges? Certainly, there are lots of ways that good parents make parenting a saner, more enjoyable experience, but even the kid addicted to Angry Birds who just downed a pack of Fun Dip and is now watching his third Pixar movie of the week (day?) still has a decent shot at not being a sociopath.

I remember years ago hearing a line from Alistair Begg, quoting another man, that went like this: "When I was young I had six theories and no kids. Now I have six kids and no theories." I must be smart. It only took me four kids to run out of theories.

Getting a few things right

I look back at my childhood and think, "What did my parents do right?" I watched too many Growing Pains reruns and played a lot of Super Techno Bowl (LT could block every extra point and Christian Okoye was a stud). I never learned to like granola or my vegetables (kids, stop reading this post immediately!). But yet, I always knew they loved me. They made me go to church every Wednesday and twice on every Sunday. They made us do our home-

work. They laid down obvious rules—the kinds that keep kids from killing each other. They wouldn't accept any bad language, and I didn't hear any from them. Mom took care of us when we were sick. Dad told us he loved us. I never found porn around the house or booze or dirty secrets. We read the Bible. We got in trouble when we broke the rules. I don't remember a lot of powerful heart-to-heart conversations. But we knew who we were, where we stood, and what to expect. I'd be thrilled to give my kids the same.

I worry that many young parents are a) too adamant about the particulars of their parenting or b) too sure that every decision will set their kids on an unalterable trajectory to heaven or hell. It's like my secretary at the church once told me: "Most moms and dads think they are either the best or the worst parents in the world, and both are wrong." Could it be we've made parenting too complicated? Isn't the most important thing not what we do but who we are as parents? They will see our character before they remember our exact rules regarding television and twinkies.

I could be wrong. My kids are still

young. Maybe this no-theory is a theory of its own. I just know that the longer I parent the more I want to focus on doing a few things really well, and not get too passionate about all the rest. I want to spend time with my kids, teach them the Bible, take them to church, laugh with them, cry with them, discipline them when they disobey, say sorry when I mess up, and pray like crazy. I want them to look back and think, "I'm not sure what my parents were doing or if they even knew what they were doing. But I always knew my parents loved me and I knew they loved Jesus." Maybe it's not that complicated after all.

Kevin DeYoung (M.Div., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) is senior pastor of Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina, board chairman The Gospel Coalition, assistant professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte), and a PhD candidate at the University of Leicester. He has authored numerous books, including Just Do Something. At the time of writing Kevin and his wife, Trisha, had four children. MAY 10, 2011

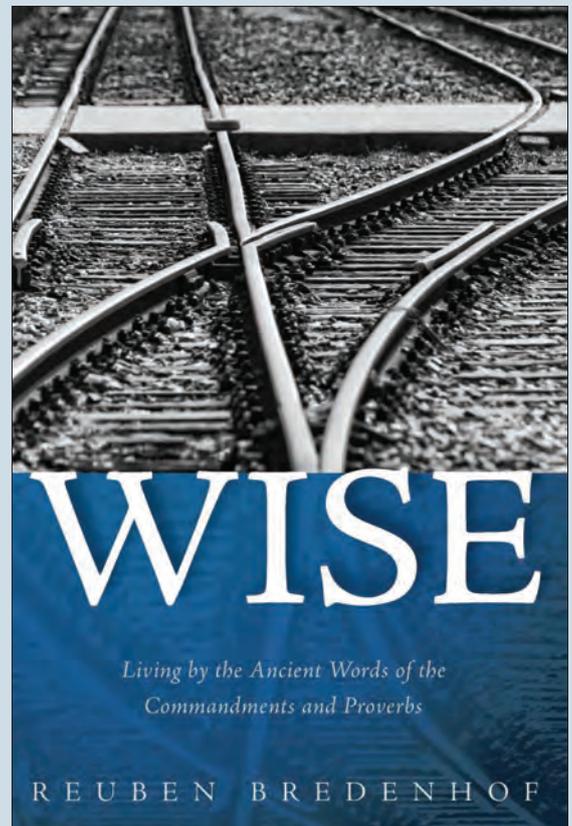
Wise: Living by the Ancient Words of the Commandments and Proverbs

"How can we find our way through the complexities of life in the 21st century? Many Christians are familiar with the pointed directives of the Ten Commandments, and many will regularly read Proverbs for bite-sized pieces of God's wisdom. When we study Proverbs within the framework of the Ten Commandments, we hear both parts of God's Word speaking in ways that are refreshingly practical and eminently memorable. Wise shows how these ancient words relate to such diverse areas of life as worship and prayer, our words and money, marriage and sexuality, and our fears, loves, and desires. This book will instruct and encourage with the wisdom that comes from fearing God."

Each chapter includes reflection and discussion questions, making this a suitable book for personal or communal study.

It is now available to order from the publisher Wipf & Stock and on Amazon. See: <https://wipfandstock.com/wise.html>

Booksellers can place volume orders through emailing orders@wipfandstock.com



Parenting by the Book

Parenting

by Paul David Tripp

Crossway, 2016

Available at your local Christian bookstore

Reviewed by R Bredenhof

What's the best passage in the Bible about parenting? Maybe some will say Ephesians 6:1-4. Others will point to Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Paul Tripp has his own suggestion about a helpful parenting passage. But he also wants us to realise that the Bible isn't meant as a topical resource to consult when we have specific questions or difficulties. We probably sometimes wish that that's how the Bible was organized: if you're angry, turn to this text; if you're lonely, read this one. And if you want good advice about raising your strong-willed kids, read this.

The Bible isn't written as a topical study, addressing the daily issues which concern us. From beginning to end it's a story, where God is telling us about His great work of salvation through his

Son. And so nearly every text in the Bible reveals something about God, or about ourselves, or about sin, or grace through Christ, or life in this world, or our calling. This broad scope means that almost every passage in the Bible has something to say that relates to the many diverse areas of your life, including your job as a parent.

This is the kind of "big picture" perspective that Tripp teaches in his book *Parenting*. He doesn't provide ten practical steps for raising nicer kids. He doesn't share how-to strategies for the challenges of boundaries and discipline. Instead, he wants to reorient the very way that we look at parenting. What are we really trying to do in our homes? What are our chief goals? And what's the one foundational thing that parents and children need, so much more than good manners, civilized dinner times, and open communication?

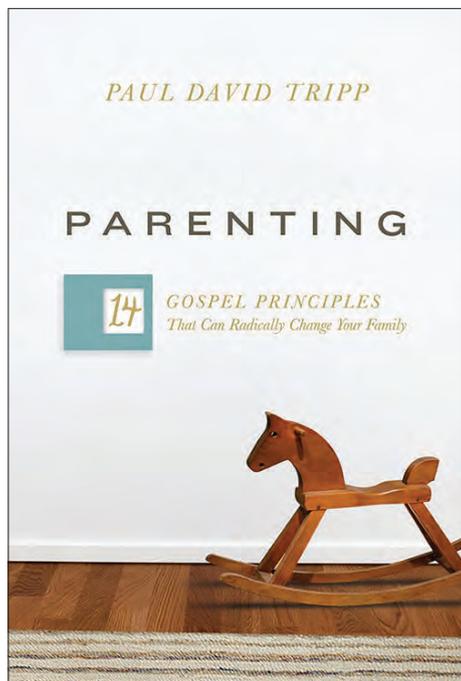
The subtitle of Tripp's book says a lot about his approach: "The 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family." He argues that the better way of parenting—the only way—is the "way of grace," or the way of the gospel of Christ. That sounds vague, but then follow fourteen chapters exploring principles of how God's grace is worked out in the parenting task. For example, Principle 1 is, "Nothing is more important in your life than being one of God's tools to form a human soul." Or Principle 5, "If you are not resting as a parent in your identity in Christ, you will look for identity in your children." And Principle 11, "You are parenting a worshiper, so it's important to remember that what rules your child's heart will control his behaviour." These powerful principles give a flavour of the kind of book that Tripp has written. For each of these norms he shows that the core of parenting resides in the human heart: not just the hearts of our children, but our own hearts as dads and mums. Both their and our hearts need to be changed by the salvation that is granted through the work of Jesus Christ.

Our children need transformation because they all believe two dangerous and destructive lies. First, a child reckons that he's autonomous, a completely in-

dependent human being with the right to live his life however he chooses, and to worship whomever he wants. Second, a child believes that he is self-sufficient, that within himself he has everything that he needs. If you pay a bit of attention, you can see these lies getting worked out in the conduct of our children, right from those aggravating moments of trying to spoon mushy peas into their mouth, to the frustrations of getting the silent treatment from your teenage daughter. Born in sin, our children desperately need help. God has placed them in our life so that we can help them, with wisdom, compassion and hope.

As a parent, reading parts of this book made me uncomfortable. This is because Tripp seems to know parents and our weaknesses so well. He knows that we often focus on changing our children's outward behaviours (use of technology, clean language, respect for curfew, etc.), without targeting the heart behind the actions. He knows that we tend to "lay down the law" when there's been a household infraction, instead of showing grace. He knows that in the heat of the moment we can get sinfully angry and say cruel things to our children, and then spend the rest of the evening telling ourselves that what we did was totally fair and completely justified. Uncomfortable, because it's true.

Still, Tripp wants to encourage. He says that parents who finally admit that they're inadequate and run to God for help actually make the best parents. When your weakness is again so painfully evident, "Know that God hasn't left you to the limits of your righteousness, wisdom, and strength" (189), but that He is with you, and He is almighty and gracious. Tripp insists that successful parenting isn't about us achieving our own goals or upholding our own values (e.g., producing punctual, responsible, hard-working children), but it's about us being usable and faithful tools in the hands of God. After all, God is the only one who can produce good things in our children, and He's the only one who can bring them to faith in Christ. As parents, we are unfinished people ourselves, being used by God as agents of change in the lives of unfinished people.



Tripp doesn't pretend that it's going to be easy. I love his line on page 208, "Parenting is about the willingness to live a life of long-term, intentional repetition." Our task as parents means that we'll need to do the same thing, over and over. We'll need to say the same things, over and over. That's fine, for God is pleased to use our humble prayers and efforts and energies for the good—and even for the salvation—of the children He's entrusted to us.

This is an excellent book. It's a book to savour: read a chapter, and then let it simmer. Talk about it with your partner in parenting, or talk about it with other parents (whether more or less experienced). You'll be challenged and encouraged.

Reuben Bredenhof
is minister of the Free Reformed Church of Mount Nasura.

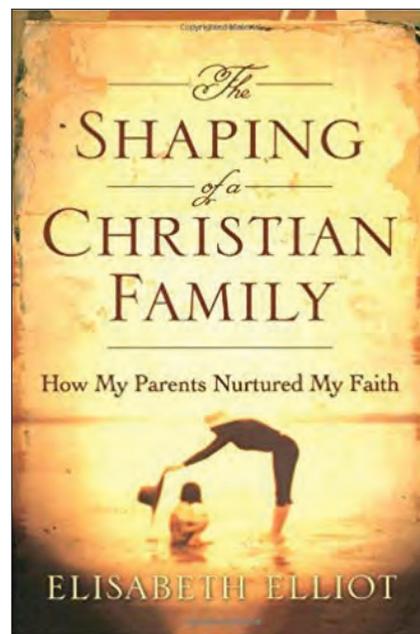
The Shaping of a Christian Family
 by Elizabeth Elliot

This book contains the story of Philip and Katharine Howard, the parents of Elizabeth Elliot and her five siblings. Elizabeth writes about how biblical wisdom fashioned her parents' approach to aspects of family life, such as hospitality, leisure time, rules, courtesy and discipline. The Howards "understood very clearly that

the principles they taught their children would have meager effect if they were not strongly fortified by the pattern of their own lives." By way of example, regarding her parents' view of punctuality, Elizabeth writes: "While some may regard strict punctuality as an amusing peculiarity or an irritating compulsion, it was a matter of Christian conscience to my father and hence to us. Lateness is stealing, he said. You are robbing others of their most irreplaceable commodity, time."

Elizabeth adds her own thoughts to each aspect of family life that she describes. For example, while considering the place of rules she comments, "Parents are given the delicate task of training an imperfect and highly impressionable child who is not their 'property' but is entrusted to them for a time, that they may curb the natural tendencies which are useless or destructive, and guide him instead to God."

This story is not meant to be a prescription for other families establishing their homes, but is simply a description of how one Christian couple went about it. I liked this book for the reminder that it is to Christian parents of the powerful influence their own faith and life has in the lives of their children. I saw anew the importance of diligently teaching our children about the Lord, and how necessary it is for parents to carefully apply godly principles to the ordinary rhythms of family life.



In her 'Afterword,' Elizabeth asks provoking questions of the reader: "What do you want your home to be? What does God want it to be? Waste no time wondering if you can do it. The question is simply Will you? As my husband and I begin our own home and family, I found this book somewhat inspiring, pertinent, practical and an immensely enjoyable read.

Bianca Van Ameyde
is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Benefits of reading for your family

I was asked by the Faith in Focus editors if there were people in our church willing to write a book review on parenting for this edition. Many of those asked were reading books on other subjects so were unable to do so. They were focused on reading for other purposes.

This made me ponder the benefits your reading has for your children. Here are some of these:

When you read you are teaching them that books are worth reading

and have something to tell us. All our learning does not have to come from a screen. Books are portable, can be read anywhere and there are so many to choose from.

When you read and prepare for a Bible study your children see that they you are taking this Bible study seriously and that studying God's Word is worthy of your time - and is valuable.

When you study a subject to understand it better, whether a church or social issue, (such as addiction) you are showing your children that you care enough about others to do the study required to be a more effective helper to your brothers and sisters in the Lord.

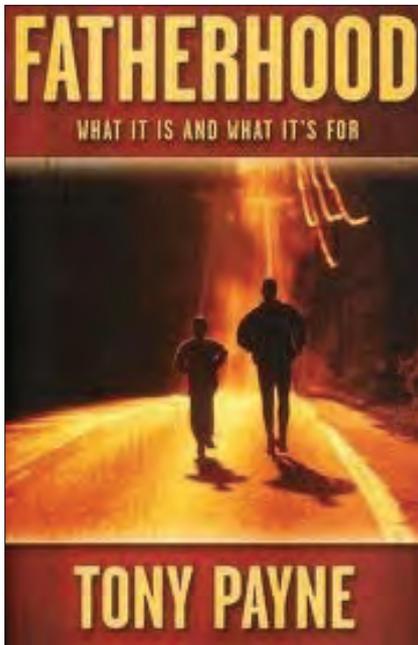
When you read for your own pleasure this too gives a message. Books can

be like friends. And even with fiction we can learn and derive enjoyment.

Last but not least God has used His Word, the Bible, to teach us. It is one of the primary means of grace. "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17. This is the best reason to read.

Enjoy reading, learn from it, grow in righteousness and wisdom, increase your knowledge and in the process you will be teaching your children by your example.

Harriet Haverland



Fatherhood: What it is and what it's for

Tony Payne

Matthias Media 2004, 177 pages

What does it really mean to be a father? What should I be trying to achieve as a father? How can I do a better job of being a father? *Fatherhood: What it is and What it's for*, written by Tony Payne, concisely answers these questions with wisdom, practical advice and humour.

Payne argues that to be a father means: to be a life giver to his family, a loving and faithful sustainer of that life, and a leader and decision maker who exercises authority in order to fulfil his responsibility. As the source of life for his family, the father has the responsibility and authority to pursue his family's wellbeing. A father must balance authority and respect with love and kindness, in order to avoid the two characteristic errors that beset human fathers: tyranny and abuse; or weakness and neglect. Payne helpfully points us to our heavenly Father as the perfect model for us to see authority and love working together for the good of his children.

The book then goes on to explain the purpose of being a father. The goal of fatherhood is not so different to the goal of our life, which is to be a disciple and to make disciples. In this particularly challenging part of the book the question is asked, what is the most important thing we want for our kids? Is it educational, professional and financial success? Or is it the best and most enduring good we can seek for them;

that they too would turn to Christ and walk with us down the road of discipleship as we follow Jesus through suffering to glory?

As a new father, this book shaped my attitude about God's design for fatherhood. Its clear application of the truths of the gospel to the subject of fatherhood, with some practical advice along the way, makes it a book that any new (or old) father would benefit from.

Ruben van Ameyde

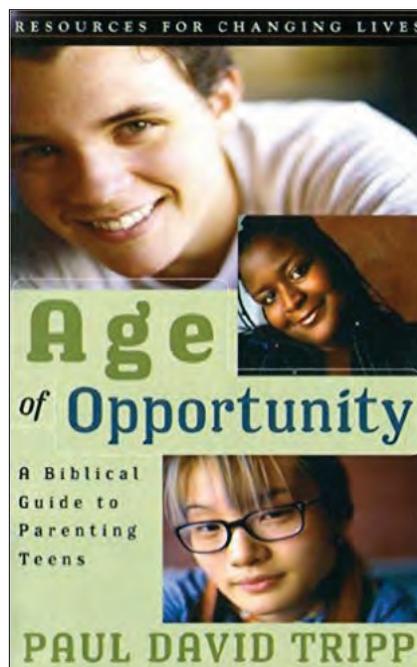
is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale

Age of Opportunity

by Paul Tripp

First published in 1997, this is by no means a new book, so 'an oldie but a goodie' would aptly describe it. It was written for parents of teens, but I wish I had first read it when my children were younger, because it has plenty of application that is helpful even for pre-schoolers.

This book is not merely a manual on how to survive the teenage years with helpful anecdotal examples, although it does have those; some very real and amusing. What I particularly appreciated was Paul Tripp's address to parents; for example: "it is a waste of time for us as parents to think about strategies for parenting our teens without first examining ourselves. If our hearts are con-



trolled by something other than God, we will not view the golden opportunities of the teen years as opportunities at all." In other words, do we have a sense of entitlement when it comes to parenting; the idol of respect or appreciation or success or control because of all our hard work?

Children have an uncanny way of revealing to us the things we don't like about ourselves such as pride or selfishness. The easy scapegoat is our children, but Tripp highlights the opportunities that God gives us to work on our ourselves as well as our children.

Parenting is such an important task. Thankfully, there are insightful, knowledgeable authors like Paul Tripp to aid us in this task.

Judy Snoek

is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Parenting in the Pew

by Robbie Castleman

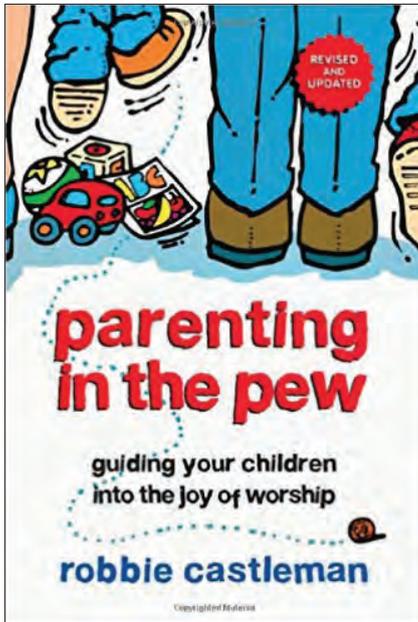
This book is one of those little gems that seems to stand the test of time. It is 139 pages of rather large print, and is a very easy read. John and I have lent this book to many parents who are struggling with having their children sit through worship.

In Pukekohe Reformed Church we do not run Sunday School during the worship service, but encourage parents to train their children to be in worship. This training requires an active involvement by the parents.

Telling children to be quiet in church is not training them to worship, just to be quiet. Training means that children need to know why they are going to bed on time on Saturday evening. On Sunday morning they need reminding that they have the privilege of worshipping God that day, and that their hearts should be glad to do this.

Their hearts will mirror ours. If we have a negative attitude to worship, so will they. If we are negative about the children being with us in worship they won't want to be there. Conversely, when we are excited to go and hear what God is telling us this Sunday, and excited to be able to praise God, our children will follow suit.

This book deals with the area of tithing and giving in worship. It tackles the issue of who should our children sit with, us as



parents, or their friends. It discusses the blessings of music and learning hymns and songs. It reminds us of the value of corporate prayer and it encourages them in a wider, more diverse prayer life. The book points out the blessing of our children seeing the sacraments administered; of learning what the Lord's Supper means and hearing again the promises made at baptism.

Worshipping God is such a privilege and joy, why wouldn't we want to train our children to worship? If you struggle in this area, or want to help others, I strongly recommend this book.

Harriet Haverland

is a member of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.

The Attributes of God for kids

by Lydia white (author) and Taylor Nelson (illustrator).

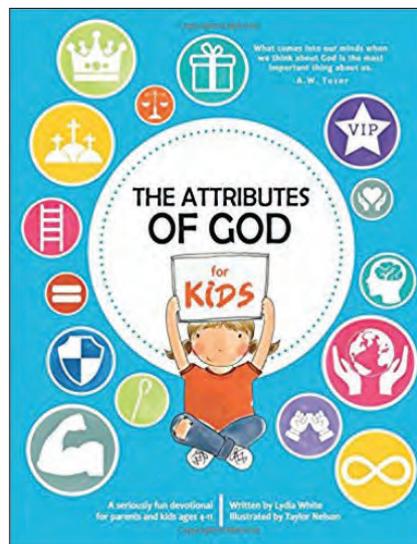
This devotional book is a fantastic resource for helping to teach children about the character of God. Based on the work of A.W. Tozer on the attributes of God, it is recommended for kids aged 4 to 11. Our kids in this age bracket are 5, 7 and 9, and I found it age appropriate for all of them.

It consists of simple, concise lessons on the different attributes of God and is divided into two sections. Section 1 explores the attributes of God that are unique to only Him (e.g. omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, self-sufficient etc.). Section 2 looks at the moral attrib-

utes of God that we, with the help of the Holy Spirit can also develop/imitate. These attributes describe what God is like in his relationship to us and include attributes such as being good, faithful, merciful, loving, gracious and so forth.

Every lesson highlights an attribute of God and then also highlights what that particular characteristic of God means in terms of His relationship to us. For example "God is omnipotent" which means that "you are never alone". This was particularly helpful in explaining to the kids (and understanding/reminding myself) who we are because of who God is.

Every lesson also includes scripture readings and memory verses which was great for re-enforcing the information and getting the kids to commit it to memory. My kids really enjoyed trying



to remember all of the memory verses as there were quite a few by the time we reached the last few lessons! We covered one lesson per night, though you could spend more time on each attribute.

The book is written to be used in conjunction with 'The Jesus Storybook bible' and suggested 'Seed Family Worship songs' that are available online. (Links provided in the book). We only used the devotional and the bible and still found it extremely valuable and educational.

I cannot recommend this book enough for family devotions. Aimed at teaching our young ones about the attributes of God, it is also a valuable reminder for the adults about *who* our awesome God is.

Sonja Vorster

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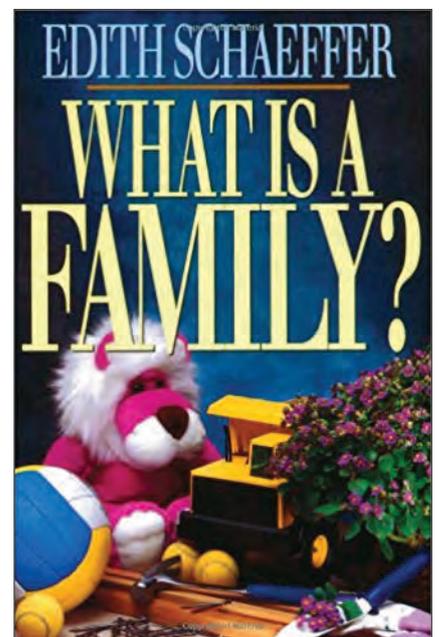
What is a Family?
by Edith Schaeffer

You know, there are books and books. The really good ones grab us and change us more and more into the person God intended us to be. Edith Schaeffer's book, *What is a Family*, is such a book for me.

Even though I grew up in a very loving family it wasn't intentionally focusing on biblical homemaking. As Arjen's and my walk with Christ grew more biblically based, I loved to learn more about the practicalities of living out our faith in our home. When I started being 'a fly on the wall' in Edith's family home L'Abri in Switzerland, it was as though my loose collection of ideas about homemaking, parenthood and being a Christian witness came together and placed themselves firmly in Scripture. As 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us, I learned to replace my fear of failure with power and love and self-control.

Yes, because she writes with a constant stream of examples and quotes from her family members, one can be put off by the fact that the book is written in 1975. It is dated from that perspective, but the principles undergirding it are both ancient and alive today; God's living word is speaking on every page.

Look at some of the titles of the chapters and you get an idea about how she sees a Christian family functioning. There is one chapter called "The birthplace of creativity", and another called "Shelter in the storm", and a special one for me "A door that has hinges and a lock". This book is chock full of ideas about all sorts of aspects of family living. I partly



love the book because it is so honest. This book doesn't picture the beautiful, perfect, never-any-difficulties family. On the contrary, there is, for example, a whole chapter about dealing with illness, disability and even death.

The book is medium-sized and an easy read. Unfortunately, the latest publisher didn't do the book any favours in its presentation, but be assured it doesn't reflect the content. Edith wrote the book in her sixties and invites you into her life as mother and wise grandmother. Hang in if you struggle with the first chapter, it is of a slightly different tone and style than the rest. I recommend this book to anyone but it surely is a great read for young couples trying to work out how they will build their home together or couples wanting to do some reflection.

"Jesus came to give us life and give it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). Reading and applying the book *What is a Family* will surely inspire you to live family life in the fullness God intended it to be.

Jantina Buter

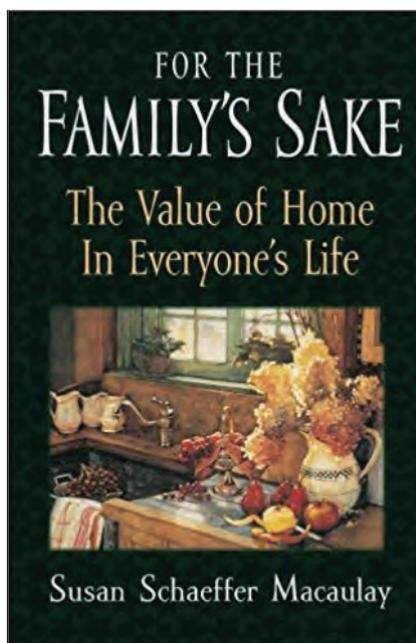
is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale

For the Family's Sake: The Value of Home in Everyone's Life
by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

The subtitle of this book is an apt description of its primary theme: the value of home in everyone's life. The author describes how we all need a home; a place where we are at ease, a place that provides stability, security, and "rootedness". This will look different for different people, but *For the Family's Sake* gives many practical suggestions for creating homes that work well in a variety of circumstances. It is a book about the foundational place that our homes and our relationships have in our lives.

While this book focuses on a family setting, Susan's examples include single people such as author Ellis Peters, missionary Amy Carmichael, and educator Charlotte Mason, so there is value for everyone in here. There are many principles that are relevant to us all no matter what our circumstances, for example, "everyday, ordinary life lived faithfully is where the glory of God is best reflected." This is something we can all aspire to, no matter what our circumstances or abilities!

The importance of human relation-



ships and "the art of giving attention to each other" is a strong emphasis in this book. Written before the arrival of smartphones, the call to invest ourselves in "flesh-and-blood relationships" is needed even more today. The importance of a stable home life for babies and young children is emphasised, but always acknowledging that there will be different circumstances and different needs. Home is also important as the place from which we reach out to our neighbours; to those who are lonely or sick or struggling.

In today's society homemaking is often considered less important than other work, but this book shows that using our gifts and energy to make a home that is a place of peace, joy, comfort, and encouragement is one of the most important things anyone can do! Consider for a moment that God's work of salvation involved the birth of Jesus into a human family, and it was within this *family home* that Jesus "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom" (Luke 2:40).

Much of this book is a personal story, as Susan shares her own life experiences with us. It is easy to read, written in a conversational style. I particularly appreciated the discussion of family relationships in Chapter 5, which provides a balanced and helpful picture of roles in the home. Although it is not a "how-to" book or a parenting manual, it contains many useful ideas for parents on family routines and activities, education, and books. It would be particularly helpful for those who have not experienced this

kind of home life themselves. While you may not agree with everything in this book (as with all books, it needs to be read with discernment), it provides a helpful starting point for further thought as you work out your own perspectives using the principles of God's Word.

Phillipa Gourdie

is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale

Habits: The Mother's Friend
by Pam Guenther

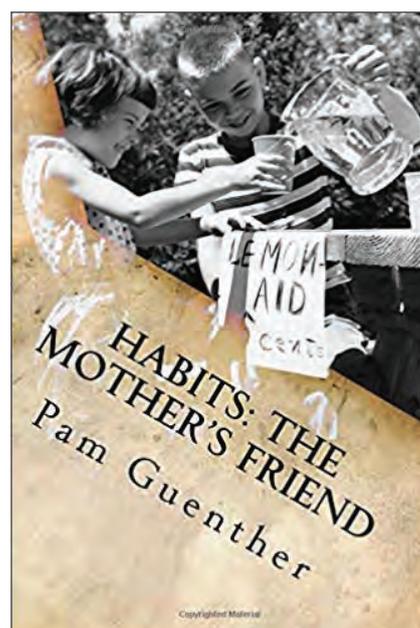
I guess the chapter on homeschooling could equally apply to normal homework and the attitude with which it should be approached.

What stands out about it for me is how intentional she is about parenting (although this book focuses on the habits children should learn – like OBEEDIENCE). It is so easy in today's culture to be absent in the sense of not using the everyday moments to instruct our children.

A thin paperback. Very basic, very obvious ideas to most young mums in our denomination, but something I needed to hear and be told how to put into practice.

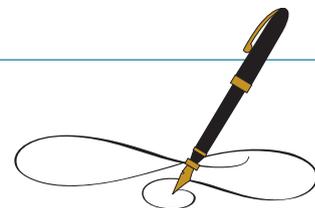
Odette de Kock

is a member of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe



Outward focus

Sally Davey



When a Conversation is not a conversation

I'm not trying to be funny when I write this. There really is a kind of conversation that quickly ceases to be a conversation after a certain point. You probably know the sort I mean – one in which one person does almost all the talking, and the other does all the listening. This conversation, to all intents and purposes, is nothing but a monologue. In actual fact, it is not a conversation at all.

I'm apparently not alone in noticing this. Several friends recently told me they too have experienced this. None of us are sure how to respond. So I've been giving this some thought, since conversation is a vital part of our human interaction. Normally in conversation two or more people talk together about each other's lives and thoughts. But in the "monologue" scenario, one person begins to hold forth about their own life, interests and opinions, their children and their achievements. The listener finds it increasingly difficult to maintain interest. This creates a problem for us. How are we to respond?

But is talkativeness really a problem? Don't people sometimes just like to talk a lot? We should, after all, allow a certain latitude for talkative types. I agree.

The Bible does say quite a lot about speech, particularly in the book of Proverbs and the letter of James (sometimes referred to as the Proverbs of the New Testament). But the warnings are mainly against the particularly bad habits of untruthfulness, gossip, slander, coarse joking and angry words. There are also, of course, warnings against boasting, something which has a bearing on the monologue. But we do find positive guidelines for what conversation should be like in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 4:29 Paul warns: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up,

as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Surely, that would suggest that we speak in a way that encourages those we're talking to and builds them up in their faith. One could also add that in Philippians 2:3, in the context of urging selflessness like Christ's, Paul advises that we should "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." That would surely include the way we speak with others.

It would be easy to write the inveterate monologuer off as a selfish and boastful airtime-hogger, and to avoid this person like the plague. But perhaps we should think more carefully about this. There may be something going on which has a call on our Christian love and patience. Here are some reasons why they may be doing it.

Many people, for varying reasons, spend long periods alone, and feel starved for someone to talk to, someone



Photo by Les Anderson on Unsplash

But what about the situations where we are on the receiving end of a monologue? Our temptation is often to switch off, retreat mentally and not really listen. Or it may be to look for an exit to the situation as soon as we can leave with some degree of politeness, and then avoid the person if at all possible in the future!

to listen to them. When they get some company, it may “all come out” in a big spurt, and the person who is visiting may find themselves hearing a great deal in a very short time. We may all face this situation at some time in our lives, so we have every reason for sympathy. Would it be a good idea to visit more often, or to take someone with you, so that the conversation is shared around a little?

The possibility that often springs to our minds when faced with a monologue (and which may not always be fair) is that the person is simply a little full of themselves and their own concerns and opinions. In other words, the problem is selfishness. It often looks like you think so highly of yourself that you assume everyone else is interested in you and happy to hear you talk about everything to do with you. If that is truly the case, then we as listeners need to ask God for special grace and patience!

Again, the problem may simply be that this poor person was never taught the art of making conversation (good manners) by their parents. They just don't realise that it is frustrating and annoying for someone to have to listen to them talk about themselves for lengthy periods. There really are people who are tone-deaf about how they come across to others conversationally.

Another possibility is that, in the Facebook age, many people have learned to project themselves as a kind of “product” to their friends. They are conscious of a need to preen their image by reference to interesting things they have been doing, success stories that will present them to advantage, and witty ways of telling these stories that will make them look good. This tends to encourage the habit of attention-seeking in conversation. It can make conversation a trying game of one-upmanship, but one easier to handle if you can detect the insecurity beneath.

Then there is the worried, the obsessive or super-intense person who often has a lot to say and seemingly can't stop talking. You can often tell what is worrying them because it's the focus of their talking – whether it be illness, their child's progress at school, the theological direction of the church, concern about a relative, the state of their marriage or whatever. A sensitive Christian can offer a listening ear with greater patience if they keep these issues in mind.

Other people jump from idea to idea. Their story has so many rabbit trails that

their primary thought is lost. They are often articulate, but can't remain focused on the subject at hand. And then there are people who genuinely struggle with being articulate. They simply have difficulty finding the words to express their thoughts. Instead of a couple of aptly-chosen sentences, they go on for paragraphs elaborating, re-stating, clarifying and re-hashing their thoughts. It's a bit like thinking aloud.

It seems to me that we all recognize monologue as a problem, and a trying one to have to deal with. Obviously, the best thing of all is for people who have these conversational habits to recognize them and take steps to change them. It's always good for us to take stock of our manner of talking with others and ask: am I building up this person? Am I giving grace to those who hear me?

But what about the situations where we are on the receiving end of a monologue? Our temptation is often to switch off, retreat mentally and not really listen. Or it may be to look for an exit to the situation as soon as we can leave with some degree of politeness, and then avoid the person if at all possible in the future! But this doesn't help them, does it? It seems to me love requires more of us. It might mean gently encouraging them to take an interest in others, or it may even mean quietly suggesting to them that their conversational habits make things difficult for other people at times. You will know better than me how to do this tactfully, and it does require a great deal of tact. But thank the Lord for the wise person who is able to take such help graciously. (Perhaps, also, for parents, there is a great teaching opportunity here...)

In the end, though, it is love which enables us to deal with this situation in the best way. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells us that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (v. 7). We have received gracious forbearance from God, which is all the more reason to show the same to others. His love never fails, so how can ours?

Christmas meditation

Stephen J. Tracey

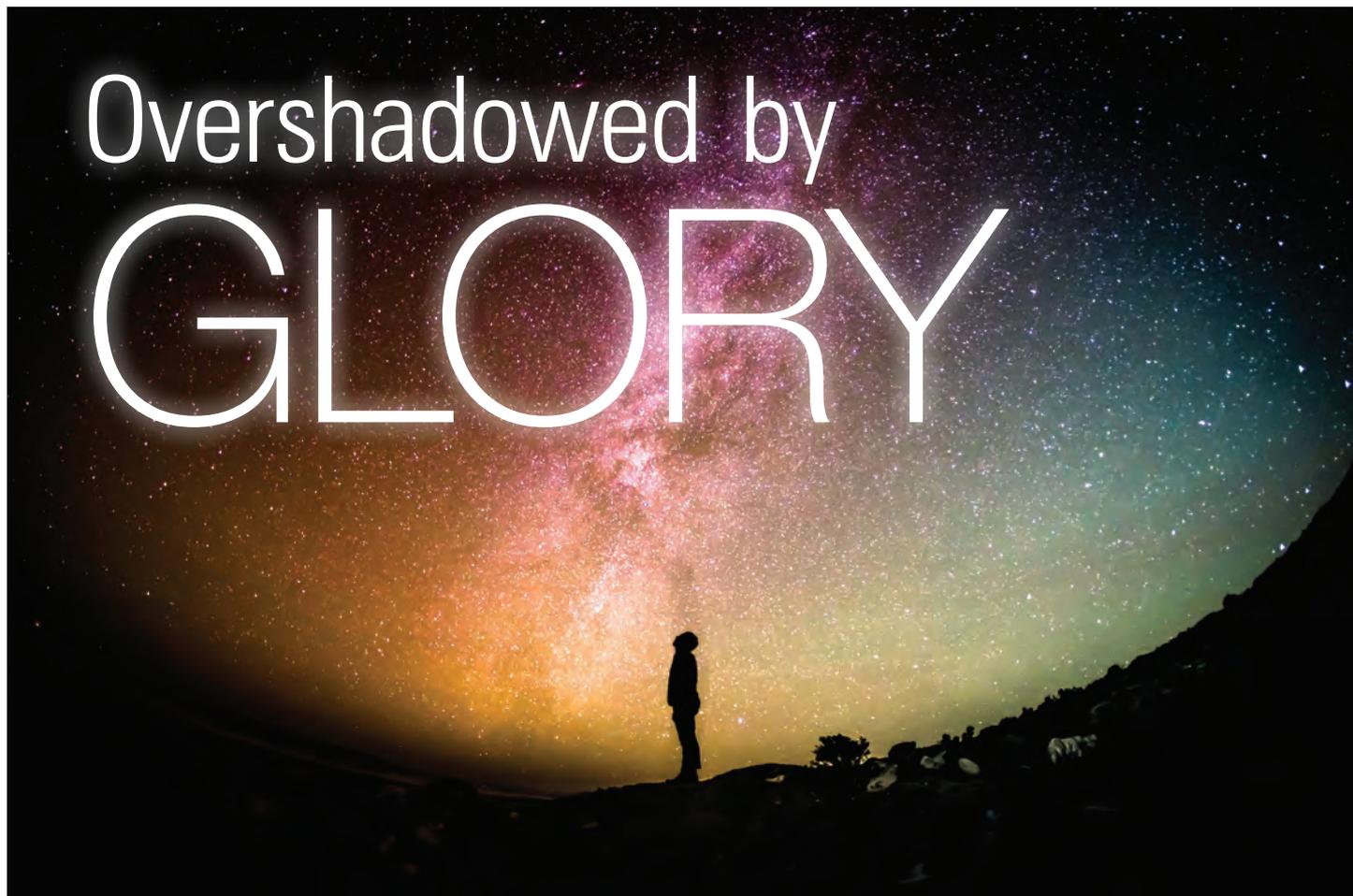


Photo by Greg Rakozy on Unsplash

I understand that Mary was confused and perplexed. I doubt she was often greeted, in glowing terms, by an angel. “And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’” (Luke 1:28). It’s not an everyday greeting.

No wonder “she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be” (v. 29).

Then the heart of the matter is declared:

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will con-

ceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (vv. 30–33)

Now that is heady stuff – a son, Jesus, great, Son of the Most High, throne of David, reigning, an unending kingdom. At last the great work of slaying Satan and sin and death was to take place. The time had come. The kingdom had come. Messiah was here; King Jesus was stepping into Mary’s life, and stepping into the world.

Then the hard news. An outside power, albeit that of the Holy Spirit, is going to come upon her and she will conceive a child. The angel said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow

you” (v. 35). There is something intense in those words. One might even say threatening. Clearly her life will never be the same again. She is going to be overshadowed.

Overcome by Grace

Coming face-to-face with the grace of God in Jesus Christ is an encounter with power: an incredible power, perhaps even a terrifying power. The words Mary hears are not necessarily comforting. The verb, “to come upon [you],” is used several times by Luke. The context is often aggressive, as in, for example, Luke 11:22: “... but when one stronger than he attacks him [literally, ‘comes upon him’] and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.” Jesus is stronger than Satan and will come upon

him and plunder his kingdom. It is not necessarily the case that Mary fears God will attack and plunder her. But it is no mere coincidence that the same word is used in these two places. God will come upon her, in order to enter this world in the flesh and attack Satan himself. Mary is being rescued. The rescue involves the power of God let loose in the world.

One should read Luke 21:24–25 and 34–35 to catch the eschatological overtones of this word. There is a sense of being overtaken by something more powerful, something irresistible, and, in most cases, something to be dreaded. That is why the angel introduced the whole idea with these words, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30).

If this is favor, the grace of the gospel, then why is it so daunting? The answer is wonderful. The King of Kings is on the move. He will bring salvation. He will melt the cold death of winter and bring new life. Yet when Mary hears this, and learns she is to play a role in this, she is “greatly troubled” (v. 29) and clearly afraid (v. 30). She does not quite understand it (v. 34). Jesus steps into her life and into our world, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and she is frightened.

The Lord God in heaven was going to come upon her; he was to begin his great work and it would begin in her body. The next, and crucial, phase of the old enmity from the garden begins in the womb of Mary. This was a most unusual moment. Mary’s body would be an instrument of righteousness in the hands of the King as he strides forward to crush Satan. But Mary, too, must yield to Jesus.

Do you see why the grace of God in the gospel can appear terrifying? God, in the gospel, is like an expeditionary force, come to invade your life and to retake possession for his holy residence.

Our first reaction is to say that it’s not fair. We want Jesus in our lives, but on our terms. But God steps into our lives on his own terms. Too often our desires are too small. We want God to help us be a better spouse, or parent, or person. We want him to solve a problem, to fix a part of our lives. But the good news is this: he will do a much more powerful thing.

We might feel defenseless, invaded. But perhaps there is a better way to view it. The Holy Spirit will come upon us and, through the finished work of Jesus, make us new – a whole new creation. What do you say to that? Come, Holy Spirit.

Incarnation

The Son of God
on earth He trod,
He for our bliss was giv’n.
Such was His love
Poured from above,
that we may live in heav’n.

Oh! Where He walked,
And where He talked,
Where Jesus came to earth:
Amazing place
Where by His grace
He came to grant new birth!

Oh! Hear His word,
Worth to be heard:
Essential so for all!
And live the truth,
men, women, youth:
It’s blessings are not small!

Amazingly
He made us free,
That we might go to heav’n.
So down to earth
through human birth,
this precious Gift was giv’n!

John Goris

Wellington, October 2017.

Caught up into the Glory

This idea of power is reinforced by the other words used by the angel, “the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (v. 35). Overshadowed – that does not sound comforting. We might not react well to being told we are going to be put in someone’s shadow. We think of grace as raising us to glory. We rarely think of it as being overshadowed by the glory of another. Yet everyone in the nativity was overshadowed by the glory of God. Joseph was overshadowed; Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, John the Baptist, even the angels, for they cry, “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14).

To be overshadowed is to be caught up into the glory of another, that of God himself. It is to be caught up into God’s own glory cloud. All three synoptic gospels use this word to describe the cloud of glory that appears at the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, and Luke 9:34). The only other occurrence in the New Testament refers to Peter’s shadow falling on the sick (Acts 5:15). For Mary, the good news of the coming of Jesus means that God’s shadow has fallen upon her. There is healing under that shadow.

While Mary probably did not know of the coming transfiguration, she certainly knew of the cloud of glory in the Old Testament, the presence of God saving his people in the Exodus and the presence of God filling Solomon’s temple. To be overshadowed in this sense is not to be pushed off the stage; rather, it is to be pulled further up and further in to the glory of God’s own presence. When God’s shadow falls upon us in the person and work of Jesus, it is a moment of joy. It is a moment of redemption and salvation. At last, God has come to rescue us from the misery of our sin.

The good news of Jesus is about grace and glory. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Suddenly Mary finds herself living in the grace of God, because of Jesus Christ. She is in the glory, and she is not consumed. She is overshadowed by the power of God. Overwhelmed by love, overshadowed by glory.

No glory thief

After the angel explains that her older cousin Elizabeth is also miraculously pregnant, “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37), Mary’s re-

sponse is that of faith. She believes, and so she says, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (v. 38).

She is no glory thief. She simply gives her whole self into the hands of the Lord: “I am your servant. Let it be to me according to your word.” It is an amazing surrender of herself, body and soul, to the living God. She embraces the promise of a son, a holy son. More, she embraces the Son of God. She takes God at his word. Unbelief is to fight to be kings or queens in our own right. Faith is simply to cling to the Lord. Mary gives the glory to God because of the Son.

Now is the time to stop trying to defend yourself against God. Now is the time to hear the wonderful news.

[Jesus] will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (vv. 32–33)

Mary’s faith in the soon-to-be-born Jesus is the same as that of the dying thief in the soon-to-die Jesus: “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (23:42). He gives glory to Jesus and hears the reply, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (v. 43). What a glorious thing grace is.

The author is the pastor of Lakeview OPC in Rockport, Maine.

Mary’s faith in the soon-to-be-born Jesus is the same as that of the dying thief in the soon-to-die Jesus: “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (23:42). He gives glory to Jesus and hears the reply, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (v. 43). What a glorious thing grace is.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to our contributors for again providing edifying articles this past year; Mrs Sally Davey as sub-editor and regular columnist for her continued diligent and tireless work, – her talents and creativity are very much appreciated, Mrs Yvonne Walraven for the compilation of the *Gleanings*; to the members of the National Publications Committee, who ensure that the magazine continues to be viable; to Flying Laser Colours for their expert technical support and printing.

I would like to make a special mention of Mr Sebastian Bolhuis, who is a member of the Free Reformed Church in Bunbury, Western Australia. He has been the distributor for *Faith in Focus* in Australia for the FRCA for the last 12 months. We appreciate your labours and your enthusiasm. Many thanks.

Many thanks to you the readers and those who encourage us on.

On behalf of the *Faith in Focus* team, we wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season, and pray that the Lord will keep you all in His grace in the new year of our Lord 2019.

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

April 1981

We have just returned from a grand holiday through the South Island and I plan to put down some of my impressions of the wild South in a separate article for the benefit of the Aussies. Maybe we can induce them to come to this part of God's world for resettlement? While we motored through the rich heritage of our country and ate up thousands of kilometres, I also cleaned up a box of books I had with me and read some of Alvin Toffler's books on what future generations may expect in new, evolving life structures, as he, an ex-Marxist, saw them.

When he discusses the family setup, he makes some suggestions for a return to the nuclear family as we understand it, a husband-breadwinner, a wife-housekeeper and a number of small children. Here are some of the suggestions he made:

- Smash the computer;
- Ban the television and the cassette tape recorder;
- Drive women back to the kitchen by reducing women's wages to the absolute minimum, in other words: disadvantage the women in the labour force. We must remember that the nuclear family has no nucleus when there are no adults left at home;
- Slash wages of young workers so as to make them more dependent for a longer time on their families and thus psychologically dependent;
- Cut the standard of living since affluence makes it possible for single people, divorced people, working women and other unattached individuals to "make it" economically on their own;
- Resist all changes.

"Well," says Toffler, "if we carry on as we are, we are going to witness the death of the family and will see the emergence of a diversity of family forms."

I think that we all agree that the foundations are being shaken, and that values and practices in our present society are being attacked left, right and centre. But regardless of all these trial marriages and commune experiences, we know for certain that the institution of marriage is

not a casual one. When we study marriage, family and home life, we know that these are the most fundamental and basic institutions in society. Thank God for that. I do like some of Toffler's ideas. To come back for a moment to that computer smashing business, I can tell you a little, but costly story about computers.

I ordered a book from America and paid a couple of dollars too much, which was then credited to my account. For the last eight months I have been receiving statements via airmail letters. This exercise has already cost them over \$20. I have written twice to the computer and advised it to use that credit to buy a McDonalds hamburger for the boss, but the computer doesn't seem to read me and keeps on faithfully sending out the statements. The thing sure needs smashing up all right!

May

The farmer said he was converted. One Sunday he went to church in another village. After church they asked him how things were "spiritually" in his village. "Terrible," the farmer said. "But," they asked him then, "how long have you been converted?" "Since twenty years ago," the farmer said. "How come that nobody in your village has listened to you?" somebody asked. "What has been wrong in your life that nobody has found Christ where you live?" With a red face, the farmer cried out angrily, "And who has been gossiping about me in this place." "No one has said a thing about you," someone remarked, "but could it be that your quick temper has stopped people in your village from turning to Christ?" The farmer's red face turned quite white and he became very quiet. He shook the stranger's hand and said, "You are right. I am a quick tempered man. Indeed, I [have been a bad example in my surroundings as to what a Christian should be."

That farmer thoughtfully went home and changed his ways. Much later, a neighbour came up to him and said, "Mike, I have known you for many years,



I know of your tempers, I also know of your conversion and your preaching to us. But lately I've seen by your actions that you are a different man from what you were before. Tell me about your Saviour and how He changed your life." I found that story in a box of paper-clippings, kept by my mother-in-law, dated 51 years ago. The paper was yellow with age, but the story is still as fresh and relevant in today's world as it was then.

June

Every five years our bureaucrats deem it necessary to make every person in New Zealand fill in more than half a dozen pages of Census forms. This event scares the wits out of illegal immigrants and overstayers, and worries many a person when he has to state his true worth in property and income. The government statistician has to repeatedly reassure the public that it is all going to be kept absolutely secret and that the Police and the Inland Revenue Department will in no way get access to the information. And still, people are not convinced.

On the question of religious affiliation, many of our church members seem to be stumped as to what to fill in, so

much so that one of our churches (Hastings) got itself into the Dunmore Book of Records, 1978, having been recorded as one of the smallest denominations in this country. In this Book of Records I found the following quote under the section "Smallest Denominations. 137 denominations were listed in the 1971 Census as having fewer than 20 adherents. Of these, 31 had only 5 members; they include the Calvinists, the Nativity Church, the Reformed Church of Hastings, the Temple of Targot and the Universal Christian Church of New Zealand."

A few nights ago, we discussed the matter of anger at our dinner table when we read from the Book of Proverbs, "That we must not associate with a man given to anger, or go with a hot tempered man, lest we too would learn his ways and find a snare for ourselves." Solomon sure had much wisdom but my old mother had some wise sayings too. I remember her saying once: "Don't cook a meal when you are angry."

July

Have you ever picked up a box of old photographs and chuckled to yourself when looking at the knickerbockers,

those knee-breeches you wore as a teenager? I had a good chuckle recently when I read one of the old Acts of Synod (1954) and spotted a proposal to adopt the New Zealand voting procedure.

According to our Kiwi brothers, the Dutchies would just waffle on while discussing a specific topic. After a while, the chairman would formulate the conclusion to what he felt was the general consensus of opinion and that would be noted down as the decision. To make sure that every Dutch minister and elder knew what he was supposed to say or do, the whole procedure was spelled out for them in a proposed ruling by Rev. J. A. Scarrow, our first New Zealand pastor and the Vice-president of that particular Synod. This is how it is recorded in the Acts of Synod: "One member puts forward a motion. Before this can be discussed, it has to be seconded. If it is not seconded, it cannot be discussed and the motion is passed over. If the motion is seconded, it will be discussed. After all the discussion has ceased, the chairman puts the motion to the vote. He then asks: 'All in favour, say aye.' The voters for the motion reply 'Aye.' The chairman then asks, 'All against say no.' The voters against the motion then

say, 'No.' If the vote is unanimous, we say it is 'adopted' or 'lost,' whatever the case may be. If it is not unanimous, the number for and against are counted and the majority decision is held. When the votes are equal in numbers, the chairman has the casting vote. Other than this, he does not vote at all." What comes so naturally now, was quite a mind-exerciser at that time.

The Wellington area has once again been plagued by heavy flooding. Some years ago a devastating downpour caused severe flooding around the Silverstream church and manse. Through the grapevine I heard that they had a pretty close shave this time with the flooding of the church basement only centimetres away from the rest. It seems to me that before the next attack, that church will have to make a choice, either shift to higher ground or build some dykes around the church property and install a few windmills to pump the water out.

Members of the Kerepehi congregation, living in the Thames/Paeroa district, also suffered badly with heavy flooding. This sort of thing always seems to announce the approach of winter to our fair land.

Abridged

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am writing to commend the two sister-in-laws, Emily and Joanna Voschezang, on their excellent book reviews in the October issue of *Faith in Focus*. They selected fine books to review and encouraged us to read them. All efforts that promote the reading of good Christian books are to be applauded!

The first review was on *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. This is a classic of Christian literature. Joanna rightly urged us to read it and pointed out the benefits of doing so. The book is available in a variety of editions, ranging from children's versions to classic reprints of the original. Some years ago Dr Sally Davey wrote a brief review of this book and recommended an edition edited by C.J. Lovik, published by Crossway in 2009, and illustrated by Mike Wimmer. The

English of the original text is lightly and sensitively modernised, so still retains Bunyan's style, but is easier to read and understand. It is also beautifully illustrated. I requested this edition for a birthday, have read it with much appreciation and benefit, and thoroughly enjoyed the illustrations. If you are going to purchase a copy of this book then I highly recommend this edition. Be aware that it only contains the first part of Bunyan's story, which is Christian's journey to the Celestial City; it does not contain the second part, which records the journey of his wife and children to the same city.

I am aware that many readers of *Faith in Focus* turn to the *Letters to the Editor* as their first reading of the magazine, so while I have your attention as a reader, I would urge you to read not just this letter of mine but the entire magazine! *Faith*

in Focus is an excellent magazine and well worth reading from cover to cover. If you read just one page per day, which would take you less than five minutes, you would read the entire magazine in less than a month, and you would be encouraged and edified by this exercise of your mind and soul.

In closing I want to express my thanks (and, I am sure, yours) to Walter Walraven and Sally Davey as the editors. They have been working on this together for many years now and have done excellent work. As readers we thank you for your time and effort and pray the Lord will give you strength to continue this task.

With appreciation,
John Haverland
17th October 2018

Helpful pointers for visiting the elderly



Photo by Cristian Newman on Unsplash

In my (much) younger days I spent time with several Christian organisations in some social work, and especially time as part of the Chaplaincy Team in Christchurch Hospital. It was very valuable time and I had a great learning curve in visiting the sick, especially in cancer wards. These opportunities are where I learned to appreciate some valuable guidelines, which I thought may be useful now to share with others who love visiting and comforting others. They were very useful to me later when I visited many of our church elderly in rest homes, or the sick and unwell at home. As I am now on the receiving end of visits, and at times very unwell, maybe these guidelines will be useful to others in turn. Visiting the elderly and/or sick is such a blessing to both parties (if they are up to having visitors). May God bless all who visit faithfully and give comfort from God to others.

Dear readers,

Tidying some papers I came across the following guidelines from my time with several Christian organisations and my time as part of the Chaplaincy team in Christchurch Hospital. It was useful then and I thought to pass it on to you. I am now on the receiving end of visitors [sadly not always able to cope] and may be useful to some others as well. God bless your faithful visiting, it is such a blessing to both parties.

- Sit at eye level to face the person;
- Don't stay too long as visitors can be tiring, especially if they are not too well-known or the recipient is very unwell;
- Don't bring small children, it is hard to cope for the elderly if they are ill;
- If there are visitors already, stay just a minute and say you will come back;
- Please don't bring large bunches of flowers, because the elderly are unable to attend to them and the staff do not have the time, a small posy is easier to handle and place;
- A couple nice biscuits in an easy to open throwaway container is lovely (if diet allows) gluten free sugar free, etc;
- A cup of home made soup, not too thin is great, but be aware of allergies, staff will heat;
- A few pieces of fruit already washed like grapes, blueberries, strawberries in a throwaway container is always welcome;
- Do not read lengthy pieces or have long prayers. The elderly may not be able to hear well or might be on heavy medication;
- Last but NOT LEAST: Pray for the elderly and patients you visit.

Cornelia Vannoort, age 87, Addington Lifestyle Care Resthome, Christchurch – member Dovedale Reformed Church

UN experts say Pro-Lifers are dangerous

By Stefano Gennarini, J.D. | October 4, 2018

NEW YORK, (C-Fam) UN experts said abortion-on-demand is “at the very core of every woman and girl’s fundamental right to equality, privacy and physical and mental integrity and is a precondition for the enjoyment of other rights and freedoms,” in a lengthy statement released on what abortion groups call “Safe Abortion Day.”

They also said conscientious objection “cannot be a basis for denying women access to abortion” and governments had to remove other barriers to abortion, including cost and geographic accessibility. And they denigrated laws limiting abortions to later stages of pregnancy or requiring informed consent as “designed to control women’s decision-making.”

The experts also attacked pro-life advocates.

“Some propagate a dangerous rhetoric that the rights of a pregnant woman and fetal interests must be equally protected,” they complained.

“The claim often made by opponents of abortion that their stance is “pro-life” is misleading,” they said.

The experts cited maternal health data from the World Health Organization to support legalization of abortion. But global health data does not show that maternal deaths decrease where abortion is legal. The data shows that maternal deaths decrease where maternal health improves regardless of abortion laws. In fact, Chile and Ireland, which until recently had complete bans on abortion, were leaders in maternal health long before allowing abortion.

And the experts also said that “an estimated 225 million women worldwide are deprived of access to essential modern contraception,” a claim that has been described as false and misleading by international experts. In fact, less than 2% of women in the developing world “lack access” to family planning according to the Guttmacher Institute’s own surveys.

It should be noted that abortion advocates within the UN bureaucracy do not have the warrant to tell countries

what to do about abortion. In fact, the guiding document on this issue is the Cairo Program for Action which insists these issues are up to national governments and not the international body.

Global abortion advocates reacting to the Trump administration, which has taken strong pro-life positions in international negotiations, and is expected to ramp up pressure on countries to take abortion out of UN policy. In recent negotiations in Geneva, the U.S. delegation pushed back hard against the phrase “reproductive health” which abortion activists use as a synonym for abortion. Abortion groups are preparing for stiff opposition in upcoming negotiations in the UN General Assembly.

“Of the many challenges to gender equality that women face throughout their lives, the area of women’s sexual and reproductive health remains one of the most contested and is among the fields in which women are facing the biggest backlash,” the experts lamented in the press release.

Additionally, last week at UN headquarters UN agencies and European donor nations met to renew their commitments in the “She Decides” campaign. The campaign has raised over \$600 million to bail out the abortion industry in a direct challenge to the Trump administration’s reinstatement of a complete ban on U.S. funds for groups that promote and provide abortions.

Bill Gates thinks there are too many Africans/calls for population control

By Rebecca Oas, Ph.D. | October 12, 2018

WASHINGTON, D.C., (C-Fam) The goal of eliminating extreme poverty is among the top priorities of the global community and is the first of the UN’s seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). But, according to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, progress toward reducing poverty is threatened by the presence of too many poor people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Some global leaders have drawn criticism for their patronizing comments about African fertility, including French

president Emmanuel Macron. At a launch event for the Gates Foundation’s Goalkeepers Report, held alongside the UN’s General Assembly, Macron said that Africa’s high birth rate is “not chosen fertility,” and reflects a lack of education. “I always say: ‘Present me the woman who decided, being perfectly educated, to have seven, eight or nine children.’”

Because of the history of coercive population control programs, “population was removed from the development vocabulary altogether,” writes Alex Ezeh in the Goalkeepers Report. “For the sake of Africa’s future, we should bring it back.”

The report argues that the decline of the extremely poor in the world could be hampered by population growth in Africa. Moreover, the report charges that because of increased African population, the number of extreme poor could begin to rise given that more than 40 percent of the world’s extremely poor live in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Nigeria.

One of the problems in analyzing poverty and population is the distinction between raw numbers and percentages. Take Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country; the Gates report projects the number of people in extreme poverty will expand from 81 million to 152 million by 2050. At the same time, however, they anticipate that the percentage of Nigeria’s population in extreme poverty will decrease from 43% to 35% in the same period. In the DRC, extreme poverty is projected to fall from 67% to 41%. In other words, as the population in both countries grows, the relative share of people in extreme poverty is shrinking, not growing.

Melinda Gates has long championed international family planning, and the Goalkeepers Report highlights it as one of four priority areas, alongside HIV, agriculture, and education. One of the SDG targets is to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including family planning. But when it comes to measuring access, the UN relies on metrics better suited to measuring use, or the concept of “unmet need,” of which lack of access to services makes up only 5%.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains notable for both its high actual fertility, and its

high desired fertility. While family planning advocates, including Melinda Gates, typically speak of the need to increase access to contraceptives, their real goal is to increase use and to promote a small-family norm. But the looming shadow of past abuses remains large, despite efforts by the Gates Foundation and others to bring back the demographic rationale for family planning in addition to rhetoric about human rights and choice.

Melinda Gates told the Washington Post she is frustrated with the Trump administration's decision to cut funding for international "reproductive-rights projects," calling it "incredibly disappointing." While in the past Gates notably distanced her family planning advocacy from the global abortion lobby, she co-chaired a Gender Equality Council at the G7 earlier this year, that called for public funding for abortion, abortion as a component of humanitarian assistance, and the withdrawal of the Trump administration's expanded Mexico City Policy blocking aid funding to international abortion groups.

Eritreans still suffering despite peace deal with Ethiopia, says priest

October 29, 2018 By World Watch Monitor

An Eritrean priest has called on the international community not to close their eyes to the reality of what is happening in his country, reports the Catholic news site *Agenzia Fides*.

While bilateral relations with countries in the region are improving, the harassment of religious groups at home continues, Fr. Mussie Zerai, a priest of the eparchy of the Eritrean capital Asmara, wrote in an open letter to *Fides*.

"Catholic and Islamic schools have been closed, eight medical centres and Catholic hospitals have been barred, while the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church Abune Antonios, stopped in 2004, is still under arrest after 14 years," he wrote.

"The regime in Asmara is one of the world's toughest political regimes, a dictatorship that suppressed all forms of liberty, annulled the 1997 constitution, suppressed the magistracy, militarised the entire population. A dictatorship that, in a word, has created a State-prison."

Eritrea's human rights violations have been well documented by rights groups, NGOs and the UN. The priest said it should not be forgotten that "in the

2016 [UN Commission on Human Rights] report, we come to the conclusion that there are well-founded elements to refer the main leaders of the Government to the International Criminal Court".

Father Thomas Reese, of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, told a US Human Rights Commission hearing in April that Eritrea remained "one of the worst examples of state-sponsored repression of freedom of religion or belief in the world", where an estimated 1,200-3,000 people are detained on religious grounds – in the approximately 60 prisons and camps that make up Eritrea's extensive prison network.

Eritrea is 6th on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian.

"One can pretend to close one's eyes to reality in the name of geostrategic and economic interests. Or one can give voice and content with force to the values of freedom, democracy, justice, solidarity," the Eritrean priest said.

Sri Lanka: sharp increase in violence against Christians

October 29, 2018 By World Watch Monitor Sri Lanka

Christians in Sri Lanka have experienced a sharp increase in attacks this year, with 67 reported cases between January and September, according to the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL).

September saw the highest number of cases, with 12 documented attacks. Comparatively, in the first five months of last year, the NCEASL recorded 20 cases.

"We are witnessing that communities are being mobilised in an increasing manner against Christians," a lawyer working with the NCEASL who wished to remain unnamed told *Morning Star News*.

"The incidents are not anymore only led by extremist groups, but we are seeing that the extremist elements are able to influence communities as a whole and lead violent mob attacks against places of worship and people," the lawyer said, before also noting an increase in the influence of nationalist Hindu groups in India: "In the Eastern Province, we see a lot of influence from the India's Hindu right-wing groups such as the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh] seeping into Sri Lanka ... Hindu extremist groups have had meetings with Hindu villagers promoting hatred and division and inciting them towards violence."

In a statement before the UN Human Rights Council earlier this month the World Evangelical Alliance, of which the NCEASL is a member, called on the government of Sri Lanka "to repeal legislation and jurisprudence that violate religious freedom".

In August the Sri Lankan Supreme Court confirmed that the right "to propagate" one's religion is not protected by the Constitution, which gives Buddhism the "foremost place" among all other religions and places it under state protection.

While 70% of the Sri Lankan people regard themselves as Buddhist, Hinduism is the second largest religious group (12.6%), while Christians make up approximately 9.2% of the population.

'To be Sri Lankan is to be Buddhist'

Most incidents against Christians this year involved violence (16 cases) or threats (16 cases), according to the NCEASL.

There were also nine cases each of "discrimination", "demands of closure" (of places of worship) and "intimidation"; two cases each of "police inaction, "false allegations" and "registration" (of cases against Christians); and one each of "legal challenge" and "demonstration".

In July *World Watch Monitor* published the story of a 52-year-old Sri Lankan brickmaker, Nimal Sarat, who received death threats after his conversion to Christianity.

In April civil-society groups asked Facebook to do more to prevent hate speech, including comments that discriminate on religious lines, following anti-Muslim riots.

In Sri Lanka, race and religion are intertwined and the background to the simmering tensions and outbursts of violence is the commonly-held belief that "to be Sri Lankan is to be Buddhist".

The country is 44th on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian.