

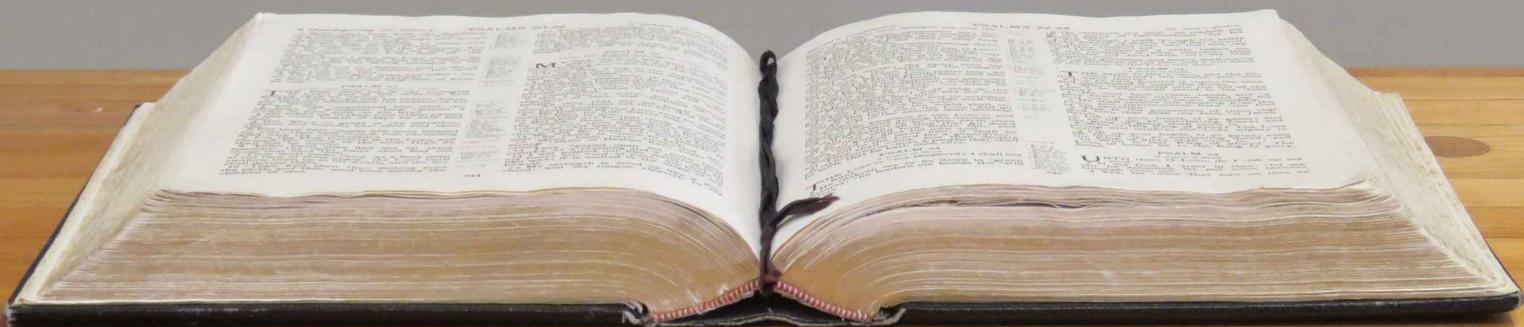
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in **FOCUS**

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REFORMATION

AND REVIVAL?



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Editorial

Dear Reader. Have you ever been to an evangelistic or revival meeting? I wouldn't be very surprised if you said "no". You may be somewhat astonished to find out that I have been to such a gathering.

It was over 40 years ago in Perth, Western Australia where I grew up. I was invited by a work mate to come and listen to an evangelist preaching the gospel. What I witnessed was a very slick event, with the preacher making an appeal for all to accept Jesus Christ. There was soothing music in the background and toward the end an altar call during which everyone sang over and over again "Just as I am without one plea", until some came forward and gave their lives to Jesus.

I walked out that evening thinking I was saved on the basis of a decision that I had made!

Another friend at work subsequently brought me to his church, which had as their subordinate standard the Westminster Confession of Faith. It was in that church that I was confronted with the truth of the Gospel! Oh, it was a different gospel to what I had heard that night at the revival meeting. It was a gospel of sovereign grace, a gospel where there was a call to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no call for me to "give my heart to Jesus" or to make a decision inviting Jesus into my heart. What I heard was:

1 "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, ... and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy ... made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together ..." (Eph 2).

That was the most confronting thing that I had ever heard! In my natural man, I was dead in sin, and then by God's grace made alive together with Christ – by grace I was saved! It became evident to me over time that it wasn't by a mere decision that I had made, but the Lord working in me through His word and Spirit, to will and to work for His good pleasure, all of which was through reading the Scriptures and hearing the faithful preaching of the word until it gripped my soul.

I certainly believe that the evangelistic meeting I went to was a factor in my attending a church and being confronted with the truth of my sin. But, it was the preaching and teaching that was the vital factor in the revival/reformation of my life and the lives of many others throughout history. Real revival/reformation needs to have faithful preaching, which results in faithful worship – the gathering of God's people to His glory.

Do we need revival or reformation in our day? Do we even have an appetite for it? Our contributors consider these questions in this issue. *S.D.G.*

Featured in this issue:

Mr Aaron Warner writes about the history of revivals and what it could look like today.

Mr Andre Holtslag asks if we have an appetite for revival/reformation.

Mrs Amanda Poppe considers the blessedness of motherhood.

Mr Martin Leenders offers practical help for marriages damaged by the use of pornography.

Mr Hans and Mrs Lisa Vaatstra send an update of the work in PNG.

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.

Reformation and revival?

AARON WARNER

Revival: what does it look like?

Imagine walking into one of those marquee tents so famously found in the circus. Upon entering you are greeted with an extraordinary sight. The man at the front, holding a Bible and excitedly quoting Scripture, is running from one end of the stage to the other. The front row of people is falling backwards as the animated preacher waves his hands over them. Others in the gathering are roaring like lions or bleating like sheep. Another group in the back are laughing hysterically. Still others seem to be speaking in another language. As the service goes on the preacher invites anyone who wants to receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour to come forward. Out of the three hundred people gathered, fifty are led in prayer and baptized. As the pande-

monium subsides, the preacher concludes the service with a prayer thanking God for the revival that has occurred during their time together.

What I have described have been examples of what some people consider to be a revival. In the Toronto Blessing people were overcome with holy laughter and made animal noises. You often see on TV the 'slaying in the Spirit'. When we pray for and hope for revival is that what we are hoping for? What is a revival biblically and historically? What were the causes of revivals? What would it look like in our day and age?

What is revival?

First of all, we need to get a Biblical definition of what a revival is. Much of

If we get back to what the word "revival" means, we see the primary way that the Holy Spirit shows His presence.



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Do we share the tears of Jesus who wept over those who had rejected him? Do we share in the grief of God that men perish without knowing him because he does “not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”?

the modern church believes that the animal sounds, the holy laughter, the speaking in tongues, and being “slain in the spirit,” are all evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence. They are correct in understanding that revival must manifest the working of the Holy Spirit. However, nowhere in Scripture do we see that the Holy Spirit will show His presence in these ways in this day and age.

If we get back to what the word “revival” means, we see the primary way that the Holy Spirit shows His presence. In a non-religious and non-historical use of the word, “revival” has to do with bringing back to life. This brings us to John 3. In this passage, Nicodemus is told that you must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. The idea that you need to be born again points to conversion, but also to new life. Jesus says that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Flesh, in the Gospel of John, has to do with our sinful state that is in opposition to God and produces death. Jesus is teaching that the Holy Spirit must bring about new life. Our flesh can only produce that which is opposed to God, but only the Holy Spirit can bring about true life in devotion to God. Upon conversion, we know that the Holy Spirit has been present and there has been a revival in that individual.

I know that when we talk about revival we are not merely discussing an individual coming to faith here or there. However, I think it is helpful to distinguish what I consider to be a true revival in contrast to the variety of events that are called revivals. With this in mind, the very first revival under the new covenant is recorded in Acts 2. There, three thousand souls were added to the church (Acts 2:41). In very short order, the church went from about one hundred and twenty (1:15) to about five thousand (4:4). Here we see the Spirit bringing true revival through conversion, new life, and regeneration.

Now some of you might point out that speaking in tongues, in this case, was also evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence. I do not have space for all the details but note the two wonderful things happening here. Some of the events are repeatable, such as the conversions to Christ. Others are not repeatable. For example, never again do you see tongues of fire fall upon people. Also, speaking in tongues was one of hearing not of speaking. Everyone heard in their language. The disciples were not

speaking in some foreign ecstatic language. The tongues in this particular case served to help people understand and hear the word of the Lord and be saved!

Other revivals in history also have been linked and shared the same pattern of mass conversions as evidence of the Spirit’s manifestation. One of the most well-known revivals in history, occurring both in America and England, was called the Great Awakening. During the Great Awakening, some have suggested that there were between 20,000 to 50,000 members added to the New England Churches in America.¹ Other historians record that George Whitfield preached to “crowds of up to 8,000 people nearly every day for over a month.”²

However, throughout history, these great revivals also evidenced themselves in another way. Not only were there new converts, but also a greater devotion and zeal by those who were already a part of the church. Therefore, I would conclude along with Sinclair Ferguson that a revival is “when professing believers are aroused and non-Christians are brought into the kingdom in large numbers, each with an individual sense of sin and need, but in the context of a widespread sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.”³

God’s great means for revival:

Now that we know what a revival is let’s consider how these revivals occurred. Because when we read about these revivals, we are so often asking ourselves the question why did this happen? Why doesn’t it happen in our day? What were the causes that brought revival? Maybe we can imitate them and bring about a revival for our own country. Charles Spurgeon, a man who has been heralded as one of the great revivalists, preached to his congregation of about six thousand a sermon titled “Preparation For Revival.”⁴ In this sermon from Amos 3:3, Spurgeon points out that to have the Lord with us, “we must be agreed as to the means to be used in revival.” The means are the instruments that God ordinarily uses to achieve His purpose.

One of the means Spurgeon mentions is the Holy Spirit as the agent that brings about revival. Revival doesn’t come about by any ability of man. People aren’t converted because of how persuasive we are, or our ability to work the crowd up into a fervour. Instead, revival is the work of the Holy Spirit. Consider the words of



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Jesus to Nicodemus again. After telling Nicodemus he must be born again, Jesus says:

“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (Joh 3:5-8 NASB)

Doesn't this speak to our utter helplessness in controlling God? I don't bring this up to discourage you, or to then absolve us of the blame for the lack of revival in our society. I bring it up to point out the second means that God uses which is prayer.

Spurgeon recounts speaking with a minister whose denomination and church had not grown over the past year. Despite having the most wealth, ministers who have never been so well educated, and the most beautiful chapels to worship in, they were unable to bring in new members. Spurgeon asked him, “What are you doing?” The pastor's answer: “It has driven us to our knees.” Prayer is a great means for revival because it turns to God who can bring revival and be pleased

to answer that prayer.

Even the disciples, who had been promised the Holy Spirit, were preparing for revival by praying. Fergusson views Pentecost as the inaugural revival of the New Testament epoch.⁵ As you can see in Acts 1, one of the key things that the disciples are doing between the time of the ascension and the day of Pentecost is gathering together in prayer.⁶ The disciples were very likely following the command of Jesus to ask God for the Holy Spirit.⁷ They were promised it and yet they prayed for it knowing that God uses the means of prayer.

Spurgeon also points out that the primary means that God uses is the preaching of Christ. Again, if you think about the central message of Peter's first sermon at Pentecost, Peter proclaims to the people that what they see and hear is the fulfilment of God's word through the ascended Lord Jesus Christ, whom they had crucified. At the very heart of Peter's message and those first sermons was the call to repent and believe in the name of Jesus Christ, for “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among

men by which we must be saved.”⁸

God, then, has three primary means to bring about revival: the agency of His Holy Spirit, the preaching of the word of God, and the prayers of His people. Therefore, we need to trust God's means for change in people's hearts and lives. We should not turn to man's wealth or charisma to bring about revival.

What would revival look like today?

Having now looked at what a revival is and the means that God uses to bring about revival, let's now consider what revival looks like. What are the fruit and outcomes of revival?

Let me encourage you to take a moment and imagine what revival might look like in New Zealand. This was the question I was asked to consider as I wrote this article. Perhaps I lack a strong imagination, but I found this a really difficult task. Of course, most of us will imagine our church buildings full. My reaction to this is good but why not bigger, why not imagine that we need to do tent meetings, as we don't have enough room

in our churches. However, it seemed that was the extent of what I could imagine for a revival.

I asked someone else what they thought revival could look like in New Zealand. This person had pointed out that they had read somewhere that in towns after George Whitfield had preached and the people had experienced the Great Awakening, a person could leave a bar of gold on his front porch and it would remain there all day. Put another way, not only did the church grow but society as a whole became less sinful.

Yet, when I look at the first revival and the effect of the Holy Spirit's powerful presence, it didn't lift society to a higher standard but brought about the persecution of the church. Society hated the message of Christ and the growth that the church was experiencing. However, I think we can see certain things that are outcomes of a revival.

Jesus tells his disciples that when the Spirit comes, "He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement."⁹ In Acts 2, we see a close relationship between Jesus' promise concerning the Holy Spirit and the fulfilment of that promise. Following Peter's sermon, Luke records that those who heard his sermon were "pierced to the heart." "One of the lesser-known revivals, sometimes called the Red River Revival, experienced this very thing. There was such a deep conviction of sin that many would collapse in sorrow. Some have even commented that this is where the term "slain in the Spirit" originated.¹⁰ It wasn't some mystical knocking people over, but heavy grief over sin that caused the person to collapse. If New Zealand were to experience revival today, then I think people would be confronted with their sin and convicted. Those who believe will repent, but for those who do not believe, it will more likely lead to anger or hatred. Much like the religious rulers who were unwilling to confess their sins, and zealously persecuted the early Church. Listen to these words of Paul:

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And

who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. (2 Cor 2:14-17)

Ferguson describes it this way, "We might say that revival is the unstopping of the pent up energies of the Spirit of God breaking down the dams which have been erected against his convicting and converting ministry in whole communities of individuals, as happened at Pentecost and in the 'awakenings' which have followed."¹¹ Revivals, then, evidence themselves in society by church growth and members being added to the church.

However, one of the things that Spurgeon points out in his sermon is that the church itself must be aroused to have a love for the lost. They must be agreed with God who says, "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."¹²

Do we share the tears of Jesus who wept over those who had rejected him? Do we share in the grief of God that men perish without knowing him because he does "not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance"?¹³

Finally, the description in Acts 2:42 ought to show us that revival brings about a church that is devoted. And they are united by that devotion. True revivals lead to churches being full, not believers who only pray a sinner's prayer and never commit to their fellow believers. God gathers us out of the world and into the church. The outworking of the Holy Spirit being poured out bore the fruit of unity, so much so that there were no needs in the congregation. There was fellowship with one another.

This fellowship was particularly around the teachings of the Apostles. They were devoted to sitting at the apostles' feet to learn all that Jesus did and taught. Revival would mean a renewed zeal and love for God's Word. So many so-called revivals today revolve around heightened emotions. The Scriptures point out that a true revival drives us to the Word, to the church and fellowship, and to prayer.

Again Acts 2:42 stresses that the first mass conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost drove them to prayer. Not only was the revival founded on prayer, but it also led to prayer. A mark of a true revival then leads to prayer. If your imagination of revival in New Zealand

doesn't include the church with one voice praying to God, then it isn't a true revival.

Conclusion:

Revivals are not without controversy. They "seem to have mixed consequences and even be mixed in character, being open to destructive influences of spiritual pride and wrong-headedness, as in Corinth."¹⁴ If we look at the Bible's understanding of revival, we can discern the good from the bad. We can seek His face to bring about a real revival in our society and country and throughout the world.

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ANDRE HOLTSLAG

Reformation and revival – do you really, really want them?

As we saw in Rev. Warner’s article, there are ‘revivals’ like the ones in Acts and the one known as the First Great Awakening of the 1700’s that we should most definitely be praying for. They are ‘seasons’ when the Holy Spirit powerfully accompanied the preaching of the Gospel, resulting in large numbers of conversions. And every believer should yearn to see these repeated and regularly pray that they might.

However, as Rev. Warner also explained, not everything called a ‘revival’ is godly. I could not find the original source for the quote, but one internet article about revival quoted A. W. Tozer as saying, “A revival of the kind of Christianity which we have had in America in the last fifty years would be the greatest tragedy of this century, a tragedy which would take the church a hundred years to get over.”¹ And what this quote has in view is that part of the wider church that minimizes doctrine/truth in favour of a numbers-driven church growth model, which caters to the felt-needs of attendees. So, the emphasis is on mysticism and/or experience and/or personal truth (and good coffee!). What is absent is preaching and teaching about the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God, His wrath against sin, His law that convicts us of sin and leads us to seek Christ in the gospel, justification by faith alone, and sanctification – growing in godliness. And ‘worship’ in these churches is about feelings and giving the people the music and pep-talk ‘sermons’ that they like, rather than worship that is regulated by Scripture and full of biblical truth content. What Rev. Warner’s article illustrated was that the preaching of

sound doctrine was at the core of the godly revivals that have occurred in church history. Sadly though, today, as one author has observed, “to large numbers of evangelicals, it doesn’t seem to make any difference what we believe, only that we are feeling something or enjoying any number of the other substitutes for biblical Christianity.”² And what makes this even worse is that another large part of the wider church has utterly rejected biblical doctrines like creation and marriage (one man and one woman), and embraced the ordination of women and homosexuals, and so called same-sex marriage. All this makes Tozer’s observation cited above accurate and alarming.

So, this is why it will help us to consider another R-word, Reformation. Reformation means a movement of the Holy Spirit to bring about reform of doctrine and practice in the church, according to Scripture. And as Reformed Church members, reformation is an important part of our heritage. It was in the 1500s that men like Martin Luther and John Calvin were led by the Holy Spirit to call on the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) to be reformed according to the Scriptures. This call was rejected by the RCC, which led to the establishing of churches that were reformed according to the Scriptures, hence our federation’s name. But reformation is much older than the 1500s! Think, for example, about the Book of Judges. Joshua was a faithful leader who led the people in the service of the Lord. But then Joshua died and we read,

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation

after them who did not know the LORD or the work that He had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger.

And so, the Lord handed that generation over to their enemies. Eventually, they cried out to Him in their distress and put away their idols (reformation!) and the Lord rescued them from their enemies and restored them. But this repeated cycle continues all the way through the Old Testament.

And in the New Testament too, each of the Epistles was written to combat theological or practical error that had already crept in to the (relatively) new churches. Again and again, the churches were told to expect and to watch out for false teachers (Acts 20, 2 Cor. 11, Galatians 2, 2 Peter, 1 John). Think of Paul’s powerful words to Timothy in the fourth chapter of his second letter:

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears

they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

And then, in Revelation 2-3, in the letters to the seven churches (which are basically representative of all churches in history), we see that apart from the church in Smyrna, there were obvious errors in all the churches. Errors to the extent that the letter to the church in Sardis is sometimes described as a letter to a dead church with a dead minister! Thus, the tendency for once faithful churches to *deform* is why we also need to pray for *reformation*.

So, what does all this mean for us today, in terms of praying for revival and reformation? Should we pray for both? Should we pray for one before the other? Do we need Reformation? Well, beginning with the revival of Acts 2 and continuing throughout church history, it is typically the case that reformation led to revival. The preaching of the Word led to a godly repentance and a reformation of worship and doctrine and personal holiness, which was accompanied by a season of revival.

And this is where I believe we need to ask the Spirit of the Lord to lead us in self-examination. We are a third/fourth generation church. Many of the founders of the RCNZ have been received into glory. Could it be that there is a generation arising who do not know the LORD or the work that He has done for the church? Who do not appreciate or value sound doctrine and why we worship as we do? Could it be that

our increasingly impressive church buildings mask a creeping malaise of deformation, similar to what we have witnessed in our ex-sister churches like the Christian Reformed Church of North America and the Free Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (FRCN)?

Perhaps you have wondered how once faithful denominations like these now ordain homosexual or lesbian ministers. How did this come about? Could this happen to us? To this end, let me recommend to you the observations of a Canadian Reformed minister who visited FRCN churches for many years. His article is called 'What led To the Changes in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands?' You can find it at <https://tinyurl.com/ypwvmjvt>. He examines changes in worship practices, how the sacraments are administered, a growing interest in 'missional' work, and the reasons for these changes (at least some of which should sound disturbingly familiar to us). We may not agree with all his observations, but his thesis is that many of these changes of theology and practice, and especially the reasons for them, led to the eventual ordination of women and homosexuals.

Another evidence of the possibility of deformation has to do with one of the three marks of the church – church discipline (the three marks are the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and church discipline (Article 29 Belgic Confession of Faith). In the commentary on our church order prepared many years ago by Brother D. G. VanderPyl, he provides the following lists as suggestive

Could it be that there is a generation arising who do not know the LORD or the work that He has done for the church? Who do not appreciate or value sound doctrine and why we worship as we do?





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of specific sins worthy of discipline in connection with Article 71:

a. *Sins of Omission*

Failure to have children baptized, non-attendance of catechism classes, failure to make public profession of faith, non-attendance of the Lord's Supper, an unwillingness to become reconciled, a refusal to contribute to the support of the church and a failure to come to church services (like the second service).

b. *Sins of Commission*

Gross sins by both private members and office-bearers, forsaking one's own church and slander, joining a sect, transgression of the seventh commandment, to be quarrelsome, unscriptural divorce, membership in secret societies, Sunday-work and recreation, worldliness and deviation from doctrinal standards.

Consideration must also be given to that which prevents the holiness of the Lord's Day such as work, except works of mercy or necessity and any recreational activity which interferes with the worship.

What is your reaction as you read these lists? Did the 'L' word (legalism) spring to mind, perhaps? My guess is that that will be the reaction of many, perhaps even most of us. My major point here is that these sins were considered the *ordinary* subjects of Christian discipline, not all that long ago,

but are not seen in that light by many today. And the reason I have asked us to think about this is well expressed by one author who connects the proper administration of Christian discipline with evangelism/revival:

Another reason for exercising church discipline is that thus only can the church be led to perform the glorious work of evangelizing the world. Not only is it true that to none but a holy church will the Holy Spirit be given as an assistant, and as a consequence of this, it could have no success; but the want of obedience to Christ's will in minor matters, and of conformity to his example in ordinary life, will prevent obedience to him with respect to those commands which require the exercise of self-denial, and the putting forth of earnest and continued effort, and conformity to an example so far above that which man can attain, without divine assistance, as to give of itself sufficient proof of the discipleship of him who thus conforms (emphasis added – AH).³

So, again, the question is: Do we really, really want reformation and revival? Do we see how they are very much connected together? I hope we do. I hope that we would all pray, earnestly, that the Lord would be at work to reveal where there is need for reformation, and that we would eagerly submit ourselves to His word in every area of doctrine and practice. And

Perhaps you have wondered how once faithful denominations . . . now ordain homosexual or lesbian ministers. How did this come about? Could this happen to us?

let us pray also that the Spirit of the Lord would work through the preaching of the word to bring many men and women and young people and boys and girls to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

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Mothers: privileged Foot Washers

AMANDA POPPE

**If you are a mother,
Satan's got you in his
sights. He knows the
crucial role that
mothers play in the
healthy development
of children.**

If you are a mother, Satan's got you in his sights. He knows the crucial role that mothers play in the healthy development of children.

He knows that "the strength of a nation is derived from the integrity of its homes," and he works relentlessly to undermine the home. His most effective strategy is to destroy the relationship between husband and wife.

But he also attacks in subtle ways, poisoning the very air we breathe. We live in a culture that does not have a biblical perspective on motherhood. We need to let God's word shape the way we think about bearing and raising children.

Before the Industrial Revolution, the home was the centre of western society. People lived and worked either on the family farm or in the family business at the front of the house.

Fathers were seen as primarily responsible for raising their children, passing on their skills and knowledge in daily interactions. Interestingly, literature on parenting was addressed to fathers, not to mothers. Mothers cared for the little

ones, taught their daughters how to run a household, and helped in the family business. Children were highly valued, because their help was needed for the family to survive. Each member of the family had an important role to play.

After the Industrial Revolution, work moved out of the home into factories and other places of business. Fathers went away to work, and mothers were left to do most of the childrearing on their own. The paid work of men seemed more valuable and mothers felt isolated from the rest of society. One feminist, writing in 1912, said,

"The duties and pleasures of the average woman bore and irritate [me]. The duties and pleasures of the average man interest and allure."

Women wanted the same opportunities as men, but one thing held them back: the bearing and raising of children.

No longer a necessity for economic survival, children began to be seen as a burden and an obstacle preventing women from achieving equality with men.

Women were encouraged to suppress their God-given ability to bear children

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well. Knowing this, we can get on our knees and wash the little feet God has put in our life. Over and over again.

with contraceptive chemicals and abortions. And if she did choose to have a child, she was told to let others raise the child so she could get back to work and not jeopardize her career.¹

This is the culture we live in. This is the air we breathe. Although much is made of “Mother’s Day,” no one actually wants to do the hard work of raising children. Ironically, it’s acceptable to look after children, as long as they belong to someone else and you are being paid. Christian mothers hear comments like, “Another baby?!” or: “You’re so young. Why throw your life away?”

Doctors may ask, “Do you want this baby, or do you want an abortion?” Mothers blessed with many children often feel conspicuous being in public with their little flock.

Complete strangers will ask, “Are those all yours?! Haven’t you heard of birth control? Overpopulation is destroying the planet.” Filling in forms with “Occupation:

Homemaker” may lead to a sense of worthlessness, as the world screams, “Are you crazy? Don’t be a doormat.

You are just as important as your husband. Why should you be stuck at home? Get out there! Pursue a career. Make a name for yourself. Don’t let your identity be swallowed up by your kids.”

The attacks of Satan and the world are very powerful because our third enemy, our own sinful nature, struggles with the self-sacrifice required of mothers. It is not hard for Satan to make us discontent with the role God has given us. We are selfish; we don’t want to serve our families. We are proud; we don’t want to do menial

tasks. We get tired of the endless cooking, shopping, laundry, and appointments.

We get irritated with the spills and fights and teenage dramas that interrupt our plans. Deep down we wonder, “What is the point of my life? I serve and serve and serve. I pour myself out for my family so they can go out and do great things. What about me?” The work of mothering is so relentless. Where do we find the perspective to do this work with joy?

We need to close our ears to Satan and open our hearts to our loving Father who tells us the truth in his word. He does not demean or disparage, but values and elevates motherhood. In the beginning God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and multiply. Psalm 127:3 says,

“Behold children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.”

That is a very countercultural statement. Do we truly believe it? God puts so much value on motherhood that he says “women will be saved through childbearing” (1 Tim 2:15).² John Calvin writes, “. . . the Apostle does not speak merely about having children, but about enduring all the distresses which are manifold and severe, both in the birth and rearing of children . . . When a woman, considering to what she has been called, submits to the condition which God has assigned to her and does not refuse to endure the pains, or rather, the fearful anguish, of parturition [childbirth], or anxiety about her offspring or anything else that belongs to her duty, God values this obedience more highly than if, in some other manner, she made a great display of heroic virtues, while she refused to obey the calling of God.”

In this post-modern culture, God’s word continues to give us direction. Women are called “to look well to the ways of their households” (Prov 31:27).

Older women are to teach younger women to “love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, and to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:4).

God says that by devoting ourselves to motherhood we won’t miss out on “real life.” On the contrary, we get to be

involved in the most amazing work on earth: the creation and nurture of a human being who will live forever.

Who is equal to this task? Thanks be to God for giving us a Saviour who covers the mess we make in parenting! We can go to him daily for forgiveness and help and wisdom and strength. All his power is available to us, if only we would ask.

The world scorns the self-sacrificing task of motherhood. But as we walk this road, we discover that our Saviour has gone ahead of us. He “did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28). He emptied himself and made himself nothing. This Saviour, knowing that all power in heaven and on earth had been given to him, “got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with a towel that was wrapped around him” (John 13:3-5).

Our pride says: I deserve to do more important things than clean toilets and change nappies. Jesus says, “Now that I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” (vs 14-16).

Rejoice that through motherhood God is conforming you to the image of his Son.

“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:17). So do it.

Pour yourself out for your children. Only those who lose their life will find it.

Give it all, joyfully and with wild abandon as a fragrant offering to God. Work hard, knowing that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. We don’t have to make something of ourselves.

Our identity is secure in Christ, and we know that a glory is in store for us that far surpasses the false glitter of the world.

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well. Knowing this, we can get on our knees and wash the little feet God has put in our life. Over and over again.

Mrs Amanda Poppe is a member of the Southern River Free Reformed Church, Western Australia

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Letters from New Zealand

D. G. VANDERPYL

September 1992

I have been reading up quite a lot on church history of late as a matter of interest, tracing the life story of our churches beginning from the days of Pentecost till the present time. Fascinating reading! It increased and fortified my love for the Reformed faith no end. What struggles for survival many of our forefathers and mothers experienced to remain true and faithful to God's Word. Attacks did not only come from outside the church, but the enemy was also inside the church. The story of the Synod of Dort of 1618/19, the Reveille (awakening, revival) of the early 19th century, the first secession in 1834 from the Netherlands Reformed (Hervormde) Church, followed later by the second one in 1886, the Doleantie, under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper and others, made fascinating reading. How these people suffered under the injustices of the "System" in and outside the church is almost unbelievable. And the,, what a feast and blessing when these two church movements recognised each other as faithful churches and united six years later, in 1892, to form a new federation, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Then I read about the attempt to preserve that unity when in 1905 the Synod of Utrecht adopted a pacification formula to satisfy both parties, but it did not bring permanent peace to the churches and eventually caused the liberation by a large section of the church in 1944 when certain confessional pronouncements were made binding on the churches. I remember those days when I was more interested in the progress of World War II, while in hiding, than in the battle that was fought in my church. As a young man of 18, who dearly loved the Lord, I had no clue as to what was going on, except that I saw a lot of unholy anger and hatred in our home and in those of some of my friends. We had a distant relative staying with us during that time, a "venijnig mannetje," (a nasty little fellow), whose whole being breathed anger as he sided with the "vrijgemaakten," (those who liberated themselves from our church). Next door lived a family who also belonged to the same church as we did.

His name was Streng (which means strict, severe) and he looked it too. As kids we were afraid of him. He too chose for the liberation. On Sunday mornings, our front doors opened almost simultaneously as we prepared to walk to church. Our boarder and neighbour Streng crossed the road towards the Liberated Church as they met in a temporary hall, while my mother with her four children and Mrs Streng with her brood of five, remained on the left hand side of the road as we made our separate way to worship the Lord our God Who is One. Dreadful and painful to say the least. But now that I have thoughtfully, I think, studied the history of our churches, and also witnessed the demise of my old home church with its resulting effects on so many of my relatives, I am more and more inclined to side with the position of our gloomy, contentious boarder and the unsmiling stern looking neighbour. Yes, the more I read and think of it, the more I too feel "liberated."

I am much impressed with the presentation of their weekly bulletin. It is a beautiful computerised and photocopied edition and pleasing to the eye, though I have something against it. Not in the vein of Revelation 2 & 3, but it seems to me rather faceless for outsiders (like me) and newcomers. Almost everybody has lost their surnames. The bulletin is full of things about Peter, Rodney, Julie, Angela, Rachel, Bob, Jolanda, Elise, Ingrid, Stella, Janice, Diana and many more. I don't know who they are. As far as I am concerned they have all become unknown nonentities. In my church there are about seven Peters. The phone rings and I hear from the other end of the line, "Peter here!" Peter? Peter who, I ask? The more I think about it, the more I come to the conclusion that we are well on the way to conforming to a well-orchestrated egalitarian society with its loss of pride in one's name and ancestry. Foei! Proverbs 22:1 states that "a good name is more desirable than riches." Well, perhaps most of us will never have riches, but if we have a good name, let us hang on to it.

November

Leadership Training Seminars are being held at regular intervals by a number of our churches, but not by all, which is a pity to say the least. Training sessions are good, not just for those who aspire for the office of elder or deacon but for all who are involved in the activities of the church. A good study course for leadership in the home would not be amiss either; some scriptural guidelines would be more than helpful both for those who are to lead and for the benefit of the other members of the household.

Once, many years ago, my family arrived at a church-do with our contribution of a big bowl full of meatballs, but when our turn came about half way through, all the meatballs had gone, and I love meatballs. I still remember the culprits and have forgiven them. Unfortunately my memory can still bring back such incidents occasionally; especially when the smell of these round crusty meaty balls comes wafting towards me from the kitchen.

Abridged

Letter to Editor

Dear Sir,

I am writing to commend you on the April edition of Faith in Focus and its articles on Biblical Counselling. It was a joy to read such excellent content on a ministry of the church that is so sorely needed in New Zealand today.

Kind regards in Christ
Dr Peter Reynolds
Lecturer: Biblical Counselling
Grace Theological College
Auckland, NZ
www.gtc.ac.nz

New restrictive religion decrees set to be introduced in Vietnam

According to church leaders in Vietnam, new religion-related decrees set to be introduced in the country are likely to further restrict the religious freedoms of churches. For instance, the decrees include stringent reporting requirements such as the need to furnish church activities for approval a year in advance. Further, churches are required to disclose offerings received from foreigners at worship services and any financial contributions from aboard. Moreover, the decrees stipulate that those who violate the religion rules may also be violating criminal codes, placing them in double jeopardy. The decrees also include the mandatory study of the country's revolutionary history in any training curriculum developed for clergy. According to the decrees, the failure to do so could result in the closure of training institutions.

Vietnam is currently ranked 19th on the *World Watch* List, which ranks the 50 most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian.

WEA Religious Liberty Prayer News

Over 300 homes burned down in predominant Christian village in Myanmar

On 20 May, the Myanmar military burned down over 300 homes in a raid on the predominantly Christian village of Chaung Yoe, in the Sagaing Region. According to reports, Chaung Yoe is home to around 1500 Christians. The incident followed a similar raid on 12 March 2022, during which 2 people were killed and at least 10 homes were burned down.

The conflict in Myanmar, particularly

in predominantly Christian areas of Kayah, Chin, Karen and Kachin, has resulted in attacks and raids on churches, the arrests of pastors and the killing of civilians.

WEA Religious Liberty Prayer News

Iranian Christian sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for church activities

Anooshavan Avedian, a 60-year-old Iranian Armenian Christian was sentenced to 10 years in prison for teaching other Christians in his home. The court ruling found the Avedian guilty of "establishing and leading an illegal group with the aim of disrupting the security of the country through educational and propaganda activities contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam, through the dissemination of false claims ... as well as contact with foreign countries, or organisational guidance from abroad." In addition to the prison sentence, Avedian was also deprived of social rights for 10 years.

Two other converts arrested along with Avedian received non-custodial sentences, including deprivation of social rights for 10 years and a travel ban for two years. Further, the converts were also exiled from Tehran and its neighbouring provinces for 2 years.

According to reports, the three Christians are set to appeal their sentences.

WEA Religious Liberty Prayer News

Christians arrested over protest for church construction approval in Egypt

Security forces in Egypt arrested at least 9 residents and remanded a person for 15 days on charges of organising an illegal gathering and committing a terror-

ist act, following a demonstration in January 2022 by dozens of Coptic Christians, demanding the authorities approve the construction of a church in the village of Ezbet Farag Allah in Minya.

According to rights groups, the 2016 law regulating the construction and renovation of churches codifies discrimination against the Christian community as it stipulates difficult conditions that need to be met for churches to receive approval for their buildings. These include requirements such as the need to install electronic gates, a fire alarm system and emergency exits, which prove to be challenging for smaller churches in rural areas. It is reported that between May 2018 and January 2022, 5540 churches and religious buildings submitted requests for approval. However, only 2162 churches and affiliated structures or 40 percent of the requests received approval during this same period.

WEA Religious Liberty Prayer News

Dutch doctors can euthanize elderly without their agreement pertaining to time and manner

The following is excerpted from "Dutch Doctors Can Now Secretly Place Sedatives in Food," Christian Headlines, Nov. 25, 2020: "Netherlands medical committee has changed its code of practice to allow doctors to slip sedatives into the food or drink of patients with dementia before they are euthanised so as to prevent them from becoming 'disturbed, agitated or aggressive.' The change in rules by the Netherlands review committee for euthanasia comes after the country's Supreme Court ruled in April that a doctor who carried out assisted suicide on a seventy-four-year-old patient with Alzheimer's did not commit murder by placing a sedative into the patient's

coffee. The patient woke up and had to be held down by her daughter and husband, the BBC reported. The patient previously had written a statement saying she 'wanted to be euthanised before entering a care home,' but adding that she wanted to decide 'while still in my senses and when I think the time is right,' the BBC said. The new rules say it 'is not necessary for the doctor to agree with the patient [about] the time or manner in which euthanasia will be given,' according to The Guardian. ... Ethicist Wesley J. Smith criticised the new rule, saying a doctor should not be able to decide 'why and when' a patient dies. 'Once a society accepts killing as an acceptable response to human suffering,' Smith wrote, 'there are no outer boundaries limiting where the killing will ultimately go. Those with eyes to see, let them see.'"

+ *Way of Life Literature, Post Office Box 610368, Port Huron, Michigan 48061, 519-652-2619, fbns@wayoflife.org*

In Victoria today, unborn babies have taken another battering

Commenting on Bernie Finn's expulsion from the Victorian Liberal Party today, the Australian Christian Lobby's (ACL) National Director, Wendy Francis, said, "Abortions are only going to increase whilst pro-life speech is regarded as disrespectful, particularly when it applies to politicians who have the capacity to vote and change laws on life issues. "Media reports indicate that Bernie Finn's commitment to 'pray for an end to abortion' was the final straw for the Party who voted to expel him from their ranks today."

Whilst, sadly, pro-life speech such as this will always sound disrespectful to those that don't want to hear it, advocating for the child in the womb is perfectly respectful. It's encouraging to witness a new, young, pro-life generation rising up around the globe.

"The Liberal Party of Victoria has seriously underestimated the impact this move has had on their pro-life conservative base," Ms Francis continued. "It will be a tough journey for them to regain their confidence in the lead-up to the State election in November.

"Freedom of thought, worship, speech and association are basic tenets of the Liberal Party of Australia yet, today, a democratically elected member has been expelled from the Liberal Party of Victoria for exercising these very rights."

Wendy Francis – Australian Christian Lobby

MATARIKI

So, here it is, our (and apparently the world's!) first indigenous public holiday. Many of us had Friday (24th June) off work, and you probably noticed lots of information about the meaning of Matariki in your social media feeds and the news. In its most general form, Matariki is an opportunity to give thanks for harvest, to look back, to look ahead, all while enjoying food and togetherness and family. It is associated with the rising in the dawn sky of the Matariki constellation of stars (also known as 'Pleiades' {Job 9:9; 38:31; Amos 5:8} and 'Subaru' in Japan) and is viewed as the Maori New year. The traditional Maori view is that these stars are spiritual beings who provide for human being's health, harvests, seasons, and entry into the afterlife. Food and prayers are offered to these stars as part of Matariki celebrations. And if that sounds to you like the pagan religions described in the Old Testament, which God forbade His people from participating in (Exodus 20:3; 2 Kings 23:5) you are correct. The stars do not have any spiritual power and they cannot guide us. We are to look to the Word of the God who made the heavens and the earth, including the stars (Genesis 1:16, references above), for instruction and guidance. Psalm 8, Psalm 19:1, and Romans 1:20 inform us that the stars that the Lord has set in place should fill us with awe at our Creator's power and glory. It is He who has given us life and who provides us with food in its season (Psalm 145:15), and it is through faith in Christ alone that we receive eternal life (John 3:16). Romans 1:21-25 is very clear about the dangers of idolatry, and 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 warns us that to partake of pagan sacrifices is to participate with demons. So, let's take care not to participate in any pagan worship. May we instead join with all those who worship the one true God, and thank Him for every physical and spiritual blessing.

Gleaned from Avondale Bulletin

"It would be dreadful to look back on trouble and feel forced to own that we did not cry unto the Lord in it; but it is most comforting to know that whatever we did not do, or could not do, yet we did pray, even in our worst times. He that prays in the depth will not sink out of his depth. He that cries out of the depths shall soon sing in the heights." — Spurgeon

Pornography in marriage – some practical help

MARTIN LEENDERS

The purpose of this article is to give you some practical advice on how to help a married Christian friend with a pornography (porn) problem. Perhaps your son is a user – perhaps your father, or your wife or a friend.

This is a complex issue. All of us are different and dynamics vary from couple to couple. I will use language that suggests that the porn user is the husband – but the implications remain valid if the user is the wife. My premise is that men should minister to men around sexual issues and women to women.

What's all the fuss about?

Some base line truths around porn use before we begin:

The *availability* of porn has grown exponentially. Porn is just a click away in your living room, workplace, car or bedroom.

The *stimulus* and addictive nature of porn has increased markedly. Video (rather than fixed images) has a much stronger stimulating and addictive effect on the brain.

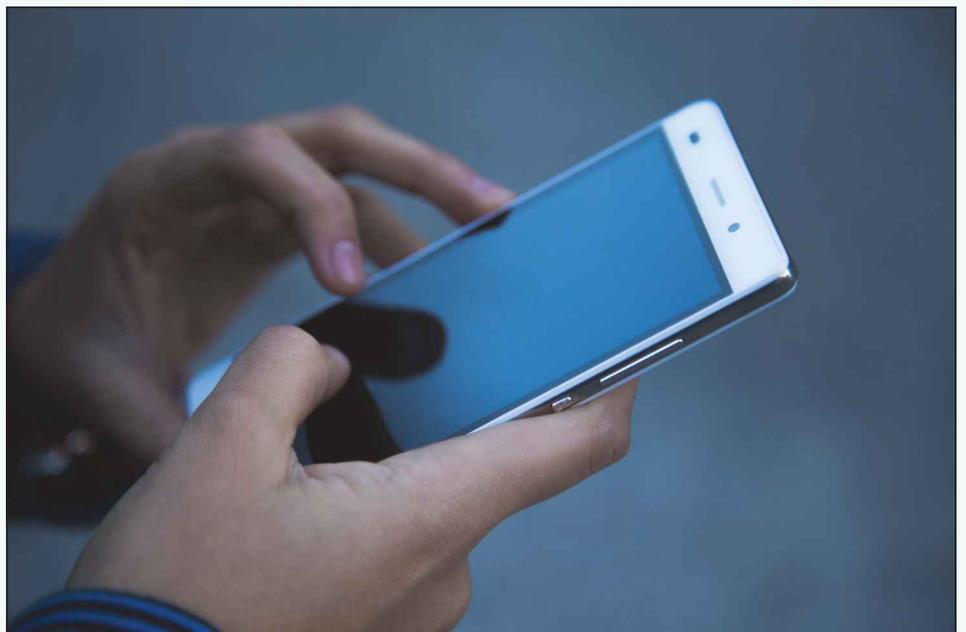
The *intensity* of porn has changed to commonly include degrading acts and violence – mostly towards women. A 2010 study of 304 pornographic scenes discovered that 88% contained physical aggression, including asphyxiation, gagging, and slapping.¹

Habitual porn usage easily leads to sexual addiction. The excellent downloadable guide from Covenant eyes “Porn and Your Husband: A Recovery Guide for Wives” comments:

This lifelong struggle has a neurochemical basis. It doesn't take long for pornography to start rewiring the brain. From childhood, it may have been rewiring your husband to desire the hormonal rush from porn instead of sex with you. The chemical vasopressin, which is released during the sexual act,

bonds the man to his sexual partner. With repeated pornography use, he has bonded to images on a screen.

What all of this means is that ***porn has changed***. It's especially important for the older generation (eg. church leadership) to realize this. To put it another way, whereas mainstream porn in the 80's might be akin to “having one too many beers” – modern porn is more like bingeing on meth. The



addictive potency is cranked right up and so is the level of degradation.

How men can help him

So, your friend has told you that he has a porn problem. If he has repented to his heavenly father and now confided in you, what can you do to help him? Commend your friend for confessing his sin and telling you. This is no small step. Remind him that he is a child of God. Pray with him and for him. Get alongside him.

Porn addiction is one form of sexual addiction (SA). Discerning if a porn habit is SA is important, because how you tackle an addiction is different to how you might tackle other sins, say like lust. Addictions also have a physiological (body / brain) component to them.

A helpful assessment tool is the Sex Addiction Test on the *Freedom Fight* website (see resources). It is a 20-question diagnostic tool to help you assess if your friend is sexually addicted. It's completely anonymous and free.

Many long-term sex addicts have told people about their porn use but have not been helped. Commonly (I have done this) we assume that because a guy has told us about his problem that he is on the way to overcoming. That is a dangerous assumption. Seriously addicted users seldom disclose the full extent of their usage up front. Take a friend's porn problem seriously. Do him a favour and ask him the hard questions.

Has he told his wife? A man's disclosure to his wife needs to be done sensitively and with good support for her. I would recommend doing this very carefully and with advice. Covenant eyes have an excellent article on how to manage disclosure to your wife here: <https://www.covenanteyes.com/2016/02/23/5-horrible-ways-tell-wife-porn-addiction/>

Initially, he needs to concentrate on getting 'sober'. This means putting in place structures to remove temptation, get accountability into his life and stay away from porn. Sobriety is not recovery. The underlying problems that lead to addiction still needs to be dealt with.

The porn addict will typically need three kinds of help:

- A. **Friendships** and close support. More than ever, guys need their close mate(s) when overcoming an addiction. Connection to people they can talk openly to is vital.
- B. **Church leadership.** For direction, resources, support and accountability.
- C. **Professional** help and counselling from people who understand the problem and are equipped to address it is important. This may not be your pastor. For professional counsellors in your area see the *Sex Addiction Specialists Aotearoa* website here: <https://www.sasa.nz/counsellors>

Where there is a sex addiction you should expect deep seated intimacy problems with his spouse. Dr Harry Schaumberg, a Christian counsellor specialising in sexual sin, writes that a SA:

*"wants to void the pain of real intimacy and obtain a sense of relational satisfaction – even if it's counterfeit – through false intimacy."*²

The consequence of the addiction is a lack of true intimacy with his real wife/spouse and a flawed sexual intimacy outside of marriage. Over time that results in a relational void in the marriage. Remember that his wife is the victim of this relational void – his addiction was the primary reason – despite what he might say about his wife. Addicted husbands often blame or discredit their wife; "If only my wife was sexier, or she was more this or less that." No spouse is perfect, but it is unjust to blame her for his infidelity. Avoid taking his side against his wife; instead uphold her.

Overcoming an addiction is more like a long-haul flight than a trip to the dairy. Generally, the longer the addiction has existed, the longer the recovery time. So, hang in there and don't look for a quick fix. Addiction recovery is characterised by a struggle with wins and losses. Be there for the setbacks too. Be sure to remind him often that he is precious in God's sight, the fight to overcome the addiction is worth it and that you will walk this path with him.

The Heart of the problem

The essence of sexual addiction is a problem between a man and God – not primarily between a man and his spouse. When a man repeatedly tramples on God's commands over many years and does what he knows to be wrong the main problem is a broken and disconnected relationship with God.³

The primary need of your addicted friend is to address the vertical 'God to man' relationship. True restoration of the relationship with God allows for the horizontal person to person relationship to stand a chance. Help him rebuild his relationship with our merciful God. Remind him that our loving saviour was a friend of sinners and tax collectors.

A Word to Church leadership

Porn is an issue within our church community. A survey⁴ of Christians reports regular porn use amongst men lies at around 64% and 15% of women. If those statistics are even half right the situation for our churches is serious. The sheer volume of porn usage and the need for women to work in this domain make it necessary to gain resources both in the pastorate and alongside the pastorate.

Some churches have a men's group (coordinated discreetly by a member) who

meet regularly to help each other overcome. A great way to do this is to go through the *Freedom Fight* program together. Consider starting a group in your church. The material is all there, ready to go. You don't need to be an expert – just discreet.

A common problem in dealing with a husband's sexual addiction is that we can be too involved with the sinner and neglect the victim (wife). Once a husband confesses, they immediately feel better. However, this burden then typically transfers to his wife, and she is often overwhelmed at the reality of her marriage. Yes, he needs to confess and make changes and repent. Yes, he needs help. However, *her needs* are acute – although perhaps less obvious.

Over time, as she puts the pieces together, she may disclose things about him that seem hard to believe. She doesn't have a reason to lie – he perhaps has many reasons. Listen carefully. Those caught in sexual addiction can be experts at deception and minimisation. Elaborate strategies are often at play for years to cover up the secret. In her excellent book "Beyond Betrayal – How God is healing Women and couples from Infidelity" Lisa Taylor says, "You're never just dealing with sex addiction. You're also dealing with an addiction to lies and deception ... the fact that our husband is lying to us and living a double life is, at times, more painful than the actual betrayal."⁵

Be gentle and kind with her. She needs you to listen and get alongside her more than anything right now. Her closest ally is unsafe. Expect anger, tears, confusion, despair. Perhaps she has been silenced or manipulated by her husband. It is common for the addicted man to appear sane and for the wife to appear a little crazy. Believe her. Advocate for her.

Elders, do you have a strategy for your church around porn prevention and recovery? Do congregation members feel safe discussing porn temptations with you? Do you ask about porn use at home visits? Do you have wider teaching about sexual issues or does that only happen at youth group? Do you encourage openness with honest discussions about sexuality and struggles?

Resources and hope

Thankfully, there are many godly people who have walked this path before us and can help us with their hope, courage and honesty. Many of the resources they have produced are outstanding. Here are a few:

Diagnostic Test – Am I Sexually Addicted?
Anonymous 5 min online test.

Covenant Eyes. This computer monitoring software is designed to help the user get sober. This is an accountability software for your devices. It sets you up with an accountability partner who is emailed a regular report of your online activity. In addition, they offer many helpful support articles on overcoming. www.covenanteyes.com/

The Freedom Fight. This free web-based program is designed to help you overcome porn use. Written by Ted Shimmer, a trained sexual addiction pastoral counsellor, this material can be accessed discreetly online and also in a group format. Their mission statement is: "The Freedom Fight equips men and women to break free from pornography so they can run their race and reach their God given potential in Christ." They address the physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational aspects of the addiction. The tools and resources available via this free website are outstanding. www.thefreedomfight.org

Books:

- Beyond Betrayal: How God is Healing Women (and couples) from Infidelity*, Lisa Taylor
- False Intimacy: Understanding the struggle of sexual addiction.* Dr Harry Schaumburg
- Worthy of her Trust: What you need to do to rebuild sexual integrity and win her back.* Afterburn & Martinkus

References

- 1 Covenant eyes – Porn Stats March 2021 pg 7
- 2 "False Intimacy" Understanding the struggle of sexual addiction. Dr Harry W. Schaumburg.
- 3 1 John 5:18
- 4 Porn usage is defined as having viewed porn within the last month. <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>
- 5 Pg 19

Mr Martin Leenders is a member of the Pukekohe Reformed Church.

Focus on the Christian life

PETER BARNES

Prayer: What can we pray for?

The shattering news of little Emily's inoperable brain tumour has dominated my thinking as nothing else could. One issue that arises is obviously 'What can we pray for?' Jesus' disciples once begged Him: 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples' (Luke 11:1). Twice our Lord told parables to encourage His people to persevere in prayer (Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8). The great apostle Paul himself confessed: 'we do not know what to pray for as we ought' (Rom.8:26). Calvin spoke the same language in his sermon on 1 Timothy 1:1-2, acknowledging that 'our prayers are always back to front'. He added: 'That is why we should follow this rule, that when we address God in prayer we should ask above all that he may be gracious to us, and that in pardoning our sins he may gather us to himself.'

So it is spiritual things first, but Christ told us to pray for our daily bread (Matt.6:11), and there are healings in both Testaments. B. B. Warfield thought healings were restricted to the ages of prophets and apostles, as they confirmed their divine authority. Surely, this is wrong; that is a key reason, but not the only reason, for them. Warfield might almost be understood as saying that one can only pray for what might be regarded as unremarkable

Indeed, there is a pattern to answered prayer, but not always a straightforward one. The apostle Paul prayed three times that a thorn in the flesh would be removed from him (2 Cor.12:7-10). The request, though lawful, was declined. This was to keep him humble and to teach him that Christ's grace was sufficient in Paul's weakness. This might discourage us as it looks like the Lord knocked back repeated prayers even from an apostle.

Yet when James encourages us to pray, he points to the example of the prophet Elijah, which does not fit Warfield's thesis too well. It means that Elijah is like us in prayer – or rather we are to be like him (James 5:16-18). Admittedly, one could hardly imagine Christians praying for a drought of three and a half years, but the context is obviously in favour of praying for something supernatural. James says that sometimes 'you do not have because you do not ask' (James 4:2). There is even the extraordinary promise of Christ that 'Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do' (see John 14:12-13).

Asking is not demanding, but there is to be an asking in faith; it is done in submission to the will of God, but not in any fatalistic way. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were all preserved from the fiery furnace under Nebuchadnezzar. Yet as they were threatened with death, they trusted God without knowing the outcome (Dan.3:16-18). It is not a case of 'name it and claim it', but it is knowing that God is at work.

We pray poorly, but acknowledge our poverty; we pray without knowing the future, but know the God who knows the future; we pray as in a glass darkly, but we pray to the Father of lights. Isaac Watts has a hymn, which is also an ardent prayer:

*Come, fill us all with inward strength,
Enlarge our souls till they possess
And learn the height and breadth and length
Of Your immeasurable grace.*

This is based on Ephesians 3 which ends with Paul's doxology: 'Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen' (Eph.3:20-21). The wonder of prayer is that we can pray for all good things spiritual and physical. We can plead before the God of the covenant: 'God, who made the earth, the air, the sky, the sea, who gave the light its birth, He cares for me' (Sarah Betts Rhodes). I wish I knew more, but Christ intercedes for us (Rom.8:34) and the Father always hears Him (John 11:42). The desperate pray in His name – and all sinners are desperate.

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In the presence of my enemies

ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD

The table was set with unfussy Corelle dishes, yellow paisley cloth napkins, and water glasses. One of the pastor's sons, a colleague of mine from the university, pulled a gallon plastic jug of water out of the refrigerator and started filling the water glasses. "It's not filtered water. I just like it cold," Pastor Ken Smith laughed as he greeted me with a warm handshake and pulled me gently but firmly over the threshold. This was one of my first experiences of a Christian family feast, one that included the Smith family, other brothers and sisters from the church, and me. The room hummed with grown-up laughter and the sing-song of children's voices. It had been so very long since I had experienced the sound of men's voices laughing and the delight of a child's giggle. While I proclaimed the value of diversity, my community was entirely composed of white thirty-something lesbian Ph.D.s in the humanities. Children dragged in extra chairs. Bowls were overflowing with Floy Smith's steaming and savory sweet-and-sour soybeans, and Ken herded us to the table with a gentle but firm touch. When we all sat down and pulled up our mix-and-match chairs to the long family table, no elbow room remained. It was intimate but not stuffy. The conversation was marked with edgy questions of the day (on which I took an opposing side) and Bible verses and principles, some that stood as answers and others that opened more questions. It seemed to me that Pastor Ken Smith and these other Christians used the Bible both for reference and for lingering long. We ate and talked and laughed. And then we sang Psalm 23.

Voices in all four parts to the tune of Crimond rang strong and right as rain. And when we sang, "A table Thou has furnished me, in presence of my foes," I started to lose my sense of which way was up. I started to get all turned around, as if I had absentmindedly taken the wrong path on a well-walked trail. I was trained to play the part of the victim and to perceive myself as a "sexual minority," voiceless among the voiced. As we sang, I said to

myself, "Yes, dear victim, here you are in the presence of your foes, these awful hateful people who want to trample on your rights." But even though victimhood served as my catechism, I couldn't make myself believe this while singing Psalm 23. Something wasn't right. And that's when it dawned on me that I, the English professor, was misreading the text. I wasn't the one dining in the presence of my enemies. I was the enemy.

Dinner concluded with prayer. Prayer was reverent and steady. There were natural pauses and unhurried reflections as these Christians shared their hearts with each other and with God. The unyielding and unanswered questions that had marked the earlier part of this evening were now put into the hand of God. They were neither swept under the rug nor turned into objects of obsession and grief. At the final "amen," someone said, "Let's sing Psalm 122." Most of the people had this one memorized too, but Floy gently touched my arm and placed an open Psalter in my hands. And so with gusto and confidence, voices raised in song once again: "I was glad to hear them saying 'to the Lord's house let us go.' For our feet will soon be standing in your gates Jerusalem. . . . In your palaces be safety, for the sake of brothers all, for the sake of my companions, I am saying, 'Peace to you!' " At the psalm's conclusion, someone said something that I didn't understand at the time. He said, "This is my pilgrim's journey."

Although I did not understand this reference, this night marked the beginning of my pilgrim journey. That I was the enemy at this table made little matter to Pastor Ken, for he knew that Christ was not done with me. That I had mocked Christians, written university policy that extolled hatred for God, taught classes that enlisted others into a worldview that walks only to hell, and sinned against others was not the main thing for this godly pastor and the church that he pastored. The main thing was Christ crucified and risen. The Christian life goes on regardless of how many enemies are at the table because enemies cannot mar or perjure the main thing of the Christian life – "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10).

That feast and the long family dinner table at the Smith house and my presence at the table were not a one-night event. It was regular and rhythmic. As these Christians folded me, the enemy, into their feasting,

I became hungry for more of what they had. I started to read the Bible, no longer to critique it or mock it or despise it but to roll it around in my private dream-talk, to turn the pages of the Bible and the pages of my heart together, to let it wash me and shape me and rebuke me and comfort me. I remember one day experiencing what happens when the Bible gets to be bigger than my sin and my selfishness. I remember one day realizing that I needed to hate my sin without hating myself. And always, in the background of these cataclysmic changes was the feasting at the Smith house. What followed was the sweet washing of repentance, my life commitment to Jesus, and the covenant of church membership. I was no longer the enemy of Jesus but His devoted disciple.

Today, I get to set our own family dinner table. My greatest honor is being married to my pastor, Kent Butterfield, and together raising and homeschooling our children. Our dining table has been in my husband's family for five generations. It overfills the dining room and the Lord fills it with brothers and sisters in the Lord and with neighbors. Some come in grief. Some come in anger. Some come in loneliness. Some come in joy. Like the Smiths, the Butterfields do not throw people away. We gather for feasting, psalm singing, and prayer. We fold in neighbors and our children's friends. We discuss the pressing questions of our day, and we use the Bible to illuminate the way forward. We include the neighborhood children. We linger long at the table in the evenings.

Feasting, psalm-singing, gathering others, continuing to gather for Lord's Day worship during a time of governmental pressure not to worship together, and homeschooling are not to be interpreted as unprecedented or unusual events. No. God intended it this way. Our faith is meant to flourish in the presence of our enemies. Psalm 110:2 declares: "The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!" It is God's will that we should always be feasting in the presence of our enemies. It is God's will that Zion (the church) will shine in the midst of enemies. John Calvin puts it this way:

Doubtless our condition in this world will include many hardships, but God's will is that Christ's kingdom should be encompassed with many enemies, his design being to keep us in a state of constant

warfare. Therefore it becomes us to exercise patience and meekness, and, assured of God's aid, boldly to consider the rage of the whole world as nothing.

We feast in the presence of our enemies not by accident but by design, not for punishment but for blessing. Paul describes the weapons of the warfare in which we are engaged in 2 Corinthians 10:4–5:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (KJV)

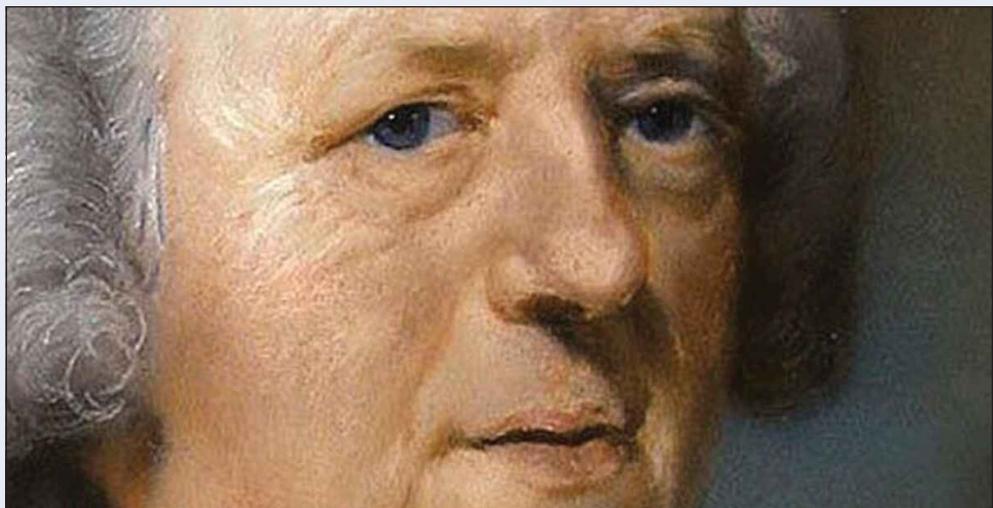
The weapons of our warfare cast down atheistic imaginations with pot roast suppers and watermelon, psalm singing and warm mugs of tea, prayer and repentance. And how do we prepare for such feasts? Know what is true. Let the inerrant and living Word of God commandeer your heart and mind and body. Worship what is true. Give God the holy worship He commands, being ready to join in the fellowship of Christ's suffering. Repent daily. Be a covenant member of a faithful church. Sing psalms. Feast in the presence of your enemies. If you are in Christ, your enemies are Christ's enemies. And this means we have nothing to fear.

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Focus on faith

LETTERS OF JOHN NEWTON



Like coins from the same mint!

My dear sir,

I could write a long note indeed, upon your very great mistake in *considering me as a great man*. If we could have a personal interview – I think you would be quickly undeceived! Ah! how different I am, from what perhaps I appear to be to others when in the pulpit.

Your mistake, however, has done me good. A whole quire of *invective* from an *enemy* could hardly have given me so keen a sense of *shame*. The Scriptures assure us that our hearts by nature, **like coins from the same mint** – are all alike. I hear my fellow-Christians complain of evils similar to what I feel. Otherwise I would have reason to conclude that there could not be one believer upon earth – **so inconsistent, so evil, so vile beyond expression, as myself!**

Ah, dear sir! what would you have thought of me, had you seen me when I lived among the slaves? The *sight* of me would have been offensive to your eyes, and my *vile speech* would have struck you with horror! I was miserable and despicable in every view – the common mark of scorn and insult! My whole wretched amusement and pleasure seemed to lie in blaspheming the name and person of Jesus, and in feeding my imagination with schemes of wickedness!

Some of my unhappy companions have perished in their sins, who have just cause to charge the ruin of their souls to *my* account! For Satan himself, had he been upon earth in a bodily shape – could hardly have been more industrious in tempting to infidelity and profligacy than I was!

There is seldom a day of my life, in which my thoughts are not led back to my former state of estrangement from Him, and that *pre-eminence of wretchedness* into which my sins plunged me!

Yet, it is of grace that my poor story is not much worse. The Lord is my keeper – therefore I am still preserved.

“By the grace of God – I am what I am!” 1 Corinthians 15:10

*I am, dear sir, your affectionate friend and servant,
John Newton, 1778*

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home!

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine!

HANS and LISA VAATSTRA

The Harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few

This picture can tell a thousand stories...each person captured here in this moment is on a journey, a momentous pilgrimage following a path that is often “hard tumas”, rocky, perilous, sometimes very costly. They are transforming and being transformed, overcoming and contending with the entrenched “pasin” customs, poverty, mindset and fear that marks the lives of most Papua New Guineans. They have been confronted by sickness, death, sorcery, addictions, hunger, violence, trouble and rejection because they are determined to follow the narrow path. They are training in Word and deed to serve as pastors, elders, teachers and servants of the Kingdom of Christ the Lord. This is the class of 2022.

The work of Reformed mission in PNG is to help establish Reformed churches and equip pastors, elders and members to stand firm and witness effectively in PNG. The Reformed Churches Bible College (RCBC) is a vital part of this work. The RCBC has come a long way since its commencement in 2006. Back then two classrooms and two staff houses accommodated two lecturers and six students on a ten-acre bush block.

Today, sixteen short, action packed years later, in addition to the original buildings there are two more staff houses, a library, an administration block, ten family cabins and two bunk houses, a guest house, a small shop and various workshops, sheds

etc. The bush is being subdued, the grounds now boast many vegetable gardens and fruit trees, while sweeping lawns and flower gardens provide a pleasant respite from the often-harsh surrounding conditions. The staff now number three full-time lecturers, two full-time support workers and many volunteers. The teaching staff is also augmented by guest lecturers who assist for one or two blocks at a time.

The question sometimes arises, why does PNG even need a Reformed witness...aren't we yet another voice in the clamour of competing religious gongs, especially considering that there are many missions and churches already in PNG? Missionaries just about form one of the largest minorities here. There is a saying here – foreigners are one of the three “M”s, mercenaries, missionaries and madmen. In fact, “Christianity” is so “mainstream”, the current Prime Minister James Marape has stated that PNG is a Christian country, and he recognizes the need for the education system to be based on Biblical principles. Yet Mr Marape is a Seventh Day Adventist.

Despite mission being well received here, the nation struggles with many entrenched stumbling blocks to genuine, robust discipleship and sanctification. The effects of the gospel should bless and prosper the people and nation but there is a disheartening lack of long-term fruit.

Here is a story of what happened after the death of a final year Theology student at the College, which horribly illustrates the point. The student Joe was a true believer, and his wife and children shared his commitment to the faith – but their faith was tested under fierce trial when Joe died.

The first indication of the sad news of Joe's death was a heart wrenching wail that echoed around the campus. This set up a response of awful keening. The wailing and crying continued throughout the night for three nights and broke out often during the day. The sound was dreadful, a repetitive, anguished, mindless chant which sounded devoid of all hope. This is part of a pasin or custom of haus kraik, which literally means crying in the house of the deceased. Joe's widow struggled with this imposition of the old way of mourning and by singing Psalms and hymns

The Class of '22 with some of their family members at the RCBC pictured in front of the student cabins.



overcame some of the hopelessness.

As the widow, however, she was still obliged to obey the authority of the family hierarchy, many of whom are not Christian. They expected the family to observe the old way of proving love and loyalty to the deceased by demonstrations of total grief and hopeless despair. In the villages this often still includes abandonment to unbridled sorrow by gruesome acts such as the widow sitting under the “patapata” which is a raised platform on which the body lies. While it decomposes in the heat, the body fluids drip down onto the mourners. Thankfully in Joe’s case this did not happen, and Joe’s body was decently placed in a coffin. A beautiful funeral service, celebrating Christ’s victory over sin and death was held at the College and then the body was transported back to his village, Veifa’a where the internment service was to be held and the body buried in the family “graun”.

As the burial service progressed the mourners became more and more overwhelmed and agitated until the Pastor conducting the service could no longer be heard. Screaming and crying, the people drowned out the words of comfort. Blindly they surged around the coffin, gripping its handles, throwing themselves over it, fighting and clawing each other, trying to prevent the coffin from being lowered into the grave. Some tried to throw themselves into the fresh dug grave, causing the sides to crumble. Eventually the Pastor was shouting the service at the top of his lungs as the pall bearers fought a pitched battle to inter the poor dead man. Finally, some of the strong men prevailed and cleared the box from the crowd. Lifting prostrate women out of the way, they managed to get it into the grave. The message of the hope of the resurrection and the comfort of Christ was all but obscured by the hysteria and despair.

The village in which this took place is predominantly Roman Catholic. Here syncretism has intertwined many of the old practices and beliefs with the Catholic faith so there is no clear contrast between Light and darkness, rather there is an easy fellowship between the temple of God and idols. The people are still enslaved to old customs by fear and ignorance and in fact are even more blinded and confused due to the addition of further layers of superstition such as worship of saints, acts of penance, the eucharist and extra Biblical rituals.

In many places people are still enslaved to sorcery, or “sanguma” and sorcery related killings are regularly reported in the press. There are several reasons for this, including deeply rooted spiritualism which is embedded in the culture and tradition. Despite the work of the early missionaries who endeavoured to overcome gross practices such as tribal warfare, revenge killings, cannibalism, polygamy, barbaric burial rites etc., the people struggle to surmount them. So much of this is due to shallow or heretical teaching and lack of discipleship in many churches.

Adding further confusion to the mix, there are many competing cults and sects in PNG which have

a strong pull because, although the people are genuinely interested in spiritual matters, most are led by their feelings. This way the cults and sects appeal to and mislead people in their deepest need. Many people do not have a deep knowledge or understanding of the Scriptures and theology so cannot discern error. Erroneous teaching, false prophesy and emotional manipulation all confuse and disappoint people, especially when they emphasise bogus healing, miracles and prophesies.

One of the most insidious and endemic false gospels is cargo cult, rice Christianity and prosperity gospels. People are vulnerable to these because they are generally poor and needy but also due the entrenched cultural characteristic of living for the day. Most people do not have a long-term view, they do not save or build for the future. They eat, spend and share what they have while they have it and will do without until the next windfall.

All these difficulties have hindered the establishment of faithful, robust churches. The Reformed Churches and Bible College are fulfilling

A satellite image of the College Campus layout showing classrooms and staff housing on the left and student accommodation around a central playing field on the right. Fruit and vegetable gardens are situated to the far left and right of the image.



a growing need as the people realize that for the Christian faith to grow, prosper and bless PNG, sound teaching of doctrine and Theology is required to equip and nurture the saints so they might be able to progress from spiritual ‘milk’ to spiritual ‘meat’ and overcome the effects of destructive traditions and fear-driven “pasin” (customs).

Currently there is one fully instituted Reformed Church of PNG which is the Reformed Church of Kamkumung in Lae. There are also six “works in progress” – young churches working towards institution. They are the “Covenant” Reformed Church in Nine Mile, “Bethel” Reformed Church in Beretete, “Immanuel” Reformed Church in East Boroko, Veifa’a Reformed Church in Mekeo, Wantun Reformed Church in the Markham Valley, and the newest church plant underway at Hila in the Highlands. Four of the fledgling Reformed Churches – Beretete, 9 Mile, Lae and Wantun are stepping out in faith and have also started Christian schools as a response to the need to train young minds. This is a significant investment into the future of family

and Church. Despite being small and having few resources these tiny schools are excelling in academics and character training and are doing a lion's roar of impacting the community. Good, thoroughly Bible based education is a pressing need here, especially in the regions outside the urban centres and people desire it for their children.

The RCBC is demonstrating the importance and benefits of studying God's Word deeply. One of the fruits of this labour has been a growing reputation for thoroughly equipping people for service in the Kingdom of Christ as pastors, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, study leaders and committed church members. The students are immersed in a new pattern for Christian life and fellowship. They benefit from excellent instruction in the many aspects of discipleship, including practical applications for everyday work, family life and community involvement.

As the reputation of the College grows, one result has been a growing relationship with the United Reformed Churches, as they witness these benefits. These churches are very keen to train their future pastors at the RCBC due of the rigour and standard of the training. There are several URC congregations along the coast south-east of Port Moresby. This is a God given opportunity to disseminate Reformed teaching since, though they are well established and some congregations are large and prosperous, their theology students desire clear and authoritative Bible teaching on important issues such as worship practices, the use of sacraments, the role of women, church discipline and government. These are the issues which many churches face in seeking to be faithful.

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand have been involved in mission in PNG for about 20 years, joining the earlier work of the FRCA and the Canadian Reformed Churches. This led to the

establishment of the Reformed Churches Bible College in Port Moresby as a means for the National churches to become independent. Some of the men and families who have served faithfully in this work are Rev Stephen and Dorinda t'Hart (1997-2007), Wally and Jeanette Hagoort, 2004-2014 (managing Mapang Mission House and assisting East Boroko church), Br Wayne Van der Heide (2006-2009), Rev Alan and Odette Douma (2009-2018), Rev Hendrick & Rita Versteeg (2009-2018), Rev Cornelis and Greta Kleyn (2012-), Br Mark and Liz Mulder (2018-), Br Richard t'Hart (2017-), Rev Hans and Lisa Vaatstra (2021-). Still others from Western Australia and Canada serve in the Lae district.

Already college graduates are filling needs and serving in the Reformed Churches in PNG. These include several pastors: Tony Aufa (Wuntun), Isidore Aufa (Lae), Nawai Renagi (Beretete), Aisi Kose (9 Mile) and Candidate Pastor Paul Ame (Veifa'a). RCBC Graduate David Kaupa is also working towards a position as Candidate Pastor in the Reformed Churches in PNG. At the end of this year, Lord willing, there will be two more diploma graduates. One will serve in the URC churches and the other will serve in the Reformed Churches. Apart from pastors there are also many people who have studied at the College and are contributing to the growth and well-being of the congregations as well-equipped members; they are able to witness, give counsel, comfort, teach one another, help with administration and many other tasks.

The Lord has richly blessed these early efforts by three Mission boards from Canada, Western Australia and New Zealand to establish and progress the work to this stage.

Of course, there has been opposition too. Satan is visibly active as he ferociously tries to keep his deadly grip on this land and retake lost territory.

Training national church leaders at a recent leadership conference at Veifa.



Genuine faith and obedience will cause the kind of reaction which we've already seen. Some church plants which flourished at first such as Badilli and Beregoro fell away. East Boroko church is also struggling. There are many reasons for this, and much prayer is needed. Many people still live trapped by fear and misery due to entrenched old beliefs and social obligations. These are not easily thrown off since people really need family and social support to survive. Poverty and addictions are relentless task masters and there is a continual struggle with sin and disobedience.

Rev. Hans and Lisa Vaatstra enjoying the perks during the Reformed Ministries PNG Conference at Alotau Dec'21. Note how they look rejuvenated...this could be you...

Mr Hans and Mrs Lisa Vaatstra are members of the Whanganui.

However, we should not be discouraged. Time in the furnace should purify and temper the church and its members. Looking at the big picture in the short space of about two decades, God has blessed and prospered the work of Reformed missions, bringing light, peace and joy to many people. The labours of the missionaries and the generous support of Reformed churches in Canada, Western Australia and New Zealand and a deep reliance on the Word and Spirit will ensure that the Light will not flicker out.

Why are we telling you all this? You've probably gathered by now that there's an angle, we've got our metaphorical foot in the door and our sample case open. Are you hooked on this story? Do you want to know what happens next...???

There is so much more yet to do here! It's exciting!! Last year, some men came from the Highlands to Wantun, asking questions about Reformed teaching and just like that, a new church plant commenced at Hila, initiated by the people themselves! There's hope of planting another church in the western suburbs of Port Moresby, again the request is coming from the local folk.

With teaching at the RCBC being a priority for the two ordained men in the POM area, there is an urgent need for another ordained missionary to come to assist with work of church planting, working alongside national leaders, helping the churches towards institution. Who will heed the Lord's call to the mission field? "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 10:37-38)

