

faith in **focus**

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Family life

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

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

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Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
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Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

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Editorial

The theme for this month's magazine, "Family life", is an important subject for 21st-century Christians.

Society is made up of families. A family is not just a bunch of individuals who agree to cohabit with one another. The Lord, in His wisdom, ordained the family as an institution – a man and wife with their children. Families are the building blocks of a stable society. However, there is more! The stability of the family unit – and that of society as a whole – is dependent on all the members living out their lives as God intended them to. This means that they live by His word. It is so very easy to succumb to the pressures of modern-day life. Husbands might be tempted out of necessity to become workaholics and "forget" their wives and children. Parents may sometimes feel that they are losing touch with their children because of a difference in language and attitudes. Maybe there are too many events to go to in our church life, which crowds out meaningful family time. Whatever the problem, it's good to get back to the basics of God's word.

In this issue we take a look at a couple of very important aspects of family life. They have everything to do with our relationships, as the Scriptures portray them. Thank you to our contributors for writing on these matters in a sincere, humorous and practical manner.

Mrs Rosalind Cressy opens the door and invites us into her home, sharing some personal details about the friendship she and her husband, Derek, enjoy. Mr John van Dyk shares some wisdom on communicating with teenagers, a topic which presents some challenges in this "get-with-it" society. Mr Andy van Ameyde reviews *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens* by Paul David Tripp – an interesting book.

Mrs Sally Davey reviews *Disciplines of a Godly Woman*, by Barbara Hughes.

Mr Daniel Wilson explores the issue of biblical forgiveness.

Mr Andre Scheepers looks at the issue of covenant obedience.

Mr Clifford G Pearce, a member of the Nelson congregation, recalls his years of teaching in Pakistan.

Mr Timothy Rott, the new minister in the Christchurch (Cornwall St) congregation, introduces himself and his family to the RCNZ.

We also have the our regular columns of World in focus, and Focus on home with the Gleanings and presbytery reports.

Cover image: Mr Paul Davey.

Photo/image credits: p3 Mr D Cressy; p5 & 13 Mrs S Davey; p22 Mr J Holtslag.

Do you have a story to tell?

Did you immigrate to New Zealand in the 1950's? Have you got a story to tell about why you came to NZ and what you found, and the life you experienced? Then why don't you let the rest of the readers hear about your story. I am sure that there are many anecdotes, humorous or serious, which would be interesting for the readership. I look forward to hearing from you. Just remember to try to keep your story to about 1400 words.

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.

Family life (1)

Companionship in marriage

Rosalind Cressy

An elderly, widowed neighbour came to us at our wedding and earnestly told us to make the most of the time we had together. Her husband had died several years before and she still missed his companionship. As a neighbour and a child, my memory of their companionship is limited to seeing them tend their colourful flower garden together. (I liked to pop their pink snapdragons when I walked past.) What is it about companionship that makes it so special even after many years of marriage?

God created us to need companionship. When God created Adam, He said it was not good for man to be alone. So He created Eve, a woman, to be a helper suitable for the man – to complete and complement the man. A wife's loving companionship was designed by God to meet her husband's need.

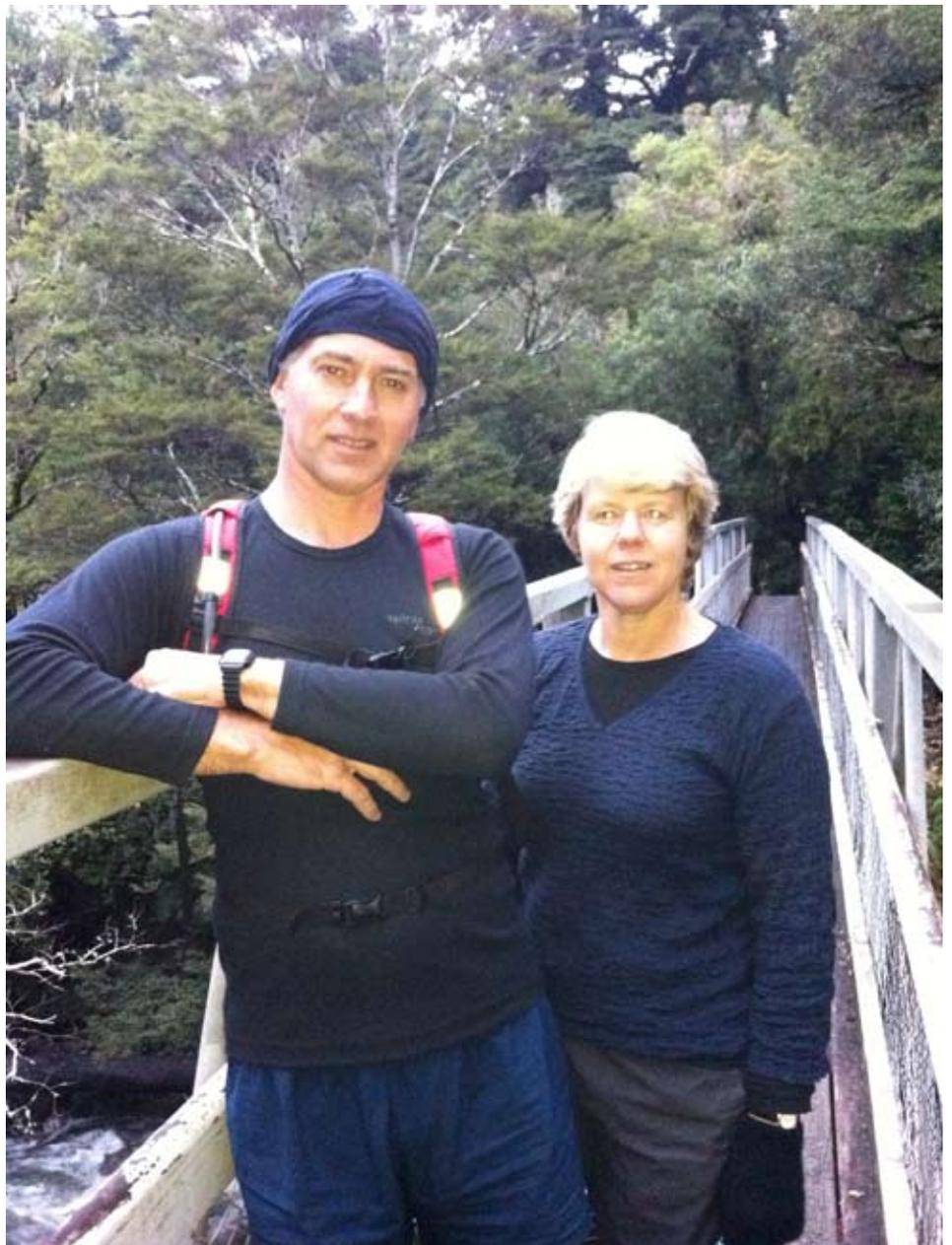
Walking before the Lord

In Christian marriage there is not just husband and wife. The Lord has joined us together and it is He who will hold us together. Our common bond is in Him. It is only when we are in a right relationship with God that we can relate to one another as God intended. It is out of the love we receive from God that we are able to love one another. Only out of a personal experience of God's grace are we able to forgive one another. His Word is the light which guides us on the questions, challenges and opportunities of each day. In daily prayerful dependence on Him we are strengthened to live before Him. When I reflect on the ups and downs of our marriage, I realise that it is when one or both of us is not walking right before the Lord that we have our "down times". Our relationship with God is reflected in our relationship with one another. And that is where marriage is such a blessing; we have the help of one another. Two are better than one. When one is weak and struggling with a particular sin, the other can give support and the needed

encouragement to repent, get up and press on. Humility and honesty are required to acknowledge the struggles we are going through, but the needed help is a blessing and our union is strengthened.

Sharing one's life with another person day in and day out through thick and thin, rain and sunshine – this is what companionship involves. It means living

and working together towards common goals and experiencing common interests together, sharing the joys of victory and the grief of failure. Mixed in with all this is the fact that in marriage husband and wife have different personalities, different roles, different schedules and engage in different activities each day. Being good companions doesn't mean we need to be constantly in each other's



Derek and Rosalind Cressy

hair all day; in fact the differences add to the richness of the relationship. I have no aptitude in engineering, but I've heard enough from listening to my husband telling me about his work as a steam engineer to be able to share his amusement when he came home from a training seminar he and a female junior colleague had conducted for a group of engineers. He laughingly told me that when giving advice on trouble shooting scenarios, his colleague told the group what to do when there are kinks in the pipes and when you have squishy steam! Even I could see the funny side of that! (In engineer's language, 'bends' in pipes and 'pressurised' steam is the correct terminology.)

Doing things together

For many years Derek and I have enjoyed walking in the bush. When the children

Last year we set aside Saturday mornings for this. Some Saturday mornings it was the last thing I felt like doing. The thought of getting out in the cold and the wet was not very enthralling, but on one of these cold mornings I did it for the sake of Derek and I didn't say anything. It was only on the way home that I told him how little I felt like it only to be told he had felt exactly the same! Once out on the track though, it was different. Some of these times, the times we least felt like it, have turned out to be such lovely times. We have returned physically invigorated, mentally and spiritually stimulated by our discussions, and this has strengthened the bonds between us. One particular Saturday morning, it was snowing in the Tararuas, and after we had walked up a steep slope, we turned a corner on the path and there below, was the river. It

had to depend on one another; which was good for us. We learned to work together as a team rather than being just two individuals doing their own thing. Running the household for a week or so after the births of some of our children gave Derek a greater appreciation of the role of a mother; and made him thankful for the calling he has. He was better able to empathise with me, and to understand the many and varied tasks I had to manage in a day. During the day life was busy, but young children go to bed early and so we had evenings to talk. His objective opinion when I couldn't see a way forward; and when I felt inadequate to deal wisely with the children day after day was a blessing and reinforced my confidence in his leadership. God uses the rough edges of each of us to help conform the other to the image of Christ.

“The pressures of life, be it the children, work, responsibilities in the church, all which are important, can easily crowd out spending time with one another.”

were younger, we would all go walking, and we enjoyed chatting and exploring the sights and sounds on the track. As the children got older and decided that Mum and Dad walked too slowly, they preferred to run; and we found ourselves more often than not walking on our own. It has become our way of unwinding at the end of the week, getting away from the telephone, enjoying one another's company and keeping fit. For us there is something about being out in the open air that helps us to clear our heads and look at problems from a different perspective. I have found that when I talk through a problem it no longer seems the big monster I thought it was. A problem shared is a problem halved. In listening to my husband talk about the challenges in his work I don't always have a solution, but listening does give me a better understanding of the challenges he is facing and a sympathising ear shares his load.

traced its way through the bush with a white ribbon on its bars. It was a sight to behold and we stood in awe of the fact that we were alone with God.

Companionship is not just about sharing the things we both enjoy. Over the years I have learned to like things I never thought would appeal to me. When we first got married I did not share my husband's passion for poetry, partly because I never understood figurative language as a child. Over the years, though, his love of poetry has rubbed off on me. To be enjoyed, a poem has to be recited and I have grown to appreciate and share in this love of his which has enriched both our lives. Conversely, Derek was never very good at detail, but my attention to accuracy and grammar has rubbed off on him to the degree that he can now write his own emails without me having to check them first!

When our children were very young, life was very busy caring for them. We

Relationships need cultivation

Just like a garden which needs regular tending and watering, so our relationship with our spouse needs to be tended and cultivated in order to grow. This requires time, effort and energy. It doesn't just happen. The pressures of life, be it the children, work, responsibilities in the church, all which are important, can easily crowd out spending time with one another. Thinking tomorrow, when ... or next week, or next year ... , there will always be something else if a priority is not made of nurturing one's relationship.

When there is much to do at home, doing tasks together is one way of getting the work done and spending time together. Undesirable menial jobs like weeding oxalis in the vegetable garden or sanding wooden window frames can be enjoyable with pleasant company.

As the seasons of life pass by, and circumstances in our lives change, continuing in friendship through a mutual commitment to God and His Word, and through prayerful dependence on Him, will provide the foundation for a growing relationship. One day failing health may mean we can no longer enjoy walking in the bush or engaging in shared activities. But instead, we will be able to reflect on pleasant memories, knowing we made the most of the time God gave us, and all the while looking forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Mrs Rosalind Cressy is a member of the Reformed Church of Masterton.

Family life (2)

Meeting the challenge of the teenage years: talking with your teenagers

John van Dyk

Meeting the Challenge of the Teenage Years: Talking with Your Teenagers

Those of us who are parents of teens know only too well the strange expressions that pass for communication between our offspring and their peers. A young lady tells her friend of an encounter with an eligible young man. "Well he looked at me and I was, like, freaked out. Then he like came over and asked me my name and I was like, duh, c'mon remember what it is. And he was like so cool about it and I was, like, sooo embarrassed."

What's the secret?

Does the secret of successfully communicating with our teens lie in somehow unlocking their obscure *lingua franca*, or even more outrageous, embracing it ourselves? Must we as parents cast off the conversational conventions and social niceties we've been cultivating for decades and attempt to emulate the vagaries of the adolescent vernacular?

I would have thought not. However, just to be sure, I suggested to our home group that for one meeting we take a break from the prophecies of Ezekiel which we had been studying, and instead discuss the science of talking to teens to see whether we could come up with a few oracular pronouncements of our own. When we did have our discussion the funny thing was that the seasoned parental campaigners were remarkably quiet while the youngest ones, those who had no children of their own, seemed to have the most to say.

To begin with, the overwhelming consensus was no, parents shouldn't use teen-talk to communicate with their adolescents. For one thing, adults don't know the idioms well enough, and more tellingly, children see such an exercise as demeaning for their parents. So how should parents address their teens, then?

Perhaps the best advice that the group agreed upon is to interact with children as far as possible in an adult way. Speak to them as if they are above their chronological age and challenge them to rise to a higher level of understanding.

Interestingly, we find no references at all to 'teenagers' or 'adolescents' in the Scriptures. Looking at the references to 'youth', far from being given helpful advice, the picture painted is very often one of unruliness and rebelliousness. Consider the disrespect shown to Elisha by the 42 youths subsequently

mauled by two bears. Or Job's (13:26) and David's (Ps. 25:7) remembrance of the sins of their youth and Paul's injunction to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:22) to flee the sins of youth. On the other hand we are told "better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king" (Ecc. 4:13). Many times the Bible relates how during one's youth decisions are made that hold fast for the remainder of one's life. Many times the comment is passed that a certain pattern has been observed since youth. For example, Elijah's confession to the prophet Obadiah, "Yet I

“Interestingly we find no references at all to 'teenagers' or 'adolescents' in the Scriptures.”



your servant have worshipped the Lord since my youth" (1 Kgs 18:12).

Two truths

So, given the importance of the time of youth, how do we as parents relate to and communicate with our teenagers? If we bear two truths in mind then we find that God's Word does indeed have much to offer on the subject. First, our teens are our children. Second, our teens may soon, by the grace of God, be our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our teenagers are our children. That's not to say we talk to them as if they were infants. But we are their parents and they are our sons and daughters. All that the Bible has to say about raising children does not fall away when those children

children. Of such significance is this instruction that it is given both to the Ephesians (6:4) and to the Colossians (3:21). In writing thus, Paul addresses fathers. Fathers are well advised to heed these verses especially during the time of life when their offspring are making the transition from childhood to adulthood. Talk to your teens as if they are still young children and they will become exasperated. Talk to them too far beyond their level of understanding or spiritual maturity and they will become embittered. Of course mothers as well as fathers can be responsible for strained relationships with their teens, but Paul addresses fathers in the first instance as they are the heads of their households and it is they who must set the tone.

“As our children emerge as adults, we as parents need to learn to talk to our teens accordingly.”

reach the age of thirteen. As parents we must continue to look to Deuteronomy 6:7: "Impress them [the Lord's commands] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." It will probably be true that by the time they reach adolescence our children will know the Ten Commandments and know that they are to love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul and strength. That doesn't mean that our job as parents is done. The message to parents is as much about setting an example, about continual reinforcement, as it is about merely imparting the truths. Parents must use all the means at their disposal to train their teens in the way of the Lord. Deuteronomy 6:7 also makes plain that our talking to our children about our heavenly Father does not just take place at our family devotions at mealtimes. Because our relationship with the Lord is, or ought to be, for the whole of life, then we will want to share the outworking of that relationship whenever and wherever the opportunity naturally presents itself.

Fathers do not ...

Another important teaching is that of Paul's not to embitter or exasperate our

Parents sometimes find it difficult to accept that in some parts of life they are outshone by their teenage children. Their children may have become more articulate, studious, musical, strong, dextrous, good-looking; indeed superior in any manner of desirable character traits. Parents will do well to recognise that such developments are gifts from God, to be thankful for, to rejoice over with their teens.

The second guiding principle is that our teens may soon be our brothers and sisters in Christ. Perhaps, praise God, they already are. At the very least they will soon reach adulthood and our everyday relationship with them will change from that of parent and child to something that more resembles brothers and sisters. As our children emerge as adults, we as parents need to learn to talk to our teens accordingly. That's not to say that teens are somehow independent, that they are free from the responsibilities and constraints of living as children in their parents' home, rather there will be many times when teens will benefit richly from being spoken to in an adult manner. Our teens ought also to be included more and more fully in the exercise of the biblical fellowship that we share with one another as believers.

Talk with them

Seek to cultivate an adult-type friendship with your teens. One that's compatible with and complements the parent-child relationship. Tell them something of the highs and lows you went through as a teen. Tell them some of the blessings and disappointments you experience now as an adult – and do it from a Christian perspective. As Christian parents, most of us regularly talk about faith with our children. But it is far less often that we talk about how that faith is working itself out in our inner being. As and when appropriate, take your teen into your confidence about your plans, aspirations, evaluations and misgivings in your own life. As we volunteer personal information about ourselves we build a bond of trust and we can expect that our teens will respond in like manner.

In this vein Lou Priolo, in his article on getting teens to open up,¹ suggests that parents have their teens memorise 2 Corinthians 6:11–13: "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also."

Be prepared to admit that you are fallible. If, regarding your mistakes and lapses in judgement towards your teens, you apologise to them then they will be less reluctant to do the same when the situation is reversed.

Get to know them

To build an effective relationship our teens, where talking together will come naturally, we need to spend time with them. We need to get to know them. Parents often think they do know their teens well – after all parents see their teens every day, they raised them from infancy. But parents can overlook the often rapid development or changes in character that occur in adolescence. Maturing children increasingly assimilate influences from beyond the home, and parents can sometimes struggle to keep up with how their youngsters are thinking. As we get to know our teens we will understand and appreciate their uniqueness; we will realise that not all the expectations we have of the one will be appropriate for the other.

In this short article I haven't attempted to discuss in detail the particular things parents might want to talk about with their teens, how they might broach these topics, how they can elicit good

responses. I would like to recommend a book by Paul Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, which is a hugely valuable resource for parents, not only in talking to teens, but in the whole task of parenting adolescents from a biblical perspective. Tripp observes that too many parents content

themselves with a mere survival of the teenage years. His response is a call for change: "It is time for us to reject the wholesale cynicism of our culture regarding adolescence. Rather than years of un-directed and unproductive struggle, these are years of unprecedented opportunity.

They are the golden age of parenting, when you begin to reap all the seeds you have sown in their lives, when you help your teenager to internalise truth, preparing him or her for a productive, God-honoring life as an adult."²

In the same way that teens are all different, so too are parents. Some find it easy to talk from the heart and forge deep relationships; others by nature are more reserved. It was clear as we talked about this at our home group that mature children do understand their parents' weaknesses and limitations. When, in spite of failings, parents do their best, then there is a great spirit of generosity on the part of former teens in accepting and giving thanks for their parents' efforts in their upbringing.³

Notes

- 1 Lou Priolo: Training teens to open up, *Reformed Perspective*, May 2010.
- 2 Paul David Tripp: *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens* (P&R Publishing, 2001), p.19.
- 3 With thanks to the members of the Mornington Home Group, 18 November 2010, whose thoughtful contributions have informed much of this article.

Mr John van Dyk is a member of the Reformed Church of Dunedin.

Think about it ...

Our focus as a church is on worship and teaching. Much else goes on, but that is the heart of our life. We want to develop a hunger and thirst for the living God. For this reason, we try not to be a "full service church," with something for everyone. We try to keep church life simple and to keep church activities to a minimum; we assume that godly homes are more likely to be built if people are at home most nights rather than run ragged by various church functions.

From the website of Woodland Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA.

Book in focus

Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens

by Paul David Tripp

**Reviewed by Andy van Ameyde
(Reformed Church of Dovedale)**

Are the challenges we face in bringing up teenagers "A Battle of Biology or a Battle of the Heart"? Tripp makes a compelling case for parents to reach far beyond the simple success of obedience to instill in the heart of our teenagers a desire to follow godly wisdom. But before I begin the review proper allow me to make a couple of general observations.

1: I have read this book for the first time as a grandparent, with four children in adulthood and two as older teenagers. But note well: this book can be fruitfully read irrespective of your stage in the life cycle! The general principles apply if your children are still young and anticipating the teenage years; if you are a parent facing the

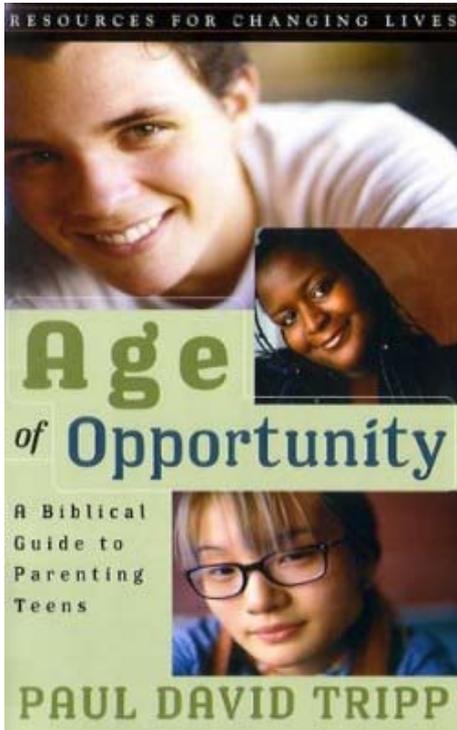
beginning teenage years; if you are a parent already immersed in the trench warfare of the teenage years; if all your children are grown up and you may be a grandparent who has the potential to be a significant influence on teenaged grand children. Or, you may just be involved as an adult in youth ministry.

2: This review is written by an imperfect parent sharing what has been read rather than by a parent of teenagers who has got it all together!

You may not need to read this book if you have the following teenager described by Tripp. The hypothetical teenager approaches their father in the following manner ... "you know Dad, I was just thinking how wise you are and what a good thing it is that God put you in my life so that I could gain wisdom. I just thought I'd come in and talk with you". I am not discounting the possibil-

ity that such a teenager may exist; but by all accounts most teenagers are more likely to be described by the well-known saying: "Ask a teenager while they know it all"! Tripp echoes this observation but states it in a negative sense with reference to Proverbs 12:1b "He who hates correction is stupid". This may sound a bit harsh but has shades of reality in that most teenagers have a profound belief in their own ability to make wise decisions. They do not have an inbuilt hunger for wisdom, are often unpredictable and spontaneous and believe that their parents have little practical insight to offer. Tripp points out that this is why so many parents dread the teenage years and unfortunately buy into the survival mode, and feel that as long as they get through these years with their sanity and marriage intact and without their teenagers having got into really serious trouble, then they have been successful.

While we cannot discount that these



are positive outcomes, Tripp offers the challenge that there is so much more that parents of teenagers can do to help nurture the child that is often in an adult's body. Tripp may be hard on teenagers – but he is also tough on parents and the idols we (so often unwittingly) cultivate and which get in the way of our being effective parents. He clearly challenges parents with the need to get their own lives in order prior to tackling their teenagers! If our parental hearts are primarily controlled by anything else than our love for the Lord then our success as parents will be limiting! Why? Because the state of our heart will rule our response to our teenagers' challenges and set the bar at the low level of our own sinfulness. Let me illustrate by way of an example. Tripp's first example of a parental idol is that of "comfort" and he observes that "secretly in our hearts, many of us want life to be a resort". When our teenager comes along and disturbs our comfort then we will see our teenager as the enemy ... how dare they disturb our peaceful Friday night with their problems! With this idol in place we will begin to fight with them, argue with them or compromise our stance; just do anything to get them out of our hair for the sake of our own comfort. "No" says Tripp ... we need to put our comfort aside, seize the opportunity and take the time to make this a teachable moment. Other parental idols mentioned are the idol of respect, the idol of appreciation, the idol of success and the idol of control.

After setting the scene in the first five chapters, which Tripp entitles "Clearing the Debris", he then moves to the second major section of the book which is entitled "Setting Godly Goals". It is here that Tripp challenges parents of teenagers that they need to be more "than detectives, jailers and judges". Parents need to have the following overarching goal in every situation: it is "to help their teenager to look at himself in the accurate mirror of the Word, which is able to expose and judge the heart. And they will do all this in a spirit of humble, gentle, kind, forgiving, forbearing and patient love". In Ezekiel 14:5 God's agenda for his people is very clear: "to recapture the heart of His people". God is not interested in an obedient formalism. And so Tripp asks the question "Can we have a lesser goal as we parent our teenagers?" Parents need to aim so much higher than just regulating behaviour or motivating with guilt or instilling fear of consequence. Parents need to aim for a change of heart so that love for the Lord will motivate behaviour. What broad goals does Tripp suggest to parents in their quest to change the heart of a teenager?

- 1: Focus on the spiritual struggle. Teenagers can be overly concerned with their physical looks and the opinion of their peers as their most pressing concern rather than seeing the wider spiritual battle that is taking place.
- 2: Develop a heart of conviction and wisdom. Teenagers need to make the

hard decisions that are right in God's eyes but may mean personal sacrifice.

- 3: Equip a teenager who is fully able to interact with their culture without becoming enslaved to its idols.

Tripp goes on in the book to offer many practical strategies for parenting teens to reach these goals. Rather than recycle the detail of these, Tripp's overall strategy is to exhort parents to be well-thought-out and deliberate. If parents don't have a "plan" for their teen then every time there is an issue we will think "off the cuff" rather than with what Tripp calls "prepared spontaneity". Secondly, parents need to be creative in ways that stimulate what Tripp calls "constant conversation". We should not accept the "non answer" to questions but patiently draw out what is living in the heart. Finally, Tripp urges parents to lead teenagers to repentance.

Overall, this book is an easy read and is more than a practical "how to" book. In essence, the book urges parents to change the heart of their teenagers so that they want to do what is right and wise and not just do what we say out of grudging obedience. Tripp urges and pleads with us to see every challenge that a teenager throws up as an opportunity to minister to our teen. He helpfully uses plenty of Scripture to reinforce what he suggests; so this book is not just the opinion of one man but is full of godly wisdom and advice. Happy reading!

World in focus

New bill in Great Britain's House of Lords Seeks to stop sharia court encroachments

On 7 June 2011, a bill designed to stop Muslim Sharia law courts from falsely claiming legal jurisdiction over criminal or family law in England and Wales was introduced in Great Britain's House of Lords by Baroness Cox. The Bill is additionally supported by The Christian Institute and the National Secular Society.

Under the Bill, it will become a crime punishable by up to five years in prison to falsely claim legal jurisdiction over criminal or family law.

The Bill makes clear that laws against sex discrimination apply to arbitration tri-

bunals, firmly outlawing the Sharia practice of treating a woman's testimony as being worth half that of a man's.

+ *The Christian Institute*

Quiet diplomacy wins freedom for convert facing possible death penalty

ISTANBUL, February 24 (CDN) — After intense diplomatic pressure last week, authorities released Afghan Christian Said Musa, who had been in prison for nearly nine months on charges of apostasy (leaving Islam), punishable by death under Islamic law. Another convert, however, remains in prison.

A source in Afghanistan told Compass that the 46-year-old Musa (alternate-

ly spelled Sayyed Mussa) was released last week and had left the country on Monday (Feb. 21), but the date of his release was not clear.

Musa had written a series of letters from his prison cell, the last one dated Feb. 13, according to Compass sources. In that letter Musa, an amputee and a father of six, said that representatives of embassies in Kabul visited him and offered him asylum.

After the representatives left, according to the letter, Musa was taken to another room where three Afghan officials tried to convince him to recant his faith. They promised to release him from prison within 24 hours if he would do so. He refused and was sent back to his cell.

"I told them I cannot [follow] Islam," he wrote in his letter. "I am Jesus Christ's servant. They pushed me much. I refused their demands."

Details of Musa's release remained confidential in order to protect him and his family, who still remain in danger, sources said.

A source in Afghanistan close to Musa praised the efforts of the international community.

"We feel that the release reveals that when many, many people come together trying to enforce justice, in some case like for our friend Said Musa, good things happen, even though it looks impossible," said the source on the condition of anonymity. "The voices of the people outside Afghanistan who put pressure on the Afghan government and on the international diplomats have been heard."

When local churches and international bodies advocate for the persecuted in faith, he added, "they have the power to change things."

The source expressed frustration, however, over the slow process for releasing Musa, who had been in prison since May 31, 2010, and over the lack of human rights and religious freedoms in Afghanistan overall.

"All this battle during nine months against the government reveals a worse situation than ever about freedom of religion," said the source. "It is very sad and discouraging, after almost 10 years of help from the international community."

Authorities arrested Musa and other Christians after the country's most popular broadcaster, Noorin TV, in May broadcast images of Afghani Christians worshipping.

The broadcast appeared on an Afghan TV show called "Sarzanin-e-man," or

"My Homeland," hosted by Nasto Nadiri, 27, an outspoken opponent of the government and a parliamentary hopeful. Noorin TV station is opposed to the government and does what it can to "embarrass" it, a source said.

The broadcast put in motion the events that got Musa arrested, according to sources. The hour-long TV show sparked protests throughout the country against Christians and a heated debate in parliament. In early June, the deputy secretary of the Afghan Parliament, Abdul Sattar Khawasi, called for the execution of converts from Islam.

During that time many converts to Christianity left the country, according to sources, and many were arrested, though the exact number is unknown.

Musa was concerned about the public outcry against Christians and went to his employer, the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, where he fitted patients for prosthetic limbs, to request personal leave the morning of May 31. Authorities arrested him after he left the building, and his family could not locate him for nearly two months.

Before being transferred to Kabul Detention Center in the Governor's Compound in November 2010, Musa had suffered sexual abuse, beatings, mockery and sleep deprivation because of his faith in Jesus in the first months of his detention.

According to the U.S. Department of State, estimates of the size of the Christian community in Afghanistan range from 500 to 8,000.

+Compass Direct News

Federal Appeals Court rules that New York City can ban use of public school facilities for Sunday services

A 3 June 2011 USA TODAY article titled "Court: N.Y. Can Block Sunday Worship Services in Public Schools" reported that the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned a lower court ruling that allowed churches to continue holding services on Sundays in New York City public schools, because doing so would be "effectively allowing schools to be converted into churches on Sunday, [in violation of the U.S. Constitution's] establishment clause."

The appeals court said that schools being principally available for public use on Sundays causes an unintended bias in favour of Christian religions because Jews and Muslims generally cannot use schools on the days when their religions generally conduct services.

The U.S. Supreme Court's 2001 decision in "Good News Club v. Milford Central School," found it unconstitutional for a public school district in Milford, New York, to exclude a private Christian organisation for children that had asked to use space in a school building after school hours to sing songs, read Bible lessons, memorise Scripture and pray.

The appeals court decision rejected the applicability of the 2001 U.S. Supreme Court decision, saying that there is "an important difference between excluding the conduct of an event or activity that includes expression of a point of view, and excluding the expression of that point of view."

+ USA TODAY

Polish abortion laws targeted by supranational institutions

"Polish sovereignty to limit abortion is under strong political pressure from supranational bodies," Grégor Puppincq of the European Center for Law and Justice told the *Friday Fax*.

Puppincq was commenting on the recent ruling from the European Court of Human Rights on the case R.R. v Poland that is the newest in a constellation of cases from the ECHR that challenge Poland's abortion laws. Polish laws on abortion are among the strictest in Europe and allows for therapeutic abortion only in a limited number of medically-determined situations.

Lauren Funk

Afghan Christian asylum seekers without protection in India

Christian Solidarity Worldwide Hong Kong reports about the possible forced repatriation of seven Afghan Christians from India after local officials from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refused to grant them refugee status. One of the seven Afghan Christians is Aman, a father of four who fled to India following the May 2010 TV broadcast of Afghans praying and being baptised, which had led to government persecution of converts. Apostasy (abandoning Islam) is a crime punishable by death under Afghanistan's sharia law, which means that returning converts are expected to meet harsh punishment back in their country. However, the UNHCR office in India stopped accepting applications from Christians fleeing religious persecution, stating they did not meet protection criteria. Christian groups supporting Aman and other asylum seekers

are urging the UNHCR and the Indian government to reconsider their decision and secure protection for the Christian converts in India.

WEA Religious Liberty – June, 2011

Christian woman arrested for evangelising in Sudan

Christian converts in North Sudan face a similar situation as their brothers in Nigeria. *Compass Direct News Service* (CDNS) reports about the arrest of a Christian woman, Hawa Abdalla Muhammad Saleh on 9th of May in the Abu Shouk camp for Internally Displaced Persons in Al-Fashir, capital of North Darfur state. Hawa is accused by the Sudanese National Security Intelligence of converting Muslims to Christianity and possessing and distributing Bibles to others in the camp. CDNS sources said she could also be tried for apostasy, which carries the death sentence in Sudan according to the sharia (Islamic law), established in the north. CDNS additionally reports that in Khartoum, 120 kilometers (75 miles) southwest of El-Fashir, a Christian mother of a 2-month-old baby has been wounded and destitute because she and her husband left Islam for Christianity. According to the report, the arrests and increased persecution comes as northern Christians become more vulnerable to official and societal pressure with South Sudan set to split from the predominantly Muslim north on 9th of July.

WEA Religious Liberty – June, 2011

Ugandan Christians fear more Muslim persecution if legislation passes giving sharia court rulings the force of law

A 7 June 2011 *ASSIST News Service* article by Jeremy Reynolds titled “Christian Fears over Sharia Courts Bill in Uganda” reports that Ugandan Christian leaders are warning that life will get worse for non-Muslims under proposed legislation that would give Sharia rulings the force of law.

The Muslim Personal Law Bill would give more power to Islamic Kadhi courts for Muslims on matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance, and the Christian leaders fear that the bill could promote Islamic extremism and pave the way for a wider application of Sharia in the predominantly Christian country. Muslims have been evading questions about how the bill would apply to Muslims that convert to Christianity, considered the capital crime of “blasphemy” under Islamic law.

+ *Assist USA*

“A new dimension of Christian persecution in India”

The Research and Analysis Report of the WEA Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) from May 19th, which most of you have already probably reviewed, gives us a thorough analysis of the current new trends of persecution against Christians in India. According to the analysis, although the politics of Hindu nationalism, which fuelled Christian persecution for over a decade in India, seems to be losing ground, the absence of mass violence may not still ensure the safety of the Christian minority. Despite the fact that India did not see any incident of “mass violence” against Christians in the last three years, the frequency of attacks on Christians remains as high as it has been for the last 13 years. The conclusion of the analysis is that “it seems almost certain that pragmatic Hindu nationalists will remain as active as, if not more than, they have been in the past – though in a fashion that does not attract too much attention. This will mean more attacks but less coverage by the mainstream media, which tends to look at the magnitude of an attack and fails to see it as part of a trend. The best way to counter this new Hindu nationalist strategy is to streamline the reporting of Christian persecution and highlight statistics periodically.”

WEA Religious Liberty – June, 2011

Pray for Christians in Somalia

The latest release of *The Voice of the Martyrs Canada* (VOM) on Somalia calls us to pray for Christians there, who persevere amid severe persecution. Somalia, a predominantly Muslim nation with Islam as its national religion, consists of a Christian population 0.05 percent. In recent years there have been reports on a number of Somali Christians, who were martyred or targeted for execution in the country. As a result many believers have fled to neighbouring countries. However, those who have remained share new testimonies that many Somalis, including believers with Muslim background, “are boldly embracing Christ, despite pressure, threats and violence.”

WEA Religious Liberty – June, 2011

Persecution against Christians in Northern Nigeria

News on the persecution on Christians in Northern Nigeria is not something new. Nigeria’s population of more than 158.2 million is divided between Christians, who live mainly in the south, and

Muslims, who live mainly in the north. *Compass Direct News Service* (CDNS) reports about the vanishing of Christian communities in two villages (Mdandi and Gumel) in Northern Nigeria, Bauchi state, as a result of Islamic attacks in March and April this year. The church buildings and the homes of the believers who fled were destroyed and the Christians are now living as displaced persons in surrounding towns. The Christians have received no assistance from the state or federal governments in resettling them back or rebuilding their houses, as the religious crisis has been portrayed as communal property squabbles.

WEA Religious Liberty – June, 2011

“Salafis’ agenda behind Christian persecution in Egypt”

The Research and Analysis Report of the WEA Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) from June 13th, which most of you have already probably reviewed, gives us an interesting political analysis of the agenda of the Salafi Muslims in Egypt after the uprising in the country in the beginning of this year and the downfall of President Hosni Mubarak. The report states that while for the youth and moderate Muslims of the country the January 25 uprising was about democratic freedom, the Salafis, who had been inactive for decades promptly saw it as an opportunity to push an Islamist agenda. The analysis is in the context of the recent spate of violence in Egypt, mostly incited by conservative Salafi Muslims, which has left over 24 killed, more than 200 wounded and three churches destroyed. The perception of threat to the Christians is so severe that many of them are reportedly seeking to move out of the country.

WEA Religious Liberty – June, 2011

Pakistan’s Christian and Hindu girls face rising incidents of forced conversion to Islam, and rape and forced marriage to Muslims

An 8 June 2011 *ASSIST News Service* article by Jeremy Reynolds titled “Reports of Victims of Forced Conversions to Islam, Rapes and Forced Marriages” reports that Pakistani girls from the Christian and Hindu religious minorities are facing increasing instances of forced conversion to Islam, along with being raped by and being forced to marry Muslim men.

+ *Assist USA*

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Ladies . . .

Imagine you have a problem. Something that's been bothering you for a good while. It's been on your heart and troubling your mind for months. You're having coffee with a friend and you've been telling her all about it. She's heard the story and listened attentively. But putting her cup down, she stops and looks at you and begins "Look, this is how I see it..." And instead of smothering you with sympathy, seeing all your problems your way, and affirming all your attitudes, she starts to summarise your situation by drawing on her great resources of biblical wisdom. She points out the roots of sinfulness in your view of the problem; she shows you where you're lacking in forgiveness; where you've wronged some loved ones; and points the way to restoring those relationships. She even shows you how to trust God in ways that you lacked faith. Wouldn't you be glad to have a friend like that? Wouldn't you be thankful for such an encounter?

Well, in Barbara Hughes you have such a friend. In writing this book she has set all the small details of our lives (the things we often worry about) against the great backdrop of the gospel of Christ. She takes us right back to the big truths – showing them to be vital and motivating – and walks us through the certainties of their practical usefulness. I was so glad of the opportunity to re-read this book. It reminded me of many attitude changes I should make, and many things which should be altered in the way I deal with others. On finishing the last chapter, I was convinced Barbara Hughes was a friend indeed. Though I have never met her, she's revealed enough of herself to assure me that I would like her. She is neither fluffy nor faint-hearted. Her book has invigorated me.

It is a perk-you-up book; a bracing and spine-strengthening one. It's the kind of book we often need in our soft, self-excusing culture. Instead of feeling better about ourselves, we often need

to see ourselves in a truer – and worse – light. This being the case, Barbara's book gives us the help we need. But she doesn't just condemn – she points the way to beneficial changes we can all make, and does so with gentle, humble and practical common sense.

The main idea of the book is encapsulated in the text which names it: "Train yourselves to be godly" (1 Timothy 4:7). Both Barbara and her minister husband, Kent (who has written a companion book for men), are of the view that living the Christian life is like exercising in a gymnasium. We need to practice the spiritual disciplines in order to train ourselves for godliness. No doubt some of you visit a gym regularly in order to

have a fit, trim body. Translate this idea into spiritual terms: Bible reading, prayer and participation in public worship train you for spiritual service to your God and Saviour.

Barbara makes the earnest point that the gospel of Christ should be our central focus throughout our lives – however mature we might become. She recounts the story of a new Christian's excitement over the words of John 3:16 at a women's Bible study, and recalls the effect this had on the more experienced Christians present: "Around the circle eyes began to glisten as Carol's awe of the Gospel laid bare the shame of those of us whose senses had been dulled to its wonder. Never lose the wonder of



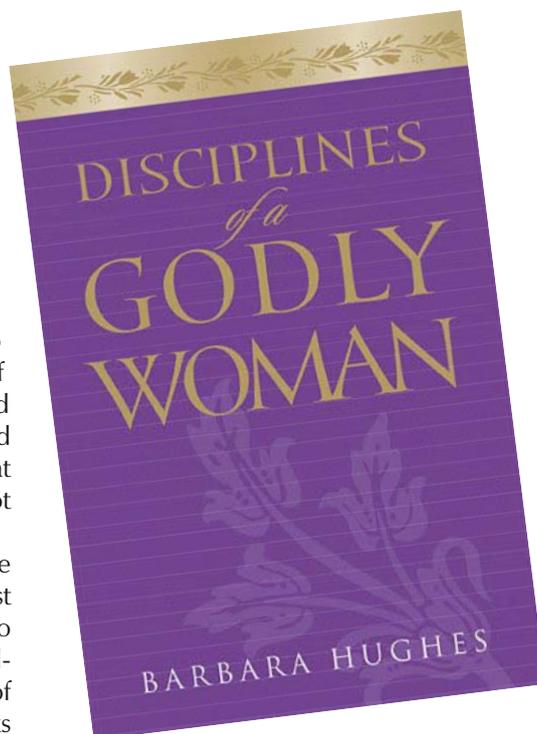
“Never lose the wonder of the Gospel! Never imagine you have outgrown it.... The Gospel is a woman’s first and most important discipline, for it is the source of godliness.”

the Gospel! Never imagine you have outgrown it... The Gospel is a woman’s first and most important discipline, for it is the source of godliness.” (p.28)

Each of the book’s four sections develops this truth through various applications. The first section deals with our walk with God. Entitled “Soul”, it covers four aspects of our life in Christ, describing them as gospel disciplines. The gospel as the source of godliness is the starting point. She then deals, successively, with the discipline of prayer (with practical suggestions on how to succeed in regular prayer habits); the discipline of submission (*i.e.* developing an attitude of submissiveness to God in all things); and the discipline of worship. This last chapter not only develops important principles about worship – that it should be God-centred, Christ-centred and Word-centred – and that we should consider all of life as lived in worship to God, every day. It also deals with the very practical matters of preparation for worship, getting a good night’s sleep, and prayer that God would be glorified in it. Do we remember that worship is for God and about Him – not for us and about us?

The second section deals with some aspects of Christian character – the first being the cultivation of our minds to the glory of God. Barbara is clearly well-read. Both the reading list at the end of the book and the wide variety of books she quotes testify to a cultivated mind. She asks: What do we feed our minds with? Good literature or junk? Have you thought seriously about the effects of television, and the fact that Christians watch – on average – very little less than the rest of the world? Do you have a good plan for Scripture reading? (It’s well within the power of most of us to

read the Bible through every year). She is wise to highlight contentment (subject of the next chapter) among character qualities Christian women should cultivate. It is sorely lacking in today’s world – even among today’s Christians – and yet it should be a crucial part of our witness. Barbara also deals with propriety (and aspects of purity) in our lives and thoughts. A fourth chapter, on perseverance, contains several wonderful stories illustrating that we can and should run



our race with endurance, because God maintains loving control of all the details of the entire course of our lives.

The third section – on relationships – is intriguing. While one might anticipate a typical emphasis on the woman’s role in home and church, on training girls to be good wives and mothers, on

marriage and motherhood as the proper goal of Christian women, and so on, this book doesn’t go there. Barbara certainly covers all of these spheres of life – but she does so in the broader context of the Christian woman’s gospel calling. Introducing her nine granddaughters, it looks as if she is heading for some grandmotherly gushing. But no – we learn instead that they are not perfect: God has given them some trials. One is so aware of sound because she is nearly blind. Another is strong and determined because she began life with a serious medical condition, requiring considerable will to survive. And she is not sentimentally looking forward to weddings. “You may think that perhaps I cherish hopes that each of these young women will grow up to meet their individual Prince Charmings, marry and provide me with plenty of great-grandchildren. Not necessarily. I hope that my grand-daughters will mature with the understanding that singleness is not something to avoid at all costs, but that singleness is in fact a desirable option for their lives, particularly in view of the Gospel.” And why? Because “Everything in our culture – books, movies, recreational pastimes – tend to push the idea that sex and romance are the ultimate pursuit. Even our evangelical churches – though in reaction to the demise of family life and the alarming escalation of divorce in our country – have overemphasised family life to the point that singles feel out of place...” (p.132) I felt like standing up and cheering when I read that. We do tend to have a narrow view of the Christian woman’s vocation, to the exclusion of those God has placed outside of the “expected” callings.

The final section of the book covers three aspects of our wider ministry: good deeds (which are our spiritual clothing); our witness to the unbelieving around us; and the call to give – of our time, our money, and ourselves. These three chapters are likewise tied into the bigger, principal picture and abound in helpful suggestions.

The book is loaded with good, practical resources for developing spiritual maturity. Each chapter ends with a series of “Renew Your Mind” questions for personal self-examination. They will provide challenges for rethinking your priorities and developing better habits; or a catalyst for discussing your way through the contents of the chapter with a friend or a group of other ladies. There are some particularly useful ap-

pendices at the end of the book. They include a list of good hymns for your devotional time, a plan for reading the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in a year, and a thoughtfully-compiled reading list. One excellent item is a list of actions to take for the "Hard Things in My Life" – a sort of spiritual emergency checklist. There's a list of Bible texts on good deeds, and lots of suggestions for practical oppor-

tunities to do them.

One of the things I love and respect about Barbara Hughes is that she knows the human heart, and from long experience. This is evident from beginning to end. You can picture the many occasions that gave rise to this reflection: "As a pastor's wife, I have often had Christian women express to me their longing for something they do not possess. In their search for what is lacking they casually

diminish and even dismiss what they have taken for granted – the knowledge of God and His gracious provisions for us discovered in the pages of Scripture." (p.27) Wouldn't you want the counsel of a friend like this? Read her book, and take it to heart.

Disciplines of a Godly Woman
by Barbara Hughes
(Crossway, Wheaton, Ill., 2001).

God's definition of forgiveness

Daniel Wilson

In Nelson, we have just finished a study on forgiveness in one of our mid-week Bible studies, and we have found it so helpful, that we decided to run it in the other Bible study as well. Lord willing, this brief series on forgiveness will be as beneficial for you as it has been for us!

Forgiveness?! What does that word mean? You hear so much about this word in Christian circles, and yet so much of what you hear is contradictory! There are so many different ideas and questions out there about what forgiveness is and what it isn't: Is it a promise or a feeling? Do I forgive for my good or the good of the person who sinned against me? Is forgiveness conditional or unconditional? How are we to know which ideas are true and which are not? The only infallible rule for defining matters of faith and practice is the all-sufficient Word of God. Therefore, to define forgiveness, we have to ask: how does God define forgiveness in His Word?

In the New Testament, there are three words translated as "forgiveness."¹ As we look at how these words are used in Scripture, they give us the background meaning for forgiveness. Biblical forgiveness involves "letting go" of bitterness or revenge and "graciously giving" pardon to those who ask. This is, by no means, a full definition. To develop a full definition, we need to look at specific instances of how these words are used. With so many references to forgiveness in the Bible, one has to ask: Where do we start? We know that we

must interpret Scripture with Scripture – So, the best thing to do is to begin with the clearest teaching on forgiveness and work our way to the more obscure and difficult passages. So, let's begin with God's clearest statement about how we are to forgive:

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving** each other, **just as** God in Christ also has **forgiven** you. Ephesians 4:31-32 (**emphasis mine**, see Col. 3:13)*

ing our forgiveness with His. God offers forgiveness of sin to *all men everywhere* who repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38, 3:18-21, 17:30-31). There are two parts to God's forgiveness: (1) the attitude and offer of forgiveness through the Gospel, which is preached to all nations; and (2) the gracious forgiveness of all those who actually repent and believe in Christ for salvation. Likewise, our forgiveness is defined by those same two elements. First, we are to be tender-hearted in attitude – willing to forgive all those who offend or sin against

“God is commanding us to forgive others in a tender-hearted way (even when that forgiveness isn't deserved) “just as God in Christ also has forgiven” us.”

In this passage, Paul uses a word for forgiveness that includes the idea of "giving graciously" or giving something which isn't deserved. So, God is commanding us to forgive others in a tender-hearted way (even when that forgiveness isn't deserved) "**just as** God in Christ also has forgiven" us. This is probably **the** most important text for explaining forgiveness! Here, God is clearly align-

us. Second, we are to actually forgive those who repent and come asking for forgiveness.

As helpful as those two parts of forgiveness are, we are still left with the same question: What actually is "forgiveness"? Is it a feeling, some form of emotion, a sense of duty, a decision or what? Again, Ephesians 4:32 tells us: "forgive as God in Christ forgave you."

How did God forgive us in Christ? For those who repent and believe in Christ, God has removed their sin and promises never to hold it against us because of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. There are a few things we must point out. First, God's grace is not free; it was purchased for God's elect by Christ's obedience, specifically His suffering and death on the cross. Second, God's removal of our sin and guilt (His forgiveness) is conditioned upon our repentance and faith in Christ. Third, once God has removed the burden of our sin, He promises to *remember it no more* and releases us from the moral obligation to suffer in hell forever (Romans 8:1-2; Heb.10:17).

“Christians are thereby called to have a gracious attitude which offers forgiveness/pardon to all those who offend us.”

However, before we proceed further, we must recognise one more thing. We know, by biblical example, that God doesn't necessarily remove **all** consequences of sin when He forgives. In 2 Samuel 12, we have the story of Nathan confronting King David about his murder of Uriah and sin with Bathsheba. In vs.13-14, David repents, and Nathan replies, “The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die.” How can God say in one breath “your sin has been taken away” and yet in the very next, give grievous consequences? Did God take away David's sin or not!? Yes, He did. But, “if He no longer holds the sin against the forgiven, then why are there still consequences? The answer is that God disciplines His own – not for the purpose of punishing them, but for His glory and for their joy in the future.”² As Hebrews 12 explains, “For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives ... God deals with you as sons ... He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.” In other words, God disciplined David to sanctify him and draw him closer to God Himself.

Through these various passages of Scripture, we see God's forgiveness defined as: *A commitment by the one true God to pardon graciously all those who repent and believe in Christ so that they are reconciled to Him, although this commitment does not eliminate all consequences in this life.*³ This definition of God's forgiveness then lays the foundation for how we understand Christian forgiveness.

Christians are thereby called to have a gracious attitude which offers forgiveness/pardon to all those who offend us. It is this tender-hearted attitude which prevents bitterness and resentment (Eph.4:31-32). Just as God's offer of

forgiveness is extended to His enemies who don't deserve a second chance, so we must offer forgiveness to those who have sinned against us – even when we don't think they deserve it! Our forgiveness is graciously offered to ALL who sin against us.⁴

Christians must also make that commitment that God makes to us. He promises to pardon us and to remember our sins no more (Heb.10:17). Likewise, when we forgive, we are making a four-fold promise:

“I will not dwell on this incident.”

“I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.”

“I will not talk to others about this incident.”

“I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”⁵

In these four promises, we are committing to remove the burden of sin just as God has forgiven us. Since we are not God, we cannot remove the eternal consequences for sin, but we can remove the burden of sin. We do so by refusing to dwell on that particular offence (which leads to disruption in the relationship) and by refusing to bring it up to the offender or others (which would lead to disruption in the offender's re-

lationship with others). In other words, we are promising not to remember the matter in such a way that we seek the offender's harm. While forgiveness does not eliminate all consequences for the offender, the offended person's attitude should not be one of saying, “I'm gonna make him/her pay.” Rather, just as God often gives us consequences to restore us and bring us closer to Himself, so, earthly consequences complete the restoration started by forgiveness (these consequences are not arbitrary or personally invented; they must be based on principles from God's Word, which we may explore further in later articles).

From these principles we can derive a definition for forgiveness. It is *A commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person, although not all consequences are necessarily eliminated.*⁶ This is a good definition from which to work, and serves as a foundation for looking at the more obscure Bible passages on forgiveness.

I know that we have barely begun to scratch the surface of this topic. There are probably many more questions that have flooded your mind as you read this article, but don't worry, we will address a lot more in future articles. For instance, in later articles I will answer the questions: Does every offence need to be confronted and forgiven? Do I have to wait until someone repents in order to forgive them? Doesn't conditional forgiveness lead to bitterness? Didn't Jesus forgive unconditionally on the cross? Aren't we told to forgive everyone? Do I have to forgive if they aren't truly repentant? Who can judge repentance? Isn't it hypocritical to forgive when I don't feel like it? And many more ...

If I have whetted your appetite for this topic, and you find yourself not wanting to wait for future articles, then allow me to recommend a great resource. You may have noted it already from the footnotes, but I have found Chris Brauns' book *Unpacking Forgiveness* to be very helpful. Pastor Brauns addresses the painful and deep implications of God's view of forgiveness. He doesn't shy away from looking into the application of Scripture to situations of rape, murder, molestation and violent crime. If you don't already have this book, I highly recommend it for every church library and for every family in the church. It is a book which you will turn to again and again for helpful advice and biblical comfort. It will serve as a

scriptural guide through the often troubled waters of forgiveness and conflict resolution. May God be glorified as we, His people, forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven us!

Notes

1 For those with Bible Software, here are the 3 words so that you can study how they are used in the NT. (1) Aphiemi (ἀφιημι) has the meaning of “to let go” or “to allow/leave alone.” This is translated “forgive” in the sense of forgiving

or leaving a debt or sins alone. 1/3 of 143 times it is used for forgiveness in NT; notable examples: Matt. 6:12-15, 18:21-35, 1 John 1:9. (2) Aphesis (ἀφεσις) is a derivative from the first word aphiemi, but it is used almost exclusively for forgiveness (16x out of 17x). Ex: Acts 2:38, 5:3, 13:38-39, Heb. 9:22. (3) Charizomai (χαρίζομαι) means to “graciously or freely give” (1 Cor.2:12, Gal. 3:18, Phil.1:29) or more often it means “to forgive debt/sin” (Eph.4:32, Col.3:13).

2 Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 49.

3 Ibid, 51.

4 In later articles, I will explain further how this attitude leads us to cover some offenses in love by addressing some of these passages: Proverbs 10:12, 17:9; 1Cor. 13:4-7; 1Peter 4:8.

5 Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 209.

6 Brauns, 55.

Mr Daniel Wilson is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Nelson.

Our call to covenant obedience

Andre Scheepers

For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it? Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that you may observe it? But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it (Dt 30:11-14).

As Christians how are we to understand God’s dealings with us? This magazine incidentally is called *Faith in Focus*. But when we consider our faith and God’s dealings with us in this life, how are we to interpret what’s happening to us? How do we remain focused on our Christian faith as we walk through this life? An important truth is to remember we live in a covenant relationship with God. God has made a covenant with us in Jesus Christ. We call this the Covenant of Grace, which basically means that God now relates to us in Jesus Christ. All that Jesus Christ has accomplished is freely given to us and this is why it is a Covenant of Grace. As our Mediator Jesus has obtained salvation for us and earned all the spiritual blessings of the covenant for us by meeting all God’s perfect requirements and now freely shares with us all the benefits that He has earned.

What is the heart of the covenant? Obviously it is God sovereignly entering into a bond of fellowship and friendship with His people. As Reformed Christians,

the covenant forms the main framework within which we understand our salvation. Sometimes the tendency is for us to theorise covenant at the cost of personal application. But we must be careful here because even though the covenant is unconditionally administered by God, He requires that we be obedient to His word. Closely aligned with God’s grace is His law. By law I am referring to God’s moral law found in the Ten Commandments and its general application given to us in the Mosaic Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament. The reason why I specifically want to stress the importance of covenant obedience is because

highlight the need for a radically different order, a dispensation of grace. But this understanding does not do justice to Paul’s understanding of the law.

A favourite quote to support this faulty view of the law is **Rom 10:4, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes**. ‘End’ does not mean that Christ fulfilled the law and therefore terminated the law. This erroneous view makes a sharp contrast between the old dispensation and the new dispensation, claiming that in the former the law was the basis of righteousness and in the latter the basis of righteousness is the gospel. But this is

“Today’s tendency in the church is to display a superficial understanding of the place of the law in God’s revelation of salvation.”

this is the basis upon which we experience the richness of God’s presence in fellowship.

Today’s tendency in the church is to display a superficial understanding of the place of the law in God’s revelation of salvation. Many Christians view the law in contrast to the gospel. Its requirements we are told, were quite unattainable. Instead they think that the Apostle Paul teaches that the law was given to merely

not the meaning of the text. The law was never the basis of righteousness. This verse is simply stating that those who trust in Christ for their righteousness cease trying to use the law to establish their own righteousness.

Besides, was not Abraham saved by faith? ‘End’ here therefore means, what we have in view, the object, the aim. In other words the object that the law had in mind was Christ. The ceremonies,

the temple, the altar, the priest, and the sacrifices – all had Christ in view. In fact there was never a dispensation of law without the gospel. The law of the Old Testament was also part of the gospel. The law pointed to Christ. When the end was attained, the law dropped away. It is in this sense that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.

As we consider the teaching of Dt 30:11-14, let us start by considering the context of the passage and its place within the structure of the book of Deuteronomy.

Verses 11-20 are what we may describe as the climax of the book of Deuteronomy. This final volume of the five books of the Law of Moses is the document which records the renewal of God's covenant with His chosen people, Israel. Israel is camped on the plains of

Moab after 40 years of wandering in the desert and is now finally being prepared to enter the land of Canaan which God had sworn to give her. In its structure the Book of Deuteronomy as a whole is a covenant document that sets out the nature of the binding relationship between God and Israel and the terms and conditions for the continuation of that relationship. Meredith Kline best explains this in his book, *The Treaty of the Great King*, Eerdmans, 1963.

After a brief preamble on Moses, the covenant mediator (1:1-5), there follows a historical prologue (1:6-4:49), which updates events since the time of the original institution of the covenant at Sinai. The bulk of the document (5-26) is then concerned with Israel's obligations, particularly as they relate to the new situation facing them, that of entering and

possessing their inheritance. Verses 27-30 give a subsequent account of the blessings and curses that follow, depending on how Israel relates to God's requirements. In Chapter 29 the consequences of unfaithfulness are spelled out in a virtual prophecy of exile from the land Israel is about to possess; while 30:1-10 is an assurance of God's gracious purpose in what amounts to a prophecy of restoration after exile. The dominant theme is that of grace; it is about what God intends to do for His people.

He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live (v5-6).

Correlative with this gracious activity, the requirement of covenant obedience is again mentioned: ***v8, you will again obey the Lord your God and follow all His commands I am giving you today.***

This then is the preceding context to the passage we are considering, wherein Moses gives his final appeal to Israel for a response of loving and faithful commitment to the Lord (30:11-20). The concluding chapters (31-34) relate to the provisions for the continuity of the covenant, after Moses' death, under the mediatorship of Joshua.

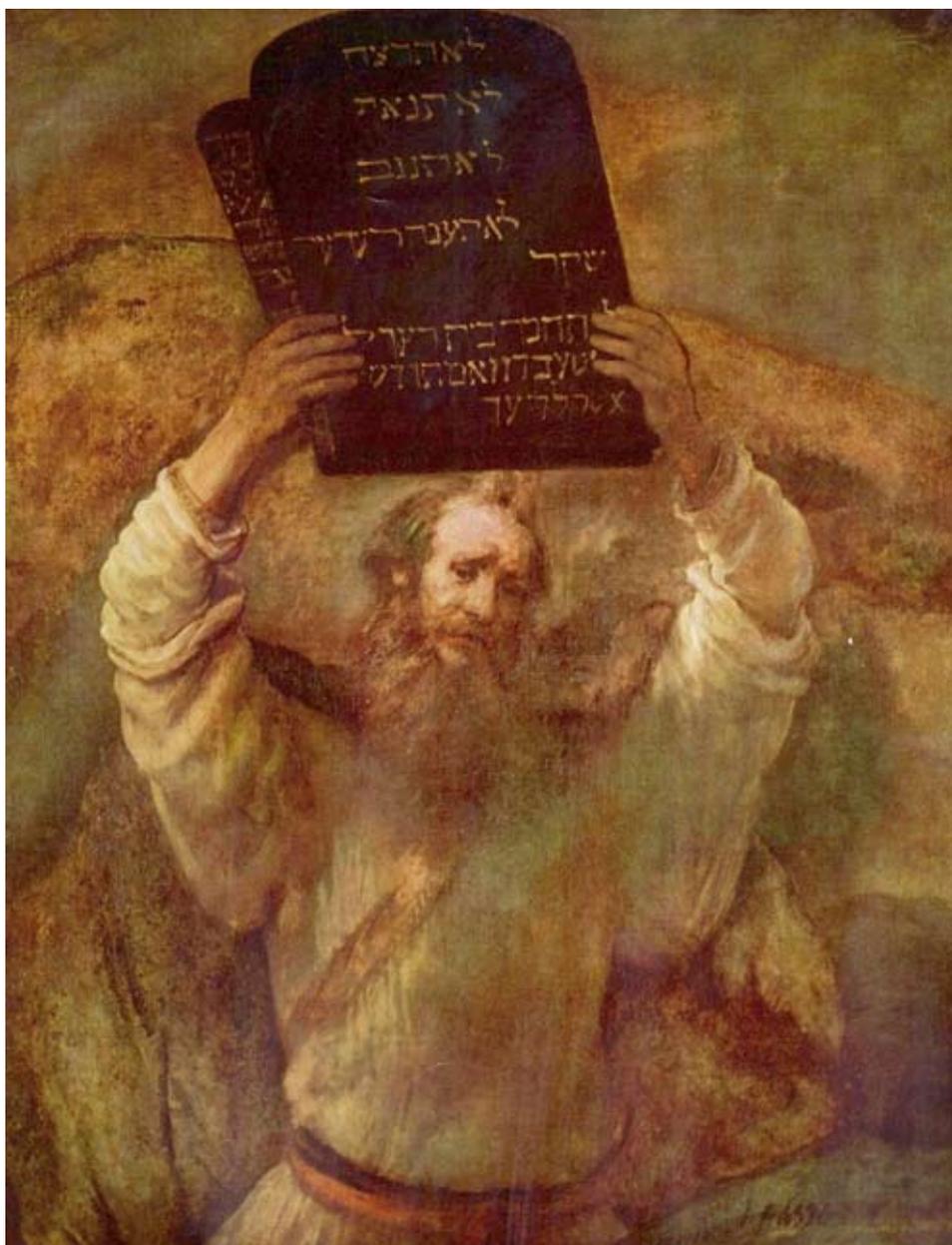
Israel's covenant requirements

v11, now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach

In v8-10 Moses had spoken of 'commandments' in the plural, referring to Israel's obligations under the covenant, but here he sums up the whole of what is required of Israel as one obligation, speaking literally of 'the commandment I am commanding you.'

This obligation denotes the sum and essence of the law, which is a commitment of love and loyalty to the Lord. The summons to love the Lord is a constant refrain of the book of Deuteronomy. From such love flows obedience to God's other commandments. What is required of Israel is not a super-spiritual understanding but an understanding of the law given to them or their performance of it.

v12-13 it is not in heaven...nor beyond the sea...to get it



Moses with the tablets of the law, Rembrandt van Rijn, 1659. <http://en.wikipedia.org>

The thought of v11 is now further explained in these verses. A man does not have to engage in an impossible search or struggle to attain a knowledge of God's requirements. For Israel to ask such questions is to try and evade their responsibility to God.

To be sure, there are bounds to human capacity and understanding; and there is a knowledge that is beyond even the reach of the redeemed, but the knowledge of the law does not fall within this category, for God has revealed it in Deuteronomy.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law (Dt 29:29).

Instead we read in Verse 14, ***no, the word is very near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it***

The 'word' like the 'commandment' above, sums up the whole law. God's 'word' is His self-expression originally exercised in creation and given through Moses and the rest of Scripture and finally manifested in Jesus Christ (Jh 1:14, Heb 1:2).

The verse gives us the reason why no difficulty is involved for Israel in knowing God's will. It is because God has graciously revealed Himself in covenant, bringing His covenant word near and placing it not merely on tablets of stone, but in His people's mouth and heart. This truth must serve as a powerful corrective for any tendency to see the Old Testament simply as a demand for conformity to an external code of law. This inward aspect of the law is seen in Dt 6:6-7 and again in Jer 31:33.

The new covenant is not to be something totally different but a glorious realisation of all that was promised under the old covenant.

Our covenant response

In the light of this, namely, the old covenant's evaluation of itself, how are we to assess the place of the law from our stance under the new covenant? Thankfully, in God's providence we are not left to draw inferences from any normative principle for a New Testament perspective on this passage. Paul explicitly deals with this subject in Rom 10:6-8.

But the righteousness that is by faith says; do not say in your heart, who will ascend into heaven? (That is, to bring Christ down) or who will descend into the deep? (that is, to

bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming (Rom 10:6-8).

Paul uses the text from Deuteronomy to demonstrate his point about the 'righteousness of faith.' Incredibly the 'word' of Dt 30:14 is for Paul 'the word of faith we are proclaiming.' Commentators have found these verses perplexing because Paul uses a passage that undeniably refers to the **law** in its original context, to demonstrate the accessibility of the righteousness that comes by **faith**. In addition, he has just explicitly contrasted law and faith in v5 where he says, **Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will**

Paul freely quotes from an Old Testament law-keeping passage to prove his point about faith ought to cause us to question this assumption.

One could even raise the question as to whether there is any contrast between law and faith intended in Romans 10. The word translated 'but' in v6 could be rendered as 'and,' the point being that in the context of Paul's discussion on the universality of salvation – for Jew and Gentile alike, both the law and faith speak with one voice. Certainly, the original context of Lev 18:5, which Paul quotes in v5, is not one of perfection but of a loyal commitment to the Lord and avoidance of idolatry.

Calvin concurs that in Paul's discussion in Romans 10 we need to see the importance of the unity of the covenant

“Both confession with the mouth and belief with the heart are indispensable aspects of a commitment to the Lord, whether for the Old Testament or the New Testament saint.”

live by them.” The text of this quotation follows the wording of the Greek Septuagint translation fairly closely.

We could paraphrase Paul's threefold use of the words, 'that is...' by 'this actually refers to...' By his interspersed comments on the quotation, Paul appears to be relating the passage to Christ. To ask such questions as 'who will ascend...?' or 'who will descend...?' is tantamount to denying the incarnation and resurrection of Christ from the dead. It is only because of Christ's incarnation and resurrection that the righteousness of faith is accessible.

This passage, together with Paul's use of Deuteronomy, brings us to the heart of the question of the relationship between the covenant responses in the two Testaments. How does observing the law as the covenant obligation in the Old Testament relate to exercising faith in Christ in the New? As indicated initially, many Christians make a sharp distinction between the two expressions of covenant response. But the fact that

of grace. In the light of what Paul says, Moses cannot be speaking of law in contrast to the gospel or to faith. The law is not to be confused with legalism, something that the Jews annexed to themselves from their understanding of the law. Paul, in countering the views of his proponents, stresses faith over against the works of the law, because he needs to make clear that acceptance with God is wholly of grace. **Therefore the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace (Rom 4:16).**

Paul is under no such misapprehension as to the place of the law rightly understood. Far from ignoring the context of the quotation from Deuteronomy, Paul has with great insight seen the same principle of grace operating in both the Old and New Testaments. It is impossible to attain our salvation by meritorious performance of the law or meritorious faith. It is only by the revelation of God's grace in the redemptive work of Christ that the covenant 'word,' the 'word of faith,' is brought near, 'so

that (we) may obey it.'

It is, then, our response to God's grace, not the attainment of it, that is in view in both Deuteronomy and Romans. Yet it remains true that without that response there is no salvation. Paul continues to echo the language of Deuteronomy when he says:

If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Rom 10:9-10).

Both confession with the mouth and belief with the heart are indispensable aspects of a commitment to the Lord, whether for the Old Testament or the New Testament saint.

The above evaluation of the law and the identification of the Old Testament with the New Testament response to the

Covenant of Grace and the equation of obedience with faith is fully endorsed by the New Testament. Faith as the appropriate New Testament response to the grace of God is never abstracted from obedience. Believers are those who obey the Gospel (Rom 1:5, 6:16, 17; 10:16, 15:18; 16:19, 26).

Jesus portrays obedience as a realistic and practical requirement of faith. ***For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Mt 11:30).*** Whether these words have reference to law or to wisdom makes little difference, for wisdom is but the application of law to the individual. John the apostle wrote, ***'this is love for God; to obey His commands, and His commands are not burdensome...'*** (1 Jh 5:3).

Conclusion

Deuteronomy 30:11 touches the heart of the covenant, which is to say the heart

of the gospel, for there is but one covenant of grace. God requires a response of love, trust and obedience from His people. This is a response which is not inaccessible, but as Paul explains, has been brought near by the redemptive work of Christ.

Obedience to God flows out of the bond of covenant love and issues in life and blessings, whereas disobedience brings death and God's curse. What was revealed to Israel in the Old Testament endorses the fact that there is no discontinuity between the law and the gospel. In the light of this, the challenge to God's people today, no less to the Israelites on the plains of Moab is: 'choose life.'

Mr Andre Scheepers is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Hukanui.

Teaching in Pakistan

The Lord is at work around the world, and He uses many types of people. It is often useful to visit with our older members to learn how the Lord has used them for the good of His kingdom. It is a special blessing to visit with those members who came from other backgrounds; for in their story we see how God used them in His kingdom even before they were a part of our church! One of our members in the Reformed Church of Nelson has had an especially varied background ranging from being a teacher, missionary, to even being ordained in the Anglican Church. Mr. Pearce is a valued member of our church now, and a great blessing to me personally – I believe you will find the story of his work in Pakistan demonstrates the sovereignty and goodness of our great God! May we all be encouraged to trust the Lord more fully as we also serve Him.

– Pastor Daniel Wilson

Clifford G. Pearce

The call of God to serve Him in the church or on the mission field comes in a great variety of ways. Although overseas service had been in my mind for several years, my intentions had not been with Pakistan. But the words of a New Zealand Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) missionary from that country, the Rev. Selby Spence, "There is a need for teachers..." drew my attention and initiated connections that led to my going there. I had been teaching at Northland

College in North Auckland, and was attending a C.M.S. Spring School. Mr. Selby Spence told me of a school principal in Lahore, who needed a teacher fluent in English.

Another of God's appointments to make me comfortable with the idea of Pakistan was my meeting in Hamilton with the Rt. Rev. Lawrence Woolmer, Bishop of Lahore. This contact influenced my feelings about teaching in that country, and assured me of a welcome. I now see these two men as stepping stones that God used to plot my way there.

So in April 1957 I went to my first Pakistani school, the Cathedral High School in Lahore. By this time, the School Principal with whom I had negotiated had left, being replaced by an English woman. The staff consisted of Pakistani Christians and senior teachers mainly from England.

The British were ruling India until Partition in 1947, when India became an independent, secular country, largely Hindu, and Pakistan became the Muslim homeland, with an undeveloped democracy for its first 10 – 11 years. In my first 18 months, the country had five Prime Ministers. A take-over of Parliament eventuated in October 1958, when a military head of the army, General Auyb Khan, took over running the country as President. The Cathedral School was open to both sexes, with more than 1100 English speaking Pakistani pupils, over half of them girls. Most were Moslem, with some Parsees also, descended from Zoroastrians who had fled from Persia (Iran) to India in the 7th and 8th centuries, to escape Moslem persecution. Their religious beliefs were associated with the Magi of the Bible. They still observed some customs from Iran, like the

Towers of Silence in Mumbai (Bombay), where dead bodies were put out for birds to pick their flesh. The remaining children were Christians from various denominations.

I fitted into the school straight away, as all teaching was in English. Despite having no university qualifications in this subject, I taught formal English on the strength of my knowledge of the language and fluency in it.

Daily assembly before class was Christian; Hymn, Prayer and Bible reading. Wanting good quality education in English, the Moslem students were accepted on condition of attendance at this assembly, and at Bible lessons, twice a week New Testament and twice Old Testament. Christian pupils had an extra period of Catechism. With qualifications in Theology, I taught these, too. Some hostel boys attended my Bible Study on Sunday mornings. Living in the hostel gave me opportunity to take the Christian boys on a camp. The girls could also do this with the teacher of human biology, a doctor on the staff, the orphaned daughter of a British Army bandsman. She had been brought up by Christian medical missionaries.

Some Moslem pupils questioned aspects of Christian teaching, but did so courteously, and sat the Cambridge (U.K.) Annual School Exams, which presented the Bible as a subject for testing. Frequently our pupils gained high marks. Numerous Moslem students showed an interest in the Christian material; some joined Scripture Union, using its notes for daily personal Bible reading. One or two of these youngsters were later forbidden to do so by their parents. I remember particularly a little girl from a tribal background, who showed interest in Scripture Union. Her parents later made her withdraw from this.

Some Christian children talked to me about their concern for the corruption in society that disturbed their parents.

During this time, some significant incidents occurred outside the school. One was my contact with an important Moslem family with two boys on the roll. The grandfather, a highly regarded lawyer, had been Chief Justice of Lahore. The father had a law degree from the University of Cambridge, and the mother, not a Christian but sympathetic to Christianity, had an MA from an Indian University. They had visited several European cathedrals in the hope of finding healing for their sons, who both suffered the same disability – they

had no sweat glands. To cool down, a mug of water had to be poured over them. So they attended school only in winter, staying home for the hot summer. Of course, such parents wanted quality education for their sons, so I went to their mountain home for part of the summer holidays, to tutor them. This gave me great insight into their life and culture, and into Islam. I became good friends with this family. The father, well respected for his integrity, was appointed Pakistani representative at India/Pakistan Canal Water Talks in Canada. During the parents' absence for this purpose, the father's mother looked after the household, but I was entrusted with supervision, and making important decisions for the boys. They were open to discussion about Christianity. Eventually both boys went to Scotland to study engineering.

Lahore was the academic centre for Pakistan. Another boarder from a Christian family in Quetta became a doctor in Canada. The wealthy Parsee community of successful businessmen was scattered across the country. One senior Parsee pupil gained an M.A. in English at a local university, and a diploma in Dramatic Studies at Durham University, U.K, returning to teach at Kinnaird University College. Extremely interested in Christianity, she used to write to me in Pakistan and later New Zealand, exchanging Christmas cards.

During the 1958 Christmas break, another significant meeting took place. I had been to Kiwi friends in Sindh and Sukkur. Catching the train back to Lahore, I shared a compartment with a Moslem Police Officer, a Lecturer at the Karachi Police College. He sat next to me saying his prayers. He asked me, somewhat belligerently, "Are you a missionary?" Praying silently within myself, I answered that I had entered Pakistan as a teacher. "But," I added quickly, "I think every Christian should be a missionary." His next comment surprised me. Thinking of street entertainers, he expressed an objection to singing in worship. "Only low class people sing."

Moslems recognise four holy books; the Koran, and three from 'the Book' (the Bible, as the Koran speaks of it): the Torah (Tawrat), the Psalms (Zabur) and the Gospels (Injil). Providentially, I had recently had my attention drawn to Psalm 40: 2, 3 while reading Guy King's exposition of these verses, which he summarised in three catchy phrases, "The Lord picked me up, the Lord set me up, the Lord tuned me up." So I

referred to these Scriptural verses, "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see it and put their trust in the LORD."

Why did I find this meeting 'significant'? Although casual, I felt that it was one of God's 'coincidences', by divine appointment. We parted amicably. Who can tell how God works through us?

In January 1959 I moved to Peshawar. There was then no fear in this now dangerous city. The change from Lahore came about after I talked to a teacher with a similar background to my own, a fellow-student from Canterbury University. Academically well qualified, and



Clifford G. Pearce

from a Christian background, he was nonetheless not committed to Christian education. Teaching at a CMS University College that prepared students for advanced education such as engineering and medicine, he offered to recommend me, as we had followed the same university biology course, to continue the Biology Course for Pre-medical Students that he had initiated. Through his recommendation to the Australian principal of the Peshawar institution, I gained the position. Up till now I had not taught my own science (degree) subject, and was sorry not to be doing so. And so it was that I transferred to Edwardes College, Peshawar. At last, as well as teaching English, I was into my own special subject area.

Edwardes College was an institution of just over 400, only 16 being Christians, the remainder Moslem. In my lessons, I taught creationism, so was seen as sympathetic to the Moslem students! I taught evolution objectively, indicating that I was not committed to its underlying philoso-

phy. This relieved the Moslems – “Then we don’t *have* to believe it!”

Sometimes a Koran professing man interrupted our assembly, thumping on the floor with his staff to gain attention, and chanting Koranic religious slogans. Once I handed him a book of poetry, inviting him to take my class. He said he could not. Confrontation being inadvisable, I would write homework on the board and walk out, leaving him to it.

This college too, offered quality education – 28 from my class of 40 proceeded to Medical School and it was noted there, that Edwardes College produced the medical students with the best record.

Once I spent Christmas in Peshawar with the vicar. I noticed that the church organ was in a shocking condition. I was told that an American had used unskilled labour to clean the pipes. Some, broken off the sound board, were lying in disarray on the floor. Others were badly out

of tune. A violinist undertook to help me correct it. For a week after Christmas we spent at least three hours a day to ‘set a scale’ and tune the remaining pipes. How did I know how to tackle this? My Dad, whose father was a pipe-organ builder, had learnt to maintain an organ by going as a boy with my grandfather to maintain the Christchurch Cathedral organ. Dad learnt “the works” by holding the keys while my grandfather tuned it. My Dad in turn maintained other organs and took me for the same purpose. Later, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh attended a service in this church. I touched the organ up by re-tuning it before the service. After that, I discovered several church organs where my limited skills were useful. God prepares us in unexpected ways for unexpected work to His glory.

In 1961, having completed my contract, I returned to New Zealand for the sake of my parents, and became a

teacher again in my homeland. Since then, the Cathedral High School has expanded into several separate institutions scattered around Lahore. Government policy has sought to limit Christian emphasis and increase Islamic teaching, even in Christian schools. But there is a continuing demand for Christian educational institutions, for morality and quality. For – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: all who follow His precepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise.” Proverbs 110:10

Mr Clifford Pearce was a secondary school teacher for several years, prior to ordination to the ministry in 1983 in the Free Church of England, U.K. He served in the USA Reformed Episcopal Church and in Nelson, and is now a member of the Reformed Church of Nelson.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

QUOTABLE “QUOTES”

“People will not care what you know until they know that you care.” *Anon*

“It is the Spirit’s ministry to bring the sinner to the Saviour and to make the sinner like the Saviour.” *John Blanchard*

“Evangelism is a process of bringing the gospel to people where they are, not where you would like them to be... When the gospel reaches people where they are, their response to the gospel is the church in a new place” *Vincent Donovan*

“You never so touch the ocean of God’s love as when you forgive and love your enemies.” *Corrie Ten Boom*

“I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians of England.” *John Wesley*

BIRTHS

Dickson, Zeke Benania – a son born to Andrew and Eden – 5 June (Hamilton)

Steenkamp, Willem – a son born to Jan and Lerina – 1 May (North Shore)

Van der Wel, Audrey – a daughter born to Phil and Talia – 6 June (Hamilton)

Watson, Danielle Grace – a daughter born to Johnny and Glenys – 1 June (Hukanui)

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Dovedale: Danielle Haverland

Palmerston North: Phillip Dykstra, Benji Minnee, Ryan Minnee

FROM THE PASTOR

Oamaru: Rev. Bruce Hoyt

The church, the congregation of God’s people, is where God dwells. And in the context of the congregation God is pleased to strengthen us so that we may function as a living body with Christ as our head. All believers therefore have two important duties: 1) we must join the local church where we live. Apart from the church we will wither and die spiritually. And 2) we must not be bound together with unbelievers, that is, organisations,

groups or individuals outside the church of the Lord Jesus. Being bound together with unbelievers will hinder us from living holy lives which glorify Him.

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Pukekohe: A warm welcome to the Stolte family; to Erik and Georgina, Juliette, Johanna, Jacob, Rebekkah, Georgia, Phillip and Emmaleigh. We are glad to have this opportunity to meet you prior to your coming back here for your vicariate year soon. The family will be in Masterton for six weeks before returning here.

Masterton: A welcome back party will be held for Jan-Erik and Gina Stolte and their children back to the Wairarapa. We will have some games for the kids, big and small. It will be a dessert evening so if you could, take a small plate of something tasty to share.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Pukekohe: The Building Committee has engaged CTM Architectural to carry on developing the plans we received from Mr. Louis Draijer. The committee will be seeking resource consent and will also

carry on developing the plans to building consent stage.

CHURCH PLANTING

Bishopdale: The possibility of planting another Reformed Church is always an exciting development in church life. We would like to work towards establishing a fully functioning Reformed Church in or near Rangiora. We believe that there is a real opportunity to spread the Gospel in this area. We will first convene a meeting of all members interested in being involved in this work. We can do nothing without God's help and blessing. As we read in Psalm 127:1, "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."

EVANGELISM

Avondale: We are running a Holiday Club 12, 13, 14 OCTOBER 2011 from 9am – 3pm each day with a Family BBQ on the Friday evening. Our theme is Son World Adventure Park.

MISSIONS

Hastings: The Doumas are due to visit Hastings from 27th until 31st August as part of their deputation visit prior to Synod later this year.

DENOMINATIONAL

Auckland Men's Presbytery Day: This will be held in Pukekohe on the 6th August. Dr Peter Reynolds will be the speaker.

National Deacons Conference: This triennial conference took place at Avondale (6-7 May) and was attended by about 35 deacons representing a majority (but not all!) of our churches. The folks at Avondale proved themselves competent hosts in a facility well suited to such a gathering. On Friday evening, the Rev Peter Moelker of Avondale gave an inspiring and challenging message on the biblical requirements of being a deacon. On Saturday the focus was on the work that the National Diaconate Committee supports. There was also a presentation on tax laws with respect to giving. The meeting was deemed both good and necessary and those present were enthusiastic about meeting again in two years time – possibly in Christchurch.

Ministers and Wives Conference: Next year's conference has been scheduled for May 21-26 in the Silverstream area and

will feature Rev. Peter Brain, Bishop of Armidale, NSW, Australia as our guest speaker.

Queen's Birthday Camp 2011: The WRYC would like to say a massive thank-you to everyone who made this such a fantastic camp. Thank you to Hans Vaatstra for the challenging and encouraging studies, to the camp parents for their hard work and dedication to the cooks for their great food and nutritional sustenance and to the youth for their participation.

ACTS OF SERVICE

Christchurch: Liquefaction again, caused by the earthquake last Monday, at the Maranatha Homes village. A heartfelt THANK YOU to all those, who came and helped clean up. A big job well done.

Silverstream/Wellington/Wainuiomata: The recently formed Reformed Church of Silverstream choir is planning an Evening of Choir Song in October. The Choir has also sung at local Rest Homes and plans some more visits.

CLASSES AND COURSES

Dovedale: Do you know anyone who might be interested in exploring Christianity? Or someone you should ask that question of? It's nearing the time of year for a Christianity Explored course. The course has recently been re-vamped with new filming and is a shorter, 7-week course, but with the same true-and-tried subject matter. It's based on Mark's gospel and asks questions like "Who is Jesus?" and "What did he do?". The course is open for people with different ideas on those subjects but who are willing to look at the historical events and what Jesus actually said and did. We're looking for both participants and leaders.

Foxton: Christian Marriage – Five Great Encounters! Session has purchased a set of 5 DVD's on Christian Marriage, produced by Marriage counsellors Emerson & Sarah Eggerichs. These DVD's will be shown in our Bible studies. All married and engaged couples are invited to come participate in the watching and discussion of this set which covers the same topics covered by Eggerichs' book, "Love & Respect."

ACTIVITIES

Avondale: God uses suffering for good and wants us to use our suffering to serve others. Come along to the Men's Breakfast as we continue our study in 1 Peter

and look at what God says to us.

Avondale: The fellowship committee invites you to an all age birthday party. Come and celebrate everyone's birthday, meet other people born in the same month as you, eat cake, play games and enjoy an afternoon of fellowship. Please bring a 'present' for the local food banks such as some canned goods or other non-perishable items. We are also looking for some folks that would be keen on baking a cake for the party.

Bucklands Beach: The youth are going to Parakai Hot Pools for a sweet as event, and have invited everyone to go. They are also having a sleepover at Church till the Saturday morning, and would love if you came to that too. It's going to be off the chain.

Bucklands Beach: An International Night is planned starting with a shared

BOEKHOLT EL (Eildert)

Died on 12 March 2011 from cancer, at home. His wife Ineke and three of their children, including some grandchildren, were at his bedside. El was born in 1930 in Groningen. In the early 1950's he came to New Zealand on board the Sibajak and in 1958 he married Ineke (Catharina) Markenstein. El and Ineke were founding members of the Reformed Church of Silverstream where El served as deacon and as Cadet counsellor, a work which El really enjoyed. For the last three and a half years of his life, El and Ineke lived in Foxton where it was our joy to see how he loved the Bible-study evenings. Ten months before El passed he away, he got news of his cancer. Yet, it was a great encouragement to all of us to hear El say with great conviction and peace of heart that he was looking forward to be with his Lord. Our Lord graciously granted El to celebrate his 80th birthday in October and after that still allowed five more months for El to be with Ineke and the family. We are thankful that El did not suffer too long and that he is now in heaven with his Lord. (Foxton)

meal with all of us providing a speciality from our home country. A variety evening follows. The request is that you present some entertainment from your home country – a musical item, a song, a short play, skit or whatever. This can be prepared and presented either as a solo or a group. Tables will also be set up for you to display interesting items from your homeland.

Christchurch: All of the ladies of the church from Year 9 to age 99+ are invited to participate in Secret Sisters, a ministry of caring and sharing with other sisters in Christ. We are running this again this year. Should you wish to be part of it you will be given a 'sister' whom you will be asked to pray for and encourage. Someone else will be given your name as her 'sister'. It is a wonderful form of encouragement, so please join in.

Dovedale: Winter is coming and it makes for a great time to sit back with friends and enjoy some music! Mrs. de Graaf is hosting a classical music afternoon at her home. We intend to listen to our favourite pieces on CD. If anyone is keen to perform on piano or organ (or BYO instrument) we may be able to slip a couple live items into the programme. So start practicing!

Hamilton: Do you have a story to tell? F.L.A.M.E. youth group would love the opportunity to hear and record our congregation's experiences in "the early days" (c1940s-1960s, give-or take). We'd like to include experiences of individual members/families of the congregation(s) as well as of the church as a whole. Are you willing to share your experiences and thoughts about life when you were young? For example: Were you around when the Reformed Church in Hamilton was being established or in its infancy? Did you migrate to New Zealand (e.g. following WW2)? Do you have photographs or journals from around this time period? You have much to offer, and we have much to learn, so please let us know if you are willing and able to help us compile a picture of our congregation and the churches we have built here in Hamilton. We would record your stories and thoughts by way of video interview, although we are happy to receive them in any form with which you are comfortable (e.g., written or voice recording only). It is our intention that small groups of the youth will spend a bit of time visiting with you to record whatever you would like to share with us The

final aim of this project is to produce a small documentary.

Hastings: The Youth Group extends a cordial invitation to the Young at Heart in our congregation to come to a fun filled freaky Friday. This is a chance for young and old to unite with fellowship, food and a fun-filled night.

North Shore / Avondale: Dr. Carl Wieland of Creation Ministries International will speak at the Reformed Church of the North Shore on why is there death and suffering in the world? Many reject God on the basis that He must be a cruel god to allow the terrible events and suffering that we see in the world today. Could you answer this? Find out how you can use this question, and more, as a powerful tool to reach others for Christ.

Palmerston North: We are going to have a concert showcasing Palmerston North Reformed Church's talent for everyone that is interested. So think about what talents you have and start practicing. Whether it be a musical item, poetry, a skit or even wiggling your ears.

Short Report of the Auckland Presbytery 24th June at Pukekohe

Items of general interest included:

1. Two potential overtures were submitted for discussion and evaluation.

The first, concerning the overall focus of our denomination's mission strategy, was subsequently withdrawn on the understanding that the question raised arises from the report prepared by the Overseas Mission Board.

The second was an overture asking the Synod to mandate the Interchurch Relations Committee to consider exploring an ecclesiastical relationship with the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia. This denomination has asked us to consider this. The Presbytery agreed and the overture, along with the grounds, will be forwarded to the Synod on its behalf.

2. The annual men's study day will be held on Saturday, August 6th at Pukekohe (9.00am till 12.30 with a free lunch to follow). The guest speaker will be the Rev Dr Peter Reynolds (Grace Theological College). Topic: The Wise Man.

3. The Reformed Church of the North

Pukekohe: Family-lympics will be held in August. Start getting your team together and training (mentally and physically!).

Silverstream/Wainuiomata/Wellington: Calling all walking encyclopaedias, sports fanatics, film buffs and literary bookworms. Yes, it's that time of year again. You can all test your knowledge and compete in the enormously funny and incredible 2011 Silverstream Quiz Night for young and old.

Wainuiomata: We are having a Mid Winter Dinner. The main attraction will be an Auction. The committee will be happy to receive any items for this (small or large). Any money received by the Auction will go to the Church Fundraiser.

Wellington: Hosted by the Young Adults Group a Soup and Song Evening will follow the afternoon service. Please bring along your lovely singing voices and some bread or salad to share! No pressure to sing, so please feel free to come and enjoy the soup and songs regardless of participation.

Shore responded to questions from Art 47 of the Church Order. They presented a positive report with special emphasis on a developing unity of vision in the areas of mission and diaconal ministry. The home groups are strong and vital.

4. The 2011 Synod looms large in the minds and agendas of all sessions. Preparations are well underway.

5. Next meeting: Friday, November 25, 2011.

Dirk van Garderen

Short Report of the South Island Presbytery Meeting on 11 June 2011

Rev Andrew de Vries opened with a reading from Luke 17:7-10 highlighting that service in God's Kingdom is a duty as a servant before his master. This can serve as an encouragement when work goes unnoticed or unappreciated. Without a doubt God has freely extended his grace to us, nevertheless there is nothing that he owes us. Our service is a glad response to his goodness.

After reviewing recent minutes from other presbyteries and classes Rev Bruce

Hoyt led in prayer for situations where there is tension and upheaval.

In answer to Article 47 questions Nelson reported thankfully on spiritual growth with many families as well as conversion. The Dovedale congregation have agreed to share with Hamilton in support of Janice Reid, and they are pursuing a focus on evangelism in the local community. Bishopdale reported close working relationship between

elders and deacons, and the extensive opportunities for diaconal work in the wake of recent earthquakes.

The Reformed Church of Bishopdale is actively investigating the possibility of planting a new church in or near Rangiora. Lord willing, they hope to hold evening worship services every second Sunday and regular Bible studies. Those living in that area will be encouraged to find ways to establish point of contact

with the community. After six months they will review the situation.

Time being at a premium, the delegates segued into a working lunch during which an informal discussion was held concerning Bible translations. In the face of mounting concern over the 2011 revision of the NIV, several churches are formulating overtures to Synod.

John van Dyk

Letter to the editor

Sir,-

It was great to see (May 2011) the reprint of Klaas Stam's article telling us our Heidelberg Catechism is perfectly correct in applying the term "cursed idolatry" to the Popish Mass – which is a horrible blasphemy too. Although our magazine rightly castigates "liberal theology" (a euphemism for atheism) and some other deviations from Bible truth, we don't get enough exposures of Rome's apostasy. In all essentials, Rome has changed only for the worse since the Reformation and has merely applied new cosmetics to her face, and has thereby deceived most Protestants!

It's therefore unsurprising that many Reformed people, in all age-groups, are now soft on popery! Even in the RCNZ, some people are affected by "ecuma-

nia": seemingly visible unity MUST be achieved, even at the expense of truth. As well, we mustn't ever be "unloving" and "judgemental": Rome maybe has just another "insight" to the same Gospel believed by Evangelical Protestants – yeah, right!

Rome has always been perfectly orthodox in its Christology and about the Trinity: there's never been any quarrel about those matters. But Rome is quite wrong in its soteriology; and Luther would never have been fooled by that preposterous "agreement" of 1999 between the Lutherans and Papists. (Neither have a good many Lutherans who know they were betrayed by the spurious agreement.) If I'm not mistaken, Cardinal Cajetan tried that one on Luther, early on, in a public

debate; and Luther wouldn't wear it! We are asked to believe that Rome and Augsburg had simply been at cross-purposes, misunderstanding each other's meaning, for over 400 years: they now realise they both meant the same, but were using different terms for the same thing – I ask you!

Basically, that was the root-cause of the Reformation: Rome does NOT believe in justification/salvation by faith ALONE, while we do. But Rome is very cunning with double-talk, prevarication, and ambiguity as temporary expedients: when silly Protestants have submitted to the Pope, they will be plainly told what Rome really did mean, and that they'd better believe it too!

H. Westfold, Reformed Church of Wellington

Ministers in focus

Mr Timothy Rott

My wife, Georgette, our daughter, Tiffany, and I arrived in Auckland on 24 February, just two days after the devastating aftershock in Christchurch. We were on our way to New Zealand, where I had accepted a call to be the Minister of the Word and Sacraments at the Reformed Church of Christchurch. We remained in Auckland over the weekend until it was safe for us to continue our journey. On Monday, 28 February, we arrived in Christchurch and took up residence in Unit 2 at the Maranatha Homes in St. Albans. Our younger daughter, Shannon, her husband, Pablo and our first grandchild, Pabli (Pablo) reside in Crestview, Florida.

My story begins with a mother and

father who were staunchly Roman Catholic. My education included attendance at a Roman Catholic grade school and high school. From a young age, I had the desire to pursue the priesthood. The high school I attended was a preparatory school for young men who wanted to attend college and then seminary. In God's providence, during my last year at this school, I no longer had a desire to pursue ordination as a Roman priest.

In time, I met the woman who is now my wife. Georgette and her mother attended a Protestant church, although neither she nor her mother were regenerate. As a Roman Catholic, I attended church with them, which was *anathema* for a member of the Roman church.

It was during this time that the Lord brought an evangelist into our church and our lives, and the Lord used him to preach the gospel and give us His Spirit and faith. It was after my conversion that I once again sensed the Lord's calling upon my life.

My wife and I were married in 1973 and we headed off to begin pursuit of the educational requirements for my ordination. Covenant College, on Lookout Mountain, Tennessee is where I obtained a BA in History and Bible in 1976. Then, it was off to Westminster Theological Seminary, where I graduated with a Master of Divinity degree in 1979. These times of learning were blessed with lifelong friends, while being



Mr Timothy and Mrs Georgette Rott

taught the great truths of the doctrines of grace in the Reformed faith.

Upon graduation from seminary, I was ordained by the Presbyterian Church In America and served a congregation just outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After ministering there for two years as a student supply, and over three years as an ordained minister, I resigned and was commissioned to serve as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. Serving God's people in the military was challenging, and took our family to places around the world. It was another blessed time of ministry and making lifelong friendships. During my time in the military, I earned a Doctor of Ministry degree

in nouthetic pastoral counselling from Trinity Theological Seminary.

After retiring from the military, we returned to Pennsylvania, where I pastored a church for three and a half years. The Lord moved us again, this time to Pensacola, Florida. There, I began a teaching ministry that lasted for seven years. It was a blessed time of being involved in the lives of families and their children. Watching young men and women grow in their spiritual lives and academic knowledge gave me great joy!

During my teaching ministry, the Lord placed within me a renewed desire to seek the pastoral ministry and the preaching of the Word. As I sought His

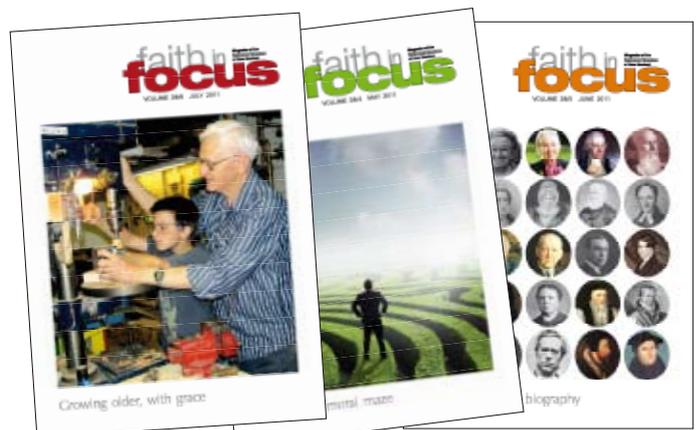
leading as to where He might place me for ministry, each door that seemed opened was closed. As I continued to search, New Zealand was mentioned at a conference that my family attended. Fifteen years before, the Lord had presented Christchurch as a possible place for ministry after my military career. However, my wife and I, after prayerful consideration and reflection on family circumstances, determined that it was not the right time for such a move. With New Zealand fresh in our minds, I changed directions in my search.

With Christchurch as the focus, since it was the place that had been considered before, I searched for Reformed churches in New Zealand, and discovered the RCNZ. Navigating through the website, I discovered there was a church without a pastor. A simple email asking "Would you consider having a Yank as a Pastor?" began the process that brought my family and I to the Reformed Church of Christchurch.

We have been blessed with a loving and supportive congregation. No one knew that a 6.3 aftershock would occur the day before we were to leave America for Christchurch, and create a housing shortage that would lead to over four months of searching for a place to live. (At the time of writing this, the Lord has helped us secure a place to live!) God's people here have been a source of strength and encouragement to us, even as I have been called to be a pastor to them. Our God is awesome!

My family and I look forward to our time in Christchurch and fellowship with the Lord's people. I would ask for your prayers for us as I begin my pastoral ministry at the Reformed Church of Christchurch.

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See page 2 for details