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## Editorial

The word cancer may possibly be one of the world's most threatening words, arousing people's emotions, depending on their relationship to it. Most people don't want to know about it!

I have heard people give cancer a nickname, like "The Big C", for instance, as though that would lessen or soften the reality of what they may need to deal with. Another more novel name I came across recently was Mr C Ancer. However, the person who created this pseudonym wasn't minimising reality. In fact, it was to highlight the fact that Mr C Ancer was uninvited and unwanted in his family and home.

Most people don't give it a thought until either they, or someone close to them, has been diagnosed with it. It would come as a huge shock to be told the reality of their present and future situation. This is major! They thought they were fit and healthy! It is all rather surreal.

For the Christian, I am sure the shock and uncertainty about the future is somewhat the same as for all people, although some may suffer a great deal more, physically and psychologically. However, there is one big difference. We have a Saviour who is able to sympathise with us in our weakness and give us grace in our time of need. While the physical struggle may be similar for every person under the sun, it is the faith of the believer that will give hope to the sufferer and to everyone believing around them.

Please forgive me if I seem presumptuous in what I have written above. I know nothing about suffering with cancer, but I do know how shocking it is to the senses when you receive news from a medical specialist that you have something majorly wrong with you. I had open-heart surgery in November 2014 – it hit me like a tonne of bricks.

Our contributors get personal and share their experiences or those of someone close with cancer.

Mr John Haverland reflects on his own experiences and reviews *My God is True! Lessons Learned Along Cancer's Dark Road*, by Paul D. Wolfe and *Hope Beyond Cure*, by David McDonald

Mr Raymond van der Meulen writes about an unwanted intruder.

Mr Paul and Mrs Annamarie van der Wel write about their journey with cancer.

Mrs Judy Snoek looks at health and happiness in the here and now.

Dr Oneira Johanna Meyer (a former member of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe and a GP in Rotorua) looks at cancer from a medical perspective.

Mrs Sally Davey exhorts readers never to lose hope.

Mrs Jenny Waldron explores the need to be physically and spiritually fit.

Mr Chad van Dixhoorn (an associate pastor of Grace OPC in Vienna, Va.) considers the power and wisdom of the cross in this year's Easter meditation.

Mrs Harriet Haverland provides interesting bits 'n pieces from around the churches for the last time.

Mr Peter Kloosterman promotes the latest project in PNG – looking for a compound manager.

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

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## Cancer – suffering in the light of the gospel (1)

# Reflections on my cancer

### John A Haverland

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 2015 I underwent a major operation to remove my left kidney, which had been taken over by a large cancerous tumour. My immediate and extended family were very supportive of my wife and me during this time, as was the Pukekohe congregation, and we have been humbled by the concern, love and kindness shown to us by many of you in our Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Thank you for your love and prayers.

During my recovery I had time to rest and reflect. I found it helpful, both spiritually and mentally, to write down some of my thoughts and feelings. Those notes have formed the basis of this article. I pray these reflections may be of interest and help to some of you. I don't want to suggest that my experience is unique. Many in our denomination have had, or currently have cancer, and mine has been light and of short duration compared to what others have suffered, and are suffering. Yet, having cancer, of whatever variety and degree, makes one think about life and death and eternal realities. Another pastor who experienced cancer wrote, "... a little cancer goes a long way. Though we did not suffer the most, we certainly suffered enough – enough to be given a unique opportunity to consider the reality of suffering in the light of the gospel."<sup>1</sup> This is the purpose of this article.

### Diagnosis

I am 57 years old, and through all these years the Lord has blessed me with excellent health. I have hardly ever been ill and, until recently, the only operation I had was for a groin hernia, which was repaired with day surgery. Late in June last year I had symptoms that gave me concern and went to see my doctor. He sent me for blood tests and then for an ultrasound. The scan revealed a large cancerous tumour that had taken

over and distended my left kidney. This was followed by a CT scan and a visit with an urologist. The weeks between the ultra sound diagnosis and receiving the result of the CT scan were the most difficult for us as we did not know how far the cancer had spread. If it had gone to my liver or my lungs then my life expectancy would be relatively short.

### First reactions

One morning during those weeks I was home by myself, sitting in my study, reading and praying. I looked around at all my books, many of which I have read, but a good number I have not. Some I plan to read in my retirement. Suddenly it struck me that maybe I would not get to retirement age and these books would remain unread. This loss triggered the thought of other possible losses: my wife as a widow, my children and grandchildren, our lovely home and beautiful garden with the camellias and rhododendrons in flower. Suddenly I was overcome

with emotion and for the next half hour I wept and prayed. This was unusual for me (the weeping, not the praying!) as I am not usually an emotional person. At my elbow was my collection of books on suffering and dying. Looking at those I noticed a book presented to me after I had led a Young Adults Camp in Rotorua two years earlier - *O love that will not let me go – Facing Death with Courageous Confidence in God*, by Nancy Guthrie. I picked it up and began reading and was greatly helped by a quote from Andrew Rivet, a Christian scholar who died in 1651 at the age of 77. Just before he died he wrote this;

*The sense of divine favour increases in me every moment. My pains are tolerable and my joys inestimable. I am not more vexed with earthly cares. I remember when any new book came out, how earnestly I longed after it – but now all that is but dust. You are my all, O Lord; my good is to approach to you.*



John and Harriet Haverland

*O what a library I have in God, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! You are the teacher of spirits – I have learned more divinity in these ten days that you have come to visit me, than I did in fifty years before.*

That same morning I was preparing a sermon on Psalm 119:105-112 and was reading a commentary by Charles Bridges on this great psalm. The thoughts and reflections of Bridges were just what I needed. I read, “The time of special need is at hand with us all, when we shall need substance and reality for our support – the true confidence of a living faith. Those who have never felt the nearness of eternity, can have but a faint idea of what we shall need in the hour when ‘flesh and heart fail’,

to fix a sure unshaken foot upon ‘the Rock of ages’.”<sup>2</sup> I was able to apply to myself the words of the psalm before I preached it to others.

During this time of waiting and uncertainty I also drew much comfort from the doctrine of the providence of God and the wonderful summary and application of this in the Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 28; “How does the knowledge of God’s providence comfort you? We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love.” I was very thankful for the many blessings God had given to me over so many years and now, when things were going against me, I knew I had to be patient (more about that later).

The diagnosis of cancer and the uncertainty of our future was a sudden and sobering reminder that our lives and times are in God’s hands (Psalm 31:15). Like most of us, Harriet and I have often talked about our plans for the future. We thought that when I retired from pastoral ministry we could spend a few months helping out churches in our denomination that did not have a pastor. We had talked about a long holiday around the South Island with our caravan. Suddenly all these plans were called into question. It reminded me of the warning in James 4:13-17 against making plans as though our lives and future were in our own hands. We always knew that our plans were *Deo Volente*, Lord willing, but my cancer impressed this on us with new clarity. It reminded us that we “are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14).<sup>3</sup>



Many, many cards were received from so many.

### **Surgery**

Five weeks after I first saw my doctor I had a visit with an urologist through the public health system, and two weeks after that I was admitted to Auckland Hospital for surgery. It was a major operation as the surgeon wanted to be sure that the cancer has not spread to other organs in my body. Thankfully the surgery showed that the cancer was completely contained within the kidney membrane.

In hospital I began reading the Psalms. I read regularly and systematically through the Psalms, but decided to begin again in hospital as this seemed an appropriate part of the Bible for my present circumstances. This proved most beneficial and I was able to draw much comfort from many of them. When I had trouble sleeping at night I meditated on what is known as “The Evening Psalm”, Psalm 4, “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (v 8, cf. Ps 3:5).<sup>4</sup>

Many people came to visit me during my week in hospital, including my family, my sister in law from Australia, members of the Pukekohe congregation and other Reformed churches in Auckland, and my fellow pastors from these churches, and all were a great encouragement.

### **Further reflections**

When I arrived home I continued reading the psalms and also began reading the book of Job; I thought that would aid my reflections on suffering and trial and how God uses these in our lives. I noted that Job spoke honestly to God about his suffering. I was reminded that Job’s friends

“Often the focus goes on the person with cancer and the spouse may be ignored.”

were the most help to him when they came to visit him and sat with him for seven days without saying anything; yet when they began to talk to him they only intensified his suffering with their distorted theology and insensitive applications. Thankfully, friends who came to visit me were of better comfort and consolation!

In the weeks leading up to my surgery Harriet was very emotional, partly due to the shock of the cancer news, and partly because of the uncertainties of my situation and our future. Those of you who know her will know that she both laughs and cries easily. Harriet wondered if her crying demonstrated a lack of faith and trust in God. I reassured her that was not necessarily so; some people are more emotional than others and for many crying is a helpful release of emotion. In situations of grief and uncertainty our emotions will fluctuate and that is entirely understandable. What you do is more important than how you feel. Are you still attending worship? Are you praying? Are you reading your Bible? Are you meeting with God's people? Are you getting some sleep? Are you emotional? My wife was doing all these things and recognising this helped put her crying in perspective.

My wife's reactions also highlight the need to care for the carer in times of illness. Often the focus goes on the person with cancer and the spouse may be ignored. Thankfully that was not our experience. A friend came specifically to visit Harriet to encourage her; another woman in the church took her out for coffee; and we particularly appreciated cards that were addressed to both of us.

This experience has made us more aware of the brevity of our lives and of death. We all know that one day we are going to die. Most of us put it to the back of minds as something that will happen in the distant future. But

cancer, a serious accident, or the death of a relative pushes death to the forefront of our minds. Solomon encourages us to think about death: "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart" (Eccl 7:2). My wife and I have taken this to heart and have discussed what Harriet would do if I died before her: would she continue living in our large home? Have we made adequate provisions for her living on her own? None of us want to be morbid and overly pre-occupied about our death, but we do need to be realistic and each one of us needs to be prepared. That preparation should include practical matters, but even more our *spiritual* preparation. Ask yourself; Do I know God as my Creator and my Father in Heaven? Do I trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of my sins? Am I living a godly and holy life? Am I prepared to die? Do I have assurance of salvation?

The temptation I struggled with most of all was impatience. During the early stages of my recovery I was impatient with my pain, with my weariness, with the loss of my sense of taste, with not being able to be at my work, and with not being strong enough to attend church services. One Saturday evening I was struggling with all this and had to confess my impatience to God, ask for forgiveness and pray for more patience! The next morning I continued reading in the psalms and read Psalm 40:1, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry." Then I read James 1:4, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." These were verses from the Holy Spirit for my situation! I needed to wait patiently for the Lord and to persevere in my trial! I had to remind myself that two months of recovery is a very short time of illness in a life-time of ministry, and that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Furthermore, "Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

#### **Back to work**

I had six weeks off work and preaching, although the elders of the church urged me to take all the time I needed to fully recover. At week seven I led the morning service only and preached on Philippi-

ans 1:12-26.<sup>5</sup> The apostle Paul was in prison awaiting possible execution by the Romans. He wrote to the believers in Philippi that he was torn between two choices: "to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" or to "remain in the body" (v 23f). He expressed this succinctly in this well-known phrase; "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (v 21). My thoughts and feelings through my surgery and recovery were similar to those of the apostle. There was immediate gain in going to be with the Lord, but there was also the desire to stay here on earth to be with my wife, children and grandchildren and to be of some use in the Pukekohe church and in our denomination. Thankfully, God makes these decisions, not us, and I was content to leave that in his hands.

As I write this it is almost six months since my surgery. In a few weeks time I will receive another CT scan to see if there is any further evidence of cancer. I am fully back at my usual work and am feeling fit and well. After I had recovered a member of our church asked me if I viewed life differently. Yes, I do. I am more aware of my own mortality and that this present life is a gift of God, and not to take this for granted. My wife and I are thankful to God for his grace and favour to us in our marriage and in preserving my life, health and strength. I am reminded that on the one hand no one is indispensable but on the other that each one of us must make good use of the time, gifts and opportunities God has given to us. I have gained a new empathy for those who are unwell or having major surgery. And, finally, I am very grateful for the love of God and the love of his people, in Pukekohe and in our denomination.

#### **Notes**

- 1 Paul D Wolfe, *My God is True – Lessons Learned Along Cancer's Dark Road*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 2009
- 2 Charles Bridges, *Psalms 119*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, p 278
- 3 There are other biblical references to the fleeting nature of our lives; "You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath." Ps 39:5, cf. Ps 90:3-12
- 4 Psalms 16, 27, 28 and the beginning of Psalm 18 were also especially comforting.
- 5 You can hear this sermon on the Pukekohe website – [www.rcnzonline.com/pukekohe](http://www.rcnzonline.com/pukekohe) - as well as a sermon I preached on James 4:13-17 just before my surgery.

*Mr John Haverland is the minister of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.*

## Cancer – suffering in the light of the gospel (2)

# He didn't even knock!

### R van der Meulen

He didn't even knock! He just burst through the front door uninvited. That infamous rogue Mr. C. Anker marched right into the middle of my home and family. My wife looked at me with horror on her face. The children were bewildered! He sat down at the family table and life hasn't been the same since. Why? What for? Why me? Why us? Why my home? Why not our elderly neighbour? Is it something we did? Why? Why?

My beautiful wife of 24 years – my loving and perfect partner, the glue of the family, needed mother to four teenagers, friend and witness to so many – was diagnosed with breast cancer in early 2006 and so started the years of upheaval and uncertainty. Operations, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, diets, and alternative medicine were all part of the fight but the Lord called Helen home on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2009.

Why would God do such a thing? What about your promises Lord, like obey your parents so that you may live long in the land the Lord is giving you

(she was a great daughter!), or what the Proverb says about wisdom and fear of the Lord prolonging life (she reverently feared the Lord!)? My wife's father told me he would have swapped with her in an instant. Surely that's how it's supposed to be, Lord? Surely that's wiser?

What are some of the things that I have learnt from all this?

First, God is in control and he moves in a mysterious way. Psalm 31 tells us that our times are in the Lord's hand. Proverbs 19 says that we make lots of plans in our minds but the Lord's purposes prevail. Our lives here on earth are but a small pin-prick in the ribbon of eternity so whether it's 50 years or three score and ten, it's what we do with the years on earth that the Lord gives us which is important. When the word 'life' is used in Scripture it frequently has in mind eternal life, ultimately. Having said that, it is heart-wrenching to go through a family cancer episode. But it is a huge comfort to know that it is part of God's plan, even though to us it doesn't seem to make sense, especially if it is too early in our eyes.

Second, cancer makes you right-minded concerning God. With a personal or close (spouse or child) cancer encounter priorities fall in place more correctly. Time spent in the Word becomes more valuable. Prayer is more vivid and real. The frivolities of life become more frivolous. Reliance on human strength and ability decreases as the sense of Christ's sufficiency increases. Hearses don't have trailers; the real treasures in life are those being stored in heaven. How you and the family deal with cancer can be a powerful witness. Cancer is also a blessing in that it allows time to prepare. Goodbyes can be said, plans can be properly finalised, opportunity exists to mend relationships, and most importantly the opportunity to be right with God is given.

Third, cancer is good for the church! Yes, true! Concern, sacrificial service, card and email writing, empathy, prayer, meal preparation, and visiting are stirred up. It makes the body of Christ do what it should – take good care of a suffering member and family. Many are built up and blessed in their works of service. And it is good to receive and accept help when it is offered. It's often the simple gifts or offers – the young man turning up with coffee refills or the family dropping off a box of groceries – that are most appreciated. It was such a blessing to be part of a caring church as we walked the road of trial God had put us on; my wife was tremendously comforted knowing that it would remain so once she passed to glory.

And last, cancer is one of the ways that the Lord uses to call home those who are his. We will all face death and nearly a third of all deaths in NZ are from cancer. One in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during their lifetime. The ratios would be similar in the church. When we get sick we want to be healed. Sometimes we are (temporarily) healed physically in this life but the only real healing solution is Christ. Christ is the cancer-curer.



Mr. C. Ancer is no longer in my house but his legacy remains. I know now that he isn't a rogue but actually a servant from the Lord. The sovereign God uses him to fulfil his purposes even though I may not know the reasons and maybe

never will. At some stage he may be back in my home again – actually, likely. He may visit you too. Through God's grace try and see him as from the Lord, even though the 'why?' questions aren't fully answered. Have another look at Romans

8, especially from verse 17 on. The real question is actually "Why not me?"

*Mr Ray van der Meulen is a member of the Reformed church of Dovedale*

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## Comfort in the face of difficult hurdles

**From Paul and Annamarie van der Wel. We are members of the Reformed Church of Hamilton and Paul is currently serving the church as an elder.**

When I was approached to write this article my initial reaction was that my journey with cancer is like many others, so what could I offer in terms of comfort and advice? However, recently a brother in Christ and good friend was diagnosed with cancer and embarked on a similar journey. While I was supporting him I realized that there is great comfort when we can show how our mighty God works in our lives even when faced with some of the most difficult hurdles. During this time our gracious Lord worked with me and through me and in His providence has allowed me to continue to serve Him on this earth until, in His perfect timing He calls me home. There are realities of the Christian walk I have come to understand more fully during this journey:

1. How true it is that trials as described in James 1:2-4, even though they test your faith, produce steadfastness.
2. How God uplifts us in these times through the prayers of many as described in 2 Corinthians 1:11.
3. How, as a follower of Christ, it is often in these difficult times, that those around us who don't know him see clearly the reality of our personal faith in our lives in how we deal and cope with confronting our earthly mortality as in 1 Timothy 6:11-16.

The reality hits when the definitive diagnosis is made. In my case this was in February 2012. I was 52 years old. After a year of investigation I had my diagnosis – an aggressive form of prostate cancer.

Even with amazing advances in modern medicine we still tend to equate cancer with death. The term cancer describes a whole range of related diseases and a number of these are curable. However knowing this does not prevent the emotional response from both yourself and those you love, to the reality of our mortality humanly speaking. As we came to grips with this it was simply amazing **how God's peace which surpasses all our understanding settled us.** After all, this life on earth is transient compared to eternity with Jesus.

The treatment journey began. I was blessed to know a fine Christian urological surgeon. He helped guide me through the various procedures: biopsies, staging scans, bone scans etc. He shared my faith and understood how this impacted on the treatment decisions we made. The biopsy results showed a high grade aggressive tumour. Scans showed numerous small nodules in my lungs. After some consideration the decision was made to proceed to a radical prostatectomy as we could not determine whether the lung nodules were related or not. After 7 hours of surgery the primary tumour was removed and investigation showed that the tumour cells had invaded the lymphatics and blood vessels. It also extended outside the capsule and into local lymph nodes.

As I recovered, each morning on waking I would reflect on Ps 118:24, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it". Self-pity can be incredibly destructive in these circumstances. I tried to consciously close this door in my mind and instead count my blessings. **I had the prayers of many brothers and sisters uplifting me,** even

to the point where clients from my Veterinary practice who I hadn't even realised were Christians would let me know they and their church fellowship were praying for me. In fact these trials can be more arduous on those around you. I had a strong supportive family, my wife Annamarie, who is a paramedic, knew how to help me during the most difficult times, and our 4 children and their spouses, who all walk in the Lord, understood that our God had the master plan. We were blessed to be well prepared for such a situation with good medical and income protection insurance cover. Indeed, there were many blessings to consider. It says in James **"through trials your faith will be made more steadfast"**. This was my

“There is great comfort when we can show how our mighty God works in our lives even when faced with some of the most difficult hurdles”

experience. I understood that sickness and disease entered the earth after the fall, but also knew that experiencing this was part of God's plan for my life. Each new day was a day the Lord had given me and I rejoiced and was glad in it.

The staff and clients at my veterinary practice would ask me how I coped. I had so many opportunities to share my faith in how the Lord was holding me in the palm of his hand, giving me the strength and peace to deal with what each new day brought. I explained how I was a forgiven sinner and had no fear of death, if the Lord chose to call me home. For me a real note of sadness was the fact that one of my receptionists was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer two months before my diagnosis. She was

cancer, rapidly dropped to undetectable and have remained so until this day. Each month I was tested. CT scans of the chest and abdomen every couple of months showed no changes and as time proceeded the nodules in my lungs remained static. Originally radiotherapy was not considered as they felt the cancer had already jumped the gate, so to speak. However, the picture was changing and now I was advised to consider this treatment, as there was a chance for any stray cancer cells to be killed by the radiation, so I had a chance of a cure. So I spent the summer of 2012/13 on daily visits to the hospital for an arduous 8 weeks of strong radiation treatments. Of all the treatments this was the toughest. The side-effects were difficult. Each morning

shape and form, some are obvious and some are not, hidden or borne in silence. On Paul's diagnosis it was never "why us", but rather, where do we go from here? There were some difficult decisions to make and I knew that our God did not give us more than we could bear, which gave me comfort.

In my profession I see the effects of disease, and knew what the road ahead for Paul potentially could be. Whereas before, we had made long-term plans, now we looked very much at the here and now. After visiting various specialists we decided to fast-forward some long term plans and together experience a few things on our wish list. This included some international travel, something to look forward to between the scans and treatments. We were living very short-term now, no long-range plans, only re-focussing. We were told not to make any radical decisions for the first six months, such as selling the farm or throwing in our professions, etc. This proved to be good advice.

During this time we had cards, visits and phone calls, and felt buoyed by the love of God's people in this stormy sea of emotions. Books, miracle cures and diets were also sent to us. While perhaps motivated by concern, some of the more radical information was not very helpful. I found much more comfort in knowing that our brothers and sisters in Christ were praying for us. I was not about to clutch at straws, radically changing our lifestyle and diet, eating food that was not part of our usual diet. Matt 6: 25-27/Luke 12:22-23. God was in this and to start blaming something for causing the cancer is to negate that He knows the length of our days and that every step is ordered by Him. God is the Great Physician so could provide a miracle if He chose to.

We are almost three years into this journey and have since been blessed with two beautiful grandchildren. Paul has enjoyed good health with regular monitoring, and has not needed direct treatment for the cancer for the last 18 months. The future is in God's hands and we will rest in his loving care.

In closing, let me share this. When things got too overwhelming during the uncertainty about our future, I read this quote I had found and had pinned to my wall, and that reminded me that God is my rock: 'When all around my soul gives way, HE then is all my hope and stay.' This helped me get back on track when my emotions sometimes got the better of me. :)



a wonderful "salt of the earth" type of person, but up till her death 11 months later she never opened her heart to the wonder of salvation through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

After surgery I was put on an aggressive regime of drugs to block my hormone production to slow progression of the cancer. Prostate cancer has no human cure as such unless totally removed, but different drugs are used to delay the progression. Encouraged by my surgeon, I visited specialists for opinions on further treatment including radiotherapy and chemotherapy oncologists. They painted in the main a grim picture. **But we knew that only our Lord really knew my days on this earth.**

For me it was a choice whether to wait with trepidation the return of the beast, or to go on really "living" my life before the Lord. After surgery my markers, which had never been high as is the case with more aggressive forms of prostate

I woke and told myself "This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it", then raced to the bathroom. Over the next year my body gradually healed to the point where I was able to return to my full time role managing my practice. As each test and scan showed no progression over time, we decided to phase out all the medical treatments for the meantime, as these could be reintroduced on evidence of the return of the cancer. The cancer and its various treatments have left their scars and aspects of my life will never be the same, however I know that each new day the Lord has made for me to serve and enjoy Him first, and of course to rejoice and be glad in it.

Annamarie will conclude.

I remembered a Dutch proverb my mother had once said, which loosely translated means 'every house has its cross to bear'. No one is exempt or untouched by trials. They come in every



of people's concern and prayers without the topic dominating every conversation. I hasten to add that I don't mean for it to be a taboo subject. For example, asking what specifically to pray for, is beneficial to us mutually. Of course God knows every minute detail of our lives, but we as Christians can pray more meaningfully with a fuller picture of any given situation.

Interacting with people who have a terminal illness may be very intimidating for those who have had very little or no experience with it. What does one say to him or her? I confess we have had some strange comments or questions at times, but fully appreciate the awkwardness some people struggle with in such unfamiliar territory. Demonstrating that you care by engaging with that person will override any bumbling comments.

Several books were given to me while

living in the US. A "good read" is *Coping with Cancer* by John E Packo. Joni Eareckson Tada also wrote a helpful booklet, *Diagnosed with breast cancer*. The biblical counsel is pertinent to anyone facing a terminal disease. I have read biographies of Christians who have suffered in many different ways (far greater than I, I might add) and have been encouraged and inspired.

While the most challenging aspects of this journey so far have been waiting on the Lord and His timing for us, and the roller coaster ride that often comes with cancer, when we left the U.S. 18 months ago I didn't envisage being able to enjoy the quality of life that I currently have – chemotherapy side effects notwithstanding. As far as we understand, the medical toolbox has a few more potions available to us. Indeed, many

cancer sufferers can live for years with advanced (in my case lungs, spine, and liver) disease, able to go about their daily lives in an ordinary fashion.

Yes, it has been reinforced to us that we are not promised a long and happy life here on earth, because that is not our purpose here. Psalm 90:12 teaches us to "number our days so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom". However, for now, we live as normally as possible, enjoying the time we have been given, endeavouring to use it in ways pleasing to the Lord, thankful that He, "who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies, so that they will be like His glorious body", Phil 3:21.

*Mrs Judy Snoek is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.*

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## Cancer from a Medical Perspective

There are a variety of cancers. Many types are not deadly and can be managed quite well. Cancers have got a variety of treatments, and if no curative treatment is available, there are many options to help a cancer patient keep their dignity, be as comfortable as possible and keep to their expressed wishes.

Cancer, "The big C". A scare-word. A feared word. Why a scare word? Often

it is the big uncertainty.

Why a feared word? Because of the fears of discomfort and pain or the fear of death. You might also have financial, practical or emotional worries for your family. I am sure you could add to this list.<sup>1</sup>

The uncertainty. Thanks to the media (in its many forms), our general public are well aware of suspicious symptoms

for a variety of cancers. I would urge people to see their doctor if they have got concerns about e.g. bruising, bleeding, unexplained weight loss, swellings and changing moles or lumps, to name but a few. Investigations are often reassuring for people with benign (non-cancerous) lesions, or reassuring in early/precancerous lesions with a clear plan for follow up. Despite what you might think, I have witnessed several times that stress decreases once a cancer is diagnosed. The burden then gets shared (by health professionals and your loved ones) and processes are activated to get management plans under way.

When a cancer is confirmed (and often before final confirmation), a grieving process is set in motion. Grieving after loss due to death is a well-known phenomenon. Grieving can occur after any loss, e.g. loss of income, loss of freedom, loss of health or loss of independence. It is important to realise that not only the one diagnosed with cancer will go through the various phases of grief, but those around him or her will also be grieving. The cancer sufferer could be experiencing the grieving process differently, or be in a different phase than those around him or her. Love, patience,



grace and information are needed.

## **2 Galatians 6 and Romans 8**

Challenges in our lives are amazingly used by God for us to grow in our faith, trust and thankfulness. I have witnessed how families unite, how people turn from selfishness to care and support, how many re-evaluate their own priorities in life and how unbelievers come to the faith through the example of a Christian patient's trust in God during terminal cancer.

Every individual is unique in so many aspects (personality, previous experiences, seasons of life, viewpoints) and therefore everyone is unique in their experiences. For example: The different ways in handling information (some want to know everything there is to know about diagnosis and treatment options and others want to know only the minimum). There are variations in the amount and types of treatment that people want. Others have difficulty being in a "patient-role" and the list goes on.

After diagnosis of a treatable cancer, the best option/s will be discussed by specialists. Due to the scope of this article, treatments will not be discussed here.

Advanced care planning<sup>3</sup> is available in New Zealand and supported by the Ministry of Health of NZ. This is a helpful

guide to get you to think about what is important to you. It includes information booklets and a form to fill out (as little or as much as you prefer to complete).

If the cancer is beyond curative treatment,<sup>4</sup> it does not mean that we have reached the end of what is available. Your health team try to work together to get the best outcomes. This team usually includes your general practitioner and dedicated specialists and nurses. Palliative radiotherapy, palliative surgery, medications, equipment and support are available in various forms to get you or your loved one as comfortable as possible. Despite the challenges, personal growth, growth in knowledge and appreciation on several levels are seen.

Conclusion: A diagnosis of cancer does not need to take over our lives due to fear. There are options in the form of helpful, caring support and medical treatments; but above all, from our loving and all powerful God.

### **Notes**

1 Anxiety, worry, fears : Eccl 11:10 Banish anxiety from your heart.

1 Pet 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. Ps 139:23 Test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Matt 6:27 and Luke 12:25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?

2 Galatians 6:2 Carry each others burdens.

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory

that will be revealed in us

8:22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

8:35,<sup>38</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3 <http://www.advancedcareplanning.org.nz/> for guides, templates. Supported by the Ministry of Health of NZ. Advanced Care plan could include e.g. contact details of family, of enduring power of attorney, pastor, funeral services and solicitor. Also if people would prefer to stay at home the last days of their lives or rather want to be in a hospital/rest home and many practical options that could be very important for an individual

4 Palliate definition, to relieve or lessen without curing; alleviate, mitigate;

Cancer patients are served by Palliative care, hospice, or district nurses depending on different areas in NZ.

There are a variety of cancer support groups. Overarching is Cancer Society of NZ Cancer Information Helpline 0800 CANCER (226 237) or email [information@akcansoc.org.nz](mailto:information@akcansoc.org.nz).

*Dr Oneira Johanna Meyer, is a General Practitioner in Rotorua, previously from the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.*

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## **Cancer – suffering in the light of the gospel ... a review**

### ***My God is True! Lessons Learned Along Cancer's Dark Road***

by Paul D. Wolfe

Published by Banner of Truth Trust, 2009. 148 pages, paperback.

**Reviewed by John A Haverland**

On the first Sunday in August 2014 immediately after the morning service I informed the Pukekohe congregation that I had kidney cancer and that I would have surgery on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August. During the following week two members of the church came to our home with a couple of books and a card. One of those books was titled, *My God is True!* I read it during my recovery and found it most helpful.

This book was written by a pastor about his own experience of cancer. At the time he was diagnosed with cancer he was a student at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, USA, preparing for the ministry. After months of suffering severe back pain an MRI scan showed that he had a cancerous mass pressing up against his spinal cord. This diagnosis began a battle with cancer that went on for a year, at the end of which he was healed. He describes the struggles he went through with honesty and realism.

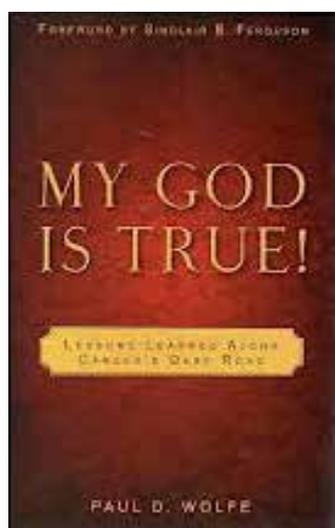
What I appreciate most about this book is its biblical and reformed perspective. Paul Wolfe recognised that God was in charge of his life and that

God could do as he willed and that he had to accept his cancer as the providence of God. This resonated with me because this was how I thought about my own cancer. In chapter two he quotes from the *Heidelberg Catechism* on God's providence, which I often called to mind, and went to the passage in James 4 about God's sovereign will over our plans, which was also a help to me. He explains that he deliberately put this truth at the beginning of the book because of "the conviction that the one who is ordering the course of my life – the *whole* of my life, no gaps, no holes, no exceptions – is my loving heavenly Father." This chapter sets the tone for the book – his life, and ours, was and

is in God's hands and he trusted in his heavenly Father. He quotes the hymn "What'er my God ordains is right" and he was able to accept this for his own situation, as I was.

No doubt you will find other Christian books that urge you to pray harder in sickness promising that God will heal you, or advising you to go to a healing meeting with the expectation that a pastor with the gift of healing will restore you to good health. We know that God can work miracles and that he can heal people marvellously and miraculously, and that sometimes he does; but we also know that often God allows us to suffer, and that he works through medicine and surgery to heal us, and that sometimes he allows us to suffer and then die. Paul Wolfe explains the biblical perspective on sickness and healing in chapter three, concluding with the death of his mother-in-law, Linda Olson, after two years of struggle with cancer. "What had God promised her? To heal her of cancer? No. But something far better. He had promised to stand by her as her loving heavenly Father in the face of her greatest fears, and then to use her death to bring her to her eternal home."

In the middle section of this book the writer describes his surgery and the subsequent rounds of chemotherapy and radiation which took a great toll on his body. I was grateful that my cancer was contained in my kidney and that I did not need any of this. Yet, as I write this my father-in-law is nearing the end of months of chemotherapy in preparation for surgery to remove his stomach which is infected with cancer. My wife and I are aware of how difficult this has been for him. This was also difficult for Paul Wolfe, but he not only wrote about his struggles but also about his joy in the



Lord. He affirmed the faith of Habakkuk, who, in the midst of great trial wrote, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will take joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab 3:18).

Chapter 6 is titled, *You'll never walk alone*. Here he wrote about the wonderful companionship and support of his wife, Christy, and his wider family, those in the seminary and in his church. This chapter spoke to me as my wife, Harriet, was looking after me with much love and attention during my recovery. We also received much support from our family and from the members of the Pukekohe church, and received many emails and cards from other members of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. We are not alone in our suffering because God is with us, and we have the prayers, support and love of the Christian church. In this chapter the author also offered perceptive comments on how the regular, biblical, preaching ministry of the church helped prepare him for his trial and sustained him in it. "... it is most relevant for a preaching ministry, over the long haul, to pour a steady stream of biblical truth into people's hearts and minds." Rereading this, and typing it now for this review, is a good reminder to me as a pastor to keep up a preaching ministry like this.

This is a fine book – well-written, sensitive, sound, biblical and reformed. It is an excellent book for your own shelves, for your church library, or to buy and give to someone struggling with cancer. Thanks Eric and Linda for giving it to me!

### **Hope Beyond Cure**

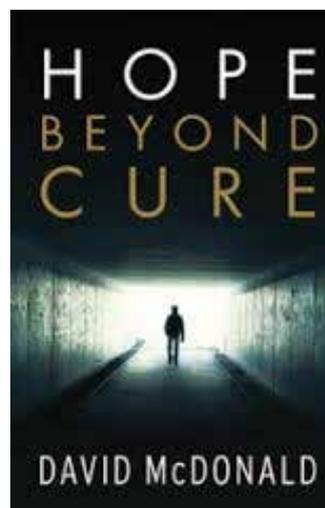
by David McDonald

Published by Matthias Media 2013,  
89 pages, paperback.

Reviewed by John A Haverland

This is another book I was given during my recovery after my cancer surgery. It was posted to me from Canberra, Australia, by Don de Vries who is the brother of my brother-in-law! He had recently heard David MacDonald speak and kindly bought this book for me. The author is the pastor of Crossroads Christian Church in Canberra and has been there for 20 years. This little book is an honest and open description of how his cancer affected him, his family and his faith. Here again is another pastor writing about his cancer in a manner that is edifying and up-building.

In December 2011 he was diagnosed with stage-4 lung cancer. The doctors told him that it was incurable and that



he had ten to thirteen months to live. He underwent two major operations and lost 15 kilograms in three weeks. This was followed by 26 three weekly cycles of chemotherapy. All this was a great test for his faith. "I began questioning my convictions. Did I really believe? Was it true or had I been kidding myself? Were there good reasons to have faith?" This pastor re-examined his faith and re-read his Bible with new eyes. As he did so his faith grew. "I began to feel a peace and confidence in trusting Jesus that I knew I would never find anywhere else."

The author uses his cancer to diagnose our deepest problem, which is not sickness but sin. The second part of this book is evangelistic outlining the need for faith in the death of Jesus, the hope found in Christ's resurrection (and the evidence for this), and the love of God for his people.

He concludes by reflecting on the 'bucket list' that people have – "a list of things you want to accomplish before you die or 'kick the bucket'." He acknowledges that he had, and still has, a list of things he would love to do but then writes that "they're not the matters that matter most .... Having a terminal illness increases the urgency, but having a strong hope in God sharpens the focus of life .... I long for people to experience the hope that I have."

This is a fine evangelistic book based on the author's own experience and pointing readers to faith in Jesus and the hope for eternal life to be found in him. It is a great book for Christians to read and to give to non-Christians who are suffering cancer. Now that I have completed this review I've just returned after giving it to our elderly neighbour who is suffering from lung cancer.

Sally Davey

# Never lose hope

Does your heart ache for a friend who doesn't yet know the Lord? A friend whom you love dearly, with whom you have shared much of life, and with whom you have spoken often, and deeply, about the need to trust God with all your heart? Yet this friend has so far resisted all appeals to turn to Jesus and be saved from the consequences of her sin. You sense a kind of ebb and flow in her interest. At times she seems close, and biblical truth strikes a chord in her heart. Then at other times she puts up the shutters and wants nothing of spiritual conversation. You realise the danger she's in, and wonder how long God's patience will last.

Or perhaps your anxiety is over a son or a daughter who's strayed far from God, and whose heart is now hardened. Perhaps, even, it's your spouse whose distance from Christ grieves you. You came to believe but he never did – what can you do for this dearest person in your life? You've talked often, you've explained your faith, you've tried to show, by your words and actions, just how wonderful the love of Christ is – but so far, it seems like your loved one is a brick wall. All your pleadings have fallen on deaf ears – or so it would seem. How should we respond?

### How do I respond?

Our temptation, sometimes, is to re-double our efforts; to think of ways to *make* things happen. We engineer encounters with other Christians, throw them into our Christian circle and hope that somehow mixing them up with other believers will help faith rub off on them. Perhaps more frequently, we try to get them along to church, thinking that that's the place where they'll hear and believe. Sometimes God does use a good sermon to move hearts. But sadly, in our unreligious age, it is quite unusual for someone to come to faith in Christ simply by attending church – unless he also has considerable, ongoing

discussion and interaction with a friend who believes and who loves him. Merely attending worship seldom leads to faith by osmosis.

In the end, we find ourselves acknowledging what we know to be true. Nothing can *make* a person believe in the Lord Jesus: neither clear explanation, nor loving actions, nor pleading, nor warnings of the judgement to come. God can use these things – indeed, they are his usual human means of drawing people to the Saviour. But unless he himself is at work in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, no external influence will have any effect. Faith itself is a gift from God; no one can believe unless God first gives the new heart. We are dead in our trespasses and sins until he intervenes to raise us to life. We know all this to be true; but it is the unresponsive nature of our friend, daughter, or husband that shows us, face to face, its sad reality. Unless God moves, our friend is dead. Where does that leave us?

It does not leave us without hope. Because God *can* do something; and we can plead with him to intervene. And he loves us, and hears our prayer. He is a

God of love and mercy; and we want his love and mercy for our friend. We can pray that God would be kind and make her alive in Christ. We ourselves were once dead, and God gave us life. Surely, then, we can pray that God would do the same for her? If there is one thing that we can pray with the greatest confidence it is this: that he would bring a sinner to salvation. What could be more in line with his will? What could bring him, and all the angels in heaven greater joy than this, that one more lost sheep is found, and in the arms of the loving Shepherd of her soul? We are pleading with God for mercy for our friend; and God, being the God of mercy, is the one to whom we can turn with the greatest confidence. The passage of Scripture which encourages me in this matter more than any other is Jesus' parable of the importunate neighbour – the one who knocks and calls out in the night until his neighbour answers and gives him bread for his guest (Luke 11:5-13). We can keep praying; praying often, praying earnestly, with boldness – and without ceasing – for God to intervene and grant faith, sight and forgiveness for this one we love.



“Is our witness to our friends one of gentleness and love, of persistence in faith ... of reliable, consistent friendship over many years?”

But what keeps us from discouragement when years, or even decades pass by and our friend or family member still resists God? We certainly know from Scripture that God is patient; much more so than we are, and that he has his own perfect time for each one to believe. We can also take heart from the stories of believers who have gone before us. Let's consider a few.

#### **Augustine, John Newton, A.N. Wilson ...**

There could hardly have been any Christian more helpful to the church in its first few centuries than Augustine of Hippo – and yet it was by no means certain, when he was a young man, that he would ever believe. His mother, Monica, a devoted follower of Christ herself, was often in despair over her wayward son. As a teenager and young man he lived an immoral life, pursuing women, and the pleasures of life in general. He was a gifted man, educated beyond the norm; and in his reading he drifted from one philosophy of the day to the next, trying them all out in turn. Nothing his mother could say seemed to move his heart toward Christ. But she kept praying; and finally, at the age of 32, the words of Romans 13:13-14 pierced his heart and he believed. Perhaps he had heard all these things many times in his life from his mother, from Christian friends, or from Bishop Ambrose of Milan, whose preaching he had often appreciated. But God had his own time for

Augustine to take up Romans and read; and at the appointed time, his eyes were opened, and he believed.

Another man, fourteen hundred years later, came to believe long after his faithful mother had prayed for his salvation. Elizabeth Newton died before John was seven; and she never saw her son believe at all. He gave few signs of doing so in his younger years. Young John was brought up by his sailor father, and accompanied him on sea voyages a number of times in his teens. He joined the navy, then sailed on slave ships, and was at one stage press-ganged into further naval service. All this was a rough, sometimes cruel life, filled with scenes of brutal and licentious behaviour. He was ultimately imprisoned and badly treated by one slave trader and his wife in Africa; but finally rescued and brought back by ship to England. On the voyage home the ship was nearly wrecked in a storm off Ireland; and during this crisis, at the age of 33, he had a spiritual experience which led to his conversion. He began to read the Bible, and gave up drink, gambling and swearing. This same John Newton, once a slave ship captain, became a minister of the gospel, hymn writer, vocal opponent of the slave trade and the one who did more than any man to establish William Wilberforce in his walk of faith and in his calling as leader of the campaign against slavery.

Both these men came to believe long after their mothers began praying for them. But, you might say, they were both still only in their early thirties. What if the one I've been praying for is now in his hardened forties or fifties? Is there hope yet? Most assuredly. There are those who believe in their sixties, seventies or eighties. Didn't Jesus explain that the reward of the labourer who came into the field in the eleventh hour will be the same as those who came early in the morning? (Matthew 20:1-16).

Recently I read the testimony of A. N. Wilson, a well-known English journalist and historian who, for much of his life, was a sceptic and an atheist, and very forthright in his views. As a very young man he began study for the Church of England ministry, but dropped out at the end of his first year at Oxford. Why did he turn away from Christianity? He claims that it was the overwhelmingly secular, even anti-religious cultural milieu of the modern western world that swayed him. "To my shame", he recently admitted, "I believe it was this that made me lose faith and heart in my youth. It

felt so uncool to be religious. With the mentality of a child in the playground, I felt at some visceral level that being religious was unsexy, like having spots or wearing specs."

Yet peer pressure was not enough to entirely extinguish this professed atheist's fascination with things religious. As a journalist he continued for over 30 years to write about religious subjects and about individuals such as Leo Tolstoy, C.S. Lewis, Hilaire Belloc and even the Lord Jesus. It seems he could not entirely let go of God; or perhaps more accurately, God had not entirely let go of A.N. Wilson. In his late 50s Wilson announced he had become a Christian, writing in an article in the *Daily Mail* newspaper that in the previous five or six years he had changed his mind entirely. Why?

The answer is quite striking. Partly, he says, he had lost his fear of man and was no longer cowed by the smooth assumptions of unbelieving opinion-shapers in the media. "I relish the notion that, by asserting a belief in the risen Christ, I am defying all the liberal clever-clogs on the block; cutting-edge novelists such as Martin Amis; foul-mouthed, self-satisfied TV presenters such as Jonathan Ross and Jo Brand; and the smug, tieless architects of so much television output."

But if that were all, it would simply be a kind of perverse pride – a sort of "Believers Strike Back" mentality, which is not heart-level faith. There is more: Wilson says his belief "has come about in large measure because of the lives and examples of people I have known – not the famous, not saints, but friends and relations who have lived, and faced death, in the light of the Resurrection story, or in the quiet acceptance that they have a future after they die."<sup>1</sup>

And herein lies reason not to lose hope. If a man can live for more than thirty years resisting the gospel, but after all that time repent and believe; confessing that the simply-lived-out Christian faith of others has been used to convince him, then why not take heart ourselves? Is our witness to our friends one of gentleness and love, of persistence in faith whatever our circumstances, of reliable, consistent friendship over many years? Keep praying, and God may well reward your importunity.

#### **Notes**

- 1 A.N. Wilson, "Religion of Hatred: Why We Should No Longer Be Cowed By the Chattering Classes Ruling Britain Who Sneer at Christianity", *Daily Mail*, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2009

Jenny Waldron

# Physically and spiritually fit

I have just had the privilege of walking the Milford Track, one of the Great Walks in our fair land of New Zealand. These four days, three nights in huts, carrying all our own food, clothing and sleeping gear trip of a lifetime started after a spur of the moment decision to join friends who were planning to do it in January. I can see why so many people from overseas flock to our shores to walk this track. It has some of the most dramatic, beautiful and amazing (an over-used word, but here it means “to stand back and marvel and be awed by”) scenery. From high mountain passes, plunging waterfalls, lush green rain forest, still lakes, roaring rivers to alpine gardens, this walk continued to delight and find us utterly in awe of our Creator-God.

In preparation for this trip, I went online to look for information about the walk and discovered that one day in particular would take six-seven hours [we took even longer because the scenery was so spectacular] and climbs a long way up, descending an even longer way down to the next hut. To truly enjoy this tramp I needed to be fit because I knew if I was not, I would spend a good proportion of it crying, in pain, staggeringly tired and/or wondering how much it would cost for a helicopter to come and pick me up!

Anyone who knows me well will know that I prefer to sit and read a book rather than climb mountains. However, two things have happened in my life that have motivated me to change. One, I am married to a mountain climber, skier and trumper and I love spending time with my man; and if I am to do so, I need to get “out and about” more than my natural inclination is wont to do. Two, as I scream up towards 60 I realise that in order to continue to enjoy some measure of physical fitness in the future, I need to be physically fit now. So I embraced this idea of walking the Milford Track with some trepidation but also with determination.

The training began in earnest but I found that the biggest hurdles is motivation then commitment to stay with the programme. The training was difficult enough in and of itself, but much easier because I had huge motivation and because I had a deadline. A boat was leaving the dock at Te Anau Downs at 10:00am for the start of the track and I wanted to be on it! I committed myself to exercising and getting physically ready for the Great Walk. I found it so much easier when I had someone that would encourage me, spur me on (push me out the door) and be with me as I struggled to complete yet another trip up the Bridle Track, a steep wee track where the early settlers would climb over from Lyttleton Harbour to Christchurch.

As I hiked the Milford Track, all that training came into its own. (However, if I had trained even more I might have found the tramp easier and even more enjoyable.)

So it is with our spiritual lives. When we train ourselves spiritually during

stable, peaceful times in our lives we are better equipped to trust in the Lord as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, knowing the truth of God’s promises never to leave us, nor forsake us. It is not an “if” whether times of suffering will come but when! If we train ourselves spiritually we are better prepared for the hard roads, rocky paths and steep climbs of life than if we are lax in the daily and weekly disciplines of living a life for Jesus.

However, in the busyness of our daily lives we become slack and skip our devotions, even finding excuses not to go to church regularly - and then we tend to become spiritually flabby and unfit like spiritual couch potatoes. Then, when difficulty or suffering come, we may react with anger or crying, not understanding what is happening and blaming God for the trouble we find ourselves in. We may become bitter about the lot that has providentially fallen our way rather than be thankful for the life that the Lord has given to us. I have seen this so clearly



“So train to be spiritually fit and be disciplined in your training for godliness. Stay close to Jesus Christ at all times and find a training partner that will encourage you.”

played out in the lives of a number of my friends who, in their fifties, have lost their husbands to either cancer or accident. Most of these friends have been strong Christian women throughout their lives and when the deaths of their husbands occurred they were comforted by the peace of God and carried along in His strength, His care, His providence, and His love. There is a very real sense of loss, tears and ongoing loneliness but in their weakness and distress they are trusting in the Lord every step of the way and they have been a very real encouragement to many people. However, I have one acquaintance who was not a strong Christian before her husband died, and afterwards she struggled to find purpose for her life. She often questions why this has happened to her and she is floundering around trying to find direction and peace.

It is at times like these that our spiritual training comes to the fore. If we are spiritually fit, we are well-prepared to navigate times of distress and suffering, trusting in our Lord Jesus Christ and accepting His providence for us. You wouldn't climb a mountain pass without training for it, yet we often think we can get through life, as a Christian, without preparing for the hard times adequately.

If I had been more physically fit for

my walk, then my calf muscles wouldn't have forgotten what they were supposed to do every time I sat down (or rather when I stood up from sitting down. For days!). As we go through struggles and we are being tested and tried, even being spiritually fit does not mean that we will not feel the hurt and sorrow, but we will be fitter in the end. Although we may be relatively fit, we can also load ourselves up with extra loads that we do not need to carry because we will not let things from the past go, or we develop an unkind, unfaithful or bitter attitude. A bit like choosing to carry a heavier pack than necessary on a hike.

One of the members of our party started moaning on the last day. Everything seemed a problem. His legs were sore, the sandflies were biting, he was getting wet, his pack was heavy and on and on it went. The tramp became harder for himself and was discouraging for the rest of us as we listened to his litany of woes. The tramp gradually became a miserable place, the waterfalls no longer held any joy. I began to notice my pack was heavy, too, and that the rain seemed to be getting heavier and the sandflies bitier! After rearranging his pack, and feeding him muesli bars, his outlook changed totally. Often, we need to rearrange our attitudes, “feed” on God's Word, before we are strengthened and able to look up with joy at the beauty around us and to notice the great care that God continuously shows us. We can also be an encouragement, rather than a discouragement to others.

A spiritually fit Christian doesn't fret or worry about what comes their way nor is anxious about the future, but knows, deep in his heart, that the Lord is in control, that He loves us deeply and dearly and gives us His strength to keep going even in the most difficult of situations. The key to spiritual fitness is a close relationship with Jesus Christ, becoming more and more like Him, shunning worldliness and our natural selves, and putting on Christ.

Here are some spiritual exercises that can help us to become spiritually fit:

- Reading the Bible daily and thinking about what you have read throughout the day
- Memorising Scripture
- Praying
- Attending church (twice if possible)
- Fellowship with other Christians
- Attending Bible studies (when possible)

- Attending church camps, Family Camp, Youth and/or YAC camps, Christian conferences, Christian retreats
- Sharing with others (Christian and non-Christian) how God is working in your life
- Reading good Christian books
- Discipling others
- Being thankful in all circumstances
- Doing good works

Training to be spiritually fit isn't any easier, and is in fact harder, than trying to get physically fit, because it requires internal discipline. But our gracious and merciful Christ Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to help us. Christ has also put us in a body (the church, of which he is the head). Just as it is helpful to have someone to help you to train physically, find someone within the body to encourage you, to pray for you and to hold you accountable for how you are living your life. Having someone alongside you can be so helpful, to strengthen and motivate. So find a fitness partner and train together. My best friend and I exhort, encourage, admonish, bolster and help one another. That we are married to each other means that we see each other at our best, worst and all places in between; and we make ourselves accountable and available to be used by the Holy Spirit in each others' lives. Having your husband as your spiritual training partner is ideal but may not be possible or suitable for you, so I encourage you to find a mature Christian to help and disciple you.

Train! Physically and spiritually. When you are physically strong, the tasks you are called upon to do become easier and we can accomplish more than we thought possible, without becoming overwhelmed and fatigued. When we are spiritually strong we can face times of suffering and difficulty with the steadfastness, faithfulness, strength and the peace that surpasses all understanding. We will be able to give thanks to the Lord in all circumstances.

So train to be spiritually fit and be disciplined in your training for godliness. Stay close to Jesus Christ at all times and find a training partner who will encourage you. Leave any extra burdens with the Lord and resist the temptation to pick them up again. And if you ever get the opportunity, walk the Milford Track.

# Declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection

**Jack J. Peterson**

Resurrection! What is it? You haven't experienced it, at least in the physical sense. Many of you have experienced it in a spiritual sense, though – and you know that resurrection is a radical transformation. You have been raised from being dead in sin to being alive in Jesus Christ. You have been transformed from being a sinner to being a saint.

**What is resurrection?**

If you are a child of God, you are anticipating your own resurrection, and you expect a rather radical transformation. It is not just that you will get rid of your glasses. You will also be able to get rid of the upper and lower plates, as well as those aches and pains.

But resurrection is more than just coming back to life – there is a difference, a distinction. Between what? Between resuscitation and resurrection. The contrast is seen in Lazarus: he was brought back to ordinary, physical life – resuscitated – but he wasn't really resurrected. Some time later, undoubtedly, he died again. But there is a radical transformation in resurrection from death to eternal life.

We often think – at least I did, until I started to dig into the Scriptures – that when Jesus was resurrected, he just came back to life again. But if that is what you think, you haven't read the Scriptures carefully. Why? Because resurrection is radical transformation.

In Romans 1:3-4, Paul refers to God's gospel "regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." Literally translated, that last phrase is "by resurrection of the dead." By those words, the apostle indicates that Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of others at his second coming are both part of the same category of resurrection. Elsewhere he says, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

Our resurrection is going to be a radical one. Christ "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). We may not grasp all that that entails, but this shell of ours is going to become as glorious a body as Jesus has.

**From humiliation to exaltation**

Let's look more closely at Romans 1:3-4. Here Paul is speaking of "the gospel [God] promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (vs. 2). This is the gospel "regarding his Son" (vs. 3). It is the good news of which he later says: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (vs. 16). That gospel has to do with Jesus Christ, the Son of God (vs. 3). Literally, it pertains to "his Son according to the flesh, a descendant of David." Then verse

4 adds, literally: "and who according to the Spirit of holiness was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead." With respect to the flesh, God's Son was a descendant of David, but, with respect to the Spirit of holiness, he was declared to be the Son of God. This has commonly been understood to contrast the human and divine natures of Jesus. That contrast is most certainly taught in the Bible – but not here!

What the apostle Paul is saying is that the Son of God became the incarnate Son according to the flesh. God sent him into the world at the proper time as a descendant of David – born of a woman, born under the law (Gal. 4:4). With respect to his flesh, he is a descendant of David. Jesus' humanity is real: he has a family tree that can be traced. In fact, it is traced for us in Scripture. Jesus, the Son of God, became – "according to the flesh" – the seed of David.

His humiliation reached its climax in his obedience unto death, sacrificial death, on the cross. Romans 1:4, then, describes the stage of exaltation: he was "declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead."

What happened to Jesus in the Resurrection? It is not just that his flesh and his spirit reunited, so that he became alive again. That did happen. But there was more: he moved from one stage of his ministry to another – from humiliation to exaltation. He was raised from

the dead and ascended into heaven, where he was seated on the throne of God. Jesus, by his resurrection, is invested with kingly power, so that all authority is given to him. Jesus could stand on a hill in Galilee after his resurrection and say, "All power is mine" (see Matt. 28:18).

The kings of the earth take counsel against the Almighty and against his Anointed One (see Psalm 2). They don't want his chains. They don't want to be bound by his power, and they say, "We will break away from him." At first the Lord laughs! But then that laughter turns into anger: "I have set my King on Mount Zion." This is King Jesus, who is enthroned when, by his glorious resurrection, he enters the exaltation stage of his ministry.

God declared Jesus to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead. That was the theme of Peter's sermon on Pentecost: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Oh yes, he had those titles before. It is not that he became God, for he was God before that. But, because he was obedient as his servant, the Lord granted him the fulfillment of the promise, saying: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Ps. 110:1). That enthronement scene began in Jesus' resurrection from the dead!

### **King Jesus**

Jesus, who lives today, who sits at the right hand of the Father, and yet who through his Spirit is present with us now, is the all-glorious, all-powerful Son of God. Yes, there is a sense in which we speak of him as Jesus, meek and mild. But now he has been invested, by his resurrection, with authority and power and might. That love is there, and it still invites sinners to come to him. But he is the embodiment of saving power! As Paul sums it up, he is "Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4). Savior! Master! Messiah! King!

This is the Jesus who still calls to sinners, "Come to me, you who are weary, who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (see Matt. 11:28). This is the Jesus who calls his own people as their Shepherd, and says, "Follow me. I will be with you in every need you have. In every trial you undergo, I am there."

This is also the Jesus who, if you reject him, will reject you. To any sinner who wants to pay for his own sin in hell, Jesus will say, "Go!" But don't wait until then. Jesus, this all-powerful figure, this Savior, this Messiah, this Prophet, Priest, and King, this risen embodiment of saving power, cries out to you, "Come to me! Come to me and I will give you rest!"

*The author recently retired from being pastor of Grace OPC in San Antonio, Tex. Reproduced from New Horizons, March 2002.*

# Risen!

It is done, it is finished!

Our sins are atoned for,

God's promise fulfilled by His Son.

The suffering Servant,  
righteous Redeemer.

Our Saviour has suffered . . . and won!

Jesus has offered His life for His people.

His flock He was given to keep.

He carried our sins

to the end He was faithful.

The Shepherd who did for His sheep.

They buried His body,

sealing the grave.

But Jesus triumphantly rose.

Heaven was opened, satan defeated.

And God draws His children close.

And now we may live redeemed and forgiven.

In Thankfulness and joy all our days.

Praising the Son, praising the Spirit,

and glorify God for His grace.

And as we await that glorious morning.

When Jesus shall come once again.

To gather His sheep from the ends of the earth.

And no one is missing.

Amen!

*Bep de Jonge*

## Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

# Gleanings

## THE GLEANINGS TEAM:

**Odette De Kock** –  
Auckland Presbytery

**Yvonne Walraven** –  
Wellington Presbytery

**Frances Watson** –  
South Island Presbytery

*Collated and edited by*  
**Harriet Haverland**

The time has come to close the page of Focus on Home. We thank the Gleanings Team and those who have done this column for so many years before, particularly Andrew Reinders. Times have changed in how information is shared in our world. Most bulletin editors are sharing information with each other and Social Media is covering a lot of personal information. Most of what you read in this column is already known, so we are bringing this to a close. If you believe this can be reworked in the future, and are happy to do that, then please contact the *Faith in Focus* editor.

## MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

**Rev. Paul Archbald** declined the call extended to him by the Reformed Church of Palmerston North and decided to continue in his ministry in the Reformed Church of Silverstream, Wellington.

**Rev. Tom and Mrs. Jean Tyson** had arrived in Hastings to help out with preaching there for a couple of months. The Wellington congregation has issued a call to **Julian Dykman** to serve as minister there. Julian has also received a call from the Christian Reformed Church of Ulverstone Tasmania. Please pray that God would grant them wisdom and peace as they consider where He would have them serve.

**Wally & Sjannette Hagoort** have returned permanently from PNG. They plan to settle in Dargaville. Please remember them in prayer as they establish themselves again in New Zealand.

**Rev. Frank Van Dalen** was one of the keynote speakers at the ICRC conference held in Chch a few years back. He has connections to the RCNZ that go back many years. For some time now, he has served as director of missions for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in the USA. He recently left that position to take up mission work in Lithuania. He is currently visiting some of our churches before heading over to Lithuania.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

**Hamilton:** Christians Against Poverty – The Hamilton Central CAP Debt Centre continues to go from strength to strength. Eight clients had become debt free and 34 clients were actively engaged with CAP to become debt free. Eight clients had come to the Lord through this ministry directly, and another three had come to the Lord through the clients. They continue to be fully booked for three months in advance. An extra debt coach was appointed at the end of 2014 to increase the centre's capacity to see more clients struggling with the burden of unmanageable debt. With the constant demand for CAP Debt Centre services they require more befrienders/support people to offer practical help, love and encouragement to the clients on their journeys out of debt. Training and ongoing support is provided.

## CAMPS & CONFERENCES

**Hamilton Easter Convention:** The 21st Hamilton Easter Convention was held. The speaker this year was Rev. Andrew



*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."*  
Prov 1:7

## Teacher Vacancy

Silverstream Christian School is seeking the services of a Reformed Primary/Intermediate School Teacher for the 2015 school year. Silverstream Christian School is a school set up to provide Christian education to our covenant children. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed Faith. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed Faith and Reformed Christian Education. This is an opportunity to be a part of a vibrant covenant community.

If you have any questions or wish to apply please email:

**board@silverstreamchristian.school.nz**  
**or phone Koen van der Werff on (04) 5297 558**

Stewart, the minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Geelong (VIC). He spoke on The Parable of the Two Lost Sons (Luke 15). The titles of his presen-

tations were Leaving Home (Luke 15:11-12), The Road to Ruin (Luke 15:13-16), Going Home (Luke 15:17-20a), The Father's Welcome (Luke 15:24) and The

Quiet Rebel and the Persistent Father (Luke 15:25-31).

**Easter Youth Camp 2015** to be held at CYC Ngaruawahia, with the theme: *What you want to be when you grow up?* Studies will be led by Rev. John Haverland of the RC Pukekohe.

**South Island Easter Camp:** If you are in Senior Youth Group and have been wondering what to do for Easter Weekend look no further. The MRYC is hosting the annual South Island camp and would love you to be there for a weekend of fun and fellowship. Keep your eyes open for enrolments and if you have any questions please see your local youth group committee member or speak to one of the MRYC members.

**Palmerston North and Wanganui Reformed Church Camp:** The church camp is all go and there will be a brochure in your cubby holes after church today. We hope you can all make it!

## CLASSES, COURSES & SEMINARS

**Pukekohe:** Rev John Haverland presented a seminar series over four evenings during the first term on *The Christian in the Workplace* considering the subjects of *Vocation and Work*.

## ACTIVITIES

**BBQ and Family Day:** Everyone is invited to our BBQ/family day to be held at Frimley Park. We will be bringing the meat and we would like you to put your name down on a list in the fellowship hall with what you can bring ie. something for afternoon tea, specialty bread or a salad for dinner. We are looking at using the Frimley pools, so bring your togs if you wish to swim. We will be organising some games. Come and join us for a lovely time of fellowship. Note: If it's raining it will be cancelled. – The Social Committee (Hastings)

**The Amazing Race:** Calling all adventurers!! The Masterton youth group is hosting the Amazing Race! If you want to be a part of the action please RSVP your name and cell-phone number and we'll organize teams. It would be great to get some adults involved who would be willing to be a part of the teams and drive to the activities. Cheers, from the committee.

## Persecution update

An update from what happened in Nigeria in 2014. In Nigeria 8,500 Christians were murdered through the violence by Boko Haram. Around 450,000 families are fleeing for their lives – from that number 250,000 are families still living in camps or other places with no proper housing. And why is this, just because they believe that Jesus Christ is their Saviour. Please keep those families and their persecutors in your prayers. If you would like to have more information, you can ring Jenny on 06-304-8587. Thanks on behalf of our persecuted brothers and sisters.

## Prolife facts

The New Zealand Listener is one of the country's most widely read magazines. Now it has come out in a recent issue (17–23 January) promoting assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia. Stories on euthanasia in the New Zealand media usually begin with a tragic case guaranteed to elicit public sympathy. The *Listener* article "Dying Wishes" tells the plight of a young married Wellington lawyer facing brain cancer. She wants to die before the cancer destroys her personality. The editorial team at the *Listener* advocate legalising euthanasia. The cover shows the woman, the editorial pleads for the Law Commission to recommend change, and there are a further eight pages of text and photos promoting the cause. Nobody opposed to euthanasia is mentioned except for a cursory reference to the Catholic Church. Nor is Professor, Dr David Richmond mentioned. Dr Richmond is a New Zealand expert in geriatric health who is committed to opposing euthanasia. He recently observed that very few terminally ill patients request assisted suicide. The request frequently comes from the family, who appear to have a variety of motives.

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New Zealand's current population is just under 4.5 million people. Sometime later this year, possibly around August or September, an unfortunate baby will be legally killed. His or her death will mark 500,000 recorded abortions since the first dedicated clinic opened in April 1974. The oldest of those missing children would now be 41 and had they been allowed to live, most would have gone on to have children of their own. Consider this:

The logical result of 500,000 missing babies is an aging population. Freedom of choice inevitably has public consequences – fewer younger taxpayers to support the increasing number of retirees eligible for superannuation. In recent years, politicians, economists, business journalists and pundits have insisted that the age of eligibility has to be raised to 67, or even later to 70, because the tax payer base cannot sustain the cost of superannuation. Yet in all the dire predictions and arguments for increasing the age of eligibility, no mention of abortion as a contributing factor. For more information on pro-life issues, phone Voice for Life on (09)4430995 or visit [www.voiceforlife.org.nz](http://www.voiceforlife.org.nz).

# Working towards better support – looking for a compound manager

At the last Synod, the delegates agreed to the Overseas Mission Boards proposal to support sending an expatriate mission worker to Papua New Guinea (PNG) to assist with managing the Reformed Churches Bible College compound. This is a joint effort receiving the support of the RCNZ, the Toronto Board of Foreign Missions from the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Armadale Board of Foreign Missions from the Free Reformed Churches. It arose from a need identified at the conference held by representatives of these three boards in October 2013. I am thankful for the opportunity to explain this proposal and the support that is needed in PNG.



*(right) The student gardens, (below) student housing. This would be part of what the Compound Manager would be responsible for.*



## Grounds

Here are some of the reasons why a manager is needed. First of all, this will relieve the current missionaries of administrative/ managerial work that will allow them to focus on the primary task of their calling: to preach, teach and work pastorally among the church-groups in PNG. It is fair to say that while the curriculum is almost completed, the workload for the ordained missionaries has still steadily increased. Added to the teaching duties and care of the students are the practicums, candidate minister programme, teaching in the churches. This work has increased but so has the ongoing managerial work of security,

gardens, poultry project and maintenance. Secondly, having a manager on site will allow the missionaries to have a reasonable workload that they may do what they were called to do well and with zeal for long term development of the churches in PNG. Presently the College staff are overworked and not able to do the tasks they were called to do well. There is neither time nor opportunity to grow deepening relationships with the students or churches because there are an overwhelming number of practical and administrative needs to attend to. The church-groups in PNG are fledgling and need a great deal of assistance and teaching, that

they may grow in the Lord and mature. They need experienced missionaries to help develop Christ-like leadership and pastoral skill. Thirdly, there is a goal of various self-sustaining projects growing to a viable stage of employing nationals to run them at a viable profit. Presently we are merely dabbling in these self-sustaining projects. The missionaries do not have the expertise, time or the energy to grow the gardens and the poultry project into viable, profit making businesses. We are needing an individual or a couple who would be able to relieve the missionaries of some of their administrative duties. The right manager would have to work well with the missionaries and the students at the College.



## Job description

Some of the tasks that the manager would be responsible for are:

- administrative work for the College such as: managing finances; technology development and photocopying.
- managing the day to day running of the College.
- supervising the security personnel and the students' living accommodation.
- oversee and compensate the students who need to work on the compound during student breaks and also supervise the food rations.
- maintenance of the College
- development and planning for capital improvements.

We are looking for someone who could do this from either the RCNZ or the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. If you are interested, the OMB has developed its Missions Policy Handbook to help you and your session start to think through this process and evaluate whether the Lord is calling you to this work.

## Support

This is a combined effort with all three mission boards. All three boards will be contributing to the support of the mission worker, as the Bible College is something that is vital to the work of missions in PNG. It is necessary to develop sound instruction within the churches so that by Gods grace they might become self-sustaining, self-propagating, self-governing. All three boards are committed to this goal but realise also that it is going to take time to accomplish. We are thank-

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*The welcoming to the congregation in Veifa for the visitors from New Zealand.*

ful that the Lord has opened this door to engage in this work in PNG. Some within the RCNZ have questioned the cost of this work in PNG. Yes, it is expensive to support the work. As stewards of the Lord's funds, the OMB constantly evaluates the needs on the field with the resources that we have.

One of the things that the OMB recognises and wants to encourage you to think about is some of the intangible realities that we are also blessed with in PNG. Often we think of the money that is needed to support this work. We are conscious of the cost, and do not take these concerns lightly, but there are other factors that we must also keep in mind. Factors that don't really have a monetary value, but are important considerations with regard to the work of missions.

One important factor is accountability. We are in PNG supporting a missionary and his wife and soon a mission worker. If the worker is sent by a church from the RCNZ, we have a responsibility for their spiritual well-being. We need to maintain their well-being on the field and can easily do this because we are one of the boards that has a directing hand in this work of missions. That means our input is vital and also directive of this work. We are directly responsible for setting the vision and striving to reach the goal of this mission endeavour. The personnel we have on the field are accountable to the sending churches and the OMB. Our missionary isn't accountable to a third-party organisation, but directly to his

sending church. This is a real blessing for us to realise.

Coupled with this accountability is accessibility. PNG is only a 6 hour flight from New Zealand. This means if something happens on the field we can send a representative to the field or have the missionary or a worker come home with minimal time and cost for flights. It is the close proximity that also provides us with opportunity. We know that there are many people from the RCNZ who are eager to go and help. We are grateful for this and it is a great opportunity for us and for our brothers and sisters in PNG to have occasions for working together and building personal relationships. When we met at the On-Field Conference in October 2013, the delegates from Canada expressed the difficulty they had with the distance. They find it challenging to send teams and offer support to the field on a regular basis. This means that they miss out on these opportunities. They encouraged us to see the value of this for the close connection between the sending churches and the field.

At the Synod we were also encouraged by our brother, Mark Bube, from the OPC. He spoke with me personally but also on the floor of the Synod. He reminded us that this is the Lord's work, and our calling is to keep doing the Lord's work well and in a focused way where the Lord provides those opportunities as He has in PNG.

The practical outworking of our

support as the RCNZ is that we will assist with one-third of the cost of this work. The person who is called to this work will be sent from one of the supporting churches of New Zealand or Australia. The OMB has decided to seek the support of the churches in two stages: set-up costs and stipend. For the support of the mission workers stipend the Synod has approved the use of funds from the OMB quota. The mission worker will also need support for set-up costs like: accommodation, transport, and various training and medical provisions for getting to the field. For our portion of support for these set-up costs we will be asking the churches to give for this like we have asked for special projects on the field. We have appreciated the way numerous projects have been supported by the RCNZ. We thank the Lord for the abundance He has blessed us with and the desire of the churches to support the projects that the OMB has promoted. We estimate that our portion for this project will be NZD \$133,000. We will be sending information to your deacons to ask them for offerings for this amount.

Our vision for PNG is that the Lord would use us in the RCNZ to help the Reformed Churches of PNG to be rooted and grounded in the truth of God's word; that they may grow and develop by God's grace in the gospel

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*Preparing for worship at East Boroko.*



of Jesus Christ. We work and pray for the day when we can see Gods church flourish there with their own ministers, teachers and workers serving the Lord in accord with the Reformed confessions. This compound manager will serve to be a vital step for the accomplishment of that goal.

Please pray for this proposal and for the work in PNG. We are excited to see the way the Lord has blessed us with this opportunity and also the way that He has sustained the work. We trust that the Lord in His grace will also provide the resources of money and the right person for this work, just as He has through you in the past. May He receive the glory.

**Peter Kloosterman**



*(right) Mr David Waldron leading the worship service. Behind him on the black board you can see the order of worship and the songs and scripture readings – a true bulletin board.*

*(below) The graduation ceremony at the RCBC 2013.*

