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# faith in **FOCUS**

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## THE INTERNET AT HOME: HOW TO SET THE RIGHT BOUNDARIES



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# Contents

<b>Parenting well in a digital world</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Managing screen time</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>God's Providence: from Roman Catholic to Protestant</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Focus on faith</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Focus on the Christian life</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Letters from New Zealand</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Books in focus</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Focus on current affairs</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Letter to the editor</b>	<b>18</b>

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All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

### The Editor:

Walter Walraven  
Email: walterwalraven@icloud.com  
website: www.faithinfocus.org.nz

### Editorial Assistant:

Mrs Joanna Voschezang

### Production:

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Email: SebastianB@HarleyDykstra.com.au  
Ph: 0419 043 116

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Mrs Nicola Wharekawa  
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# Editorial

When I was a young boy in the 1960's the only type of screen that you had in the home was either a TV screen or a screen to project your home-made movies or colour slides on. Growing up in that era, most of us did not watch much TV because we had other things to do. We used our imaginations and inventiveness which dictated some of our activities. We used to play cricket on the road in front of our house with the boys in the neighbourhood, or play in the bush just up the road from our home.

As I got a bit older, I was permitted to watch some relatively innocuous programmes on TV most Friday nights after I had a shower, dressed in my pj's laying on the floor, taking it all in. In some respects, they were the very best of times. We didn't have computers, calculators or tablets and the phone was made of black bakelite, weighed quite a bit and didn't fit in your pocket or handbag. Things were quite uncomplicated when I was growing up and I am thankful for that.

Now, I am all grown up, have received my SuperGold card, and we have computers, mobile phones, tablets etc., in fact, we have had them for quite some time. There are at least another three generations who have grown up with the proliferation of gadgets and electronic gizmos that we are told we *must* have.

How do young parents today deal with their children and all these screens, especially those connected to the internet? I am sure that there are a lot of responsible parents who oversee what their children are doing and watching. I am sure that they set reasonable boundaries for their little ones in regard to time limits and content. However, I am equally convinced that there are parents who use screens, such as their phones and tablets, as babysitters and pacifiers.

Wild assumptions you think? Just think of it! What sort of example do you as a parent set? Are you one who spends hours-on-end on your phone, tablet, computer or playing video games? Do you suffer from "fomo" and spend much time on social media? Remember, parents are the primary instructors for their children – they may just grow up like you!

A weighty side of this issue is the protection of your children's hearts and souls. Will the content they are exposed to cause them to grow up with distorted ideas about life and who they are in this world? Will they be psychologically damaged? Will they be lured away from their Saviour – just think of it!

I am thankful for the contribution of two young mums who have given thought to the dangers of screen time for their children and how best to manage things in a God-centred manner. *S.D.G.*

Mrs Emily Voschezang considers how to parent well with Tim Challies.

Mrs Laura van den Engel gives good guidelines for managing screen-time.

Mr Cees Majoor writes about his conversion to the Reformed Faith.

Mr John Rogers responds with further insight into truth-telling.

In this issue we also have a letter to the editor, book reviews, and current affairs news.

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

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EMILY VOSCHEZANG

It's safe to say all parents feel some degree of stress, shame or fear regarding the way their children interact with all the different screens in their homes. Practical advice on how to tackle these challenges is hugely valuable, and Laura van den Engel shares some great tips in her article in this issue of *Faith in Focus*. By contrast, the following article by well-known author and blogger Tim Challies steps back to offer more of a birds-eye view of the issues at hand, and a pep talk to parents in the trenches.

# Parenting well in a digital world

BY TIM CHALLIES

Even at the best of times there is nothing simple about raising children. But throw in a million new technologies – new devices and social networks and apps – and things get far more complicated still. This is every parent's challenge today, therefore I want to offer some tips on *parenting* well. I will use the format: 3 things you need to put off or reject, and 3 things you need to put on or embrace.

### **Reject ignorance, embrace education**

You need to put off ignorance and in its place put on knowledge. Whenever a new technology invades society, we see a consistent pattern: the older people tend to reject it while the younger people embrace it. The older people are perfectly content with the technologies they have always known, while the younger people are excited to try something new. The younger generation surges forward and the older is left behind.

This is true of parents. Parents often feel intimidated by new technologies, so do not bother to investigate them. Instead, they hand their children devices without really understanding their power and capabilities, and that leaves the children as the ones who bear all the risk. This is what we saw at the dawn of the Internet, where parents handed their children a computer and an Internet connection, never even considering that their children might just look for and find pornography. As a consequence, we found an entire generation of young people addicted to porn. Why? Because

the parents did not do what they should have done. It is easy to blame the boys, but we also need to look to those parents who did not fulfill their responsibility.

So parent, you need to reject ignorance and choose education. As new technologies come along and as existing technologies evolve, you need to remain educated about them. Before handing your children those new, shiny gadgets, or before allowing them to join those new, exciting social networks, or before letting them download the new apps everyone else is using, you need to educate yourself. Reject the temptation to be passive and ignorant, and instead force yourself to get educated.

### **Reject folly, embrace responsibility**

You need to put off foolishness and embrace responsibility. Today we are handing our children power tools and then acting shocked when they cut off their hands. This is absurd, and we should expect that our children will make serious mistakes if we do not guide them. So parent, you don't need only to educate yourself, but also your children. You need to have a plan for introducing new technologies to your children and for monitoring them as they use them. This is your responsibility – the responsibility of having a plan.

Whatever plan you implement needs to account for both training and monitoring your children. Think about training your teenager to drive the family car. When that child turns 16 and gets his learner's permit you would never just hand him the keys

and say, "Have a good time and be back by midnight!" You would get in the car, take him to a mall parking lot and allow him to drive around in circles for a few minutes. Maybe if he did exceptionally well you would even allow him to drive home. You would instruct him, watch him, and give him greater privilege as he showed greater ability and responsibility. When it comes to a car, trust and privilege are hard-earned and quickly-forfeited. And in the same way, you have no business handing your children a mobile phone or signing them up for Facebook without providing instruction and guidance.

The Bible assures us that folly is bound up in the heart of a child. The consistent message of Proverbs is that young people are lacking in wisdom and desperately need parents to teach them how to live with virtue. This puts all the responsibility on you. When you give your child a computer, a mobile phone, or a social media account, you are giving something that has immense power. Your child can use these things to do so much good, but he can also use them to do so much evil. If folly truly is bound

up in the heart of a child, you need to assume that without guidance, your child *will* use them for evil. You need a plan: a plan that will help teach children to use those technologies responsibly. Where should you begin? You could begin with "The Porn-Free Family Plan" or with my book *The Next Story* (the second edition, that is, which has "The Porn-Free Family Plan" as a new chapter). Don't be a fool; instead, embrace the responsibility that God has given you.

### **Reject fear, embrace familiarity**

By this point you may be thinking that these new technologies are just too risky. You may want to take the Amish approach and find ways to keep all of these technologies far away. You may feel it, but you cannot succumb to it. After all, this is the world your children are in, and it is far better to train them now while they are under your care than to send them off ignorant. So this is your solemn responsibility before God, to train them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord even as they use a mobile phone or even as they use Facebook.

People often ask me if can predict what will become of all of these technologies exploding onto the scene around us today. I never know what to say except this: God is going to use them in unexpected and amazing ways. He *will* glorify himself through them; I am utterly convinced of it. How do I know? Because God has always done that through every scary technological innovation. Think about it:

- When people first began to record things in writing instead of relying on their memories, many people were terrified, thinking that writing would breed ignorance. But God used writing in the best way – to record his Words, so even today we can find manuscripts going back thousands of years that contain what we now know as the Bible.
- One of the greatest technologies in the Roman world was the Roman road system. It was created to quickly move soldiers from place to place so they could dominate other peoples and crush rebellion. But the same roads that carried the feet of soldiers carried the feet of missionaries who took gospel to



Photo by Bermix Studio on Unsplash

the distant corners of world.

- The printing press came along in the 1500s and people feared its power. But what happened? Soon the printing presses were churning out Bibles, and the Bible sparked Reformation. Not only that, but the Bible became the bestselling book of all time.
- Radio came along and before long the gospel was being broadcast all over the world.
- The television was invented and soon people were watching services and crusades and the gospel was flying to distant lands.
- Digital devices allowed people to create apps, and very quickly Christians were churning out Bible apps. Already those apps are extremely popular, and more and more people today are experiencing God's Word in app form. And that's okay. That's beautiful. God is using digital technologies too.

We tend to think that no one has ever endured what we are enduring today. The truth is, this is a recurring pattern. Time and time again the world has witnessed technological explosions that have changed everything. Today we are at a new frontier, and we – you and I – have to do the difficult work of learning to use these things well. Instead of choosing fear, we need to choose familiarity. Instead of fearing new technologies, let's investigate them and look for ways we can use them to advance God's cause. Let's investigate the benefits and the risks, and learn how to use these things to carry out God's calling. And then let's put them to work in doing good for others and bringing glory to God.



Tim Challies' words are a valuable gut-check for most parents. He hits on the bigger issues parents face when it comes to dealing with technology. We feel hypocritical because we ourselves are addicted to screens. It feels insincere, perhaps even unfair, to demand restraint from our kids that we ourselves don't possess. Furthermore, we are often simply lazy about these things. We enjoy the peace and quiet of entertained children. How many times have my husband and I had friends over, and after half an hour of interrupted conversation we say, "Should we just put a show on for the kids?" It makes life easier.

Staying on top of the latest trends is hard work, too. Who has time in their busy schedules to figure out if this particular YouTube channel is appropriate or not? This is where resources like Focus on the Family's *Plugged In* ([www.pluggedin.com](http://www.pluggedin.com)) are absolutely invaluable. They share reviews and information about the most popular apps, movies, TV shows, YouTube channels and video games, giving parents a way to quickly discern if something is suitable for their kids. Of course, it's not an exhaustive compendium, but it does a decent job of showing you the latest trends and giving you a biblical framework with which to talk about them with your kids.

As Challies drives home, it is your solemn responsibility before God, as a parent, grandparent or mentor, to protect and prepare your kids for the digital future into which they're being plunged. This is not something to be put off lightly. Thankfully, we can step into this responsibility with confidence, knowing that God Himself will provide us with the strength and the peace we need as we prayerfully tackle these difficult subjects with our kids. The measures you take today to parent well can have an eternal impact for your children, your church, and God's greater kingdom.

*Emily Voschezang is a member of the Reformed Church in Pukekohe.*



LAURA VAN DEN ENGEL

# Managing screen time

computer technology and what your children might see online. With access to the internet, they can see pretty much anything. And studies have overwhelmingly shown that too much time on a smartphone or tablet, 'screen time,' has detrimental effects to both kids and adults. Feeling overwhelmed as a parent? Rightly so. Here are some ways to manage screen time.

'Screen time' is not something that our parents worried about when we were children. Sure, they kept an eye on how much TV we watched, but TVs were just that – television. Cartoons, the news, or movies. Today however, tablets and smartphones have become so much more powerful in their reach. We can read books, work, manage emails and our calendars, check the weather, read the news, take and edit photos, do online shopping, look at social media. All through one device that your kids have in their back pocket. Maybe you yourself do not have a good grasp of

**1.** Parents, watch your own screen time. We didn't grow up with parents who were constantly checking their phones but that is what kids today see. We don't yet know how this will affect them psychologically. Children learn by example and parents are the biggest influence on their kids' behaviour, especially when they are at a young age. As parents our screen time is often spent productively but all our children see is our heads buried in our phones – they do not necessarily know that we are



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The less interest we show in our devices, the less interesting or important they will seem to our children. Instead of reading your Bible app, get out the family Bible for your daily devotion or Bible study.

working, or ordering groceries, or reading a bible app. I try to leave my phone on the kitchen bench during the day so that I am less likely to check it so often or spend long periods of time using it in front of my kids.

2. Delay screens for as long as you can. The research is clear that screen time in children can increase the risk of developmental delays, obesity, hyperactivity, anxiety and depression, and affect their sleep. Screen time is not advised at all for children under two, as their vision is still developing, and looking at a screen can negatively affect this. Many schools require students to use a tablet from year one, so screen time might be inevitable for your child. And once they start using a device, the amount of time they spend on them is likely to increase gradually.

3. No devices in the bedrooms. Anything can be accessed on the internet, and if you allow your kids to use their phones or tablets in the privacy of their own room you cannot monitor what they are exposed to. Kids can easily access disturbing content either through their own curiosity or by accident through an advertisement. The average age at which children are exposed to pornography is around 11. We need to protect our children from this, as pornography skews their view of sex as God created it.

4. Limit internet access. Consider setting a time after which the wifi is turned off for the evening and have your kids hand in their phones or tablets. There are devices available that can turn off wifi at a certain time or when a data threshold is reached. Screen time shortly before bed can also adversely affect sleep, so your kids will benefit from this rule in more ways than one. Net Nanny and other internet control systems work by filtering content and blocking anything that is inappropriate or dangerous.

5. Make certain days, times or events device free. Try 'no phones during dinner,' or when watching a movie as a family, or on Sundays. Family dinners have numerous proven benefits for kids including higher grades, lower chance of eating disorders or experimenting with drugs, improved language skills and better relationships with their parents. However, none of these results can be expected if everyone around the table is absorbed in their screens. Relationships form when we use our undivided attention, and even young children are aware that they do not have your undivided attention if you are talking to them but looking at your phone. Furthermore, the more screen time your kids have generally the less they are able to concentrate on other activities. While visiting Indonesia I was captivated by a two-year-old who spent hours happily playing by herself in the dirt with a stick. It was a stark contrast to kids in New Zealand who have bedrooms full of toys but complain that they have nothing to do. Boredom sparks creativity: let your children become bored.

6. When your kids are old enough, teach them about the dangers of the internet. Our generation grew up aware of 'stranger danger', but our kids should be aware of this principle in relation to being online too. The internet is a dangerous place where an unsuspecting child can fall prey to bullies, scammers or predators. The more time they

spend online, the higher chance they could be targeted.

What does the Bible say about screen time? Nothing directly. But Proverbs has plenty of warnings against laziness, such as in chapter 6- "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider its ways and be wise." Sometimes our smartphones are used in an incredibly positive or productive way. But more often than not they are just a way for us to waste time, something our children can quickly learn themselves.

I would encourage you to think critically about screen time in your family. Is your device a tool to help you become more productive and efficient, or is it something that you are overly focused on and waste time with? A huge portion of the world's screen time is taken up with social media and I would argue that an overabundance of time spent on social media can lead to us breaking many of God's commandments. Social media in itself is not an evil thing, but it can lead to feelings of envy, lust, hatred and jealousy. We know it is addictive, therefore it also has the risk to become an idol in our lives.

The less interest we show in our devices, the less interesting or important they will seem to our children. Instead of reading your Bible app, get out the family Bible for your daily devotion or Bible study. Consider the words of Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!" God has charged parents with the responsibility of raising up our children in the instruction and training of the Lord. This includes properly managing screen time in your house, so you can control what your children are exposed to and protect them.

*Laura van den Engel is a member of the Reformed Church in Hukanui.*

# God's Providence:

## *from Roman Catholic to Protestant*

I have written this short life history to show how God's Providence works in one's life. By looking back through my story this has become quite obvious to me.

I was born in Holland during the Second World War (1941) into a large, devout, Roman Catholic family; we were quite engaged in work for the church because my uncle was a fulltime verger.

We were often asked for practical assistance related to his work, e.g. funerals and weddings.

I attended the Catholic primary school in my hometown which was run by teaching brothers. When I reached my final year (1954) my teacher asked me about my future but I could not give him an answer. He replied, "How about

becoming a brother?" This was something I had never thought about. I mentioned this to my parents who were also surprised. I agreed and at the age of 13 (!! ) I started my training for the brotherhood and professed my religious vows at 20 years of age (1961).

After one year of teaching in Holland I was asked by the congregation to become

### Focus on faith

## Reflections on Time Past

You have heard of the preciousness of time; and you are the people concerned, to whom God has committed that precious talent. You have an eternity before you. When God created you, and gave you a reasonable soul – he made you for an endless duration. He gave you time here in order to prepare for eternity, and your future eternity depends on the improvement of time.

Consider, therefore, what you have done with your past time. You are not now beginning your time, but a great deal is past and gone; and all the wit, and power, and treasure of the universe, cannot recover it. Many of you may well conclude, that more than half of your time is gone; though you should live to the ordinary age of man, your glass is more than half run out; and it may be there are but few sands remaining. Your sun is past the meridian, and perhaps just

setting, or going into an everlasting eclipse. Consider, therefore, what account you can give of your improvement of past time. How have you let the precious golden sands of your glass run?

Every day that you have enjoyed has been precious; yes, your moments have been precious. But have you not wasted your precious moments, your precious days, yes your precious years? If you should reckon up how many days you have lived, what a sum would there be! and how precious has every one of those days been! Consider, therefore, what have you done with them? What is become of them all? What can you show of any improvement made, or good done, or benefit obtained which is answerable to all this time which you have lived? When you look back, and search, do you not find this past time of your lives in a great measure empty, having not been filled up with any good improvement? And if God, that has given you your time, should now call you to an account, what account could you give to him?

How much may be done in a year! How much good is there opportunity to do in such a space of time! How much service

may people do for God, and how much for their own souls, if to their utmost they improve it! How much may be done in a day! But what have you done in so many days and years that you have lived? What have you done with the whole time of your youth, you that are past your youth? What is become of all that precious season of life? Has it not all been in barren to you? Would it not have been as well or better for you, if all that time you had been asleep, or in a state of non-existence?

You have had much time of leisure and freedom from worldly business; consider to what purpose you have spent it. You have not only had ordinary time, but you have had a great deal of holy time. What have you done with all the sabbath-days which you have enjoyed? Consider those things seriously, and let your own consciences make answer.

**By Jonathan Edwards**

a science teacher in Tanzania, East Africa. This involved obtaining a bachelor degree in physics in Canada for three years. Study in Canada was followed by teaching science in Tanzania (4 years) and Liberia (16 years).

The civil war in Liberia and my questioning of religious life made me decide to go back to Holland. I wrote a letter to the Pope to dismiss me from my vows and emigrated to New Zealand at the end of 1986. I got married to a Presbyterian and worked in a flower

nursery. My first wife passed away and I got to know my present wife, A. d V. She introduced me to the Reformed Church and I learned about the reformed faith. This was quite a change, especially the focus on the Word of God. In the Catholic Church the Word of God became more accessible only in the 1950's. I remember my father starting to read the Bible. It opened a new world for him.

By God's grace I did my profession of faith after being instructed by one of the elders. This was followed by our wedding

in 2010. I have never looked back. I feel spiritually well in this church community. I know I am "saved through Grace by Faith and the works flow forth out of gratitude". The central place of God's Word in the Reformed Church is the most important and my relationship with God is now more personal.

**C.M.**

## The Goodness of God

by Eric Alexander

Many years ago, my wife and I were on our summer holiday. At church on Sunday morning, we met a friend whom we had known as a student. He was a bachelor, and we took him to lunch. As we talked, he confided in us that he had recently been diagnosed with a serious cancer. Before we parted, he told us that he had already made some tentative plans for the future. "If God is good," he began, "I may be able to retire early, and live not far from here." Unfortunately, he had to hurry away. All I had time to say to him as he left was, "Do remember that Romans 8:28 will always be true." Afterward, the phrase which kept repeating in my mind was, "If God is good." Four words, of which the first is the most significant.

I hope our friend did read Romans 8:28 before that day was done. We lost contact, but I do want to tell you what he might have discovered from that verse. It reads, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called

according to his purpose."

Let me first of all point out two things Paul is not saying. First, he is not saying that life is guaranteed to be trouble free for the Christian. Indeed, in verse 17 of this very chapter, he tells us that "sharing in Christ's sufferings" is a condition of "sharing in his glory." Second, Paul does not claim to know or understand all of God's mysterious providences. "We know" in verse 28 sits comfortably in the same chapter with the disclaimer in verse 26: "We do not know what to pray for as we ought." But we do know God, and we know that whatever He decrees or permits will be for our ultimate good and for His glory.

Now we can follow Paul as he elaborates the way God is at work in our lives.

First, *God is personally at work for us.* You must have heard the secular version of this conviction, which has absolutely nothing to do with God, the Bible, or Christianity. It is usually expressed like this: "Don't worry; everything will work out alright, you'll see." That is human optimism, founded on nothing but wishful thinking. Paul's conviction, on the other hand, is founded on the character of God as a loving Father who cares for us and on His personal government over every detail of our lives (see v. 32).

Second, *God is ceaselessly at work for us.* We know this from the tense of the

verb Paul uses. It is the present tense, which implies an unceasing action. That means God is working out His purposes for us whether we are spiritually dry or spiritually refreshed. He never gives up. As A.W. Tozer put it, "Our heavenly Father ... does not keep office hours, nor set aside a time when he will see no one. God never changes His moods, or cools off in His affections, or loses enthusiasm."

Third, *God is universally at work for us and in us.* Notice that Paul says "in all things." That means that nothing is excluded from the personal government of God over what happens to us. It includes the bitterest as well as the sweetest of experiences. It includes the sinful acts of others, as Joseph states in Genesis 50:20: "You intended it for evil to me, but God meant it for good." John Calvin said, tellingly, "Whatever poison Satan produces, God turns it into medicine for His elect." Spurgeon said, "Omnipotence has servants everywhere."

Now the final question is, what type of person is able to say that God is working in all things for my good?

Well, Paul is anything but vague about that. Indeed, he is quite specific. His first description is "those who love God." But, of course, that love, in Scripture, is the love of commitment. I have often spoken with young people who told me they had declared their love for someone, only to

receive the answer, “Oh now, I don’t want to get too serious!” There are many who say that to God. Could you be one of them?

The second description in Romans 8:28 is “those who are called by God.” Now, whenever someone hears the gospel message, they hear the external call of God summoning them to personal faith in Jesus Christ. But that call, when it is truly heard inwardly by those to whom God has given spiritual ears to hear it, actually draws the sinner to Christ: “I heard the voice of Jesus say ‘Come unto me and rest’: I came to Jesus, as I was.” The question is, have you heard the call of God in the gospel, and have you found it drawing you to Christ?

So, “all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called by God.” They then discover that they are caught up into the perfect, sovereign purposes of God, which involve His “good

and acceptable and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2).

I well recollect Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preaching in Glasgow from Psalm 73. He told us that he had discovered that the first line of Psalm 73 could be better translated “God is good and nothing but good to Israel (his people).” I have been a Christian now for almost seventy years, and I must tell you that that is my personal testimony.

Joseph Hart in the eighteenth century expressed it perfectly in his hymn:  
*How good is the God we adore, Our faithful, unchangeable friend, His love is as great as His power, And knows neither measure nor end.*

*First published in Tabletalk Magazine, an outreach of Ligonier.*

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## Focus on the Christian life

GARY MILLAR

# Why living a Gospel-shaped life isn’t complicated — just hard!

There are lots of things in life that are relatively simple to explain, but hard to actually pull off. Swimming is just a matter of pulling with your arms alternately whilst kicking with your feet. Writing an essay is all about setting out a clear argument and topping and tailing it with an introduction and conclusion. Cutting through a plank of wood is just about measuring and marking, and then keeping the saw straight and the strokes smooth. Playing golf is all about keeping your head still and swinging the club through the ball. Simple. But simple as they are, all these things are also remarkably hard. And living a gospel-shaped life is like that.

When it comes to living with and for

the Lord Jesus, it’s easy to slip into thinking that because it feels hard a lot of the time (and in my experience, it does!) then it must be incredibly complex. But that would be a mistake. The Christian life is delightfully simple and delightfully rich at the same time. Essentially straightforward, but endlessly challenging! That’s why I’m convinced that getting the ‘basics’ of the gospel-shaped life in place as early as possible is so important, and relatively achievable.

Over the years, I’ve realised that lots of our problems in living for Jesus flow from the fact that we are a bit confused about (or lose sight of) the core elements of the gospel. So we forget that knowing God is the greatest privilege in the world. We forget that he is for us, will never let us go, and is constantly speaking to us through the Bible. We insist on doing things on our own, when God has made us part of his people for our good and his glory. We get down because we aren’t making as much progress as we like, and seem to be getting

worse rather than better – even though God told us up front that change is a slow and painful process. We make a mess of things because we slide into thinking and making decisions in the same way that everyone around us does, rather than looking at the world through the gospel. That’s why I’m convinced that taking time to lay solid foundations (or to go back and ‘check our foundations’ after we’ve been living with Jesus for a while) is such a good investment.

At the heart of the ‘gospel-shaped life’ is, in the words of Paul from 2 Tim 2:8, *remembering Jesus Christ, raised from the dead*. Working out from this glorious reality will shape every part of our lives, every day. ‘Need to Know’ is designed to step through the amazing implications of what God has done, is doing and will do for us in Christ (the ‘gospel’) in a way that will set us up for living the gospel-shaped life in the long haul. It’s written to help us to see that life with Jesus is not complicated – just hard. And just because it’s hard doesn’t mean we’re doing it wrong!

A gospel-shaped life is a matter of knowing God, listening to God speaking to us through his word, speaking to other people about God, being changed by God so that we love like God and allowing his agenda to shape every opinion and action we take. It really isn't all that complex – we can boil it down to the length of a tweet – but living it? That's hard.

The great news is, of course, that as Peter says, God has already given us everything we need for life and godliness in the Lord Jesus (see 2 Peter 1:3). Christianity isn't a 'try hard and do your best' thing – Christianity is built on the marvellous news that God has already done and provided everything we need in Christ to enable us to live for him. To put it a bit differently, in Christianity, God has already done all the heavy lifting – and continues to do it for us! I hope you can see the glorious simplicity of a gospel-shaped life – not least because that's exactly what will help us to keep going when it's tough – and I really should warn you up front (if you haven't got it yet) – that it will be! It will be hard because our world is a broken mess, and things regularly go wrong. It will be hard because this messed-up world is populated by broken people like you and me – who regularly let each other down, and live inconsistently, and hurt each other. It's hard because the Bible also says that we are involved in a cosmic conflict, and the forces of evil are focused on making it difficult for the church to live for Christ. But 'hard' isn't the same thing as 'impossible' – and the marvellous truth of the gospel makes it clear not only how we should live, but how in the strength of the Lord Jesus, we are able to pull it off as we walk with him.

Gary Millar is the Principal of the Queensland Theological College.

Originally published in Australian Presbyterian. Used with permission.

## Letters from New Zealand

D. G. VANDERPYL

April 1990

Ordering some books from a South African catalogue, I came across a small booklet written by an emeritated minister. I gave it a tick; it was only a couple of dollars and the title raised my curiosity. Did I ever enjoy reading that little gem! The author wrote it when he was in his eighties and consequently had titled it "80 – MY Best Year". There was so much delightful Wisdom in the pages of *that small book*. I felt like translating it from Afrikaans into English *and even made an attempt*, but it lost its flavour in the process so I wiped it from the screen. I now share it with some of my contemporaries and it surely perked (some of) them up.

Soon after reading that, a Mental Health magazine presented an interesting news item. "It has been reported that scientists are currently investigating the theory that age brings increased wisdom. The good news about this investigation is that if it can be established that there is a link between old age and wisdom, it may then (hopefully) improve the esteem in which elderly people are held in society, rather than being written off as redundant." The news item stated, 'The first point the researchers will need to establish is what constitutes wisdom, searching for current academic definitions ranging from judgment, decision-making ability, and comprehension of other points of view to the acceptance of life's uncertainties.' The difference between what that 80 year old pastor wrote in his little book, and what some scientists researched the elderly for, is all found in the Word of God. What a pity that so many scientists often seem to be digging in the wrong corner of the garden.

To complete this item of interest, my wife and I joined a trainload of super-annuitants on a day's outing to a country show above Auckland. The Railways provided a special train; the wagons were almost as old as their passengers. We were fanfared out of the Hamilton station by a lone piper, and accompanied by a large contingent of St. John's Ambulance volunteers and a doctor, in addition to a comedian to amuse us as we clickety-clacked and screeched through the surrounding scenery. The highlight for us was the development of a romance next



to us on the other side of the aisle. On the way out, we overheard a very elderly man, seated there, introduce himself to a very elderly lady next to him. On the return trip two glowing faces beamed and two gnarled hands lovingly intertwined and the happy couple were totally oblivious to the rest of us.

I hope that our above-mentioned researchers won't overlook this part of their study and come up with a proper academic explanation as to why cupid's arrows find their targets even in the most unexpected and unusual places.

Let's move on now to some other items of news from New Zealand. We almost did better than the men and women from the land of Oz at the Commonwealth Games in Auckland if one divides the number of medals won by the number of inhabitants in each country. One Aussie wrote to us: "We only heard the Australian national anthem coming across the Tasman from Auckland. We are watching the replays again and again; and we listen to the national anthem again and again." Frankly, we Kiwis are as biased as them Kangaroos!

One of our Maori ladies, a well-known stirrer, has been in Holland at the invitation of like-minded extremists. She was there to incite the natives of the province Zeeland to claim their name back from New Zealand. According to her own Book of International Law, if that claim could be substantiated, New Zealand would no longer be New Zealand; we would all become Aotearoans.

## May

Something quite incredible happened to me the other day. From time to time I get voluntarily roped in for some door to door collection. Each time it has been a disappointing experience. Numerous excuses, blatant lies; I also learned the best “dodgem” tactics for pretending that nobody was home. Success rates averaged between 20-30%. A nice young lass from the Salvation Army called at our home and asked me if I would be willing to canvas my street for the annual Salvation Army appeal. Armed with the badge of a genuine Salvation Army Collector and my little box with the slot in the centre I started on my journey down the road. They were waiting for me, to push their contributions large and small through the narrow slot. The carton box started to bulge by the time I got home. The success rate was 99%! I was treated with the utmost respect and awe as if I was some holy man from India. Some almost wanted to reverently touch me, hoping that a bit of that might rub off on them and get them, in addition to their contribution as an act of good works, a place up yonder. It was pure and undefiled superstition sprinkled with a fair amount of hypocrisy. I won't forget that experience for a long time.

Editorials are usually worthwhile reading as they not only reflect the policy of the particular newspaper or magazine but also try to influence the thinking of its readers. Late in February a local editorial had something really worthwhile to say about the demise of the family. Initially I intended to quote from it and add my comments but on second thoughts I will give you the whole editorial with one response chosen at random from a large number of “letters to the editor.”

### DEMISE OF THE FAMILY

*This nation's social experimenters might as well admit it: Their chipping away for years at our foundations has finally succeeded. They can now officially announce the near demise of the New Zealand family, as once we knew it. Far fetched? Not at all. Today's once normal mum, dad and children families now comprise less than a third of the nation's households and are getting fewer every year, according to the Planning Council. Meanwhile, more than a third of the nation's children will be brought up by a single parent eking out an existence*

*on a low income. More than half of our mums with dependent children work and one in eight New Zealanders simply live alone. Only one in eight households now has a working father and housewife mother. No longer does Dad bring home the bacon and Mum stay home to cook. Instead, we have a whole generation of latchkey kids who often miss meals.*

*The reason taxpayers now face a near impossible task in footing the bill for this family fallout, is that recent social reform has favoured this self-indulgent lifestyle at the expense of the basic cornerstone of the community.*

*De facto relationships, which by their very nature lack the permanency of a marriage contract, have been given equal social and taxation status. The right to be gay, to have abortions, to pursue whatever may take your fancy, rather than be a responsible parent has been trumpeted about so loudly for so long, that bringing up children in the good old-fashioned way has been made to seem drab by comparison.*

*Yet the home of yesteryear where Dad earned enough to allow Mum to stay home if she chose to, usually did far more for its members and for others outside it than the self-centred dollar-grabbing lonely lifestyles that are replacing in.*

*Abortion was unthought of, there was time for Gran, enough love to give a handicapped child a home, time to support a neighbour in trouble and time to help the needy. It gave a reason for fathers and sons who went to war to fight and was a rallying point and haven in times of stress and crisis.*

*Today, torn as it is by unemployment, economic stress and selfish lifestyles, the fabric of New Zealand society desperately needs the stabilising warp such families supply.*

*It also needs a government dedicated to restoring the family as the national linchpin, turning a deaf ear to the trendy cries of those who would seek to see it further sacrificed on the altar of supposed freedom.*

*For to continue to build on individual license rather than family duty is to risk the chaos that sank the Roman empire and every society since that has removed the family as its base.*

*Quite simply, for our children's sake we can't afford it.*

The newspaper received many positive responses such as, “You hit the bulls-eye”,

“Bravo for your courageous editorial,” and so on. One letter stated, I agree wholeheartedly with the truth of your remarks. Let's hope the message hits home to those who have up till now refused, or been blinded to see what really ails our society and will be willing, under God's guidance, to rectify the situation. Thank you for the reminder.

### Unabridged



then we are duty bound to protect the innocent against the aggressor, even if it involves a lie. This is carefully defined by the Southern Presbyterian, RL Dabney; "Is not human life sacred, and the property of the Maker alone? The law answers: Man may kill, when the guilty life is forfeited to God, and he authorizes man to destroy it, as his agent. So, I conceive, extreme purposes of aggression, unjust and malignant, and aiming at our very existence, constitute a forfeiture of rights for the guilty assailant... his right is forfeit to the superior right of self-defence.... By the rule that the greater includes the less, may he not also deceive him for a righteous purpose? ... only in the extreme case where life is maliciously assailed."

Rushdoony continues, "No one who is seeking to do us evil, to violate the law in reference to us or to another, is entitled to the truth. More than that, it can with scriptural grounds be called an evil to tell the truth to evil men and enable them thereby to expedite their evil. Asaph declared, 'When you see a thief, you are pleased with him (consent with him, AV; join with him, NIV), and you associate with adulterers' (Ps.50:18). To see theft and to be silent is to be party to the theft. To see men planning theft or murder, and then to answer truthfully concerning the whereabouts of the man, woman, or property they mean to kill, rape, or steal, is to be party to their offence. Such truth-telling is then participating in the crime. In terms of this, Rahab, had she told the truth, would have been an accessory to the death of two men" (the Israelite spies). "The Christian is under obligation to God to tell the truth at all times where normal communication exists. This truth-telling means, not the exposure of our privacy, but bearing a true witness in relation to our neighbour. It does not apply to acts of war. Spying is legitimate, as are deceptive tactics in warfare.... No man can heedlessly expose two men (the spies Rahab hid) to death on the pretext that his duty is to tell the truth irrespective of the circumstances, expecting God to deliver the men whom he himself refuses to deliver."

So also in the case of the Hebrew midwives who lied to Pharaoh. "Pharaoh was at war with God and with Israel; Israel had been enslaved, its people abused, and its newborn babes sentenced to death. This was clearly war; even more, it was legalized, wholesale murder. The midwives lied to Pharaoh to save the lives of the babes. It was clearly lying; it was clearly justified.

*And it was clearly blessed by God."*

He continues, "Scripture does speak at length of the fact that lying is hateful to God (Prov.6:16-19; 12:22; Lev.19:11; Col.3:9, etc.). Satan is spoken of as the father of lies (John 8:44; Acts 5:3). The critics of Rahab and of the midwives (as well as of Abraham, Isaac and others) fail to cite verses like 1 Kings 22:22,23, where God is declared to have put a lying spirit in the mouths of the false prophets in order to deceive a false king. The reason is that it militates against their absolutism. And this is the heart of the matter." And here, I believe, Rushdoony's consistent theological reference point results in a very important insight. "Shall we, in platonic fashion, absolutize truth-telling as a word, idea, or universal above God, or is God alone absolute? To absolutize truth-telling is to make Scripture an absurdity, because God in his sovereign power is alone absolute. Truth-telling is always in relation to and in terms of the absolute God and his law. Man has an obligation to speak truthfully in all normal circumstances, but he cannot permit evil men to steal, murder, or rape by his truth-telling, which must at all times have reference to an absolute God rather than an absolute idea."

He then quotes the Westminster Larger Catechism, which is to the same effect as Lord's Day 43 of our Heidelberg: "And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbour's good name." "If we are not permitted by this law to injure 'our neighbour's good name,' how much less are we permitted to aid evil men to steal his property, rape his women-folk, and kill him as well? Truth-telling under such circumstances is not a virtue but moral cowardice."

"The concept of truth-telling implicit in the critics of Rahab, the midwives, Abraham, Isaac, and others is related to a pagan doctrine of sanctification. In paganism, the self-perfection of the individual is the religious ideal and the purpose of sanctification. The perfect individual is his own ultimate. The goal pursued, whether by the Sufis or by Buddha, has no reference to God and his law-order, and, very often, little reference to other men as well. The self is the world of pagan holiness and of truth-telling which is abstract, i.e., it is abstracted from the reality of God and his law, and the reality of a world at war. An abstract, non-Christian moralism can thus declare that it is holy to tell the truth to enemies and thereby lead to the killing of friends, neighbours, or loved ones, because the only issue is the abstract purity of the

soul. Such a doctrine is clearly not Christian" (Institutes, p.542-549).

It seems to me that in recent issues of **Faith in Focus** the Rev. Joshua Flinn and Andrew Bajema make the same mistake on this, admittedly difficult, subject. Both brothers assume that all untruth-telling is a breach of the ninth commandment. In my judgment that is no more true than that all killing is a breach of the sixth. If I therefore had managed to pull off a lie to the German officer who had knocked on my door in Amsterdam in 1940 demanding to know if any Jews were in hiding I would thank God in my prayers that night that he had enabled me to do it; I would ask his forgiveness for whatever sin had marred my best works that day, as we always should, but the deliberate lie that saved a life would not be one I would have in mind.

PS. I am not presently convinced of Rushdoony's defence of Abraham and Isaac lying by telling pagan kings their wives were their sisters in Genesis 12:11-13; 20:2; 26:6-7. Sarah was Abraham's half-sister; Rebekah was a cousin. (See also his **Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis**.) Perhaps I don't as yet know enough of the ancient situation. Rushdoony raises interesting considerations in those men's favour and he may be right. But at points his assertions are assumptions.

Mr John Rogers is an emeritus minister and a member of the Reformed Church in Palmerston North.



## **CROSSROADS PRISON MINISTRIES NZ NEWSLETTER JUNE 2021**

In Luke Chapter 4:18-19 the Lord Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1-2 "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Four specific groups are mentioned in these verses – the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed. I give thanks to the Lord that we may serve Him and see Him at work in this ministry which seeks to bring spiritual freedom through the light of the Gospel giving men and women in prison a living hope.

Globally the year 2020 was a challenging year and this was also the case for Crossroads Prison Ministries around the world. Here in NZ we were able to continue to send out Bible Studies to prisoners. However with each lockdown, whether it was at level 2, 3 or 4 there was a disruptive flow on affect. Chaplains were either very restricted in their contact with prisoners or not able to go into the prisons at all. Postal services in and out of the prisons were also severely affected. These issues continued into this year with further lockdowns across the country in February and March.

Despite the challenges and disappointments we know that NOTHING can stop the Word of God doing what God the Father has purposed for it to accomplish.

In the NZ prisons there are many new faces on the Chaplaincy teams which

highlighted the need to visit and introduce them to the ministry of Crossroads. I travelled to Auckland, Hamilton and Whakatane during September/October 2020. In March 2021 I was in Dunedin and Invercargill. In April/May 2021 I was in Christchurch and Takaka. During these trips I also met with the volunteers reviewing the lessons as well as training more people interested in doing this work. In all these places the response has been very positive and encouraging.

More Chaplains have requested the Crossroads Monthly Student Updates for their prison sites. Recently one of the Chaplains emailed: "This is very handy as we now know who is studying with you. This goes a long way in conversation and encouragement for those who are not engaged with these lessons. Thank you so much. God bless your work."

A few days before Christmas 2020 we moved into our new office. It is a lovely area to work in with lots of space. We are very thankful to the Lord for His guidance as we navigated through the various stages to get to this end. Also thank you so much to the people who financially contributed to make this all possible. We are very grateful for your generosity and support.

The Lord equips each of us with different gifts and talents to serve Him in the 'body' where He is the Head. As the body is made up of many parts so there are many who support this ministry. We are dependent on the Lord and each other – those who pray, those who contribute financially, those who review the lessons and write letters of encouragement, those who provide hospitality, and those who speak to others about the work of Crossroads. Thank you so much to all of you to help this ministry to function effectively in the prisons. Praise the Lord for His design to bring His Word with power to the ends of the earth including those in prison.

Many of our students struggle with literacy and often are unable to express themselves well yet the words 'thank you for the lessons' coming from them is loaded with so much meaning. It is very encouraging to see them persevere with the lessons. I am sure that the love and support expressed in the letters from those who review the lessons goes a long way to encourage the students to keep trying. Recently a student wrote: "Manga Messiah lesson is too hard and I can't finish it. I don't understand how to do it. At least I have tried to do it. I am so sorry that I can't do this Course unless you got something more easy for me to do."



I am upset that I can't do it." We got in touch with the Chaplain to see if there was someone, perhaps a prison volunteer who could help him. About 2 weeks later we received the following letter from him: "I have found someone to help me to do my Manga Messiah course. The person I got is a Christian himself so that will help me to go all the way." He has continued with the studies.

It is a joy to share more of our student responses with you all. "I am being released on ... My new address is... Please send the study there. Thank you for all your support. Really appreciate all the nice letters too. I look forward to more study. God bless and much love." Another student writes: "I just wanted to say thank you so much for your guys support and help with this study. I'm now getting a lot out of this and want to get to know Him more as me and my partner have had our first baby and she is 3 months old. I want a better life for my family than jail. I've spent the last 18 years of my life in and out of jail. I'm nearly 35. I'm ready to break free from all this. I've

also left the gang to better my new life with God. So thank you so much. God bless." Another student shares with us: "My relationship with God is growing. Thank you for helping me with my spiritual journey. I am so grateful. Thank you all at Crossroads. I am happy to have God in my life. Please can you pray for me and my partner. She is now on a journey with God to and I believe God reached out to her. He answered my prayers. Thank you Lord."

"Hello Crossroads, I want to say thank you for your letters. I am grateful for your input in giving me the guidance and keeping my faith strong. It definitely helps. I hang each new letter on my wall just to keep reminding me of the good people and love that is around. It gives me the confidence to be able to keep myself grounded and to set a good example for others here. I thank God for your help and inspiration."

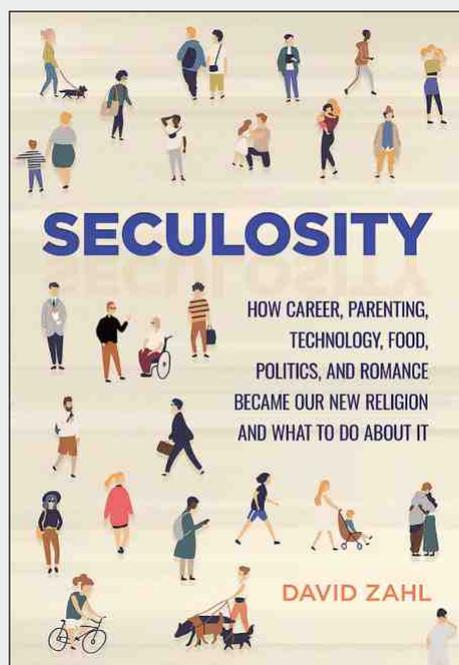
"My cell mate showed me the Manga Messiah book of his and I was hooked. Reading the first few pages put a big smile on my face. It is easy to understand. Thank

you. It's hard for me to understand big words in the Bible. It put me off reading it. Forgiveness is what I am working on even now. Just writing this down I'm crying, why? I feel reborn again. I feel my whole being is transformed. Taking responsibility for my actions was a big weight of my back."

"Your letters are warmly received and read out to our small but growing Bible Study group. Some of who I now understand also started with Crossroads. My personal thank you for providing me with spiritual guidance and support during this time separated from my family in Australia."

If you would like further information you can contact us at [cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz](mailto:cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz) or write to Crossroads Prison Ministries, PO Box 11005, HASTINGS 4156.

## Books in focus



### ***Seculosity: How Career, Parenting, Technology, Food, Politics, and Romance Became Our New Religion and What to Do about It***

by David Zahl. Fortress, 2019.  
Hardcover, 250 pages, \$18.69  
(Amazon)

**Reviewed by OP elder Joseph W. Smith III**

"For an increasing amount of the population, to be alive in the twenty-first century is to wonder privately how much longer you can keep feeding the beast before you keel over" (6).

That's author and podcaster David Zahl in his terrific new book, *Seculosity*. He's talking about our society's exhausting (and self-imposed) busyness – just one of many "new religions," which, as the book shows, have replaced genuine spirituality in modern culture.

The widespread nature of this "secular spirituality" is indicated by Zahl's subtitle: *How Career, Parenting, Technology, Food,*

*Politics, and Romance Became Our New Religion and What to Do about It*. As the author puts it in his text, "The religious impulse is easier to rebrand than to extinguish" (xii).

In a series of pithy, insightful, and often convicting chapters, Zahl shows how contemporary Americans use such things as work, family, love life, and political affiliation to gain the sort of self-worth, inner peace, and freedom from guilt that were once the purview of traditional Christianity.

Yet he also shows that in the long run, these quasi-religions are actually much crueler taskmasters than the biblical gospel of free grace from a kindly Father who (unlike worldly pursuits) does not constantly require us to "measure up."

"We may be sleeping in on Sunday mornings in greater numbers," Zahl writes, "but we've never been more pious. Religious observance hasn't faded apace 'secularization' so much as it has migrated – and we've got the anxiety to prove it" (xii).

*Seculosity* is especially hard-hitting in its examination of jobs, love, and politics. Zahl shows how success and failure are now automatically (and absurdly) linked to career – and how making romance the be-all and end-all has actually weakened lifelong marriage.

As for politics, *Seculosity* explains why this has become increasingly divisive and vitriolic: because we've staked our entire well-being on our own political stance, resulting in moral outrage, finger-pointing (by which we alleviate our own guilt by accusing others), and virtue signaling, as Zahl penetratingly dissects (148).

And yet the church itself is not free from these problems! Zahl's penultimate chapter, "The Seculosity of Jesusland," insists that we, also, inside the church have often replaced biblical dependence on Christ with a works-oriented mindset that results in one-upmanship, superficiality, and exhaustion. At the same time, he shows how both the church and the true gospel really do provide a refuge from the black hole of replacement religion.

Undergirding the whole book is a winsome, conversational, and often humorous writing style – one that is notably free from Evangelical jargon, while also drawing on a wide array of sources both secular and Christian.

This is a wise, helpful, and genuinely grace-driven book that can easily be shared with unbelieving friends and neighbors.

*New Horizons*, July 2020

***With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will Toward Christ***

by A. Craig Troxel. Crossway, 2020. Paperback, 224 pages, \$13.38 (Amazon)

**Reviewed by OP pastor John D. Van Meerbeke**

One may say, "My heart says one thing, but my brain says another." But Craig Troxel, professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California, gives the interested reader a better biblical understanding of the heart as the source of what we think and feel and say and do. Having served for twenty-four years as pastor of two churches, Troxel provides a generous and instructive study that will serve the church for years to come in studying Reformed spirituality, as devotional reading, and as a Sunday school text for young people and adults. Thirteen chapters are a useful convenience for a class

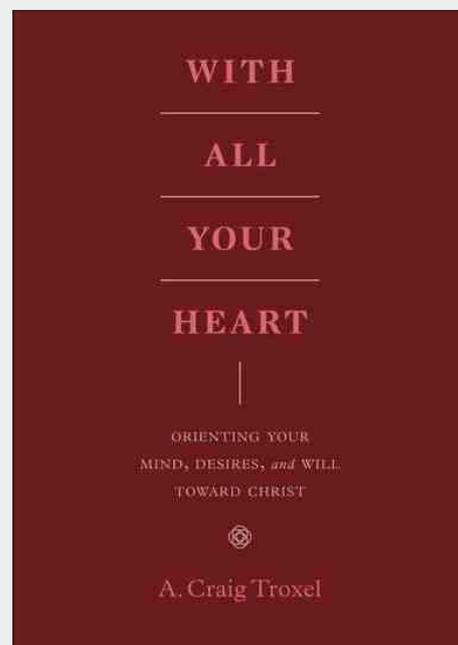
quarter. The book divides into four parts, discussing the heart's mind (with Christ as Prophet), desires (with Christ as Priest), and will (with Christ as King), and concluding with the keeping of the heart and the Lord as our keeper (Psalm 121).

Early in the book, the author underscores the modern usage of the word "heart" in our language, providing plenty of examples of popular conceptions (and misconceptions), but also he lays the groundwork for his study by showing that the word occurs nearly a thousand times in sacred Scripture, enough to fill a two-hundred-page book worthy of your learning (17). Most pages have footnotes and an abundant supply of supportive Bible texts along with a liberal provision of references from authors like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Edwards, Ryle, Lewis, and Keller. And the reader will be reminded throughout the book that the gospel of Jesus Christ is alive and well in the true heart, despite frequent discouragement. Only by God's sufficient grace are hearts purified. Thanks be to God! Troxel writes, "Christ's free grace renews us constantly through the driving force of the Word of God, the power of prayer, and the nourishment of the Lord's Supper, all of which is carried out by the Holy Spirit" (97). In his biblical, theological, and practical treatment of the heart, Troxel examines the real matters of the heart for Christians in all their painful struggles and sometimes surprising successes, stressing that God is our ultimate guard and keeper.

The book is very readable and accessible in its scope and detail. In all, the author is a generous writer. Looking up the Scripture references (and hymns) will only add to the depth and richness of the reading experience. There is a five-page general index of subjects and authors and a Scripture index with well over 1,500 entries.

Crossway has done us a favor in helping to produce this handy book. Those of us who have sat under Craig Troxel's teaching and preaching ministry will recognize good reading and good feeding in this highly recommended volume on the biblical anatomy of the heart, written from the heart, for the heart.

*New Horizons*, July 2020



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## Letter to the editor

Dear Sir,

I write with concern over the following;

The article entitled "Conspiracy Theories and the psychology behind them" in the *Focus on current affairs* section in the July 2021 issue.

The whole article strongly advocates that anyone who questions the common believed message that the main stream media and ungodly governments are telling us regarding Covid 19; must be a conspiracy theorist.

The paragraph, "Last year COVID -19 was a new coronavirus, and little was known about it. It takes time and painstaking research over months and years to fully understand what we're dealing with. Some people find it very difficult to live without knowing. And, so, they assume it's better to latch onto something, even if it's the wrong thing than to know nothing. For these people believing a lie is better than facing reality."

Also later on in the article, "those who have a higher education can be harder to convince that they are wrong."

Then later on in the article under the heading of "The need for self": "People who focus on individual rights and freedoms

as more important than concern for the broader community are more likely to be anti-mask, anti-lockdown, and anti-vaccine. They'll view restrictions as attacks on personal freedoms rather than common-sense measures to protect society. I'm going to do what I want and no socialist politician/dictator/communist is going to tell me what to do. Sound familiar?"

These comments are massive leaps in logic and finger pointing and name calling for people who have genuine concern for individual freedoms and in finding out the truth, rather than just blindly swallowing the message of the left wing main stream media as gospel.

I share the same concerns regarding the Covid 19 issue, and the many lies and inconsistencies we are fed daily by the left wing main stream media and by the anti-God government, and I am motivated by love for my brothers and sisters in the Lord and for the wellbeing of all people in free society.

The authority behind this article in *Faith in Focus* is a certain Rob Buckingham, the founding pastor of Bayside church, a thriving faith community in the Bayside suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

When you look at that church's website they state "Bayside church is a Pentecostal church."

They also state "Our choice is simply to accept His love for us. All we need to do is say a simple prayer like this ... "Lord Jesus, I acknowledge I have lived a life separated from you and have committed many wrongs. I ask you to forgive me and I ask you to be my Lord and Saviour. I choose to live from this day on with you as my Lord. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit and guide me from this day forward. Thank you Lord for loving me! Amen.

So my concern is: in our Reformed magazine, *Faith in Focus*, we have a large article which is originated by and authored by this church pastor and that theology.

Brothers and sisters, let us be careful where we get our authority and thinking from.

God bless you all

**Will Van Kessel**  
**Reformed Church of Dovedale**

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## Focus on current affairs

# New poll shows kiwis want to keep 'Critical Theory' out of classrooms

**Bob McCoskrie**

**July 20, 2021**

A new poll has sent a clear message to New Zealand's Government: don't politicize

schools, and keep critical race theory out of the classroom.

In the poll of 1,000 New Zealanders surveyed by Curia Market Research, respondents were asked whether they strongly supported, somewhat supported, somewhat opposed or strongly opposed the following topics being taught in New Zealand schools:

- Preparing students for the workforce
- Teaching students how to reason and think well
- Teaching students to engage in political activism and protests

- Teaching students that their race is the most important thing about them
- Teach students that white people are inherently privileged
- Expose students to different opinions for and against an idea.
- Teach students that Maori and other people of colour are inherently oppressed and victimised
- Teach reading, writing and arithmetic
- Assign white students the status of 'privileged' and assign non-white students the status of 'oppressed'
- Only expose students to ideas that the

teacher or school believes are correct as believing the wrong ideas on important social issues is very harmful.

- Teach students that New Zealand is systemically racist today

In terms of net support, “Teach reading, writing and arithmetic”, “Teaching students how to reason and think well”, “Preparing students for the workforce”, and “Expose students to different opinions for and against an idea” had at least 80%+ net support.

There was opposition to “Teaching students to engage in political activism and protests” (-12%) and strong opposition to “Only expose students to ideas that the teacher or school believes are correct as believing the wrong ideas on important social issues is very harmful” (-62%).

There was also significant opposition to all elements of ‘critical theory’ being taught in school classrooms: “Teaching students that their race is the most important thing about them” (-32% net opposition), “Teach students that Maori and other people of colour are inherently oppressed and victimised” (-37%), “Teach students that New Zealand is systemically racist today” (-43%), “Teach students that white people are inherently privileged” (-61%), and “Assign white students the status of ‘privileged’ and assign non-white students the status of ‘oppressed’” (-68%).

There was little difference in view based on age, gender or area. Interestingly, strong opposition to elements of critical theory were held across the political divide, including Labour and Green party supporters.

Despite widespread acceptance of bi-culturalism and the increasing use of Te Reo Māori, terms like “systemic racism”, “White guilt” and “White privilege” are being enthusiastically embraced by schools, organisations, and governments.

An example of this language can be found in the Ministry of Education Te Hurihanganui policy, which was created to “Address racism and inequity... throughout the education system”. The Teaching Council of NZ, responsible for setting and maintaining professional standards for all teachers in New Zealand, have released their “Unteach Racism” resource to “Identify, confront and dismantle bias and prejudice so teaching is free from racism”. Critical race theory is implicit in all of this material.

As Family First has argued in their policy paper on this issue, it’s wrong to teach children to be defined by their race rather than as individuals, as though they are only the colour of their skin and that’s all they



will ever be.

This is confusing to children and creates resentment, tribalism and division in schools. Fighting racism with racism is a double standard.

Schools should be prioritising excellence, merit and personal achievement, to inspire people from all ethnic backgrounds and genders to achieve their potential and not teaching children collective guilt and racial superiority theory.

Critical theory over-simplifies the problems by making everything about race, while ignoring the many other factors contributing to poverty and societal dysfunction – not least of which being family breakdown.

Good teachers simply don’t have the time or inclination to politicise their classroom and teach children to be woke, and the clear message from this latest polling is that New Zealand families agree: “Keep it out of the classroom.”

The nationwide poll which was commissioned by Family First NZ was carried out 28 June to 1 July 2021 and has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%.

<https://mychristiandaily.com>

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## 8 years waiting for freedom, U.S. Supreme Court declines to hear Christian florist’s case

MCD Staff | July 6, 2021

Washington floral artist Barronelle Stutzman was hoping that the second time would be the charm.

But after roughly eight years of standing for her freedom, two trips to the Washington Supreme Court, and two petitions to the U.S. Supreme Court, the high court announced today that it won’t hear her case.

This is devastating news. Barronelle had hoped that the Supreme Court would deliver justice and protect her freedom – and yours. Now, her future remains uncertain.

Barronelle is the owner of Arlene’s Flowers in Richland, Washington. And

she serves everyone who sets foot in her store. This includes her longtime customer and friend Rob Ingersoll, whom she served for nearly ten years.

Barronelle loved to design beautiful and creative floral art for Rob. But when Rob asked her to design floral arrangements to celebrate his same-sex wedding, Barronelle knew that because of her Christian beliefs about marriage, she couldn't agree.

So, she walked Rob to a quiet part of her shop, took his hand in her own, and gently told him why she couldn't do what he asked. Barronelle then referred Rob to three local floral artists who she knew would do a good job. They chatted a few more minutes about Rob's wedding plans, hugged, and then Rob left the shop.

Then it was over. Or so Barronelle thought.

But Rob's partner posted about the encounter on social media. That post generated news coverage seen by the Washington Attorney General, which prompted him to file a lawsuit against Barronelle. And using unprecedented measures, he not only went after Barronelle's business, but also sued her in her personal capacity. Later, the ACLU also joined in,

filing a separate lawsuit on behalf of Rob and his partner.

Now, Barronelle may lose her business and her life's savings. The life she and her husband worked so hard to build could be forever changed.

### **Barronelle's case may have ended at the Supreme Court – but there is hope**

In 2017, the Washington Supreme Court ruled against Barronelle the first time.

Later that year, Barronelle appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. It then sent her case back to the Washington Supreme Court in June 2018 after the decision in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case.

In *Masterpiece*, the U.S. Supreme Court made it clear that government hostility toward people of faith has no place in society. And the State of Washington has certainly been openly hostile toward Barronelle's religious beliefs. Just consider how the state has pursued unprecedented measures to punish Barronelle but did not file a lawsuit when another business obscenely berated and discriminated against Christian customers.

Unfortunately, the Washington Supreme Court doubled down on its first ruling against Barronelle.

And now the U.S. Supreme Court's decision not to hear Barronelle's case means that the ruling against her will stand.

But while this may be a victory for opponents of freedom, there is hope. People like wedding photographer Bob Updegrave, web designer Lorie Smith, and many others are still standing for the freedom to live and work consistently with their faith. And Alliance Defending Freedom will continue to defend them – all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, if necessary.

After all, the First Amendment's enduring promise is that people of good will are free to live out their beliefs without facing government hostility or punishment. Whether you agree with Barronelle, Bob, and Lorie about marriage or not, you should still support their right to live and work according to their faith.

Because if they don't have that freedom, then none of us do.

*Alliance Defending Freedom advocates for your right to freely live out your faith*



# Vicar facing discipline for singing without a face mask



Rev. Charlie Boyle, a vicar in Dorset, was pressured to leave his post and his home – along with his wife and four sons – and now faces discipline over allegations relating to Covid.

During the pandemic, he had sought to minister the gospel – sharing his faith and pastoring his congregation – while avoiding spreading Covid-19. But at a meeting after Easter Sunday 2021, the Archdeacon of Dorset met Charlie and put pressure on him to leave his post and the vicarage by the end of July.

The Archdeacon didn't say why. But he wrote to Charlie on 24 June 2021 listing allegations that Charlie had broken Covid rules.

What were these claims?

He had sung "Thine Be the Glory" at the end of an Easter Sunday service while leaving church. He had returned Bibles to the church building. He had hugged a mourner following a funeral. He had conducted an online service from a beach hut he rents.

What would Jesus say? Charlie's story was featured in this week's Mail on Sunday.

Charlie can answer every one of these claims – he has not been reckless. For example, he has diagnosed asthma but sought to wear a mask when possible for the comfort of others. Another accusation was that he had not taken responsibility for the church's Covid risk assessments, despite strong evidence that he did.

But even if he had, these are not sins worthy of the heavy-handed discipline being enacted by the Archdeacon.

Putting Charlie through discipline over

these matters paints a picture of church authorities acting like Pharisees over Covid, while doing nothing about other church leaders promoting all sorts of false teaching within the Church of England.

Members of Charlie's congregation have rallied to support him after discovering that he had been asked to leave, particularly as he was unaware of the allegations against him.

One message of support said: "Having discovered to my horror that Charlie and Sarah Boyle are being asked to step down from their present roles, I felt it only fair and right to let you have my input as someone who has been quite actively involved with them since they arrived eight years ago."

Another said: "I know there can always be difficulties in any parish, not least leading a parish through a pandemic. Charlie has achieved this admirably in my opinion."

Furthermore, a member of the congregation said: "Rev. Charlie Boyle has brought a vibrancy to All Saints during the past eight years and a younger congregation have embraced the church wholeheartedly with him at the helm. It has been a wonderful experience and he should be congratulated on the work he has achieved."

'I won't give up my calling.'

Charlie commented on his case:

"I am deeply saddened and hurt that Covid regulations are being used as an excuse by the church hierarchy to bully me and my young family.

"During the pandemic, due to government guidance, churches and their congregations have become places of

division and fear instead of the places of prayer, refuge, worship, outreach and hope they should be.

"We must all take precautions of course, but we also have to ask the question of what Jesus would do in such a crisis?"

"Churches have been forced to capitulate to government and Church of England guidance and have been prevented from supporting their communities in the biggest crisis since the war.

"I have done everything possible to reassure and protect people's material, emotional and spiritual well-being."

+ *Christian Concern*, 70 Wimpole Street, London W1G 8AX, England, 020 7935 1488



## GENERAL MANAGER

Vacant Position – Expressions of Interest Required

Fair Haven is seeking an experienced General Manager to provide overall leadership to the organisation. This is a part time position 20-30hrs/wk.

In this role you will provide leadership to the management and staff in the ongoing development of a Christian home environment benefitting residents and their families. Financial Management, Governance and Compliance, Risk Management, Policy Development, Strategic Planning, and Community Liaison are key components of this role requiring a competent person with a hands-on approach. While business experience is essential, Aged Care experience is desirable.

## FACILITY MANAGER

Vacant Position – Expressions of Interest Required

Fair Haven is seeking an experienced Health Care Manager or Nurse (Enrolled or Registered) to manage the residential home. This can either be a full or part time position 30-38 hrs/wk.

In this role you will provide leadership to the Clinical Care Coordinator, the Catering Manager, nursing, administration, and care staff to deliver quality resident care, ensure policies and procedures are followed and compliance and quality standards are met. This position includes Human Resource Management, Accreditation and Quality Management, Incident and Clinical Management, ACFI Management, Budget Management, and liaison with regulatory authorities and government departments.

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Fair Haven provides homes for the aged, and residential care for the frail aged members of the Free Reformed Church Community in Western Australia and aims to do this by fostering a harmonious Christian environment where both staff and volunteers can use their God-given gifts to the wellbeing and benefit of their elderly brothers and sisters. A successful candidate for either of these positions would demonstrate a collaborative, servant leadership style with outstanding people and good communication skills.

If you have the above-named qualities and skills, we would love to talk to you, so, for a discussion, for more information, a copy of the job description, or to apply for either position please speak to the Board Chairman: **Harry Pitlo**.

**Phone 0417988059 Email: [boardchairman@fairhaven.asn.au](mailto:boardchairman@fairhaven.asn.au)**