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# faith in FOCUS

Volume 47/9, October 2020



**IS THE AGE OF  
READING BOOKS  
OVER?**

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# Editorial

Have you read a good book lately, one that you would be so happy to recommend that you tell everyone you know about it? Or maybe you are not that person who recommends a book so freely. But the question remains, have you read a book that enthralled you, and kept you captivated to the last page? Or is the age of reading books over?

It seems to me that we don't read very much anymore, generally speaking. As Christians we seem to have moved in the same direction as the world around us, soaking up snippets of information from sources such as the Internet, social media or television – television is a big one. As a result, the information we digest is only a small portion of a larger picture. Christians, however, are supposed to be people who view the big picture, who view things with an eye to eternity, and should never be content with small bytes, but rather with megabytes.

The inscripturated word of God records a big picture from the creation to redemption, from the beginning through to the consummation of the ages. I assume that most of us have read the whole of what God has to say to the world and His people. And I believe that we appreciate every portion of it, right? So, if we have an appreciation for the entirety of God's message/revelation, shouldn't we have that appreciation when it comes to reading other books, too?

Now, we come back to reading books.

The most wonderful thing about reading books (depending on what they are, Christian or not, fiction or non-fiction), is that they are able to transport you to another place and time. They can be a help to your imagination, attitudes and outlooks and beneficial to your learning and appreciation for the world which God created, and don't we want to learn more about that? Isn't the life we have just one big learning experience?

For instance, biographies may help you to share in the life and times of a notable person in history or the present day. History books or factually accurate historical novels can bring you into the presence of people and places with whom you are not familiar and help you to look back in time to a bygone era.

Our contributors are serious readers. Mrs Harriet Haverland, Mrs Lois Hoyt, Mrs Moana Leenders and Mr John Holtslag share short reviews of books that have left an impression on them. I know you will enjoy their recommendations.

Mrs Sally Davey considers the prevalence of loneliness.

J C Ryle, asks the question DO YOU PRAY?

Mr Tim Challies writes on being hospitable in his series on the Christian character.

*Letters from New Zealand* takes a short break this issue.

For our Reformation Day article we look at the Reformer Martin Bucer.

Mr Ryan DeJonge considers Solomon's advice on smartphones and the lure of pornography.

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.

## Harriet reads

HARRIET HAVERLAND

### ***Beyond the Point*** by Claire Gibson

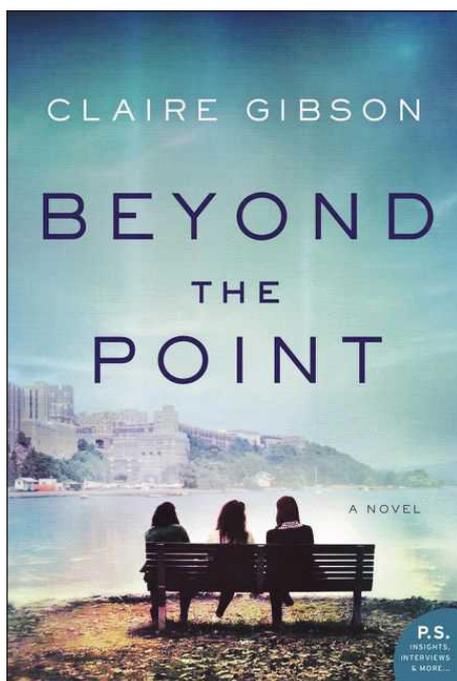
I borrowed this book from the public library because I thought it would be interesting to read a book about female cadets at the USA Westpoint Military Academy. The first female Cadets were only admitted in 1976.

What I didn't expect was that this would be a Christian novel. This book deals with the issues of death and grief, family influences and pressure, racism, friendship, hospitality, singleness, betrayal and illness. Throughout the book the hard questions are asked. Where was God when my husband died? Why am I still single? Why do I only attract the wrong kind of guy? Why did I get this life altering illness?

This book deals very sensitively with grief and sorrow, the things we do and don't want others to say, the well meaning platitudes which increase the pain, and the fact that good friends can be an amazing help.

It also follows these women through their doubts and struggles and shows how God works through all their lives, often by putting them through a "refiner's fire".

If you want to read something a bit



different but still spiritually encouraging I would recommend this book. This is a very well written novel based on the author's own experiences and extensive research and interviews. She is a self confessed army brat. (Her father was a lieutenant colonel in the US army with a PhD in systems engineering. He joined the faculty at Westpoint and taught there for 6 years.)

### ***For the Glory – The life of Eric Liddell from Olympic Hero to Modern Martyr*** by Duncan Hamilton

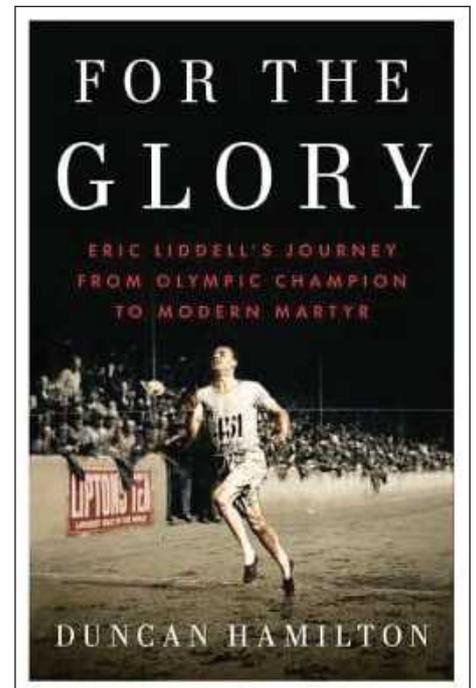
This beautifully written book about the life of Eric Liddell is a must read. His life has been made famous with the movie "Chariots of Fire," but there are some inaccuracies in the movie. Eric specialised in the 100 metre sprint but when the schedule came out for the 1924 Olympics to be held in Paris it was discovered, (rather late in the piece), that the event would be held on a Sunday. Despite considerable pressure by the British Olympic Committee Eric refused to run. Abe Abrahams ran and won that race on behalf of Great Britain.

Eric's coach trained him for the 200 and 400 metre race which he believed Eric might be even better suited to, and the rest is history. He won the 400 metre and placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 200 metre.

However of far greater note is that the Scottish Running Reverend as he was known had a strong desire to be a missionary in China. He met his wife Florence while serving there.

World War II intervened in a massive way and for the sake of the family Florence (pregnant with their 3<sup>rd</sup> child) and their two daughters were eventually returned to Canada while he served in China. He ended up in a Japanese Concentration Camp in Wiehsien, China.

Eric was known as a sacrificial, godly, caring man who continually gave his wisdom, spiritual insight, pastoral care and the few belongings left to those he was interned with.



An undiagnosed brain tumour resulted in the decline in his health which was blamed on a nervous breakdown. This diagnosis was hard for him to accept as he believed that full trust and reliance on God wouldn't allow for this. When he died suddenly it was a shock to all who knew him, including the medical staff. The book goes into detail on some of the atrocities committed by the Japanese against the Chinese. This is a very difficult part of the book to read.

I strongly recommend this book as it describes the life of a truly godly man. In this day and age when we go through our own struggles, it is a wonderful encouragement to read about a man whose faith did not waiver despite incredible challenges and adversity.

Eric's life is truly an inspiration of love and service to God, in both the good times and bad, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, and to be faithful to our Lord and Saviour till our dying day.

***God Is More Than Enough – Foundations for a Quiet Soul,***  
by Jim Berg

This book was recommended by a friend while I was going through a trying period in my life. I found it insightful, encouraging and challenging. That is because it deals with our thoughts and motives, our underlying pride, anxiety, discouragement, hatred, greed, shame etc. We all have a sinful heart, and if we are honest with ourselves we will have times when we think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

This book encourages us to look at our soul and our responses to what God is doing in our lives. How do we handle the pressures of life in a biblical manner? What is robbing us of peace and rest in our souls? How much of what we do in our lives is selfish and worthless? Do we trust God? Why are we anxious and fearful? Are we content? Do we believe that God is sufficient for all our needs?

Can we say with David "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23)? Do we believe that "God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"? (Philippians 4:19) We won't be content if we covet. Yet do we realise that coveting and contentment are polar opposites? Hebrews 13:5b,6

expresses this beautifully, "... be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"

The book goes through the attributes of God and applies these to our lives. Berg points out that we have an amazing, powerful, wise, faithful, loving, gracious, infinite, patient, perfect and merciful God. His rule and power is absolute. Nothing is outside of his control or knowledge. Yet all things that happen in this world are for our spiritual good and God's glory.

For us to be wise we must know this amazing God, rest in him, study His word and grow in knowledge. God is more than enough.

***Graffiti***  
by Erin Davis

I found this book an interesting read. I would have liked to have read it when I was younger. I think it is a good book for parents to read to have some tools to help them with their teenage daughters.

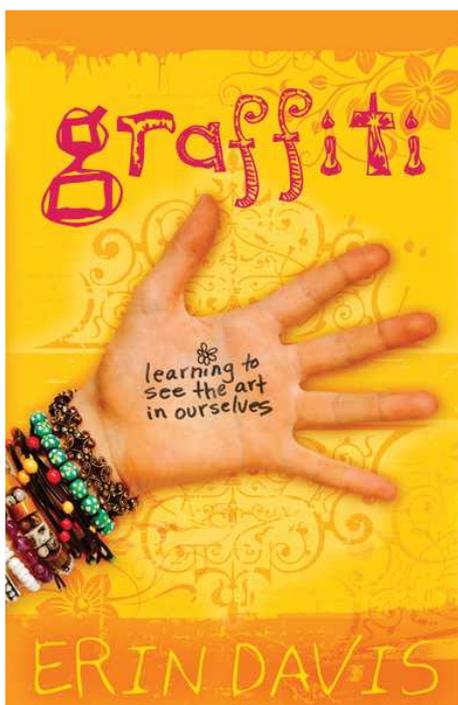
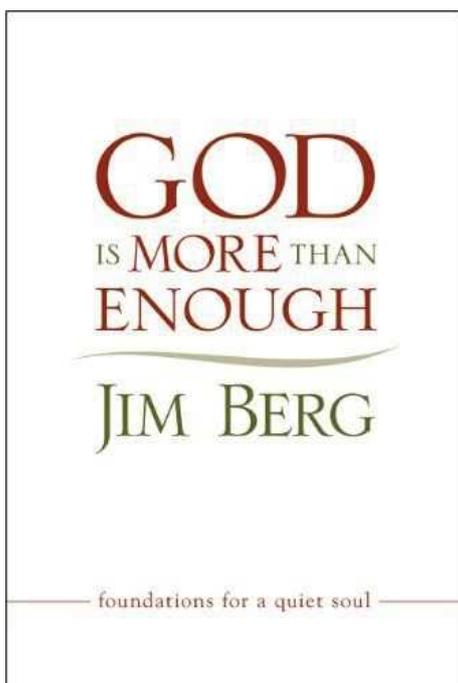
Our society is obsessed with beauty and ideal body weight and most of us are never going to measure up. The media and magazines target teenage girls and they are left feeling depressed and taking extreme measures to attain the perfection they will never achieve.

Anorexia and bulimia are continuing to rise and we have known people who struggle with this in the three churches we have served in. The plastic surgery business is booming, and suicide is on the rise.

It is only if we turn our focus away from our physical bodies and focus on God instead that we can be healed from this obsession. We are all created in God's image. We are all unique and are all His masterpiece. We are daughters of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

1 Peter 3:3-4 (NIV)

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.



## ***The Afternoon of Life – Finding Purpose and Joy in Midlife,***

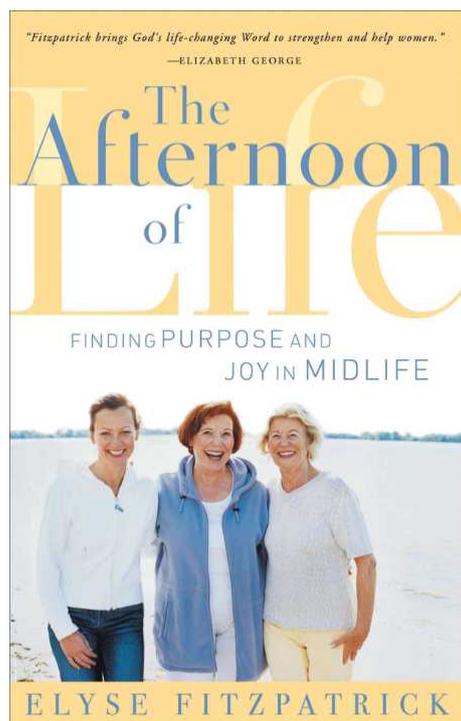
by Elyse Fitzpatrick

This is a good book to read for women who are at the stage of life of being empty nesters and going through physical change. It is in our Pukekohe church library.

This book focuses on “Where do I find my joy?” It talks about health, beauty, home, family and relationships and gives practical suggestions on how to deal with different scenarios. All of these change as we age. What changes can we as women expect? It is not often something we think about, but as someone in the right age group for this book I can testify to its applicability. One sentence in the book jumped out at me. “Life is a series of divestitures”, which means to let go, dismantle, strip bare etc.

So how does that apply to you and to me?

- From the time our children are born we are raising them to leave home. God has entrusted them to us for a time.
- Looking back there will be things we regret, but we can't undo anything we have said or change our decisions.
- Due to your children's choices or circumstances you may end up raising your grandchildren or have your children move back home.
- You will get health issues, you just don't know when.



- Your body will deteriorate and you can't stop it.
- Members of your family including your spouse may die before you do.
- Financial institutions with your nest egg may crash.

So how do you cope with the world's message that you must be beautiful to be loved; that your peaceful retirement home is once again full of children's toys; that the world tells you that you deserve a better life? The answer is to focus on the internal qualities that God loves and wants to see in us. We need to build our

homes with wisdom and we need to feed our minds with God's word.

At a stage when I am going through quite a few health issues and surgeries, I found this book encouraging. Externally I will worsen with age. It is a given. What counts is how I am on the inside. How is my spiritual walk? What am I focussing on? Why are my health issues so psychologically difficult?

God wants me to be a Proverbs 31:30 woman: “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”

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## **John selects some favourites**

JOHN OFREIN HOLTSLAG

After being approached by the Editor in October 2019 with the request for comments on five books read in the past year, it was not until the onslaught of a certain Covid19 virus, and the forced isolation, that I faced up to the task of producing this article.

As it happened I was in the middle of Sinclair Ferguson's book “The Holy Spirit” and so will start with that book and later another of his, entitled “The Whole Christ”.

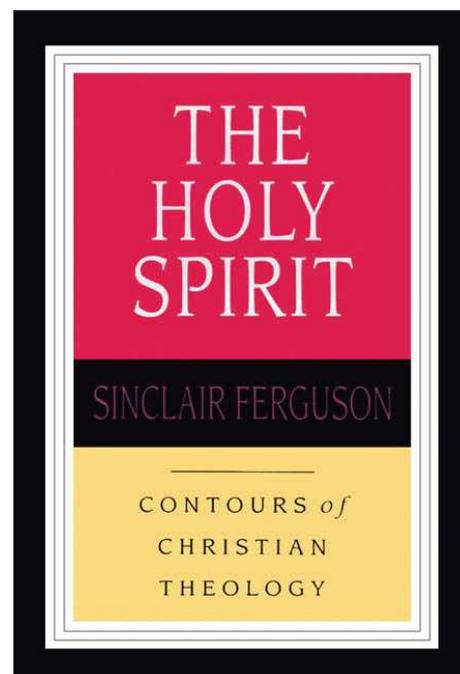
We have been privileged to hear and see Dr. Ferguson through the work of Ligonier Ministries and have always been impressed by his down to earth and yet in depth approach in his preaching and teaching.

Born in 1948, he is a Scottish theologian known in Reformed Christian circles for his teaching, writing and editorial work. He is Chancellor Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary since 2017, commuting from Scotland where he is Assistant Minister at St. Peter's Free Church of Scotland, Dundee.

He also obtained the Master of Arts, Bachelor of Divinity and Ph.D. degrees.

The book “The Holy Spirit” is part of a series entitled “Contours of Christian Theology”, a concise introductory series of textbooks focussing on the main themes of Christian theology, produced by Inter Varsity Press under the General Editor Gerald Bray, and was first published in 1996. I purchased the book from Reformers Bookshop, 140 Albany Road, Stanmore, NSW 2048, Australia.

Ferguson's introductory comments to the book are “that the Holy Spirit, once forgotten, has been “rediscovered” in the

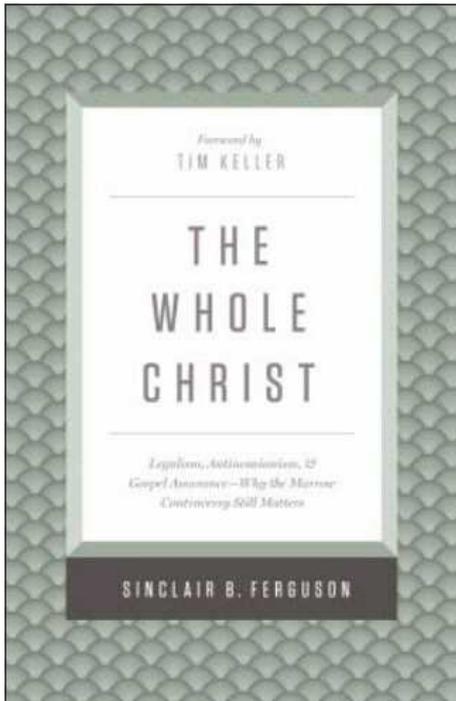


20<sup>th</sup> century – or has He?” He believes we should rephrase this common assertion: “While his *work* has been recognised, the Spirit *himself* remains to many Christians an anonymous, faceless aspect of the divine being”. In order to redress this balance, Ferguson seeks to recover the *who* of the Spirit fully as much as the *what* and *how*.”

His study is rooted and driven by the scriptural story of the Spirit in creation and redemption, addressing many foundational issues, contemporary and historical and shows a mature reflection of a Reformed theologian who has widely studied the in depth issues facing the churches today.

At times, I found his writing exciting, exhilarating and always informative due to his vast knowledge of the history and complexity of the place of the Holy Spirit within the Triune Godhead and the church, as the body of Christ under His divine guidance.

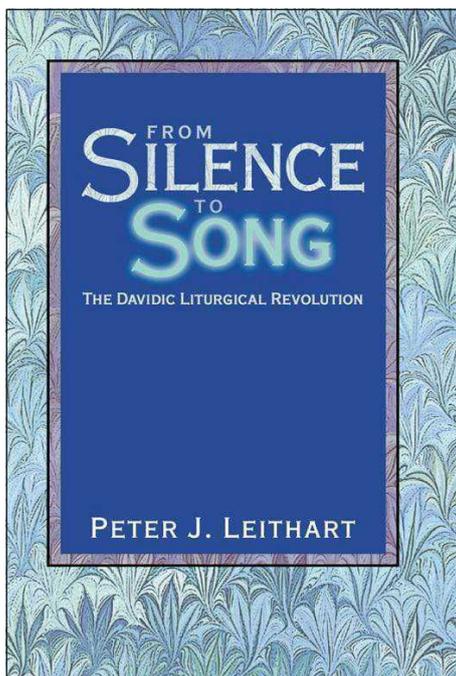
I was particularly impressed with the latter chapters on the Spirit’s gifts to the early church, tongues, healings and prophecy and their continuation or cessation, always carefully considering the subject from Scripture and with the vast knowledge of how the churches have dealt with it in history.



The same can be said of another book by Dr. Ferguson, entitled “The Whole Christ” where he gives a most interesting and insightful historical analysis on a controversy that had arisen in the Church of Scotland in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Entitled the Marrow Controversy it considered the perennial difficulty of properly relating works and grace, law and gospel, not merely in our systematic theology but in our preaching and pastoral ministry and, ultimately, within our own hearts. It all arose when a young candidate for ministry was asked to agree to the statement: “*I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God*”.

I have asked the question of some of my friends and relatives and received some interesting responses!

I purchased the book through the Book Depository where it was readily available. Published in 2016 by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, USA.



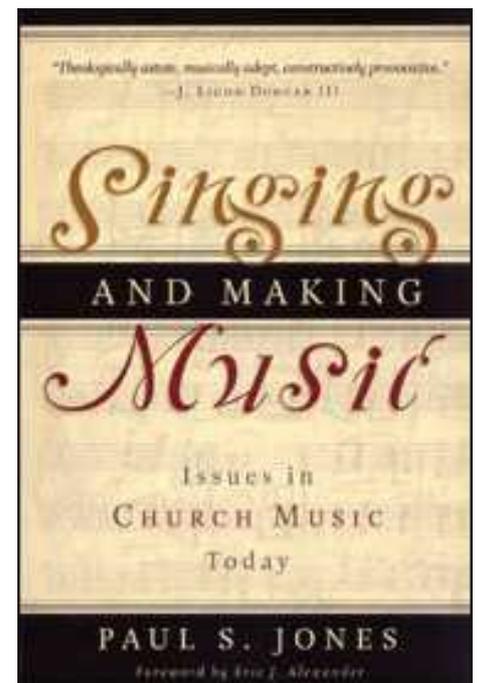
I would not be an organist in our churches for the past 56 years if I did not include at least a couple of books on the subject of church music. One of the best, dealing directly with the issues of Church Music today is written by Paul S. Jones, entitled “Singing, and making Music”.

Dr. Jones, organist and music Director at historic Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, USA, provides a “treasure trove for Pastors and church musicians and indeed any Christian who wants to build a biblical theology of music and worship”.

He reminds us that true praise begins with God and His glory, and not man and his need or preference. A consideration very relevant in today’s contemporary musical sphere where we are literally bombarded with music with little or no theological content, especially through the means of electronic social media. The book was produced in 2006, by the P&R Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, USA., and again was readily available at Book Depository.

Seven of his song tunes are included in the Sing to the Lord book of our churches.

Another book very relevant to the musical liturgy of our churches is Peter J. Leithart’s “From Silence to Song”, in which he explores the earliest introductions of music into the worship of God.



I was intrigued by his careful explanation of the development of musical instruments into worship introduced by King David on the placing of the Ark into his tent on Mount Zion (2 Samuel 6:17; 1 Chronicles 16:1ff) resulting in the beautiful Psalm of thanksgiving, concluding in verse 42: "And with them were Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those who should sound aloud, and with instruments for the songs of God, and the sons of Jeduthun for the gate."

I quote: "In this study, Peter Leithart's key insight reveals a prominent scriptural example of a liturgy that interprets God's commands for worship in ways far more biblically grounded than traditional regulativism allows".

Peter Leithart (PH.D. Cambridge) is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and a senior fellow of theology and literature at New St. Andrews College, Moscow, Idaho. Published in 2003 by Canon Press, P.O. Box 8741, Moscow, ID 83843m USA.

Just to show my heritage, a beautiful rendition in the Dutch language, entitled "Niet ik ... maar Hij" (Not I, but Him) written by Jacobus Overduin, a well-known and respected Pastor in the then Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

Rev. Overduin survived the Dachau concentration Camp, where, after his arrest, he was taken together with 70 others from which only three survived.

He was arrested because of his open protest at the limitation of Christian Education by the Nazis.

The book speaks of the effect of knowing Christ in our daily walk, the importance of preaching the centrality of Christ and the danger of religiosity.

After many years of considering theology in the English language, reading it in Dutch, though a genuine struggle for me, was nevertheless a worthwhile effort. I doubt that the book is still in print but anyone wishing to read it is welcome to borrow my copy. It was produced by J.H. Kok, N.V Kampen 1971 in The Netherlands.



## Lois's selection

LOIS HOYT

### ***Anne Bradstreet: Pilgrim and Poet***

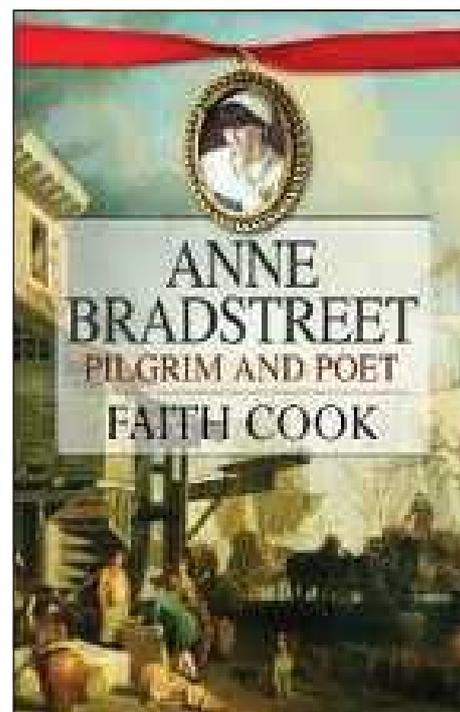
by Faith Cook, published in 2010 by EP Books

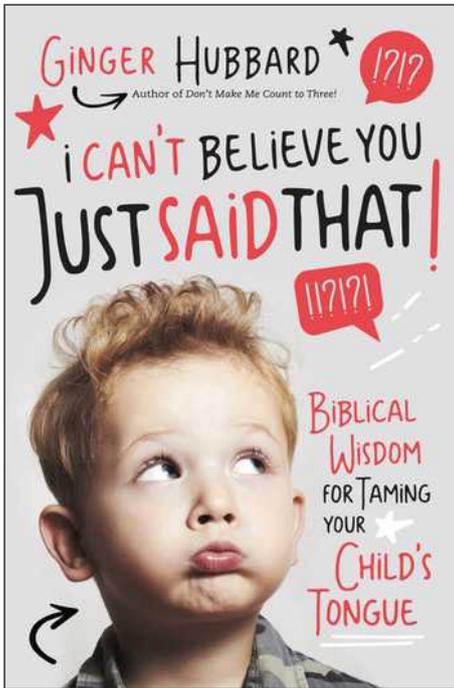
Anne Bradstreet was in one of the first groups of Puritans to flee persecution in England, arriving in the American colonies in 1630 at the age of 18 and just recently married. Very difficult circumstances resulted in the death of hundreds of the immigrants in those early years, and Anne herself suffered from several debilitating illnesses.

Childless for six years, Anne and Simon Bradstreet eventually had eight children, all of whom lived to adulthood – unusual for that period. In spite of illness and the frequent lengthy absences of her husband due to his demanding work as a leader in the colonies, Anne managed the home and in the midst of it expressed her thoughts in poetry.

It was very unusual at that time for a woman to be writing poetry; only a few knew her secret. But, amazingly, Anne became the first published American poet! This is a story in itself, for her poetry was published by an admirer without her knowledge. I could only be 'horrified' with her to learn that this was done without Anne having any chance to edit her work or correct mistakes. Nevertheless her work had a remarkable reception.

Her poetry reflects spiritual sensitivity, strong spiritual insight, earnest desire for each of her children to trust the Lord and walk in his ways, a thorough knowledge of classical literature, and an awareness of the issues in society and the church. She faced trials and losses by trusting in the Lord, but often not without struggles of soul to reach a place of rest and submission.





***I Can't Believe You Just Said That***  
by Ginger Hubbard, published in 2018 by Thomas Nelson

The author discusses many different challenges in training our children, particularly their speech, but she approaches all of it from a biblical perspective. Each chapter includes specific suggestions for reproving and training a child in a particular area of life, starting with helping a child look at what is in his or her heart. The ideas are practical applications of the approach found in *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Ted Tripp, to whom she gives much credit for her thinking.

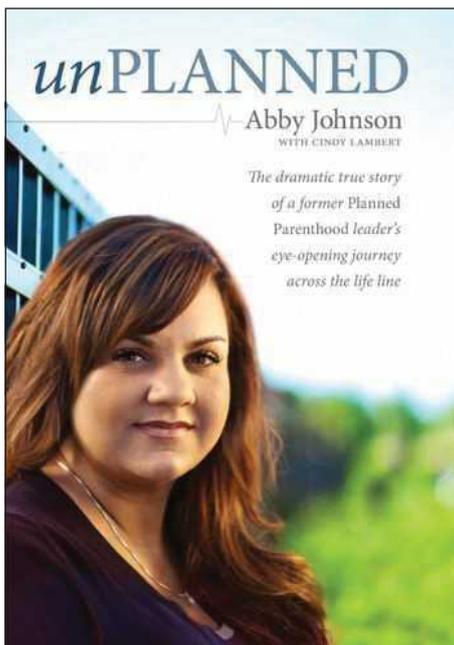
The book is very readable but is also convicting – to me as a grandmother too – about how we train (or trained) our children. The scriptural basis for interaction with a child is very helpful – not so much with the purpose that a parent would always quote scripture, but rather because the scriptures form a biblical basis for thinking about what is right and wrong in attitudes and actions. It is not just a book of methods but rather of facing the core issue of pointing our children to Christ and guiding them in living their faith in him day by day. In reading the book a parent has to face the question: What do I really want to accomplish in training my children?

face with many truths – including her motives and the motives of those in the abortion industry; the dilemma of seeing good and compassionate people on both sides of the abortion issue; but also finding many abortion promoters are in it for profit – and then as she became convicted herself about her own abortions and her abortion work. The highlight of the book was seeing the grace of God at work in her life 'under the microscope' over a period of about eight years; many were praying, many were befriending her, and step by step God brought her to face her sin, to confess it, and to know God's forgiveness and grace when she repented. Following that the reader sees her as she begins to live her new life as a believer. May God be praised!

***Interwoven***

by Russ and Nancy Ebersole, published in 2002 by ABWE Publishing

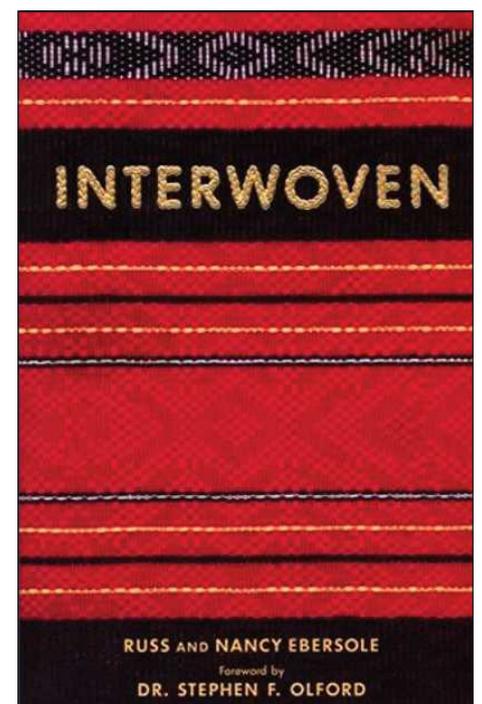
Here is a missionary story of the last century that will challenge your own commitment to the Lord and your desire to reach the lost for Christ. First are separate stories of two couples who were committed to the Lord and focused on their challenging missionary labours, one family in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and one in the Philippines. But a few



***Unplanned: the Dramatic True Story of a Former Planned Parenthood Leader's Eye-Opening Journey Across the Life Line***  
an autobiography written by Abby Johnson together with Cindy Lambert, published in 2019 by Tyndale Momentum

Probably every reader of *Faith in Focus* has heard of the movie *Unplanned*, and many will have viewed it. Either way, I highly recommend that you read the book. Why is the book better, as we often say?

The movie tells the story in short form. It is well done and is very moving, especially if, as a Christian, you put yourself into the shoes of Abby as she lives for years in turmoil of soul and then changes direction dramatically. However, it was when reading the book that I experienced the *details* of her journey and felt her struggle as she came face to



years into their respective ministries each lost a spouse in very challenging circumstances. Within a few years widow and widower met and believed God was leading them together – not only for further missionary work but also to raise the eight young children from their first marriages, five from one and three from another!

The title is well chosen, reflecting the many events woven together by God as the new family follows his leading, but the ‘interweaving’ begins long before the Ebersoles’ marriage. This true story includes time in a Japanese prison camp for one of the wives and her family in her growing up years, miraculous escapes and deliverances, later a hijacking of the Ebersoles to Communist China in the era of Mao, and – most rewarding of all – story after story of how God wove together threads to bring people to himself.

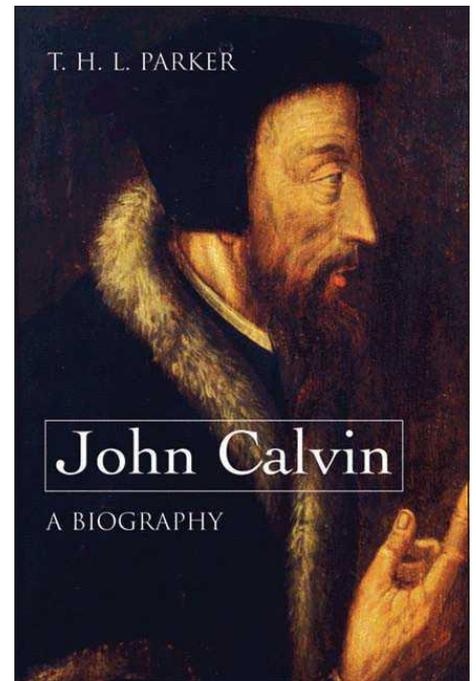
### **John Calvin**

by T. H. L. Parker, published in 1975  
by Lion Publishing

Bruce and I read this one together, the 1975 original version, but I see there is a revised edition published in 2007 by Westminster John Knox Press.

There is much biographical material available about the life of Calvin. What is particularly interesting in this biography is that ‘ordinary’ biographical data is intertwined with Calvin’s theology. And these are not just brief references to his theology and his written works – no, rather the doctrinal thinking is *elaborated* in the context of what was going on in his circumstances and ministry.

This meant it was not quick reading for me, but I found it profitable to read theology in this context. Because as Reformed Christians we are already familiar with the doctrinal ideas, it was achievable. Otherwise I might have found it too hard going!



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## **Moana reviews three books plus a movie**

### MOANA LEENDERS

The best books – how do I decide which titles to include? As I read my final draft I realized there is a unifying theme to the titles I have chosen; four accounts of anguish, loss and sorrow, (apologies, but tissues required). But there is good news – each story ends with hope and rejoicing. I have included a couple of ‘song matches’ as song lyrics articulate truth in a memorable way. I invite you to join me and raise a Hallelujah!

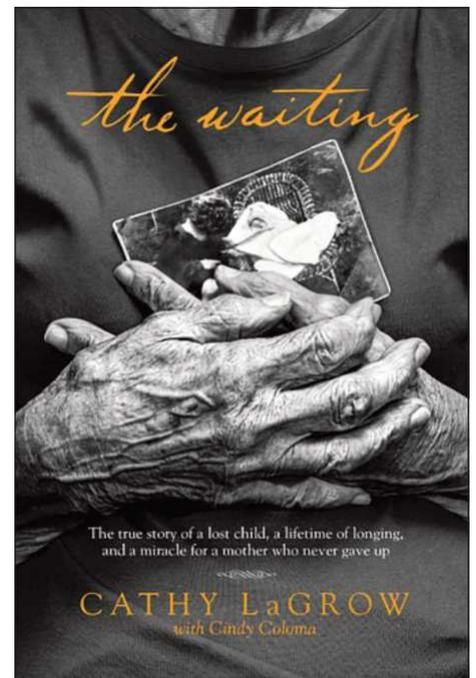
***“The Waiting – The true story of a lost child, a lifetime of longing, and a miracle for a mother who never gave up”***

Cathy LaGrow with Cindy Coloma,  
Tyndale House Publishers, 2014

Minka Disbrow kept a secret for 77 years. In May 1929, at ‘The house of Mercy’ (a home for unwed mothers), she gave birth to a baby girl, Betty Jane, when Minka herself was just an innocent teenager. Minka stayed with her newborn

for a month, and then gave up her baby girl for adoption. She returned home irreversibly changed, but resolute her daughter would have a better life than she could have given her. In the years that followed, Minka wrote over 100 letters to ‘The House of Mercy’ matron and supported the home financially. Minka always remembered her first daughter’s birthday, and prayed that she might know the love of her heavenly father. After 77 years, she added to her prayer “Lord, I’d like to see Betty Jane again before I die. Please Lord.”

Cathy LaGrow is Minka’s granddaughter and has written a beautifully sympathetic account of her grandmother’s life. If you appreciated the book (or movie) “Philomena” then you will enjoy this story. “The Waiting” will challenge your assumptions about mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. This is a story of love – unconditional, divinely inspired love. Minka spent her life choosing to love sacrificially, so her unforgettable story has much to say to us.



***“Left: The Struggle to make sense of life when a parent leaves”***

Jonathan C. Edwards, Rainer Publishing, 2016

This book represents a generation of children (who are now adults) whose dads walked out and they have something to tell Jesus’ church about pain, loss, healing and the Gospel. Children are not resilient and they do not bounce back. Children grow into adults who need answers, hope and a Saviour who understands their hurt. ‘Left’ provides a window into the lives of these children.

‘Left’ is an intense, sober and honest account of Edward’s life lived within the existential realities of divorce. Edwards shares his anguish, questions, and ultimately his answers. ‘Left’ shows us the mess of dysfunction, and then shows us the way to our heavenly Father who left his own Son that we will never be forsaken. Edwards found his identity in Christ and he uses his life story to show others the way to unconditional, never failing love.

My parents aren’t divorced, but my world includes those with parents who are separated. I will never completely understand a child’s pain of the loss of a parent, but ‘Left’ helped me see the extent of the wounds inflicted by family breakdown. Edwards has written a personal account with a universal solution. I recommend this book to all who seek to help the wounded.

Song match for ‘Left’ – “God only knows” by King and Country, album “Burn the Ships” 2018.

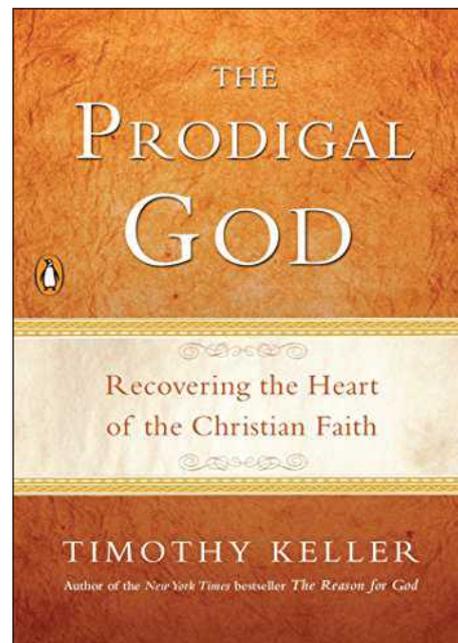
***“The Prodigal God – Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith”***

Timothy Keller, Hodder & Stoughton, 2008

I’ve been slow to read this book in spite of many recommendations. I am so thankful to have finally read it as it has led me into a deeper awareness of the immense, sacrificial love of our Jesus. As a taster, to whet your appetite for this book I give some quotes:

*“There are two ways to be your own savior and lord. One is by breaking all the moral laws and setting your own course, and one is by keeping all the moral laws and being very, very good.”*

*“Jesus does not divide the world into*

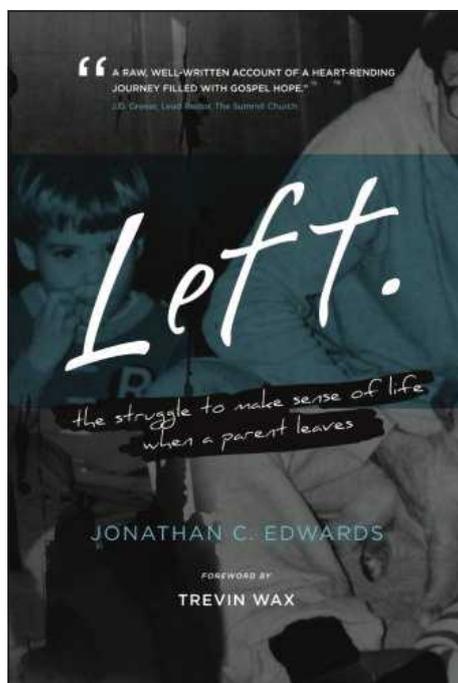


*the moral “good guys” and the immoral “bad guys.” Both sons are lost and the father cares for them and invites them both back to his love and feast.”* Keller reminds us that in this parable Jesus is making a clear distinction between the gospel and religious moralism. The religiously moral need the love and grace of the Father, just as much as their immoral and irreligious brother.

*“The point of the parable is that forgiveness always involves a price – someone has to pay. The father forgave and reinstated the younger brother, which cost the elder son profit from the family estate. Jesus is the true elder brother, the one willing to share his rightful inheritance with us.”*

Keller is a magnificent communicator; this short readable book will excite you and bring forth praise to our glorious Saviour anew. The first four chapters unpack Luke 15, the final two chapters are: “Redefining Hope”, where Keller places the Parable of the Lost Son in the greater narrative in Scripture of exile and homecoming; – and “The Feast of the Father”, unpacking the significance of the feasting promised at the return of our Lord.

Song match for ‘The Prodigal God’ – “Reckless Love” by Cory Asbury, album “Reckless Love” 2018.

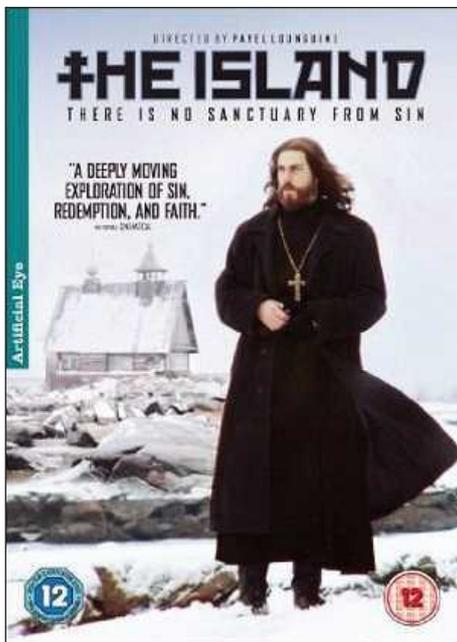


## "The Island"

Russian movie (English subtitles),  
Dimitry Sobolev, 2006 – YouTube

This movie is gloriously Russian. The setting is an Orthodox monastery on a bleak, wintery island in northern Russia. Father Anatoly lives as a reclusive, eccentric Holy Fool; distressing fellow clerics, but visited from afar by those who believe he can miraculously heal their sick children. Early we learn Anatoly's shameful crime, and then the movie portrays how we may understand his response to his guilt. 'The Island' asks questions about sin, guilt, faith and redemption. Father Anatoly will annoy, amuse and discombobulate you. However, the powerful acting reveals his humanity and draws you into his story and ultimately, to the cross.

The cinematography is outstanding and the acting superb. Needing to read the subtitles was helpful as this film demands total concentration. Whilst there are many moments of despair, the story is peppered with moments of comic relief, and is a very satisfying watch.



## OUTLOOK FOCUS

SALLY DAVEY

# No one need be lonely

Of the many ways in which sin has scarred our world, loneliness has to be one of the saddest. The feeling of being alone, of being the odd one out, of having no one to talk with, no one to love and be loved by is soul-destroying. To worry that there will be no one to call on if trouble comes is dreadful. Loneliness implies rejection: no one cares about me. I feel unlovely and unloved. This is a loss of humanness.

How pervasive is it, though? Does it afflict only a few, or is it big enough to call a social problem? We live in a very connected world – people are everywhere, and there are numerous ways of being in touch with others that don't even involve close physical proximity. Some people almost live virtually, forever looking at screens. And yet – the statistics tell us that many people in the western world do experience loneliness. From what I have learned, more than 60% of Americans report feeling lonely, left out, poorly understood or lacking in companionship. Around nine million of the U.K. population feel lonely<sup>1</sup>. And in New Zealand (there is a website on this subject<sup>2</sup>) we are not too dissimilar to the British. It can afflict anyone – even introverts can feel lonely.

As you might expect, in more atomized, individualistic societies (like the U.S.) loneliness seems to be a more common experience. People are expected to stand on their own two feet and care for themselves. But all western societies share factors that one suspects may trigger loneliness. Perhaps living alone leads to loneliness? More and more people seem to live in one-person households. This is often the situation of older people when they are widowed, and whose children don't

live nearby. But actually, it is *younger* people who report more loneliness – especially young men. Eighteen percent of New Zealanders aged 15-29 felt lonely all, most or some of the time according to a survey quoted on the "Loneliness" website. Sixteen percent of those aged 30-44 and also 45-64 said the same; but only 11% of those aged 65 and older felt lonely all, most or some of the time.

I wondered why this was. Perhaps it has something to do with the social expectations of younger people? I'm supposed to have heaps of friends! Everyone else on Facebook is so popular – everyone loves them. All those photos of people surrounded by smiling groups of friends; all those pictures of parties, of boyfriends and girlfriends... We always feel worse when we sense we're shut out of something everyone else is enjoying, and feel that we don't belong. So, do older people either accept the reality of being alone, take more initiative in reaching out – or have other resources to compensate, perhaps? Are they happy watching television, dozing off in the sun or reading books? I don't know the answer to that – perhaps one day I will find out!

"According to studies" (bound to convince us!) feelings of loneliness can be linked to medical problems such as high blood pressure, strokes, cardiovascular disease and even the onset of dementia. It seems there may be serious consequences to people's health in the misery associated with loneliness. If so, what can we do about this problem? It is distressing to think of unhappiness and suffering going on around us – it makes us want to do something to help. Christians want to respond to distress when we see it. We sense that the

gospel is the answer to loneliness. The question is – just how to convey that to people in a way that connects the dots for them?

The Bible says plenty about this subject. To begin with, it suggests that God has made us as social creatures, designed for companionship. Even before the Fall, he provided for Adam so that he wouldn't be alone. Eve was primarily a companion. But throughout Scripture God is aware of people's aloneness and provides for them in their time of need. Bitter and bereaved, Naomi is kept alive by the steadfast love of Ruth, who promises to go with her, to live with her, and to make Naomi's people her own. Psalm 68:5 speaks of God's care for the fatherless and widows – and the very next verse brings the welcome news that he sets the "lonely in families" (NIV).

Elijah thought at one dreadfully low point that he was totally alone facing Jezebel's wrath – but then God told him he would preserve 7,000 others with his exact convictions, reassuring him he was not on his own<sup>3</sup>. While on this earth even Jesus himself recognized the human need of friendship – especially in times of test

and trial. He called his disciples friends, and in the garden of Gethsemane, knowing what was about to come, urged them to watch and pray with him. He predicted that they would all run away, and that one would deny him under duress – and it was obvious this pained him greatly. This surely indicates that God appreciates our need of friendship, and hastens to provide it for us when we need it most.

All around us there are people struggling with loneliness. In part, it's the result of an individualistic culture where we are rewarded for our own efforts and take pride in standing out from the crowd. We all appreciate the freedom to express our own views without being obliged to conform to the expectations of others. But the downside is that we often look down on those who seem weak and unsuccessful; or those who look more needy, more likely to be takers than to give us something. They are the people who will require effort from us – they have no aura of popularity to share with us.

Who might they be? Think about who lives near you, in your city, town or rural

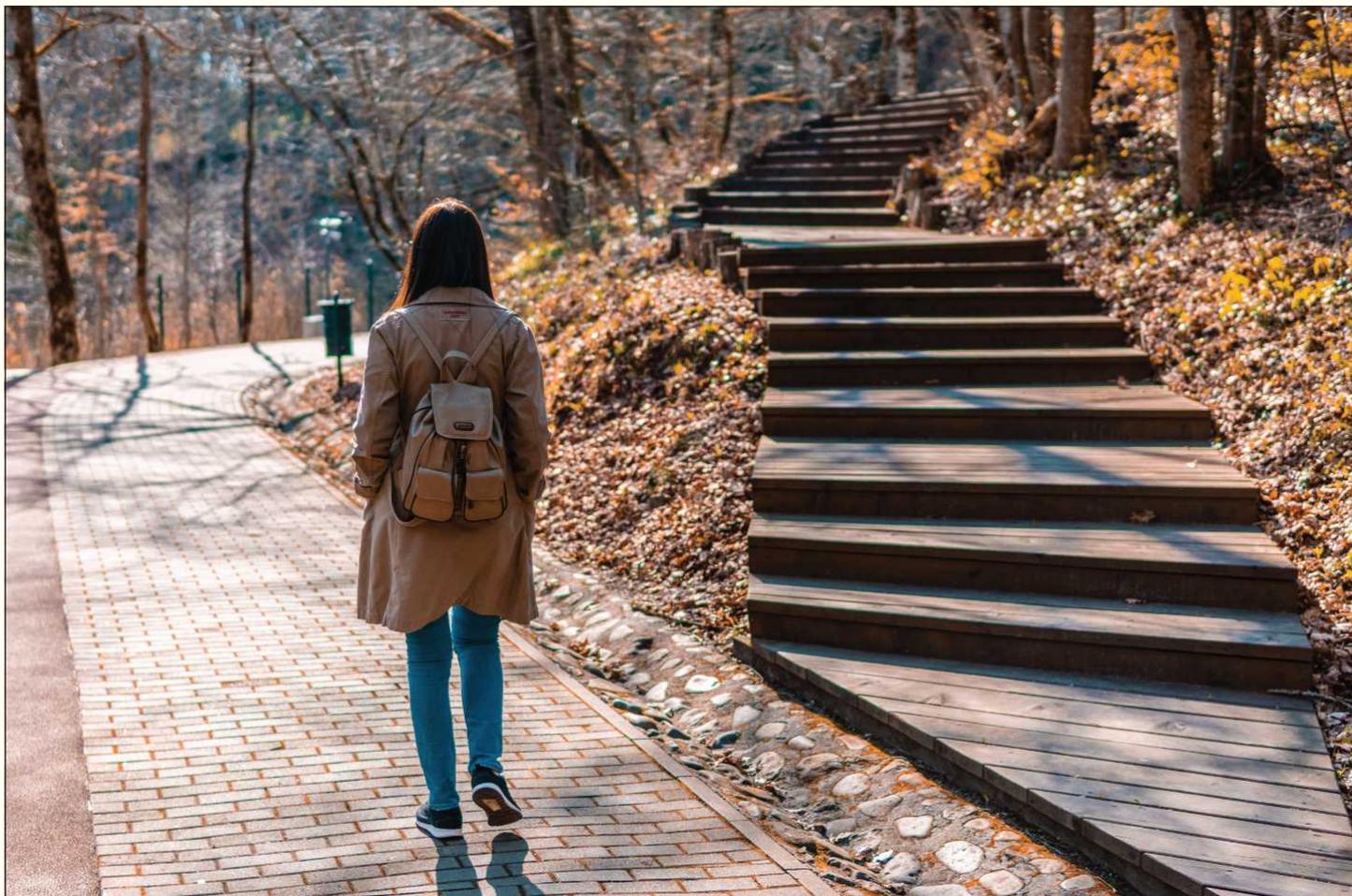


Photo by George Bakoson Unsplash

# Sometimes we overlook people who are lonely because we think it's their own fault. We, who live proper lives, who work hard and come from good families don't do the kinds of things that result in being lonely

community. Perhaps they are chronically ill and on a benefit. Perhaps they are elderly, in a retirement community, but receive visits from no one. Perhaps they are an immigrant dairy farm worker, here without his family because our immigration policy is not to allow them here. He's on a temporary work visa and does not have the sense of belonging here. He spends each night after work cooking his own dinner and watching television all alone. He is watching his children grow up on Skype. Perhaps they are a young single worker who has no one to talk to after a difficult day at work, and who relies on alcohol to de-stress. Perhaps they're a single mum who has no days off from small children and can't go out at nights to visit or make friends.

Sometimes we overlook people who are lonely because we think it's their own fault. We, who live proper lives, who work hard and come from good families don't do the kinds of things that result in being lonely. We got a good education and have good jobs. We managed to buy our own homes and don't lack for security. We go to church so don't have to worry about having enough people around to socialize with – social activities are laid on, so to speak. It was easy to find a spouse – youth group took care of that. Mum and Dad live nearby and help out with our kids. Other people, if they lived like us, could stop feeling lonely. For sure.

But that's not good enough, is it? Not too sympathetic, really. If we return to the paragraph before last, and consider the kinds of people described, we can recognize in their faces the kinds of people

Jesus sought out, and who were the very people who responded so gladly to his compassion. Luke 14:23 tells us that the very ones Jesus wants us to bring in to his feast are the poor, crippled, lame and blind – the unloved and unlovely. These are the ones so often overlooked, who cannot repay his (and our) love in any way that returns the favour.

The gospel is the most wonderful news for those who are troubled, downcast, and feel themselves lonely and unloved. Jesus came to bring them into God's family, to give them brothers, sisters and friends – of whom he is the greatest. He loved them so much that he died to make them – yes, them personally – beloved and forever secure in God the Father's love. The last part of Romans 8 reassures them that nothing, nothing, can separate them from his love.

It is also wonderful news for those who feel themselves to be unlovely. Many lonely people say they are lonely because they think it's hard to like them. They know they have sharp corners which rub others up the wrong way. They might be morose, act oddly or know they present an unfriendly face to the world. They know they're not popular, and feel that somehow they deserve it. How should we respond to those kinds of thoughts? Our instinct is to quickly reassure them that they aren't so unlovable as they might think. *I like you, you might say.*

But there is some truth in what they say: we are all unlovely and unlovable from God's perspective. We are all sinners. I find myself forgetting that when I think about lonely people. I confess I am often drawn to lonely people because I've known some of the sadness it brings. I want to put an arm around them, and I'm tempted to offer the attractions of the gospel without first letting them admit they're right, in some ways, about their unloveliness. We have all been unlovely in some way or other. God only loves repentant sinners, not those who continue to reject him. Nevertheless, it's also true that once they *do* respond in faith, he is the friend that will work loveliness in their hearts, and continue to work it until their last day on this earth.

God also gives everything to fill the emptiness of lonely hearts. Most of all, he gives us himself – a friend who will never, ever fail us. Some of the most precious things Jesus ever said are found in Matthew 11:28-30:

*"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

He is completely approachable, not haughty or forbidding or snobbish. He will welcome anyone who longs for love, and by loving them, will transform their lives. They need never be lonely again.

He also gives us families, as Psalm 68:6 puts it: even if a Christian never marries or has children, they will be able to experience the warmth of human relationships in other ways. God *always* provides us with someone to love us and to love in return. The body of Christ is meant to be like that.

But in the end, the best friend we can ever have is Jesus himself. Every other friend will fail us in some way or other. As Dane Ortlund has written in a recent book, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*:

*"... Christ's heart for us means that he will be our never-failing friend no matter what friends we do or do not enjoy on earth. He offers us a friendship that gets underneath the pain of our loneliness. While that pain does not go away, its sting is made fully bearable by the far deeper friendship of Jesus. He walks with us through every moment. He knows the pain of being betrayed by a friend, but he will never betray us. That is not who he is. That is not his heart."*<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

1 [https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/the-answer-to-loneliness?utm\\_source=feedblitz&utm\\_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm\\_campaign=Once%20a%20day\\_2020-08-22\\_08:30&utm\\_content=5575](https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/the-answer-to-loneliness?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm_campaign=Once%20a%20day_2020-08-22_08:30&utm_content=5575)

2 <https://loneliness.org.nz/>

3 1 Kings 19:18

4 Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*. (Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2020), p. 120.

# The Character of the Christian: Hospitable

This month we are exploring how the various character qualifications of elders are actually God's calling on all Christians. While elders are meant to exemplify these traits, all Christians are to exhibit them. I want us to consider whether we are displaying these traits and to learn together how we can pray to have them in greater measure. Today we will look at what it means for an elder – and for every Christian – to be hospitable. We will also see why God elevates this trait to such high importance.

Paul tells Timothy, "an overseer must be ... hospitable" (1 Timothy 3:2) and echoes this in his letter to Titus (Titus 1:8). The Greek word for "hospitable" (philoxenon) indicates a love for strangers. In the day before the Holiday Inn, Christians were expected to extend hospitality to other traveling believers or itinerant preachers. They were to feed them and to provide them a place to sleep apart from dirty, dangerous, and unsavory inns. The word is naturally expanded to include other forms of hospitality. But at heart, it indicates a willingness to invite others into your home for a short or extended stay.

Why is there such emphasis on this trait? Alexander Strauch explains by saying, "Hospitality is a concrete expression of Christian love and family life. It is an important biblical virtue. ... Giving oneself to the care of God's people means sharing one's life and home with others. An open home is a sign of an open heart and a loving, sacrificial, serving spirit. A lack of hospitality is a sure sign of selfish, lifeless, loveless Christianity." Hospitality is a tangible, outward display of godly character.

An open home displays Christian love but it also enables it. Hospitality creates opportunities for relationship, for discipleship, and for evangelism. It creates

a natural context for modeling marriage, parenting, and a host of Christian virtues. While we are to teach others what the Bible says, we are also to demonstrate what it says, and we do that by inviting people into our homes and into our lives.

Is it only elders who are called to share their lives and their resources by opening their homes? No, this call goes to all Christians. While the Old Testament law places great emphasis on caring for and protecting the sojourner, this care for strangers is made even more explicit in the New Testament. Peter writes to all Christians when he says "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9) and Paul tells the whole congregation in Rome that they must "Seek to show hospitality" (Romans 12:13). The author of Hebrews says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2). Paul instructed Timothy to extend the church's benevolence to a widow if she "has shown hospitality" (1 Timothy 5:9–10). Jesus taught that we will be judged on the basis of our hospitality, for when we love and welcome others we in fact love and welcome him (Matthew 25:35–40).

Strauch concludes, "Hardly anything is more characteristic of Christian love than hospitality. Through the ministry of hospitality we share the things we value most: family, home, financial resources, food, privacy, and time. In other words, we share our lives."

### Self-Evaluation

So, how about you? Would others say that you are hospitable? Engage with these questions and be honest with yourself and with God:

How many people from your church have you invited into your home for a meal?

When was the last time someone stayed the night?

Do others come to you when they need help, or do you give the impression that you don't want to be bothered?

Is your family intentional about welcoming others into your home, even if they are different from you or if they make

you feel awkward and uncomfortable? Why do you fear welcoming others into your life and your home? What promises has God given you that you can cling to for hope, peace, and assurance?

### Prayer Points

Take heart in the truth that the God of the weak and the outcast welcomes you – and pray to him for his help in these ways:

I pray that you would fill me with your Spirit so that my life bears fruit through loving deeds for others.

I pray that I would hold loosely to all that you have given me and to know that my home, my food, my time and everything else belong to you. Help me to be a faithful steward of all of them.

I pray that you would give me boldness to welcome others as you have welcomed me.

I pray that the motivation of my heart would be that, through loving others, I might express my love for Christ. Please give me great joy and freedom in hospitality.

Next month we will consider what it means for elders and Christians to be sober, gentle, and peacemaking.

*Challies.com*



the Holy Roman Empire, but chiefly in the imperial free city of Strasbourg. There he would serve multiple parishes, draft liturgies, church orders, and catechisms, and work in tandem with some of the more prominent intellectuals of his day, including Calvin, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, Wolfgang Capito, and Johannes Sturm.

Born November 11, 1491, in the town of Schlettstadt near Strasbourg, Bucer was the son of a poor cobbler. Despite such a meagre pedigree, he was trained at the renowned Latin school in his hometown run by the local Dominican cloister, where he would take vows in 1506 at the age of only fifteen. Proving to be an excellent young student and thinker, by 1516 he was transferred to the Blackfriars house in Heidelberg to continue his education. At Heidelberg, he studied Greek under the future reformer Johannes Brenz and also came under the spell of Erasmus of

# Martin Bucer

*Martin Bucer, Grabado por René Boyvin (1854).  
es.wikipedia.org*

While not as recognizable as contemporaries Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, or even Philipp Melancthon, Martin Bucer's influential role in the early Protestant Reformation may only stand behind that of Luther himself. As a parish pastor, reformer, diplomat, preacher, and scholar, the former Dominican Bucer would help initiate and stabilize reform throughout

Rotterdam, the most famous humanist of the day.

It was by chance that Bucer attended the Heidelberg Disputation of April 1518, where Luther delivered his famous theses excoriating medieval scholasticism. The young friar was quickly swayed by Luther's opinions and, against the objections of his Dominican superiors, obtained a papal dispensation releasing him from his vows.

On April 29, 1521, Bucer became pastor at Landstuhl, a parish under the care of the powerful German knight, Franz von Sickingen. He would soon marry a former nun from Lobenfeld, Elizabeth Silbereisen. Affairs at Landstuhl grew tense, however, when Sickingen helped lead the Knights' War against the elector of Trier. The knights were beaten badly, thereby putting Bucer at risk. Shortly thereafter, he was forced to leave for Strasbourg, but along the way he was enlisted by Heinrich Motherer to help with the work of reform in Weissenburg. During a short stay at Weissenburg, Bucer preached sermons on 1 Peter and Matthew and also drafted his first theological treatise. Nonetheless, the ultimate failure of the knights' coalition led to his departure from Weissenburg in May 1523.

Bucer finally made his way to Strasbourg and quickly became a leading proponent of reform in the city. He was named pastor of St. Aurelia's in 1524, serving until 1531. We wrote an evangelical order for mass in 1525, as well as several catechisms for use in instruction. He also became a prodigious biblical scholar during this period. He published Latin translations of Johannes Bugenhagen's Psalms commentary and Luther's sermons, and he wrote commentaries of his own on the synoptic Gospels, Ephesians, John, Zephaniah, and Psalms. By 1529, he also persuaded the Strasbourg council to abolish the Roman Mass.

In the same year, Bucer was conscripted into the Protestant controversy over the Eucharist. Though he had once held Luther's views, he was influenced by Zwingli and Karlstadt to adopt a more symbolic view around 1525, only to finally gravitate toward a mediating position. Nonetheless, despite his own personal rapport with Zwingli, he was not able to bring the Swiss theologian and Luther to agreement at the 1529 Marburg Colloquy. As a result, the various reforming parties could not present a unified stance before the emperor, Charles V, at the 1530 Diet of Augsburg. While the north German princes supported Melancthon's *Confessio Augustana* (Augsburg Confession), and the reformed Swiss cantons threw their lot in with Zwingli's *Fidei Ratio*, Bucer drafted the *Confessio Tetrapolitana*, a statement affirmed only by the four cities of Strasbourg, Constance, Memmingen, and Lindau. He would redouble his efforts to create inner-Protestant unity during the

ensuing years. He convinced Strasbourg theologians to subscribe to the Augsburg Confession in 1532, reached agreement with Melancthon on the Eucharist at Kassel in 1534, and finally broke through to Luther in 1536 with the Wittenberg Concord. The agreement affirmed Luther's language of a sacramental union of the elements with the body and blood of Christ, then used that to embrace both the Wittenberg insistence on the Real Presence and the Strasbourg emphasis on the mystery of the sacrament and the preparation of the believer for reception.

Back in Strasbourg, Bucer continued the work of reform as pastor of St. Thomas from 1531–40. In 1534, he drafted and had approved an important church order that established the office of church presbyter as a fundamental instrument of church government. While his efforts to establish strict church discipline with his church order failed, he was later able to foster an alternative by supporting small groups of Christians who would meet together to exercise discipline internally and prepare themselves for communion. He also sought to expel Anabaptists from the city, though opposing the more harsh capital measures taken against them elsewhere in Germany. Bucer would remain concerned with education and catechesis. Along with fellow reformer, Johannes Sturm, he turned the old Latin school in Strasbourg into a preparatory school in 1538, later also establishing a seminary with Sturm in 1544. He wrote another catechism in 1534, then in 1539 reinstated the practice of confirmation for the purpose of catechizing the youth of the city. Outside of Strasbourg, he became exceedingly active in propagating the Reformation. He had a direct hand in starting reform at Ulm, Frankfurt am Main, Augsburg, Hamburg, and Cologne, while also contributing to its adoption and progress in Hanau-Lichtenberg, Baden, Württemberg, and Hesse.

Bucer's later years, however, saw his influence wane as he suffered failure on numerous fronts. First, in 1540 he joined the heated religious colloquies between Protestants and Catholics that were held at Worms, then the next year in Regensburg. As part of the colloquies, he drafted the infamous "Regensburg Book" with Johannes Gropper, a Catholic theologian from Cologne. The set of doctrinal articles were written in such a way so as to reach agreement with both parties, even resulting in a short-lived settlement on the doctrine of justification.

When talks broke down over questions of church authority, however, the colloquies fell apart. In 1543, Bucer was appointed preacher in Bonn by Hermann von Wied, archbishop of Cologne, to help reform the diocese. He was again defeated, this time due to opposition from his former collaborator at Regensburg, Gropper, who refused to allow Cologne to go Protestant. Finally, back in Strasbourg Bucer found a new opponent in Charles V. Having emerged victorious in war with the Protestant Schmalkaldic League, the emperor instituted the 1548 Augsburg Interim, which forced Protestants to return to Catholic practice with very limited concessions. Bucer led the charge in Strasbourg to resist the emperor, but Johannes Sturm – again, a former colleague – negotiated a settlement with Charles against Bucer's wishes. As a result, Bucer was forced to leave Strasbourg, never to return.

In 1549, Bucer made his way across the English Channel to London, where he would spend the remaining two years of his life. He lectured at Cambridge, assisted Thomas Cranmer in revising the *Book of Common Prayer*, and composed his own magnum opus, *De Regno Christi*. In *De Regno Christi*, Bucer laid out his vision for the reform of both the British church and the British government. The work was received with great acclaim by King Edward VI and led to a doctor of divinity awarded by Cambridge, but soon after its completion Bucer fell ill. He never recovered, dying on February 28, 1551, and receiving committal at Great St. Mary's in Cambridge. After Queen Mary rose to the throne, she exhumed his remains and had them burned in 1556. Following Queen Elizabeth's accession, however, she rehabilitated him by ceremony in 1560.

<https://reformation500.csl.edu/bio/martin-bucer/>



*Image by Dariusz Sankowski from Pixabay*

# Solomon on Smartphones and the pull of PORNOGRAPHY

## PROVERBS 7, WISDOM'S WARNING, AND THE ADULTERESS'S SIREN CALL

BY RYAN DEJONGE

The book of Proverbs is a book about two ways to live, the paths of wisdom and folly. The way of wisdom is the way of the righteous, the way of blessing, and the way of life. The way of folly is the way of the fool, the way of curse, and ultimately the way of death. Along each path sits a guide who calls out to pilgrims on the road, urging them to join their path. They are both women and they both address the simple. They both sound enticing and they both promise great things.

But only one delivers on her promises. And the result of embracing the wrong woman is death.

The issue that I want to explore in this article is adultery, especially for young, unmarried, modern, tech-savvy Christians. The issue of adultery has

always been about embracing the wrong woman, and so it is easy to see why Solomon would spend so much time addressing his son on this topic at the beginning of Proverbs.

Adultery is still a real and present danger. It comes in a slightly different package than it would have in Solomon's day, but the Adulteress is still alive and well, and I would be so bold as to say that many of the young, unmarried, modern, tech-savvy Christians know her well.

In the days of Solomon, people walked on paths a lot. People walked a lot, period. Since they didn't have cars, their roads were a lot different than the roads we have today. So if adultery is a path, what does it look like today? Should we expect that it looks like a dusty, uneven,

meandering footpath? Probably not. Today we travel on concrete and asphalt. We travel fast and we travel often. And we have a path that is taking over more and more of our lives. It used to be called, "the information superhighway." You might call it the superhighway to death, because that is where it is currently taking a lot of people. The path of adultery for many young, modern, tech-savvy Christians is the Internet. And the woman along that path who is calling your name, looking for youths who lack judgment, leading the way to death, is Internet pornography.

Proverbs 7 is where Solomon speaks most extensively about the person of the adulteress. His words are strikingly fitting our modern epidemic of internet pornography.

There was a time when having a computer or phone in your room was relatively safe — that time is long gone.

### The youth who lacks judgment

Solomon communicates the dangers of adultery to his son by telling him a parable. This is how it begins.

At the window of my house  
I looked out through the lattice.  
I saw among the simple,  
I noticed among the young men,  
a youth who lacked judgment.  
He was going down the street near  
her corner,  
walking along in the direction of  
her house  
at twilight, as the day was fading,  
as the dark of night set in.  
– Proverbs 7:6–9 (NIV84)

The main character of this parable is the youth who lacks judgment. Perhaps you know someone like this. The thing about this youth who lacks judgment is that you can pick him out in a crowd. Solomon says that he looked out his window and he saw him immediately. He could just tell that this guy was in for some trouble.

For Solomon this is just an observation, but for someone with evil intentions, this guy is easy prey. He is the weak and slow antelope that gets picked out, pounced upon, and devoured by the lion.

Notice that this young man walks into his trap: “He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house.” Path, anyone?

What does this look like today? Today the youth who lacks judgment can probably not be observed by looking out your window onto the street. A modern youth who lacks judgment sequesters himself indoors, finds himself or herself on their phone late at night after everyone has gone to bed, or has a computer in their room. There was a time when having a computer or phone in your room was relatively safe – that time is long gone. Now the youth without judgment is the 16-year-old with a smartphone, or tablet, or whatever other personal pleasure machine they have in their pocket that allows them to be polluted with porn whenever they please.

Where does the problem start with this young man? It is not with his parents, as Solomon doesn't mention them. Neither is it his friends, for he leaves their company. His problem is not his environment or even the adulteress herself. This young man's problem is himself. He lacks judgment; he heads

down the path of foolishness, and straight into the trap. His adultery problem is a problem of the heart.

This remains the biggest issue for users of pornography today. The problem with porn is not porn. It is us. It is men and women who use it. In an interview for *CovenantEyes.com*, Rick Thomas was asked why kids get into porn today. What do you suppose was his answer? They have raging hormones? The porn is so good?

His answer is none of the above. Rather, the reason guys get into porn is that they lack judgment:

1. They are *lazy* – they spend too much time doing nothing.
2. They are *disobedient* – they don't listen to their parents and others' warnings.
3. They *lie* – they lie to others about what they are doing and to themselves about the nature and effect of pornography.
4. They are *self-righteous* – they suppose that porn is their right, and that those images are offered for their viewing pleasure.
5. They are *self-centered* – they have sexual desires, so why not fulfill them?
6. And they are *ignorant* – they don't realize the danger they are getting themselves into with internet porn.<sup>1</sup>

As you will be able to deduce from this list, porn is not only attractive to teens. Laziness, disobedience, self-righteousness, self-centeredness, and ignorance are no respecters of age. Do you know what the problem is with Internet porn? It is you and me. This is why when Paul addresses the Thessalonians about sexual immorality (1 Thess 4:3-8), he doesn't say, “You need to leave that sinful city!” or “You need to have accountability groups!” or “You need to campaign against temple prostitution!” or anything like that. What he says is that you need to be sanctified. You need the Holy Spirit to change your heart. The problem is with our hearts.

Our own hearts are what lead us to sin, as Jesus taught when he said: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:21). Commenting on this passage, Mark Driscoll wrote

## Internet pornography, however, is a classic case of bait and switch

"Sexual sins are not 'out there' in the media, strip clubs, a gal with low-rise jeans and high-rise thong. Truly the problem is 'in you.' It is from the sinfulness of your heart that lust and sin proceed like sewage from a culvert. This is the painful, unvarnished truth."<sup>2</sup>

### The adulteress

The next character in Solomon's parable is the inevitable destination of this judgment-lacking youth, the adulteress.

Then out came a woman to meet him,  
dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.

(She is loud and defiant,  
her feet never stay at home;  
now in the street, now in the squares,  
at every corner she lurks.)

She took hold of him and kissed him  
and with a brazen face she said:

"I have fellowship offerings at home;  
today I fulfilled my vows.

So I came out to meet you;

I looked for you and have found you!

I have covered my bed  
with colored linens from Egypt.

I have perfumed my bed  
with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.

Come, let's drink deep of love till  
morning;

let's enjoy ourselves with love!

My husband is not at home;

he has gone on a long journey.

He took his purse filled with money  
and will not be home till full moon."

– Proverbs 7:10–20 (NIV84)

Within his description of this shady lady, Solomon highlights four characteristics of the adulteress:

1. She is *devious* – She moves, according to verse 10, with "crafty intent."
2. She is *restless* – As verse 11 tells us, "her feet never stay at home."
3. She is *brazen* – She flaunts her sexuality and availability, as in verse 13: "She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows, so I came out to meet you."
4. She is *one-dimensional* – This woman is about one thing, and she makes that clear. She is completely sexualized. She communicates nothing else. She tells the young man about her sacrifices because in Canaanite worship,

sacrifices were to be accompanied by sex (vs. 14). She gives a lengthy description of her bed (vs. 16), but not because she thinks this guy looks tired. She propositions him with love (vs. 18), but she really means sex.

Do these characteristics not represent very well the ways and means of Internet porn, the adulteress of our time?

1. Pornography is *devious*. Porn promises sexual fulfillment, an outlet for lust and sexual desires. It invites you to enter into its dream world of fantasy and fulfillment. It calls out for those who lack judgment to come along and step into its trap.
2. Pornography is *restless*. The porn industry is a multibillion-dollar industry, even though 80-90% of porn that is consumed on the Internet is available for free. So pornography is a multibillion-dollar industry and only 10-20% of those who use it are paying. How much porn is out there?
3. Pornography is *brazen*. It flaunts its stuff. It finds a way to get to you through advertisements, spam, popups, hyperlinks, etc. It invites you to come, to taste, and to see for yourself. We need to realize that the people who promote pornography are master marketers – they know how to get you in, and they know how to keep you in.
4. Pornography is completely *one-dimensional*. Pornography promises one thing: the fulfillment of your sexual desires. Porn tells you that there is one thing that matters to you right now and it has everything that you need to meet that desire. Isn't this what that woman (or that man) on the screen is telling you: "Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love" (vs. 18)? Click, click, click. And you are lost in a dream world of fantasy, gratification, and self-centered sexual fulfillment.

### The path to death

Internet pornography, however, is a classic case of bait and switch. You go in looking for one thing, but come away with something completely different. Solomon explains the process as he continues.

With persuasive words she led him astray;  
she seduced him with her

smooth talk.

All at once he followed her  
like an ox going to the slaughter,  
like a deer stepping into a noose  
till an arrow pierces his liver,  
like a bird darting into a snare,  
little knowing it will cost him his life.  
– Proverbs 7:21–23 (NIV84)

With the adulteress, you start in a dream world, but very quickly you find yourself in a nightmare. Notice the progression that verses 21-23 describe: first you are lead astray, then you are trapped, and then slowly, unknowingly even, you head to your death. You don't die right away. You only start dying. But just like a deer in a noose, your doom is certainly coming.

This is precisely what happens with pornography. You get into it because you have a desire to fulfill or a fantasy to explore, but very quickly it starts to unravel and destroy you. The negative effects of pornography use on especially the male mind are well documented. Here are just a few.

1. Pornography use contributes to social and psychological problems. Studies show a correlation between increased use of porn and increased neglect of work, social isolation, and even depression.
2. It rewires the brain. Just like a path in the woods is formed by frequent use, so are the neural pathways in the brain. Frequent use of porn changes the footpaths in that part of the brain that is used in relating to women, and so it becomes more and more difficult to relate with them in a God-glorifying, pure, and loving manner.
3. It feeds selfishness, because it is profoundly selfish.
4. It leads to premarital sex or, more frequently, masturbation. In both cases the result of pornography use



Photo by Kekai AhSam on Unsplash.com

“He lacks judgment; he heads down the path of foolishness, and straight into the trap.”

is not sex as God intended it, namely between a male and a female in the relationally safe and secure confines of marriage.

5. It leads men to demean and objectify women. When you turn women on a page or a screen into sexual objects, very quickly the women in your life will become no more than sexual objects.
6. It distorts the beauty of the God-made female body. Tragically, some Christian males suppose that pornography is good because it highlights the beauty of the female body which was, after all, created by God. But porn in no way represents the beautiful diversity with which God has created females, nor does it seek to promote this beauty to God's glory, nor does it reckon with the fact that God himself provided clothing for the man and woman after the fall into sin.
7. It distorts reality, especially in the context of marriage. Think about the effects of porn use for a man engaged to be married. Porn feeds supersized expectations about sex and diminished emotions about women. Can you spell disaster? Many guys say that they hope that marriage will fix their pornography problem. Marriage is not a fix for a pornography

problem; repentance and faith in Jesus Christ is. What porn will do for your marriage is destroy it.

8. It makes gender and sexuality one-dimensional. Both women and men are far more than merely sexual objects, but porn promotes this popular idea that women are for giving sexual fulfillment and men are for taking it. Please don't buy that perverse distortion of God-created gender. And sex itself is about far more than simply a fulfillment of your physical desires – it is a deeply emotional, mental, physical, and even a spiritual activity, one that is to be enjoyed.<sup>3</sup>

The above only begin to scratch the surface of the negative effects of porn. Porn kills. Perhaps you have heard of the infamous serial killer Ted Bundy. Ted Bundy was executed in the electric chair in 1989, after he confessed to killing 30 young women whom he had kidnapped, raped, and killed, and sometimes raped again after they were dead. On the day before he walked the last mile, Ted Bundy was interviewed by James Dobson and he had one message that he wanted to communicate to the world. The single most significant factor in his sexual crimes, in his opinion, was his habitual viewing of pornography.

Not convinced that porn kills? What about the other partner in that selfish embrace, the woman on the screen? Where does she come from? What is her life like? What does she gain from being on your screen? The reality is that for so many of these girls – yes, many are girls – life is no life at all. It is death. Pornography is directly tied with the global sex trade, where women and girls are kidnapped or promised a great modeling career, only to be reduced to sex slaves, gang-raped, hooked on drugs, and held under the thumbs of their abusive pimps and managers. There may be a few stories of a "working girl" who works a regular job, has a family, and does X-rated films for some extra money. But for each one of these, there are certainly hundreds of stories of lives that are utterly destroyed by the industry that feeds youths who lack judgment, staring at their computer screen in the middle of the night.

Adultery is death. Internet pornography is an ongoing massacre.

#### **The call**

But Solomon, and the Spirit of God working through him, does not desire that we should take this road, and so his message is clear: get off that path and on to the right one! The difference is life and death.

Now then, my sons, listen to me;  
pay attention to what I say.  
Do not let your heart turn to her  
ways or stray into her paths.  
Many are the victims she has  
brought down;  
her slain are a mighty throng.  
Her house is a highway to the  
grave, leading down to the  
chambers of death.

– Proverbs 7:24–27 (NIV84)

### Step one: repent

What do we do against the depravity of our heart and the wiles of pornography? Solomon says, “Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say” urging us to hear his voice, and turn from adultery.

I mentioned all the relationships that porn destroys, but I didn’t mention yet the most important one, the one that we have with Jesus Christ, and through Jesus Christ, with our Heavenly Father. Losing or ruining our relationships with women, with friends, with family might be painful and tragic for us, but ruining or losing our relationship with Jesus Christ is absolutely devastating.

In 1 Corinthians 5, when urging the Corinthians to avoid sexual immorality, Paul says, “Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!” You cannot be united both to Christ and to the adulteress. You must leave one to pursue the other. You cannot be on the path of folly and of wisdom – you must leave one and follow the other.

To lose that relationship, that unity, with Jesus Christ would be devastating. Why? Because you have so much to lose. Only in Christ are you God’s child, justified, sanctified, glorified, redeemed from sin, saved from judgment, renewed in love, protected from Satan, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and God’s workmanship, created for good works. Are you ready to give that up?

If you are currently pursuing pornography but want to remain in Christ, what do you do? Repent. Repent from your sins. Turn from your temptations. Reject those lustful desires and repent. We must recognize sin for what it is and follow the course of action that God lays out for us. We cannot tread the path of adultery and the path of discipleship at the same time. To get off the path of adultery recognize the sin, confess it to the Lord, seek forgiveness through the blood of Jesus

Christ, and ask God to renew your desires.

### Step two: get wisdom

The next step brings us to the first verses of chapter seven. Every thing that Solomon writes about adultery is in the context of this greater command: Get wisdom.

“Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister’ and call understanding your kinsman; they will keep you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words” (vs. 4-5).

To overcome sin you don’t need to just turn from sin, you need to cast yourself, your whole self, heart, soul, mind, upon God. Yes, you need a new heart; but you also need to live a new life. This too is the work of Jesus Christ, the way of wisdom, and the path of life. Solomon does not outline all the ways that this can be done, but here are a few route markers on the path of wisdom:

#### 1. Listen

First of all, listen to God’s Word. Wisdom speaks the Word of God. The Word of God is the Bible. The Word of God is preached to you every Sunday. Through the Word of God you gain access to wisdom, and through wisdom, you come face to face with Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of your faith. God’s Word is where you will expose the deceitfulness of sin, where you discover the atonement through Christ’s sacrifice, and where you learn to live a new life of love.

Second, listen to those who have learned this lesson already. Sin, and especially sexual sin, with its accompanying isolation, loneliness, and shame makes you feel like you are the only one who has struggled with the sin and that no one else would understand what you are going through. It can be liberating just to hear accounts of how other men and women have fought this battle. You are not alone in your struggle against sin. Hear the supportive voices of others who offer their help in the name of the Lord.

#### 2. Talk about it

Satan feeds off of embarrassment and shame. Darkness creates secrecy, shame, lies, and embarrassment. But the light brings them into the open. Bringing your sins into the light with trusted friends,

elders, pastors, and parents allows the light to begin to work on it. You don’t need to fight this battle alone.

Talk to your friends. My good, godly friends were indispensable in helping to deal with my struggles with sexual sins. Being a good, godly friend to others allowed me the privilege of praying for and helping them when they were struggling. For about four years I would meet with two or three close friends for accountability sessions every 3 or 4 weeks on a Saturday morning over breakfast. As we all broke from the grip of sexual temptations we all joined in the powerful grip of godly friendship.

### 3. Inform yourself

The best way to expose the lies of the seductress is to know the truth. Again, immerse yourself in God’s word every day. I recently heard a well-informed pastor say that he has never heard of a pastor who fell into deep sin who had a regular, daily time with God in Bible reading and prayer. Some might cast this off as a pietistic approach, and certainly the Christian’s strength does not come from a mere devotional exercise. And yet it is hard to imagine engaging in regular, daily, significant pornography use alongside regular, daily, significant devotion time.

In addition to God’s Word, get good, godly information on sex, sexuality, lust and pornography. Here are a few resources that are particularly accessible for youths who desire judgment:

- *Sexual Detox* by Tim Challies. This is a short, very readable, and very helpful book by a well-known and respected Christian blogger. You can read it as posts at Challies.com if you search for “Sexual Detox.”
- *Undefined* and other resources by Harry Schaumburg. *Undefined* is probably the most popularly recommended book about sexual purity for Reformed folks. I don’t have a copy yet, so I can’t say for sure, but I’ve ordered my copy. Perhaps you’ll consider doing the same.
- Websites: The Internet might be the home of pornographers, but it is also the home of many great resources to help you fight porn, like *CovenantEyes.com* and *SettingCaptivesFree.com*. What

better way to stick it to the Adulteress of the Internet than to use the Internet in a good, up-building, God-glorifying way?

This article has covered a lot of ground. I hope that you will cover a lot more ground on the path of wisdom. If you are immersed in a fight, do not lose hope. We always have hope, because we have a Savior who is far more powerful than our sin, far more beautiful than our temptation, and far more loving than we can even comprehend.

## Notes

- 1 Rick Thomas's "You Just Caught Your Child Looking at Porn. What do you Do?" posted to CovenantEyes back in 2012.
- 2 Mark Driscoll's *Porn Again Christian*
- 3 This is a modified list of those found at B.J. Stockman's article "7 Negative Effects of Porn" which was posted to *TheResurgence.com* back in 2011, a website that is no longer available.

*Mr Ryan deJonge is a missionary in Lae, Papua New Guinea. A version of this article was first published under the title "Get Wisdom! Adultery and young tech-savvy Christians" back in 2012.*

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## Focus on faith

J C RYLE

# A call to prayer

It is a miserable thing to be a backslider. Of all unhappy things that can befall a person, I suppose it is the worst. A stranded ship, a broken-winged eagle, a garden overrun with weeds, a harp without strings, a church in ruins, all these are sad sights, but a backslider is sadder still. A wounded conscience—a mind sick of itself, a memory full of self-reproach, a heart pierced through with the Lord's arrows, a spirit broken with the inward accusation, all this is a taste of hell. It is hell on earth. Truly that saying of the wise man is solemn and weighty, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Proverbs 14:14.

Now what is the case of most backslidings? I believe, as a general rule, one of the chief causes is neglected private prayer. Of course, the secret history of falls will not be known until the last day. I can only give my opinion as a minister of Christ and a student of the heart. That opinions, I repeat distinctly, that backsliding generally first begins with neglect of private prayer.

Bibles read without prayer; sermons heard without prayer; marriages contracted without prayer; journeys undertaken without prayer; residences chosen without prayer; friendships formed without prayer; the daily act of prayer itself hurried over, or gone through without heart: these are the kind of downward steps by which many a Christian descends to a condition of spiritual palsy, or reaches the point where God allows them to have a tremendous fall.

This is the process which forms the lingering Lots, the unstable Samsons, the innocent Asas, the pliable Jehoshaphats, the over-careful Marthas, of whom so many are to be found in the church of Christ. Often the simple history of such cases is this: they became careless about private prayer. You may be very sure people fall in private long before they fall in public. They are backsliders on their knees long before they backslide openly in the eyes of the world. Like Peter, they first disregard the Lord's warning to watch and pray, and then like Peter, their strength is gone, and in the hour of temptation they deny their Lord.

The world takes notice of their fall, and scoffs loudly. But the world knows

nothing of the real reason. The heathen succeeded in making well-known Christians offer incense to an idol, by threatening them with a punishment worse than death. They triumphed greatly in the sight of their cowardice and apostasy. But the heathen did not know the fact of which history informs us, that on that very morning he had left his bedchamber hastily, and without finishing his usual prayers. If you are a Christian indeed, I trust you will never be a backslider. But if you do not want to be a backsliding Christian, remember the question I ask you: DO YOU PRAY?

<http://revival-library.org/index.php/resources-menu/promoting-local-church-revival/a-call-to-prayer-j-c-ryle>