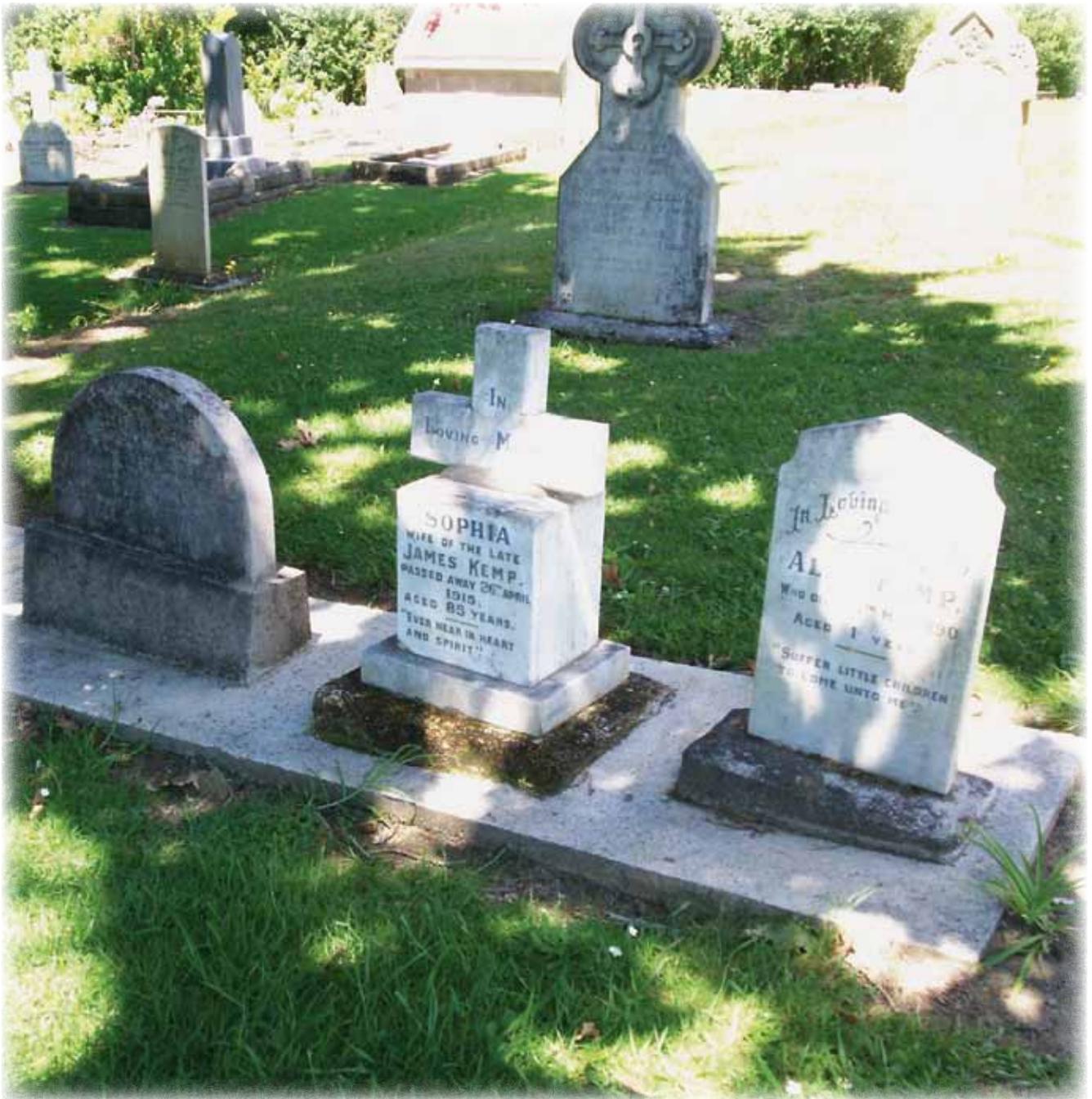


faith in **focus**

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of New Zealand

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Profiting from trials

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Editorial

One of the mysteries of God's providence is seen in the way in which He permits His people to pass through many tribulations. Some might live to a ripe old age with relatively good health. Others might die in infancy. But in both cases, those left behind mourn their loss. Yes, there will be trials and tribulations of many kinds for God's people. Profiting from trials is one of those things that only the Christian can fully learn to understand and appreciate. For the Christian, Scripture refers to trials as tests – tests of one's sanctification or perfecting in holiness. Depending on the context, "ordeal", "chastening", "suffering" and "discipline" could also be used synonymously with the word trial. Those who lack the eyes of faith would see this as somewhat of a paradox.

Trials, whether they take the form of chastening, suffering or ordeals are not pleasant or easy for anyone. Have a read of Job sometime and contemplate the ordeal he went through. What we suffer is the result of sin – the sin that came into the world via Adam. The whole of the creation was subject to futility ... and suffers the pains of childbirth ... (Rom 8:20-22) However, the Lord turns trials to our profit "... God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose". (Rom 8:28)

The apostle James writes, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." (James 1:12) The apostle Peter writes, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." (1 Pet 4:12,13) A further read of these passages, would show that there is profit in trials.

It's an unpopular subject, without a doubt, especially in a world which is always clamouring for peace, prosperity, safety and comfort as it's chief end. Our contributors give us some sobering matters to ponder which hopefully will lead us to see the Lord's goodness in them all.

Mr Michael Willemse writes about the ways we should profit from suffering; which he aptly calls "a gift that nobody wants".

Mrs Sally Davey interviews Mr and Mrs Steve and Josie Sterne about the things they have learned through trials.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt reviews *Walking Through Shadows: Finding hope in a world of pain*, by Ken Ham & Carl Wieland.

Mrs Sally Davey takes a cue from Joanne Black's recent *Listener* article and investigates evidences of a self-absorbed culture out of control.

Mrs Harriet Haverland gives helpful advice on training children to worship and Mr Larry Wilson looks at the issue of whether we approach worship with reverence or joy.

Mr William Boekestein tells us of 5 things Teens want their parents to know ...

Mrs Harriet Haverland keeps us up to date with news from our churches in the Gleanings column.

Mrs Jackie Wieringa reports on the first meeting of RCNZ Care Services.

Image: p6 Mrs Sally Davey; p17 Mr J Holtslag; p19-20 Mrs J Weiringa.

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.

Profiting from trials (1)

Suffering – the gift nobody wants

Mr Michael Willemse

One of the things my wife and I enjoy when we are on holiday is walking through those small, forgotten cemeteries next to country churches and reading the words on the headstones. Something which quickly becomes obvious is the sheer amount of suffering faced by previous generations. There are numerous headstones for babies who died at birth, young children who died from disease, young women who died in childbirth and young men lost at sea or at war. But what is also readily apparent is that these generations accepted suffering as a normal part of life and were much better equipped to face it than we are today.

In the West, we tend to treat suffering as an abnormality, an unwelcome visitor – a stranger that does not belong. We expect a life which is free from pain, in which the sun always shines from a clear blue sky and nothing of any significance will rock our world. In short, we expect heaven on earth. Yet there is nothing more sure than the fact that suffering will come to each of us.

So why does God allow suffering in our lives? Is there a theology of suffering that might help us better understand its place in our lives? Is it even possible that suffering may be a gift to us from God – something that He intends not for our harm, but for our good? The answer to these questions is a resounding “yes!” What Scripture has to say about suffering should transform our thinking and give us a much more robust faith in the face of a world under the curse.

A gracious reminder this is not our home

The problem with modern-day life in the opulent West is that we can, to a very large degree, insulate ourselves from the very real problems of the world we live in. We drive to work in our air-conditioned cars, return home to our middle-class neighbourhoods, enjoy delicious food in abundance and escape from reality through the abundant en-

tertainment options available to us. And these things mean that for long periods of time and large portions of our lives, we can forget that we live in a world under the judgement of God – a world characterised by disease, disaster and death. Instead of hungering for the world to come we hold on to this world for all that we are worth. But, from time to time, God graciously intervenes.

Suffering exposes the emptiness of the world’s allure, its inability to meet our deepest needs or to give us any real and lasting security. Many of us have experienced that moment of crystal-clear insight that comes in the wake of tragedy – in a moment we see what

really matters and how much of our lives we have poured into things that don’t. It is suffering – not pleasure – which awakens our yearning for that triumphant declaration: “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev 21:4). This world is not our home – and, many times, it is suffering which reminds us of this.

A way of revealing our self-centred hearts

A number of years ago, I remember a speaker who said that we are theists by confession but deists in practice. What he meant is that we say we believe in God,

“Suffering exposes the emptiness of the world’s allure, its inability to meet our deepest needs or to give us any real and lasting security.”



yet we often live as though everything depends on us. This can be particularly true of us as Reformed people. Though we know we are saved by grace, we live either in arrogant pride because of our 'achievements' or plagued by guilt over our failings – both expressions of the rebellious declaration of independence from God, first heard in Eden (Genesis 3).

The Psalmist expresses something of this when he says "When I felt secure, I said 'I will never be shaken.'" (Psalm 30:6.) His security led him to smugness and self-confidence – he had forgotten that it was God who made him stand firm. But then he confesses "... but when

especially in the Bible, is related to disciplining. It has in mind the shaping of character, the development of self-discipline and self-denial, training in righteousness, growth in holiness – the loving formation of a mature person. This is why Proverbs can say "do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." (Prov 3:11-12 c.f. Heb 12:5-6).

God is at work in our hearts, shaping us for an eternity with Him and, very often, suffering is the tool of choice. It is telling that, in Scripture, it is the

A reason for encouragement

Although suffering reminds us that this world is not our home, that God must be on the throne of our hearts and that He is at work for our holiness, these things do not mean that we will welcome each fresh trial with a smile. Suffering is difficult and the Bible never denies this. But the Bible does give us real encouragement in the face of suffering. I want to highlight two favourites ...

The first encouragement is by way of comparison. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Rom 8:18). These words remind us that no matter how bad our suffering may be – and at times they may be beyond imagination – the glory that waits for us will be infinitely better!

The second encouragement speaks of God's purposes in our sufferings. "For our light and momentary troubles are *achieving for us* an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (2 Cor 4:17). The very thing which gives us so much pain is being redeemed by God and used for our eternal benefit. And, in the light of eternity, we will see that our suffering was "light and momentary."

A gift!

If our suffering is a gift from God (and it is!) then what is it that God wants to give us? Is God simply at work to draw us home and to make us holy or is there more?

Ultimately what God wants to give us is Himself! Every other blessing and benefit that we enjoy – even physical life on the new earth beyond sorrow, sickness and suffering – is only ours through relationship with God. They are side-benefits of knowing and experiencing God Himself. Without Him, heaven would not be heaven.

The gift God wants to give us is life with Him, life through Him, life for Him – a life in which we glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. He has not promised us a life free from suffering. But He has promised that He will be with us in the midst of suffering (Psalm 23; 1 Cor 10:13) and that He will redeem it for our good.

Every time we suffer, we are faced with the same question – Is God enough? Is fellowship with Him sufficient – even when everything else is taken from us? This is the question that Job was faced with and it is the ultimate question that faces us in every trial. And – astonishingly – the answer not only for Job but for

“Although suffering reminds us that this world is not our home, God must be on the throne of our hearts and He is at work for our holiness, these things do not mean we will welcome each fresh trial with a smile.”

you hid your face, I was dismayed." When God withdrew His favour, the Psalmist saw the arrogance of his own heart and he cried to God for mercy (Psalm 30:8.)

Suffering often shows that I am fatally me-centred and this shows in the kind of questions I ask: Why does this have to happen to *me*? Haven't I already suffered enough? How much more of this do I have to take? Though we profess that the world is God-centred, we continually move towards self-centred lives. Suffering shows the folly and emptiness of such lives – it shows our absolute dependence on God. There are many unanswerable questions when we suffer but one thing is always true – God designs our sufferings to drive us outside of ourselves and into Him.

A tool in the hand of our loving Father

Discipline has become something of a dirty word in our day. But discipline,

tough times which shape God's people. Joseph, Moses, David, Jeremiah, and Paul were all shaped on the anvil of suffering. Psalm 119 also speaks of this truth when the Psalmist says "before I was afflicted, I went astray" and later when he says "*it was good for me to be afflicted that I might learn your decrees.*" (Psalm 119:67,71.)

Suffering is a refining process which exposes our weaknesses and the idolatries of our hearts. God is at work to make us Holy and this is no easy process – our hearts are incredibly hard and, as fast as one idol is dethroned, we put another in its place.

We may be tempted to ask "but isn't there another way that God could shape us?" There isn't. If Scripture even says of Jesus "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ..." (Heb 5:9) – how can we expect that anything less is needed in our case? God uses suffering to discipline us and to shape us for eternity.

every believer who goes through suffering is an undeniable YES! Countless believers have found that, in the darkest of trials, God plus nothing equals everything.

Suffering is no accident, no intruder.

It has not caught God unawares nor slipped past His defenses. Suffering is a good gift from a loving God who is at work to wean our hearts from everything else so that we will long only for

Him. Suffering leads us to God.

Mr Michael Willemse is the minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Hamilton.

Profiting from trials (2)

Walking through the valley

*It is very important, when facing trials, to get our biblical perspective right. But it can also be helpful to hear from someone else who has walked through a difficult trial before us. Their story might put “flesh and blood” on the framework of truth to which we’ve committed ourselves. Here is the testimony of **Steve and Josie Sterne**, an ordinary Christian couple like us and our spouses, who know what it means to walk with Christ through trials. They were recently interviewed at their home in North Canterbury (they are members of the Bishopdale congregation) by Sally Davey on behalf of Faith in Focus.*

Steve and Josie, could you please define a “trial” in the most general biblical sense?

S & J: A trial is anything that exercises our faith, and demands our reliance on God’s grace and mercy. This could come from tests that God generates, or be something from demonic powers. It could be physical deprivation, or something that results from our own fallen nature (*i.e.* our own sin). God does seem, sometimes, to bring trials that impinge on our own particular weakness – he tests us in those areas where he knows we need work done.

How do you see the purpose of trials?

S & J: Trials bring about a greater trust and confidence in God. They refine our character. They help us see our sinfulness. They stimulate faith and trust. One thing they do is help us focus our hearts and thoughts – there are so many distractions in life; and trials tend to strip them away. It seems, these days, that we put a huge effort into trying to avoid pain, discomfort and insecurity. (We want to feel secure). It’s almost as if we have a preoccupation with trying to bring about greater ease and comfort for ourselves. It’s striking that in Psalm 63 – written when David was fleeing from Absalom

– he only mentions his plight in the last three verses. Up till then he is calling for God to be nearer to him, and for greater spiritual reality. His prayer wasn’t to escape pain, but that God might be close to him.

Please briefly describe the trials you’ve experienced.

S & J: Well, we often think of trials in terms of the “dramatic” – death of a spouse, death of a child, perhaps. But we think the greatest trials are those that we endure on an ongoing, lifelong basis. These come as we deal with, and learn to live with, our own sins and the sins of others. The biggest difficulties we have are trying to live with others. [Among the trials Steve and Josie have experienced was the illness and death of both their spouses – from cancer – in 1994. They subsequently met and married.]

Speaking as a Christian, what were some of the most difficult aspects of your trial in 1994?

S: The worst parts were the thoughts that worm their way into your mind and heart. They give you an oppressive sense of your own weakness and failings, and your inability to do what’s required to get out of your difficulty. They turn

you away from your greatest source of grace and strength. They tempt you to rely on yourself.

Losing your spouse is losing a big chunk of yourself. You lose your best friend. There’s this horrendous loneliness. You go through the day feeling you can’t wait to go to sleep so you don’t have to think about it all. Then you go to bed and you can’t sleep, so you can’t wait to get up and do something. There’s no let-up.

It’s hard to look at the children, and see the pain in their eyes when you see them lose their father or their mother – and you can’t relieve their pain. They suffer something that we as adults won’t go through. The difficulty as a parent is – how do you deal with that? Then you start thinking of those who see a parent walk out – the blame, accusation and bitterness. That’s so much worse.

Can you isolate one or two major ways that God helped you through the trial?

S and J: In a supernatural way (that of course is hard to explain) God helps through His Holy Spirit. It’s difficult to define, but He really is a comforter and a help – He draws near.

He helped when we delved into his Word, and turned to Him in prayer. We deny ourselves comfort when we neglect these. Seeking out friends also helped. The most difficult trials of all are those people have to endure alone.

Placing ourselves under good teaching is important, and surrounding ourselves with godly influences. It’s important to avoid being alone too much, as your attention can very quickly become self-centred.

Seeking out people with a strong biblical perspective and understanding was



Steve and Josie Sterne

important. There are plenty of people who will come and offer sympathy, but not everyone says useful things.

Death is also a salutary warning that we fall into the hands of the living God. It's good to ask at such times – are we trifling with sin?

It is very true that it's the things that drive us to focus on our heavenly hope that are the most helpful. Both our spouses were believers, so we were assured of their eternal destiny. Focusing on the fact that God is working things for our good also helps (Romans 8:28). While this is something someone else would hesitate to say to us for fear of insensitivity, we ourselves could definitely say it.

What specific spiritual truths do you think kept you going?

S and J: The firm conviction that God is working all things for his glory – nothing is out of his control. The knowledge that we have a Saviour who knows every trial we can ever endure, x1000. The truth that he is our comforter, and does draw near. The fact that he is not a dispassionate God who doesn't identify with his people. He understands us and is able to bring consolation. He isn't an idea, or an immovable, inanimate idol.

As Bunyan would say, we are just pilgrims in this world. This is just a brief, passing experience – it's only very short in the overall scheme of things (1 Peter 5:10).

We were both reading Job, as it happens, at the time our spouses were

ill and dying. To be honest, our trials seemed small compared to his. Remember, the apostle Paul saw it as a privilege to be able to share in Christ's suffering.

We're only sharing in what our Saviour experienced – that dreadful separation from the Father on the cross, for our sake.

In what ways was Christ near to you?

S and J: He carries you through these times – there is truth in the footprints story! He is especially near in his Word. And God gives you music and song for these times, too. To be able to sing, and to hear music (the hymns and songs of the faith) in these times does minister to your heart. Surround yourself with spiritual songs, and especially, sing them in church among the believers. Both words and music have an impact. One reason is that many good hymns were written by Christians who have experienced deep trials – think of Horatio G. Spafford's "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way".

Let's consider James 1:3-4, and what it says about the outcome of trials. Do you think there are some ways you have learned patience (or steadfastness, in the ESV)?

S and J: You do look back – and although you hope you've learned a little, it's hard to say. There's often a *déjà vu* sense – here we go again, a similar experience – and you know that God brought us through the last time we felt like this, so we trust he'll do so again.

There's also the fact that we seem

to mellow as we grow older, and are hopefully a little slower to react in the old (sinful) way to a trial we might be facing. You can also take confidence from the knowledge that God's work is like a furnace – dross has to be stripped away, and the end result will be good. Part of yourself (the fleshly self) has to be lost.

Remember that all of life is a trial and it's an ongoing work. That's the whole Christian experience. The greatest trial is trying to endure the constant intrusion of sin in our lives – you look at your attitudes and they weigh heavily on your heart. It's a great joy to think of heaven and the hope of no more sin. Death is something every believer can look forward to.

Let's consider Romans 5:3-5. How would you explain this endurance-character-hope process?

S and J: it's only as the heat comes on that you get to the gold (hope). Suffering strips away arrogant pride, the idea that we have a remnant of good in ourselves. It teaches us that we are weak and sinful. Endurance comes as we consistently turn to Christ and lean on him for sustenance. Character describes the way a person thinks, feels – their ethics, standards. As suffering produces endurance it becomes evident through a person's character. It ultimately produces in them what is their only hope – that they will be transformed.

Imagine all these things as an unbeliever – the final outcome is despair, not hope. What is the hope produced here? We hope that the effects of the suffering will be godliness of character in this life, and that in eternity we won't have to endure such suffering at all any more.

Do you have any specific words of advice or encouragement you'd like to offer someone going through a serious trial right now?

S and J: Yes. One of the best things we can do is meditate on the nature of God – his character. Think of all the adjectives applied to God and then expand on the implications that they have for the lives we live. This really begins many years before losing a spouse – or any other trial. If you've developed a good idea of God – his character – then when you're faced with a trial you're never left questioning why. Work hard to develop a strong understanding of the God of the Scriptures. Work at knowing your enemy (Satan) – and your sinful self.

You can also ask yourself the question

– what is God trying to teach me? What can I learn from this trial? Pray that you would absorb the lesson.

Get busy with kingdom work. Don't let yourself become self-absorbed. Many of our spiritual ailments stem from focusing on ourselves – we become

mori-bund, sorry for ourselves, depressed. Serving others gives us perspective on our own difficulties.

The great temptation in serious trials is to wallow in self-pity; become introspective. We must be careful not to go down that path. We need to re-focus

our attention on how – in the midst of this trial – we can use it to carry the gospel and promote the interests of God's kingdom in the hearts and lives of others.

Book in focus

Walking Through Shadows: Finding hope in a world of pain

by Ken Ham & Carl Wieland

Master Books, 2002, 136 pages;

Hardcover; \$18 Can.

reviewed by Veronica Hoyt

"My sister described my brother's physical appearance this way: 'Do you remember those TV programs that showed those horrible pictures of prisoners from the concentration camps? Remember how they looked from starvation? Well, in a way, Robert reminds me of them.' This was the result of a degenerative brain disease, a type of dementia.... He was so young – early forties – how could this be happening to him?"

Yes, how?

Indeed, how can tragedy, suffering, and heartache happen to so many? We all know of someone who is seriously, even terminally, ill, of parents who have lost children in tragic circumstances, of disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis that devastate millions. How can this happen to so many "innocent" folk? Yes, how?

Walking Through Shadows helps give a clear, Biblical perspective to these questions. Written by Ken Ham and Carl Wieland, this book sees all tragedy in the light of the "big picture" outlined in the Bible, which provides answers and, above all, an unwavering focus on our God. Ham says about this:

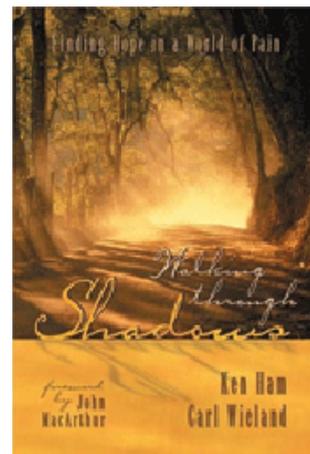
[The big picture] has helped me in dealing with the issue of death and suffering. God's Word tells us clearly where death and sickness originated. We understand we live in a fallen world. Each of us needs to recognise that we are sinful creatures living under a curse because of sin. Death for

every human being is inevitable ... Every person needs to be spiritually healed. Total healing doesn't come until we leave this sin-cursed universe. God has a sovereign plan far greater than we could imagine. We don't know everything – in fact, we know nothing compared to God. Thus, we need to put our faith and trust in God's Word and the fact that He is in total control.

A littler earlier in the book, Ham stated it a little more bluntly, quoting his (now ill) brother, Robert: "[The apostle] Paul saw illness and he saw sickness as normal (N-O-R-M-A-L). I'd like to underline it with a big felt pen and write it indelibly in every one of our minds. The apostle Paul saw sickness and illness as normal living in a world ruined by sin." Ham continues: "Although it is abnormal in the sense of not being the way things should have been, were it not for sin – it should be considered 'normal' in that sense, in this fallen world. I believe ... we need to focus on Christ."

And, indeed, *Walking Through Shadows* focuses very much on the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It provides this perspective in the context of two biographical accounts, first by Carl Wieland of God's care and provision after he experienced a terrible car accident (he needed 56 operations over a period of 7 years), and by Ken Ham of the pain and hope associated with his brother Robert's decline into dementia (as introduced in the first paragraph of this review).

Interspersed in these biographical accounts are many wise, biblical perspectives on suffering, pain, and death. Wieland, for example, reflects on aspects of healing and the health-wealth "gospel" that many charismatics believe. He also touches on topics such as whether God is unfair, thankfulness, why the maxim "there's always someone



worse off than me" might not be helpful, and how prayer fits in to God's sovereignty. Ham adds a very interesting dimension to this book, in that he uses an insightful sermon written prior to these events by his brother, Robert, a pastor, on the topic of pain and suffering.

Walking Through Shadows is a book for anyone: since our world is so full of pain, we all need a clear perspective on suffering. Not only will it help us to deal with our own pain, but it will also help us to minister to others, be they of the faith or outside it. We all need the Gospel of our Lord, and this book presents it in a way that our faith can be strengthened whatever circumstance we may be in. This book could also be a useful gift to an unbeliever – short and very simply written, this book could well help someone who is looking for answers to life's perplexing questions – someone who is seeking to know more about the Gospel of our Lord.

I'd like to finish this review with an insightful perspective given by Ham about the grief that the separation of death brings to those who are left behind: "We grieve over this separation. How much must God grieve over the separation between us and Him because of our sin! What reminder that we need spiritual healing. And what an

incredible blessing to know that God himself provided all that is needed for this healing – even though we have done nothing to deserve it.”

Indeed, what more can we say? Viewing suffering from an eternal per-

spective makes all the difference. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

Ken Ham and Carl Wieland are both

key figures in Answers in Genesis (www.answersingenesis.org).

Reformed Perspective – July/August 2005

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Cues from the World (No.4)

It's all about ME!

In the first century A.D. the apostle Paul predicted that in the last days “people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive ... ungrateful, unholy, heartless ... without self-control ... reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God ...” (2 Timothy 3:2-4).

We are still living in the last days.

Jean Twenge's five-year-old daughter came home from kindergarten last month and showed her mother the worksheet she'd been busy with. On the front of

week, the *New Zealand Listener* magazine's cover story sounded an alarm. “It's all about Me” is not a good slogan, warns journalist Joanne Black. Societies that teach their children to think they're the best thing since sliced bread may be in for deep trouble. Joanne's investigation begins with Jean Twenge's story, but moves on to her book, and the wider issues it raises. Twenge, apart from being a mother, is Associate Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University, and also a world-acclaimed researcher and author on the subject of narcissism.

Daily Mail article on why women hate her “for being beautiful” stirred a furore and incited over 5000 comments.² Likewise, when British employment minister Chris Grayling asked employers to consider hiring the local “surly young man in a hoodie” in preference to the enterprising Eastern European with five years' experience it prompted the indignant response that if young Brits think they're so entitled to express their “Authentic Self” that they won't even take their hoodies off for an interview they shouldn't be surprised that employers “feel similarly entitled to hire the Hungarian in a suit, instead.”

There is much in Jean's thesis that Joanne thinks rings true in New Zealand. Take marriage breakdown, for instance. In 1950 U.S. births to unmarried mothers were 5% of the total – now they are 40%. The acceptance is growing that people won't get married – they just “hook up” temporarily. There is no commitment, nothing long term. A major contributor is the habit “of thinking your personal happiness and desires are more important than anyone else's.” How can anyone maintain a strong relationship with another person acting on the basis of that belief?

Some people argue that self-belief is good for academic achievement and career prospects. Confident people take risks and go places. Jean doesn't agree. Apparently self-esteem is measurable – and Asian-American children have the lowest self-esteem – yet they do best in school. Likewise with employment – there is no positive correlation between

“Some people argue that self-belief is good for academic achievement and career prospects. Confident people take risks and go places.”

the paper the children had been told to draw a picture of themselves to illustrate the words “I'm very happy to be me.” But that was not all: on the other side were the words to the “Special” song, which the kindergarten children sing to the tune *Frère Jacques*. The words go like this: “I am special, I am special. Look at me! Look at me!”

That was San Diego, California. So far, so American. But what about us? This

Twenge's central thesis is that because so many children, young people and adults are being urged to focus on themselves and their own “entitlement”, society itself is at risk. Marriage breakdown and the current mortgage crisis are but two evidences of a self-absorbed culture out of control.¹ These trends, Joanne Black notes, are common to many western societies.

In the U.K., Samantha Brick's recent

self-esteem and success at work. Jean suggested to Joanne that the same may well be the case in New Zealand. Probably it is.

What is narcissism?

But let's just clarify what it is that Jean and the other psychologists Joanne quotes – including New Zealand academics Marc Wilson (Victoria) and Chris Sibley (Auckland) – call “narcissism”. According to them being happy with yourself isn't so much of a problem. It is a problem, though, when it gets out of control to the point that you think you're much better than others – better looking, more intelligent, more popular, and so on. But even worse is when it leads you to think that if things don't work out then it's someone else's fault – you've been misunderstood. A further problem is that narcissists seem unable to be empathetic. They mainly think about themselves and how others see them. Obviously, this trend is a continuum – you can be more or less narcissistic; and thus more or less a problem to yourself and others. Similarly, some cultures are more or less narcissistic – you can be a whole lot more narcissistic as an individual and not be perceived so in, say, the U.S., than you can get away with being in, say, Japan.

The psychologists are pretty interested in what narcissists do on the social media. It's early days yet, of course, but they suspect that the use of Facebook and other media will have a reinforcing effect. Narcissistic people will “Tweet” (microblog) or update their “status” and photos to promote themselves – to let everyone know “how flash they are.” Obviously, it's important that everyone knows you have a lot of “friends” – and if I have 800, that surely shows I'm special. (To be honest, I've often wondered if Facebook pages and some blogs are little more than an opportunity for exhibitionism. The sort of trivia that people want to tell everyone they're up to seems so uninteresting to anyone but the writer. “Here I am sitting under a tree and the air is sooooo cool. I'm thinking.....” You know what I mean?)

The most serious problems arise when narcissists are thwarted by others; and not given the ego-boosting treatment they are in the habit of receiving from parents, teachers and others. Perhaps someone reaches their forties or fifties even and their spouse gets tired of being a sycophant, tired of building them up, even propping them up – tired of being a

supporting act or chorus of praise. What then? Most close-up personal relationships can't stand that sort of strain – we are sinners, after all. Sooner or later there will be a shock; they may get told some home truths. Narcissists are frequently unable to take it. (They've been cocooned in unreality all their lives, some of them). Things can occasionally get nasty – take the recent cases of Anders Breivik (Norwegian mass-murderer), or Clayton Weatherston (Otago university lecturer and killer of Sophie Elliott). These are extreme examples, but we all probably know of people who had high views of themselves, couldn't take criticism, and “threw the toys out of the cot” when things didn't go their way.

By now you're probably wondering why on earth we should need psychologists building careers on what is an obvious problem. Aren't we just dealing with plain old self-centredness? Yes! Good on Joanne the journalist and three cheers for Jean the mother. (She at least phoned the kindergarten teacher and suggested the “Special” song was a mistake.) But the thing is, we're also dealing here with decades of deliberate – even institutionalised –

encouragement of this self-centredness. How many years have we heard people talking about the “problem” of low self-esteem? Or the lack of self-worth? Or the need to encourage children's self-expression? How long have parents been puzzling over school reports that never say anything negative about a child's performance? Or grades that never hit any clear failure-level? How long have employers been lumbered with loads of self-congratulatory CVs? The self-esteem movement has worked a revolution in our culture's thinking about itself. And we're reaping the whirlwind in adults who can't cope with criticism, let alone failure. Paul's words in 2 Timothy about what characterises the people of the last days are deadly accurate.

A Christian response

How should Christians respond to the problem? What should we say to the narcissists we meet? The first thing I think we need to do is be sure in our own minds that self-love, self-praise and self-absorption are all wrong. Nowhere does the Bible commend such a view of ourselves. In fact, throughout, the Scriptures teach that we should not be “lovers of



Not a very wise message...

“We all probably know of people who had high views of themselves, couldn't take criticism, and “threw the toys out of the cot” when things didn't go their way.”

self”, that we should let others praise us and not our own lips, and that we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. This used to be the common view of our culture. In fact, while discussing this subject with me, my mother recalled that when she was at school (the 1940s) they were told that “self-praise is no recommendation at all.” Let all writers of CVs take note! But not all Christians are quite certain of this, and many of us, not having thought the issue through at a principial level, flirt unwittingly with self-esteem pop-psychology. We need to be clear that it is part and parcel of the sinful, natural man's reflexes to love himself. Sinners will do this by nature. We need to realise that it is something to be rescued from – not encouraged.³

What should we say to someone floundering in the mire of self-centredness? The person who's finally recognised, post-university drop-out, post-job-loss, or post-marriage-failure, that they have a problem? That some-

thing has gone wrong (though probably, in their mind, it is someone else's fault)? It is at this stage that you might be having a conversation with an unbeliever, who's unhappy, a bit desperate perhaps, and God puts her in your path somehow. What do you say to her?

Obviously, much depends on the specifics of her situation and your knowledge of it, but it seems to me there are several important and helpful things to convey along the way. Above all, her troubles are an opportunity for her to hear the gospel of Christ from you. While it may not be what she wants to hear – or be willing to accept right away – we all need to know that none of us are as great as we think. In fact, the truth be known, we're all a lot worse than we think! And unless a person realises that, she's not going to respond to the only help there is – salvation from that condition by Christ's work on the cross. But we should explain this humbly – with the admission we ourselves fall

short, every one of us. No matter how “together”, admired, cool, calm and collected or successful you may seem, you, too, are a sinner. And we should be patient. Without doubt it takes a lot of talking, thinking and reflecting for a person who's been fed a diet of “you are special” to realise she is not.

But, of course – and here is good news, after all – there is a biblical sense in which each saved sinner is special. Think of the parable of the lost sheep. Every saved sinner can think of herself as a sheep sought – and found – and thus begin to build a proper, biblical, identity of “specialness”. Jesus really did die for *my* sins. But that very fact tells us that my life, from now on, is not all about me at all; it's all about Jesus, and denying myself to follow him.

Our aim? Friends who give up singing the “Special” song and sing “Amazing Grace” instead.

Notes

- 1 Joanne Black, “It's all about ME: The rise of narcissism is affecting us all – and not always in a good way”, *New Zealand Listener*, May 19-25, 2012; pp. 16-21. Twenge has co-written her book, *The Narcissism Epidemic* (Free Press, 2010), with Keith Campbell.
- 2 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2124246/Samantha-Brick-downsides-looking-pretty-Why-women-hate-beautiful.html>
- 3 If you are unsure about the biblical truth concerning sin, especially where it relates to love of self, it would be helpful to read the Puritans. Their humble realism about their own sin greatly impressed me in my university years, when I had the privilege of reading a good number of their books. You could start with John Owen on *Sin and Temptation*, or such books as Jeremiah Burroughs's *Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.

Training children to worship

Harriet Haverland

Mummy, what are we doing today?
We are going to church.
What are we going to do?
We are going to worship God.

All of us as Christian parents want our children to grow up to love and serve the Lord. Most of us realise that this

does not just happen. It takes a consistent, conscious effort on our part to train them. One of the places this training occurs is in church. Our family has grown up but we are blessed to be in a church which has 40 children under five. They make up one fifth of the church membership. We are now watching the next generation of parents seeking to train their children, with the struggles

and success that accompany this. We are also grandparents and want to do the best we can for our grandchildren.

Most of us would agree that when we go to worship it would be nice to concentrate on the service rather than on our children. However that is not possible. Children can be noisy and distracting. Sometimes they are an embarrassment to us. For those of us who have

raised or are raising children we know that parenting in the pew is hard work.

We could be tempted to give up, stay home, or put our children in crèche till they are ten! However this will not teach them anything except that church is *not* the place to be. Instead we want them to pay attention to God, so we can too. This is for their spiritual growth, no matter what age they are. We want them to love God and worship him.

To do this requires consistent training, week after week. It is not enough just to be quiet and still in church. That is a passive response. We and our children need to be actively listening and paying attention. We want a heart change. All of this requires hard work on both our part and that of our children, and a work of God's grace.

In your home

We cannot expect our children to worship God in church if they have not learnt to pray and concentrate on Bible readings at home. Training begins first and foremost in your own home. Children learn best by copying us. We need to set the example. They will copy us out of habit to start with, and then by God's grace, out of a response from their own hearts.

Children do not struggle with faith the same way that adults sometimes do. Many of you will have heard your three year old say that they believe in God. Build on that child-like faith. As children grow older they will ask more questions; that is good – it shows a searching heart and we have the Scriptures to give them the answers.

Saturday night

How we handle the Sunday is affected by what we do on Saturday and particularly Saturday night. I often think that that is why the Jews held their Sabbath from sundown onwards. If Saturday night was not a party night, movie night, socialise late night, extended family night, would we and our children cope better in church? We all know the answer to that. Our whole week, but particularly our Saturdays, should work towards putting us in the right frame of mind for Sunday.

As adults we also set our minds for worship with our preparations. This includes preparing food, ironing clothes, polishing shoes and so on. It will certainly take the pressure off Sunday mornings and remove the work from that day, so that we can focus on worship.

Sunday morning

If we are prepared and get up on time, we will not have to hurry everyone and then get stressed when the children are on a go-slow. How many of us have been angry with our children at home because we are trying to rush them out of the door?

We can set the right mood by playing hymns, both at home and as we travel to church in the car. How can you prepare yourself to worship God when you listen to popular songs on the radio? How can you get yourself into the right frame of mind when you are late and scrambling to find seats? How can you parent your children when your family can't sit together?

One further matter to attend to before we sit in the pew is to organise a toilet stop. How often have you seen 12 year olds, and even older, leaving church part way during the service because they have to go to the toilet? That it happens once I can understand. When it happens week after week the parents are neglecting this aspect of training. These same children can watch a two hour movie without a stop. Remind your children that their going in and out of church is not helping their worship, or the worship of others.

Another aspect of worship is our giving. We encouraged our children to tithe. When they were young and received 50 cents pocket money they brought their five cents to church. (Obviously this was done when the 5 cent coin existed.) This too encourages our children in a heart response to their

possessions. Our children thought of this as being so normal that there never was a negative response – train them young and they will follow this when they get older.

Worship

Many churches view children as a distraction in worship and want to remove them to a children's church. I understand that it can be difficult to have children in church, but the churches that do this miss out on having the covenant community worship together. Isn't it wonderful to see three and even four generations praising God?

Those of us not raising children can be a help and encouragement to young families. A grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or friend can take a child and teach one-on-one while Dad and Mum care for the other children. You can encourage the parents by praying for them and their children, particularly when you see a family struggle. It would also help if you could give an encouraging smile when the long suffering parent takes out his "little-miss-muffet" for the fourth time during that service. A glaring look from you is the last thing the parent needs. You could also give some helpful ideas if you think the parent would be receptive to this.

Years ago we visited an old church in the country and I had taken some toys to church to keep my one and two year old occupied. I had not taken into account wooden pews and wooden floors. The sounds were amplified on the hard sur-



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faces and I was embarrassed by the noise we made. One elder came to me after church and very kindly told me that soft toys and books are often a better option in church than metal cars. I fully agreed with him, he did not make me feel bad, and toy cars remained at home.

When we pray, our children need to pray. Folding their hands and closing their eyes tells them we want the focus to be on the words being spoken to God, not on everything around them. When we sing, they sing. Have an old hymn book for your child until they are ready to hold an adult one with care and respect. Little children can have a child's Bible book until they are old enough to read a Bible themselves. If we are happy to be at church it is likely our children will

be happy to be there. Whether you are a couple, or on your own, the modelling should be the same.

The sermon is one of the hardest parts of the service for a child to listen to, and yet it is possible. Some parents let their children write notes or draw pictures. We permitted our children to do this, but the pictures were not to be of the pastor in caricature! They had to illustrate what was spoken. After the service we would ask our children what they could remember from the sermon and they could explain that using their notebooks. We were often amazed at what they had remembered and learnt. As the children get older you can question them more fully. Children will listen a lot better when they know they are going to be

quizzed about the sermon and service afterwards. Of course that means that as parents we have to listen too!

If you are interested in further reading on this subject I have just finished reading a book called *Parenting in the Pew*, by Robbie Castleman. It is a very well-written book and I agree with most of it. We are a covenant people and all of us are to help each other, through prayer, through godly advice and by our example. May God use us to help our covenant children grow in their ability to worship him and may he work a change in their hearts for his glory.

Mrs Harriet Haverland is a member of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.

Reverence or joy in worship?

Larry E. Wilson

Again and again we hear it. Some say, "Our worship seems so lifeless! Let's revitalise it by adding guitar and drums!" Others respond, "No! Worship must be marked by reverence!" The first group counters, "But shouldn't it also be marked by joy?"

God says that worship that is genuinely vital – alive and enlivening – will be characterised *both* by reverence (Heb. 12:28) *and* by joy (Ps. 100:1–2). Why then do we find ourselves trying to choose between them?

Could it be because we imagine that worship is primarily something that we do? We need to understand that *the heart of true worship is the living God himself meeting with and working in his people by his means of grace*. He alone can genuinely vitalise his church. We need to get out of the way anything that might distract or divert us from his work. If we do, what will worship look like? First Corinthians 14 provides five touchstones of vital worship.

The centrality of God's word

In vital worship, God addresses his people through his word. The Father draws near through his Son by his Holy

Spirit. The Holy Spirit works to draw God's people in faith near to the Father through the Son's mediation (Eph. 2:18). He uses God's word to create this response of faith (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 6:17).

That is why prophecy – the forth-telling of God's word – was permitted in public worship, while uninterpreted tongues were not (1 Cor. 14:28). Prophecy instructs and edifies (vs. 3). But if uninterpreted tongues cannot be understood, they cannot edify (vs. 2). On the other hand, interpreted tongues could properly be used in worship during the apostolic era because they expressed God's word in an understandable way (vss. 5, 13, 18–19).

Today, we have the functional equivalent of prophecy and tongues in the reading and preaching of Scripture. The gifts our Lord designed to be central to public worship are those which he gives to teach and edify the church. First, then, the ministry of God's Word will be central to vital worship.

Clarity and order

This implies a second touchstone: "Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26). In vital worship, everything will be clear and understandable, so that it edifies God's redeemed people.

Third, we tend to think that sincere worship must be spontaneous, but God insists that public worship must be marked by order. Why? Because only God can grant authenticity and vitality, and he "is not a God of confusion but of peace" (vs. 33). Therefore, in worship "all things should be done decently and in order" (vs. 40).

One voice at a time

Fourth, worship can be orderly only if one "voice" speaks at a time. In vital worship, God speaks to his assembled people, and the congregation responds to God. These voices are to be clear and distinct.

Those who have the spiritual gifts – and are authorised to use them – speak on God's behalf. Through them, our Lord addresses his people. "Two or at most three, and each in turn," may speak (1 Cor. 14:27, 29). Only a few in the congregation may represent the voice of God in worship, and only one at a time (vss. 30–31). Our Lord wants his voice to be clear and edifying. And so verse 31 insists, "Prophecy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged."

Accordingly, in elements of worship where God speaks to the congregation, only one voice is to speak at a time.

Likewise, in elements of worship where the congregation speaks to God, only one voice is to speak at a time.

Silence

This implies, fifth, that vital worship will be marked by substantial silence. Jesus said that in this new age of covenant fulfillment, worship is *in Spirit and in truth* – by the Holy Spirit and through the mediation of Christ (John 4:23–24). This adds a new dimension and dynamic to worship. Because of Christ's accomplished work and the Holy Spirit's application of it, New Testament worship is personal and intimate in a way that Old Testament saints could only long for. Our heavenly High Priest grants access to the very throne room of God (Heb. 10:19–22). He graciously makes it possible for you to experience a new and deep interaction with the living God by his Spirit and through his Word. A tremendous amount of activity goes on when, in worship, the triune God speaks to you and you genuinely listen in silence.

This helps us understand 1 Corinthians 14:33b–35, “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak....” That prohibition is clear and emphatic. But that instruction applies to *everyone's* attitude in public worship. The same imperative – “keep silent” – is given two other times in this context (vss. 28, 30) to *men!* When it's not appropriate for you to speak, “keep silent.” That goes for everyone.

How can we follow this principle? First, we must realise that in worship, not speaking does not mean not worshipping. God calls everyone to participate actively during every element of worship. At the same time, the way you do that in most of public worship is by means of outward silence. As the minister reads or preaches God's Word, everyone else is to be silent. But when you are really worshipping, a lot will be happening in your silence. You will actively listen for God's voice. The Holy Spirit will inwardly apply God's Word. You will respond in faith. You will commune with your Lord by means of his ordinances. Keeping silent in worship is not the same as not participating in worship. Indeed, in order to participate fully, most of the congregation has to keep silent for most of the worship service.

Second, when the congregation as a whole speaks as a single voice to God, you should add your voice. Your voice

sincerely raised together with the rest of the church is part and parcel of vital worship. But so is your silence. The genuine worship which you offer to God in silence is just as important and just as spiritual and just as vital. When God allows only a few men to speak on his behalf or to speak on behalf of the congregation, he does so precisely to *enable* you to enter more fully into the essence of worship – the intimacy of Spirit-and-truth communion with the living and true God.

Genuine reverence and genuine joy

We see in 1 Corinthians 14 that vital worship is intensely spiritual. Does this help to explain why we keep finding

external changes to those practices. The first step to cure counterfeit reverence is not to add guitars and drums, nor will counterfeit joy be cured by insisting on solemnity. The first step is to get down on our knees in repentance for our sinful reliance on the flesh. It is to admit to God that we are “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked,” and that our only hope is the grace of God in Christ; it is to seek the Lord for the *internal* changes that will draw us into close fellowship with him (Rev. 3:17–20).

Vital worship depends wholly upon the living God. He is not limited by external circumstances. He can produce vital worship – Spirit-and-truth communion with himself – in any circumstanc-

“We must realise that in worship, not speaking does not mean not worshipping. God calls everyone to participate actively during every element of worship.”

ourselves choosing between reverence and joy in worship?

Francis Schaeffer observed that it is possible to counterfeit *holiness* in the flesh, but it will be legalistic and unloving. Similarly, it is possible to counterfeit *love* in the flesh, but it will be permissive and unholy. But it is impossible simultaneously to counterfeit both holiness and love in the flesh; only the Holy Spirit can produce *holy love* and *loving holiness*.

Could it be that our worship dilemma arises because we are too fleshly? It is possible to counterfeit *reverence* in the flesh, but it will be sterile and joyless. It is possible to counterfeit *joy* in the flesh, but it will be shallow and irreverent. But it is impossible simultaneously to counterfeit both reverence and joy in the flesh; only the Holy Spirit can produce *reverent joy* and *joyful reverence*. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail” (John 6:63).

Accordingly, while these touchstones do have implications for our worship practices, the first step toward solving our worship dilemma is not to make

es, from cathedrals to catacombs, using a whole spectrum of preachers and a whole spectrum of music.

But you will never really enjoy Spirit-and-truth communion with the living God unless the Holy Spirit *regenerates* you. It is impossible for you to participate in the spiritual intimacy of new covenant worship unless you are in living contact with the living Christ. Apart from that, vital biblical worship will always seem boring to you.

Moreover, unless you are also *abiding* in Christ, vital biblical worship will still seem boring to you. You'll go to worship just to meet other people, or to be entertained, or to be intellectually stimulated, or to be emotionally stirred, or to be motivated to action. But you'll miss the main point. Worship is first and foremost about communing with the living, life-giving God.

The author is pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Indianapolis, Ind. He quotes the ESV. Reprinted from New Horizons, June 2009.

URC minister moving to Mbale, Uganda with the OPC

Glenda Mathes

It's difficult enough to imagine moving to Mbale, Uganda, but the difficulty increases exponentially if one considers moving a family of ten there. That, however, is exactly what Rev. Eric and Dianna Tuininga hope to do.

Rev. Tuininga will serve as a missionary evangelist with the OPC for the next four to five years or more. He will focus primarily on training men for ministry at Knox Theological College (KTC), although he will also preach in village churches and disciple Ugandan pastors and elders. He will be part of an OPC mission team that includes two other ministers, a full-time deacon, a doctor, other medical staff, and several missionary associates.

A service to install Rev. Tuininga in the OPC's Presbytery of the Northwest has been scheduled for April 27, 2012; however, he will continue to pastor Immanuel's Reformed Church (URCNA) in

Salem, OR, until mid-June. The Tuininga family plans to fly to Uganda on July 18 so that he can begin teaching classes at KTC in August.

During 2007, the Tuininga family went from three children to six children in less than six months through the adoption of two sons from Liberia, Africa, and the birth of another son. Two more children have been added since then, bringing the family total to ten. The eight children are ages ten or younger (Timothy-10, Katelyn-9, Matthew-8, Rebecca-7, Jimmy-5, William-4, Benaiah-2, and infant Talitha).

The Tuininga family spent some time in Mbale during March of 2011, even staying in the house they will move into at the end of July. Dianna relates that the family did not feel continually "unsafe" while in Uganda.

"Our lives are in God's hands," she writes, "therefore we are immortal until the day God chooses for us to die ... so why worry? Even the hairs

on our heads are numbered."

Mbale has a population of about 92,000 and is located near the Kenyan border in eastern Uganda, in the vicinity of Lake Victoria. Students from both Kenya and Uganda attend KTC to receive training for preaching God's word.

While Rev. Tuininga will focus on teaching at KTC, Dianna will continue teaching their children and undertake her homemaker role in a new culture.

The decision to serve in Uganda arose from Rev. Tuininga's desire to best use his gifts in service to Christ's kingdom. As the couple prayerfully considered serving in Uganda, they received a letter from Desiring God Ministries that spoke of Uganda's greatest need as – not the plight of AIDS, the number of orphans, or wars and child abductions – but a "dearth of leadership in the church" of this nominally Christian country.

"There is a great need in Uganda for training of ministers," says Rev. Tuininga. "As Reformed believers living in North America, we have been blessed in many ways by God – especially theologically and materially. We have a great privilege to assist our brothers and sisters in Christ in Uganda by sharing the treasures of wisdom and theological knowledge with them."

"Please join us in prayer that the Lord will richly bless this opportunity for ministry," he adds, "for His provision in all the details of moving a family of ten to Uganda, that we might be used by the Lord in the best possible way for His glory and the edification of the church in Uganda, and for His blessing on Immanuel's Reformed Church in bringing a new pastor."

More information about the Tuingas' anticipated move can be found online at: <http://www.tuingasainuganda.blogspot.com>



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5 things Teens want their parents to know ... but may not be telling them

William Boekestein

One of the social highlights of my year happened this spring. I didn't attend a high-profile conference or speak to a group of "dignitaries." Instead, I had the privilege of sitting on the grass surrounded by twenty high-schoolers sharing in one of the most honest and sincere conversations I've had in some time.

I asked a few teens if they would help me write an article on some of their family struggles. Our discussion centered around several questions that could be summed up in one: "What would you like your parents to understand about you?" This conversation was not designed to be a complaint session but, rather, the questions were carefully asked and, for the most part, thoughtfully and respectfully answered. Wanting to avoid the bandwagon effect, I asked the students to write down their answers first before we discussed them. Notwithstanding this safeguard, their answers were strikingly similar.

This article will seem rather lop-sided. It is. Remember, this is just one side of what, ideally, would be a two-way conversation. But I believe if parents would take these concerns seriously, they might hear themselves reading in a younger voice, reminiscent of when they were teenagers.

What follows are five things your teens would like you to know but may not be telling you. Take these points for what they are worth, but keep in mind that they come from the real words of real teenagers who are quite likely similar to yours.

You don't understand me

This may sound like a line right out of a punk-rock song but several teens lamented that their parents have "forgotten what it's like to be teenagers." According to one teen, her parents only know her according to her likes and dislikes (an okay way to know a restaurant menu but not a person). One especially insightful teen would like to remind her parents that she's still trying to figure out who she is and could really

use some help. Perhaps the first line of help her parents might take would be to spend some time getting to know her more intimately.

On a related note, several of the teens expressed frustration over being compared with their siblings. As important as groups are to teenagers, they still desire to be known as individuals. Many parents have defended themselves by insisting: "I treat all of my children exactly the same." Given the reality of human complexity and diversity, this approach is probably counter-productive.

There is comfort in being known. The Psalmist rejoices that God has searched him and has known him (Psalm 139:1). In a similar way, your teenager desires to be truly known by you.

You treat me like a child

In the interest of disclosure, some of the teens admitted they kind of like playing the "kid card" when it's convenient (as in, "Don't expect too much of me, I'm just a kid"). In some sense teenagers are children. Parents should not expect the same level of performance from them as they would from themselves or other adults. Several of the teens expressed anguish over the too-high expectations of their parents. Could it be that overly-ambitious parents tend to push their teens to be equally overly-ambitious? One teen is getting the message from her folks that participation in more activities makes a better person.

Still, the reality is that teens are quickly becoming adults and they do rightly expect an increasingly more mature relationship with their parents. When this doesn't happen, frustration and disillusionment set in. According to one frustrated teen: "My parents think I don't have a say until I'm an adult." My suspicion is that many of our teens have heard a variation on the phrase "Just wait till you get into the real world" one too many times. They want to remind their parents that they do live in the real world and really do have problems. Trivialisation of this fact causes pain.

One of the great challenges of family

life is succeeding in helping children develop into wise adults. The oft-quoted proverb on child-rearing (22:6) begins with the word "train." The word implies that the relationship between the trainer and trainee will change as the latter matures.

You don't spend enough time with me

This might be surprising. With few exceptions, teens want more independence. But they are also yearning for closeness, even with their parents. Several teens claimed to spend less than fifteen minutes a week in meaningful, personal interaction with their parents. Social commentators remind us that as connected as teens are today, they are as lonely as ever. One sixteen year old said that he and his parents only communicate at dinner and in the car. Teenagers can tell when family time is conveniently squeezed into these otherwise "unproductive" time slots.

Some families' schedules are simply too hectic to allow for any real heart-to-heart time. One of the most foundational texts on child-rearing strongly implies that real training and growth requires spending considerable time together (Deut. 6:7).



Image: David Castillo Dominici / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Seventy-five percent of the teens I talked with wished the main provider of their family worked less. A young man, whose dad works hard to provide his family with all the “stuff” of the good life, still notices how much he isn’t home. Another noted: “I don’t like it when my mom isn’t around to hang out with me.”

A few years ago at a parenting conference, I heard Paul Tripp challenge breadwinners to consider taking a demotion, trading in their new cars and homes for older, less luxurious ones and begin recapturing the hearts and calendars of their kids. Not every provider will have to respond so drastically. It might be enough to say “no” to one or

then why don’t you?” A typical teen’s answer: “I’m afraid of a negative response.” Young people want to communicate openly but many have realized that they can avoid a lecture if they just keep their discouragements and fears and sins to themselves.

Let’s make this concrete. How would you respond if your son had the courage to tell you that he recently struggled with pornography? How different would your response be if the same revelation came from a close friend? Remember, as your teens grow up, they begin to move into the position of becoming your peer.

On the other hand, teens also regret not being as open as they know they

to begin dismantling that façade is to implement James 5:16, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another ...”

Regrettably, an “us-versus-them” mentality seems to exist between many parents and teens. A helpful question both “sides” should ask is, “In what way am I contributing to this conflict?” God knows that parents may provoke many of the disagreeable traits listed above. He, therefore, warns especially fathers to examine their own hand in their children’s faults (Eph. 6:4).

Most of the teens either hinted at or explicitly affirmed their love for their parents. Most of them didn’t give the impression that their parents were failing them. Still, if the above is any indication, parents and teens could use some help.

What can parents do?

Read *Age of Opportunity* by Paul Tripp (P&R, 2001). Off hand, I cannot think of a book, in any category, that has been more helpful to me than this one. One of the simplest suggestions he gives parents is to pursue their teens. “Don’t ever let them view you as being outside of their functional world” (80).

Talk to your teen about some of the issues raised here, but don’t announce to him that the two of you are going to “have a talk” about your relational problems. Instead, plan an intentional, quiet moment with him (Deut. 6:7), tell him that you really value your relationship and want to be more open, honest and involved. Ask for his forgiveness for your part in the distance that has developed between you. Then ask a few simple questions with the intention of NOT following up his answers with a lecture. Instead, you might hear your teen out, thank him for his openness, and pray together seeking God’s forgiveness and intervention. In the coming weeks, continue to talk and pray and rejoice as you see the Lord causing your relationship to flourish.

Mr William Boekestein is the pastor of Covenant Reformed Church in Carbondale, PA (URCNA).

This article first appeared in Proclamation a free monthly discipleship newsletter. To be added to our print mailing list write to covenantrc@verizon.net

two non-family obligations per week and schedule some family time instead. The burden upon breadwinners differs from one situation to another. But remember that a father’s main duty to his child is to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). It is difficult to fulfill this duty and pursue the American dream at the same time.

As an encouragement, one teen summed up what others may be feeling: “I don’t care about money ... I love my dad more than anyone in the whole world and would like him around more.” Contrary to the impressions they sometimes give, most teens don’t want more stuff. They want you. Buck the current trend of busyness and consider ways of making yourself more available to them.

I want to communicate better with you
You might be inclined to respond, “Well,

should be. They know that, despite how they are received, they owe a debt of honesty to their folks. If this is true of your teen, it might not take much on your part to facilitate the kind of honesty and openness you both desire.

I don’t have everything together

The teens honestly admitted their shortcomings in their relationships with their parents. The character failures they listed will sound familiar to you: I’m disrespectful, impatient, stubborn, irresponsible and overly blunt. I have a quick-triggered tongue and a negative attitude. I regularly fail to communicate and get easily angered. I don’t know about you, but that list reminds me of someone: ME! As a parent I don’t have everything together either. How much energy do we, like our teens, expend trying to put up a façade? One way



G. I. Williamson: An appreciation

Iain Wright

I was not raised under Reformed preaching, but in God's providence I was brought into contact with a minister who was committed to the historic standards of Presbyterian churches. He placed in my hand a copy of the Westminster Standards, and along with it Mr. Williamson's commentary and explanation of the Shorter Catechism. That was close to forty years ago, and the standards that I learned to love under Mr. Williamson's tutelage still remain, after Scripture itself, most dear to me.

Many of us could tell a similar story. However, it is the ordinariness of the story that is the greatest strength of Mr. Williamson's work. Many around the globe, unbeknownst to him, have had their thinking changed and channeled toward biblical orthodoxy by his explanation of the work of the Westminster divines.

I also have much cause to bless the Lord that I have had the privilege of getting to know Mr. Williamson personally during the past ten years. My affection for this older brother in the Lord only continues to grow, as he embodies not just a steadfast love for our standards,



G I and Doris Williamson

but an even greater love for the church of Jesus Christ, and a desire to see those standards applied through practical application in her life. For Mr. Williamson, a love for our standards does not imply a slavish adherence to them, but a warm engagement with the truth of God's word.

We bless the Lord for Mr. Williamson and for his ministry. Soli Deo Gloria.

(Editor's note: On June 1, 2012, Mr. Williamson will have completed sixty years in the ministry. Cornerstone URC in Sanborn, where he attends church in the absence of an OP church in the northwest corner of Iowa, plans to host a reception in his honor later in June.)

New Horizons, June 2012

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

QUOTABLE "QUOTES"

"Christ promises to save his people from their sins, not in their sins." *C.H. Spurgeon*

"We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and that we may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist the temptation. It comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray

on. Against our besetting sins, against the spirit of the world, against the wiles of the devil, let us pray on, and not faint. For strength to do duty, for grace to bear our trials, for comfort in every trouble, let us continue in prayer. Let us be sure that no time is so well-spent in every day, as that which we spend upon our knees. Jesus hears us, and in His own good time will give an answer He may sometimes keep us long waiting ... but He will never send us empty away." *J.C. Ryle*

"I study my Bible as I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look

under every leaf." *Martin Luther*

"God is never more properly thanked for His goodness than by our godliness." *John Blanchard*

BIRTHS

Bredemeijer, Vincent Quartus – a son born to Wayne and Hannah – April 22nd (North Shore)

Flinn, Ilda Hilary – a son born to Richie and Marit – May 4th (Wellington)

Havelaar, Avelina Celeste – a daughter born to Ed and Liana – May 3rd (Christchurch)

Stolte, Judah Justinn – a son born to Erik and Georgina – April 23rd (Pukekohe)

Stephens, Catriona Rose – a daughter born to Jonathon and Lisa – May 6th (Pukekohe)

Venter, Etienne – a son born to Riaan and Jackie – April 28th (Bucklands Beach)

PROFESSIONS OF FAITH

Bishopdale: Hannes Prinsloo will be baptised and Marriette Prinsloo will reaffirm her faith

Dovedale: Jannie Loots reaffirmed his faith

Oamaru: Anna Edzes

Silverstream: Jennifer Verbokkem, Aidan den Harder and Stanley Leenders

WEDDINGS

12 May – Carl Leenders and Stacey Donk marry in Silverstream

DEATHS

Stagg, Brian: God took Brian Stagg home into glory on May 10th, bringing to an end many years of intense suffering. Please pray for his sons and their families as they grieve his passing. But please also pray the Lord to use this occasion to bring them closer to each other and to the Lord. (Bishopdale)

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Hagoort, Roel and Maria – 60th wedding anniversary on May 8th (Hamilton)

Versteeg, Jan and Melva – 55th wedding anniversary on May 18th (Hamilton)

BIRTHDAYS – 90th PLUS

Hoekstra, Gre – turned 90 on May 5th (Hamilton)

de Jong, Nel – turned 90 on May 6th (Bucklands Beach)

Gorter, Wibe – turned 98 on May 15th (Christchurch)

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

The congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of **Bucklands Beach** received a detailed outline of what has been happening with respect to the calling of a second pastor and of the work that the special 'Calling Committee' has been doing. Broadly speaking, it was pointed out that our pastor reaches retirement age in June 2013 and, while willing to continue working, would like to do so as a 0.8 position (meaning ordinary working weeks, but more annual holidays) in the role of Assistant (second)

Pastor. The Assistant Pastor's brief would involve a special focus on working with the folks involved with and entering into the life of our church via the LABS ministry (visitation, teaching, mentoring, etc) and the seniors. This would free up the Senior Pastor in the other areas of ministry. Preaching would, as a rule, be shared. The following motions were passed:

Motion 1: That RPCBB call a second pastor to serve as a senior pastor at RPCBB.

Motion 2: That RPCBB make a single nomination call by acclamation of at least 75% of those present at the meeting.

Motion 3: That the congregation accept the recommendation of the Calling Committee of Leo de Vos for consideration as senior pastor at RPCBB.

Dunedin: We warmly welcome Erik and Georgina Stolte into our midst for a few days. It is good indeed to have this opportunity to get to know each other better. We look forward to hearing the preaching of the Word today and pray for a blessing for both preacher and hearer.

G.I. Williamson – former pastor of Silverstream: I just wanted to let you all know that I have celebrated the 60th anniversary of my ordination (June 1st, 1952) and would like my friends to join me in giving thanks to God for the awesome privilege.

The **Wanganui** minutes were reviewed. The work is clearly going well there. Rev. Vaatstra attended a prayer meeting at the Wanganui ministers' fraternal and has had phone calls from people inquiring about the church. He continues to meet with regular visitors. The Gideons will be invited to do a presentation of their work at a lunch time towards the end of the year. The financial report and budget for Wanganui were also presented. The brothers and sisters there are to be commended for their faithful giving.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Christchurch – Cornwall Street Church Property: There are several "rumours" circulating about the future of the Reformed Church of Christchurch property and facilities. No decisions have been made regarding the property or the facilities. Progress is still being made by COM to resolve insurance valuations, and ideas concerning the future of the church are being sought from the congregation through district meetings. Once all the information has been accumulat-

ed and collated, the session will bring a recommendation to the congregation.

EVANGELISM

Bishopdale: We as a church have two teams involved in the *Drug-ARM* ministry. We head out regularly on Friday and Saturday nights from 8pm to 10.30pm. If you are 18+ and you would like to see what we do, please speak to Neil Gallagher or Jacob Couprie.

The Home Missions Committee is about to trial a *soup kitchen* on the corner of Kilmore and Madras Streets on Monday nights.

Christchurch: CBI is looking for more instructors for its Bible correspondence prison ministry. This entails marking Bible studies completed by prisoners on a regular basis of your choosing (for example monthly or weekly). The marking of a study will take you between one and two hours. The ministry reaches about 120 inmates a week and while blessing those in prison, you yourself will be greatly blessed both by the teaching as well as the feedback from the inmates.

Silverstream: We would like to run the Holiday Bible Club again in the first week of the July school holidays. We need help with serving morning tea, doing crafts and organising games.

MISSIONS

Bishopdale: Jared and Candis Berends have moved to the Solomon Islands. Jared will be working for World Vision.

Hamilton: Rahab Ministries – Mission Trip 29 May – 9 June 2012: A team of 6 women including Tanya Keast (from North Shore Reformed Church) and I, will be leaving for Bangkok on the Tuesday 29th of May. Over 10 days we will be visiting various ministries to offer our support; we will be praying with them, doing devotions and bringing encouragement and praising God with them. The theme and message we are taking with us is "A Light in the Darkness". We will mainly be involved in Rahab ministries. We will spend time with the girls, making jewellery with them and putting on a 'kiwi' dinner for them. At that time I will also be leading a devotion. We will visit a couple of halfway houses and remand centres where we'll spend time with the kids and praying for them. We will also travel to Pattaya (known for being dodgy) where we'll meet with two ministries run by YWAM

(youth with a mission): the Tamar Centre and Bridge Children's Centre. Our work with Rahab ministries and the Tamar Centre will involve outreach work where we go into the bars at night to talk with the bar girls. Pray that our time there may help us and the churches we represent to be more aware of the needs of these people and how we from NZ can minister to them. *Nikki Galuszka*

Hukanui: HCS Tonga Mission Trip – On 28 June five members of our congregation went to Tonga for two weeks with the main task of building a home for Ofa, an elderly woman who requires significant support and working and teaching in local schools and visiting the hospital and villages. This was an amazing opportunity for the young people to get a taste of mission work. They have all been fundraising hard, their fundraising not only going toward the cost of the trip for them but also for the house they are building and for resources to support the schools they are visiting.

The OMB has become aware of the following opportunities for Missionary Associates. If you would like to know more information about any of the following opportunities send an email to omb@rcnz.org.nz

– Teachers at the university for the 2012-2013 school year

Japan – English teachers

Quebec – Someone interested in university campus ministry or English as a second language outreach

Uganda – Teachers to help with home schooling in both Karamoja (particularly with high school math and science) and Mbale for the 2012-2013 school year.

The Solomon Islands: We have the opportunity to serve the Lord by helping out our brothers and sisters in Christ. The SWIM base (where Jair and Laurretta Duinkerke are based), in the Solomon Islands need to extend the transit house dorms and facilities. SWIM base is set up to accommodate local and ex-pat people who are on short missions and ministry workshops. A small additional accommodation block and ablution block need to be built also an upgrade of the kitchen facilities needs to be done. We are looking at having two teams from our NZ churches go over somewhere from June to August sometime (dates will be confirmed). There is need for builders, a block layer and a plumber. The goal is to work with the locals there, up-skilling them as well as serving the Lord. You will

need to fund or find funding for your own trip. For more information please contact Ant Lagas, lagas@actrix.co.nz

DENOMINATIONAL

The ministers of the RCNZ will be attending the triennial Ministers and Wives' Conference being held at the Silverstream Retreat Centre for what is called "upskilling" or "professional development" in the business world. The speaker for the conference is Dr. Peter Brain, a retired Anglican Bishop of Armidale in NSW, Australia. Peter has written a book entitled, *Going the Distance: How to Keep Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry*. He will be speaking on topics related to a long term ministry such as, "Self Care", "Servant Leadership", "The Pastor's Family", "Thankfulness in Ministry", "Encouragements from the Familiar".

Palmerston North: Session has sent a letter to the Synodical Interim Committee, requesting that, in light of our building project, a new home would be found for the denominational archives.

ACTIVITIES

Avondale: Men of Faith Breakfast Fellowship – After being inspired by our viewing of the film *Courageous!*, the Men's fellowship is looking forward to a year of growth in grace and mutual encouragement as we seek to build one another up as faithful and courageous men of God. We will be meeting on the 3rd Saturday of every month at 8 am in the Hall for breakfast, Bible study, and prayer. Invite a friend!

Bishopdale, Christchurch and Dovedale Ascension Day Service: Every year the three Reformed Churches in Christchurch meet together to celebrate Christ's ascension into heaven. We strongly encourage you to attend. This is a good opportunity to worship our Saviour and King together as His people. This year the service is at Dovedale.

Bishopdale: Junior Youth Group will be held on Friday night. We will start with pancakes at about 6pm. The mix will be provided, and a few toppings. But please also bring a topping to share. Later in the evening, we will be playing *Coastguards* and *Smugglers* (weather permitting). So you will need warm clothing. Bring a torch if you have one.

Buckland's Beach: Hi there brothers young and old. There will be a 'men's breakfast' on Saturday. A special guest speaker for this occasion will be the Rev

Dr Andrew Young who has recently returned to Auckland. He has quite a story to tell! Cost: \$6.00 each.

Hamilton: After the evening service there will again be opportunity to share a meal of soup and bread and to fellowship together. Can families please bring a pan of soup and those who live alone or the elderly some buns or bread to go with it?

Hamilton: F.L.A.M.E Youth present a fun night on the ice. Bring along some friends and enjoy the company of friends and others from the Auckland Presbyterian Youth. The cost is \$10 per person from 7:30-10:30pm at Botany Paradise Ice Skating.

Pukekohe: Friendship Dinner to Farewell the Meyers: Everyone is invited to Dinner and Dessert at the church. Dinner and dessert will be provided. Costume Challenge: Come dressed as your place of origin (town, country, city ...) There will be prizes for the best dressed, best themed family etc.

Pukekohe: Youth Outing – We are having a Blue Blockbuster Bash!! We will be having a blue dinner and watching a movie! (not blue. ed) Please bring a blue meal to share and blue drink. Feel free to bring your own couch and blanket for the movie.

Silverstream: We give thanks for the talk by Rev. van Garderen on the LABS programme being used in Buckland's Beach to reach immigrant communities with the Gospel. Please pray for our Evangelism Committee as they weigh up this and other projects that we may want to pursue locally.

Report of Deputies visit to RTC – 2012

In early May of this year Rev Michael Willemse and I visited the Reformed Theological College for our annual visit as Deputies for Students for the Ministry. After our visit there we went on to Sydney to represent our churches at the synod of the CRCA.

At present, Luke Scheepers is the only student for the ministry studying at the RTC. Luke comes from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach. He is in his final year of three and a half years of study and has requested a vicariate for 2013. His wife, Danae, is working as a nurse in an aged care facility. She is expecting

a baby, due in November this year.

We also met with Anthony van den Engel and his wife Nicole who are from the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. Anthony is doing a one year Graduate Diploma.

Both men have appreciated their time at the RTC and are profiting from their studies, and their wives are also enjoying their time here.

During our three days we attended as many lectures as we were able to and sat in at least one class of each of the five lecturers. We found the lecturers well prepared and the lectures informative and interesting. Class sizes had increased since previous visits and some classes had between 9-12 students, which is helpful for more classroom interaction and discussion.

Our current and prospective students for the ministry are:

Luke Scheepers from Bucklands Beach who completes his study this year.

Albert Couperus from Palmerston

North who will begin at MARS in July this year.

Graeme Zuidema from Bishopdale who is currently doing an internship in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale and will begin at the RTC in 2013.

Josh Flinn from the North Shore who will begin at MARS in July 2013.

One of the concerns we have had over the last five years is the retirement of a number of members of the faculty and who would replace the lecturers who have taught at the RTC for a few decades. Thankfully the Lord has answered our prayers and provided sound and capable men to take the places of those retiring. In 2010, Dr Phillip Scheepers took over from Dr Henk de Waard to teach mission and church history; in 2011, Rev John de Hoog took over from Rev Alastair McEwen to teach Old Testament and Hebrew; this year, Dr Martin Williams took over from Dr Steve Voorwinde to teach New Testament and Greek. Dr Bill Berends has

indicated that he will continue his position in teaching Systematic Theology at least to the end of 2015. The faculty are working well together.

The RTC is now offering more distance education courses. These give members of our churches the opportunity of doing some biblical and theological study while remaining at home. These courses also allow students for the ministry to do preparatory courses that will later cross credit into their degree. This enables sessions to make a careful evaluation of their candidate while he remains in his own church and in the RCNZ.

There are 53 students at the RTC in total; 21 of these are studying full time; 27 are graduate students; 17 come from supporting churches and six are studying for the ordained ministry. Over the past five years student numbers have steadily increased. The RTC offers a B.Th and a M.Div degree for those training for the ministry or other areas of Christian service. One third of these two degrees are available as distance education courses. The college also offers a one year Graduate Diploma for those who have a prior degree; the entire diploma is available as a distance education course.

The RTC has continued with an annual "Fan the Flame" conference, now running at the end of each year, and with preaching workshops in September/October each year. These have been well attended and much appreciated by members of our churches.

Rev Dirk van Garderen is the newly appointed North Island RTC board member and Mr Hans Berends continues as the South Island member.

We were heartened by our visit to the RTC and commend the college to you for our members who wish to expand their knowledge of the Bible and our students who wish to train for the ministry. Yours in His Service,

Rev John A Haverland
Rev Michael Willemse

Office Bearers' training seminar

On Saturday, 19 May, approximately 100 men representing the eight churches of the Wellington Presbytery assembled at the Reformed Church of Foxton for an office-bearers' training seminar.

There were the many familiar faces of past and current office bearers. It was also encouraging to see a contingent of younger men, presumably in their 20's, who attended.

After a warm welcome by our hosts and a hot cuppa, the attendees, consisting of ministers, elders and deacons and those aspiring to those offices, settled into the worship hall for opening devotions and singing. Have you ever heard 100 men singing? Without exception, all these voices blended beautifully together to sing the praises of our Lord. Apart from really good congregational singing, not much beats the voices of a church full of men.

The speaker, the Rev. John Haverland of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe, led the three sessions using the Scriptures and Church Order articles 23 and 24 to present the following topics – "Leadership in the church; the tasks of the elder", "The tasks of the

deacon" and "The session meeting". All the topics were condensed versions of what was presented in the Auckland Presbytery in previous years. The seminar was interactive; which meant that all the participants could ask questions, give answers or expand further on the matters in the presentations.

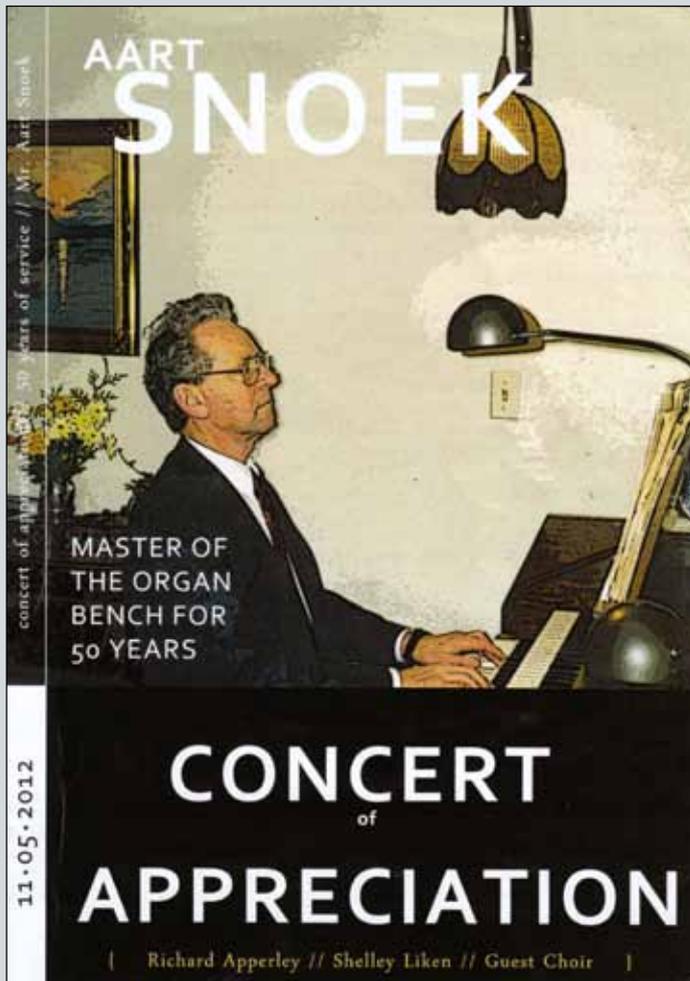
Past and present office-bearers were able to share some of their experiences and/or practices in their respective congregations, which helped to round off the topics under discussion.

On the lighter side of things, you can imagine that when there are 100 men assembled, there is the likelihood of a quip or two; and that certainly was the case at this meeting. Probably one of the best *faux pas* of the day was a reference to "deacons counting THEIR money". Another delightfully humorous statement was "unlike ministers, elders have real jobs".

Thank you to the ladies of the Foxton congregation for providing an abundance of wonderful food, dessert, cake, coffee and tea; and to the organising committee for an edifying event.

From the feedback that I have received, the seminar was a success and it is anticipated (by some) that there will be another next year hosted by another church.

Walter Walraven



Master of the organ bench for 50 years

On Friday night, 11th May, the congregation of the Wellington Reformed Church gathered for a concert of appreciation for the services of their organist.

Mr Aart Snoek, once called by Synod the “defender of sound Reformed music”, retired after 50 years at the organ bench accompanying the congregation’s singing.

A choir, including two of Mr Snoek’s grandchildren, was “secretly” organised and sang the Genevan Psalm 51, Schubert’s “Sanctus”, Stainer’s “For God so loved the World” and other beautiful songs. Shelley Liken, a previous member of the congregation sang Handel’s “I know that my Redeemer liveth” accompanied by Mr Richard Apperley, assistant organist of Wellington St Paul Cathedral, who also made the organ resound with Johann Nicolaus Hanff’s “Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott” and other pieces.

A presentation was made by the Rev Nugteren expressing the gratitude of the congregation and giving Mr Snoek two small organ pipes that had been adorning his home for many years. These were now mounted and presented to him.



Why terrorists are after Africa's Christians

By **Fernando Perez** – moderated by WEA-RLC Executive Director Godfrey Yogaraja

From Boko Haram in Sub-Saharan Africa to al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, Islamist terrorists across the continent have heightened attacks on Christians. This seems to be a part of an emerging strategy of al-Qaeda and associated local groups, which must be taken and dealt with seriously.

On April 29, Boko Haram members gunned down at least sixteen Christians and wounded more than twenty-two others as they targeted an area inside the Bayero University campus in northern Nigeria where churches hold Sunday services. The same day, its gunmen shot at worshippers inside a chapel of the Church of Christ in Nigeria in the northeastern city of Maiduguri, killing the pastor who was preparing for Communion and four congregants.

Also on April 29, a man believed to be from Somalia's al-Shabaab group set off a grenade during a church service in Nairobi, Kenya, killing a worshipper and injuring fifteen others.

These attacks came on the heels of the vandalism of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church Bible School in Khartoum on April 21. About 500 alleged members of Ansaar al-Suna, a Salafi faction which adheres to a textual interpretation of Islam, attacked the church compound in the West Gerief district of the Sudanese capital, burning Bibles and destroying and looting property.

Just before the attack in Sudan was reported, an estimated 300 Christians had to flee the city of Timbuktu in Mali after Ansar Dine, an Islamist extremist group loyal to al-Qaeda, announced in the second week of April that it was imposing Sharia law in the city. This

followed the previous month's military coup in northern parts of the country aided by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an Islamist militia which aims to overthrow the Algerian government and institute an Islamic state and whose links with al-Qaeda predate the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

It is believed that Osama bin Laden was in Sudan from 1991 to 1996, when he was allegedly expelled by the Sudanese government under U.S. pressure. Al-Qaeda has had links with local groups in African nations for decades. Apart from al-Shabaab and AQIM, al-Qaeda has had direct links with the Libyan Islamic Movement (formerly known as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group) in Libya, and Somali insurgents allegedly sheltered by Eritrea.

But now, the number of such organisations is growing as al-Qaeda is desperately looking for new territories to establish its new bases in the wake of the NATO-led mission in its traditional heartland, such as Afghanistan.

The global terror group wants to create areas in African nations where it can establish its control, as well as un-governed areas or failed states where it can operate more or less freely. To achieve this, the terror group is seeking to strengthen local Islamist groups and give them a transnational vision and a religious motivation to carry on with their existing struggles as well as broaden the scope of their operations by including Western and Christian targets.

It is believed that al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabaab and AQIM provided technical sophistication and weaponry to Boko Haram, which had been targeting police stations and local people with machetes until 2010. But now, Christians are one of its primary targets and the methods include bombing. Boko Haram killed at least 510 people and destroyed over 350 churches in 10 northern states of Nigeria last year.

In February 2012, al-Shabaab for the first time officially pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab leader Mukhtar Abu al-Zubair sent an audio message to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, saying: "On behalf of the soldiers and the commanders in al-Shabaab, we pledge allegiance to you. So lead us to the path

of jihad and martyrdom that was drawn by our imam, the martyr Osama," as reported by CNN.

Al-Qaeda-linked groups in Africa, representing the global terror network locally, have established links with several other smaller local groups.

As London-based security analyst Valentina Soria, author of *Global Jihad Sustained Through Africa*, believes, "The aim is now for the central leadership [of al-Qaeda] to try to forge strategic relationships with like-minded groups in Africa ... like al-Shabab, and obviously strengthen the already existing relationship with AQIM," as quoted by the British newspaper Daily Mail. She adds that al-Qaeda is also working with other terror organisations to secure stable footholds in "volatile" countries.

While it was anticipated that the Arab Spring would give a blow to terrorist groups by showing that autocratic, non-Islamic regimes could be overthrown by largely peaceful protests as opposed to armed struggles, the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa also offered some opportunities to the terror network.

The actors in the uprisings in various countries were diverse in their motives. Especially the ones who helped initiate revolutions were largely secular-minded. But extremist factions were naturally emboldened by the fall of regimes in some countries like Egypt. And then, there was, and is, widespread disillusionment among people as the transition to democracy has been chaotic. Al-Qaeda is seeking to exploit all that.

In countries in transition from dictatorship to democracy, al-Qaeda is calling for the establishment of pure Islamic governance, saying the overthrowing of the regimes is just half the work.

Two weeks after the killing of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda released a message by its former leader, saying: "We watch with you this great historic event and we share with you joy and happiness and delight and felicity ... We are happy for what makes you happy, and we are sad for what makes you sad. So congratulations to you for your victories." Laden's message was identical to that of his successor Ayman al-Zawahiri, who said: "Your jihadi brethren are confronting alongside you the same enemy, America and its Western allies, those who set up

... Husni Mubarak, Zein al-Abidin b. Ali, Ali Abdallah Saleh, Abdallah b. Hussein [sic] and their ilk to rule over you."

Al-Qaeda finds a fertile ground in Africa, which has numerous insurgencies, volatile geopolitics, weak and corrupt governments and easy availability of arms and presence of large Muslim and Christian populations. Local militant groups also find al-Qaeda attractive in hope of recruiting more youth with a more "chal-

lenging" transnational agenda and access to sophisticated weaponry and training.

The al-Qaeda strategy apparently includes incitement to sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians as it seeks to create civil wars and unrest, such as in Nigeria.

Such attempts are likely to accelerate in the near future if the international community fails to prevent radical Muslim movements from spreading

across the continent. While military aid by the West to African allies to fight radical forces might be part of the solution, that's not all. It would also involve ensuring good governance, strengthening of democratic institutions and organisations, and removing the underlying conditions which are conducive for terrorism. + *Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance* – May 2012

RCNZ Care Services

Plans for the future care of members of the RCNZ who have special needs

Jackie Wieringa

The RCNZ Care Services Committee was set up two years ago to explore the possibility of establishing a small home for RCNZ members from within the Wellington Presbytery who had special needs and who were no longer able to be cared for by their parents or family. The concept of establishing and running a Christian home for special needs adults requires much prayer and planning and the Committee is realistic that this idea may take some time to become reality. A draft Trust Deed has been drawn up in anticipation of becoming formalised at some time in the future when the need for such a home is more pressing. In the meantime we have identified five young people from within the Wellington Presbytery who may require this assistance in the distant future.

As a starting point, we organised a Get Together Day on 31 March 2012 where these five young people came together, along with their parents, to have a day of fun and getting to know each other. The main purpose was to facilitate relationships between the parents, for them to discuss ideas for the future of their special needs sons/daughters with the committee, and to create contact between the young people within a fun environment.

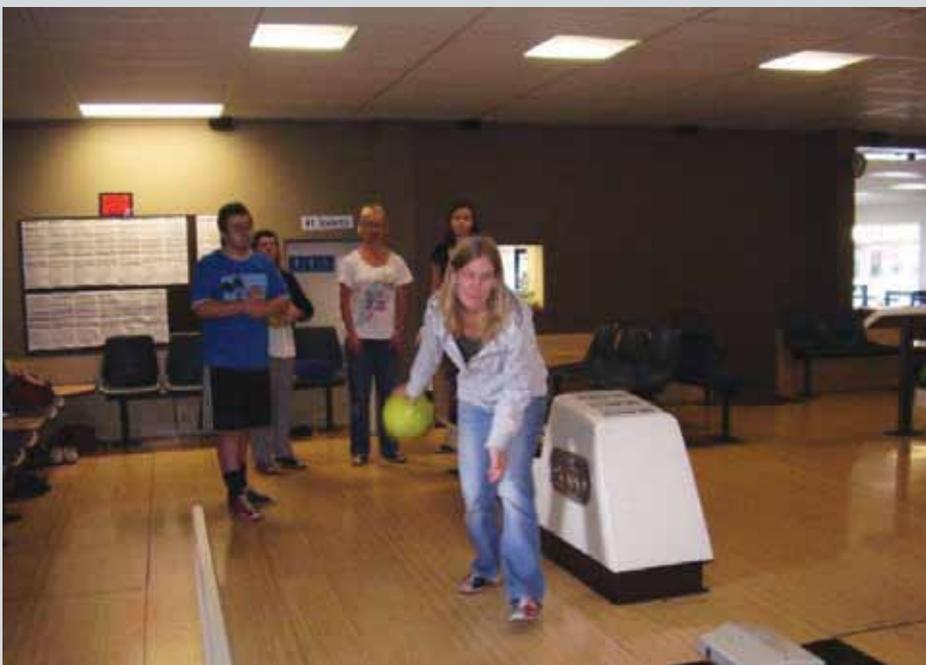
The young people were taken out on a 'mystery trip' which turned out

to be a visit to a local poultry farm to collect eggs, followed by a game of indoor bowls. During their absence the parents and committee got together to discuss the concept of a Christian special needs home. It quickly became apparent that they all believed that raising their special needs children was a responsibility given to them by the Lord, and He provided the grace and strength

to fulfill this calling. Their children are vulnerable in this sinful world and they want the assurance that in the future their children will be able to live in a safe Christian environment. This may be within the biological family, or in a home set up for the specific purpose of caring for these young people. It was agreed by everybody that such a home should be run by qualified Christian



The parents discussing options for the future of their special needs children.



staff that enabled family and church family to become involved, one which facilitated social interaction between the young people, and which also assisted with employment or day time activity which was appropriate and safe. Community services and government financial support were also discussed with suggestions given to the parents for funding and employment possibilities.

After a very successful day it was agreed by all that the committee, parents and young people would meet again, perhaps twice per year, to keep up the contact and to support each other. We also identified a number of practical topics which could be addressed at future meetings, such as how we can encourage awareness within the churches of the need to support parents of children with special needs. The church has an important role in supporting these families through prayer, friendship and practical help.

The Committee covets your prayers and welcomes any ideas or assistance in support of families of special needs children and adults within the NZ Reformed Churches. Members of the Committee are:

- Wim Stolte, Masterton
- Herman de Jonge, Wanganui
- John Dykstra, Foxton
- Gary Veenstra, Wainuiomata
- Diky Datema, Masterton
- Stephanie Donk, Silverstream
- Diana Minnee, Wellington
- Jackie Wierenga, Wellington

From top to bottom:

Anna, Grace, Henny and Janelle at the poultry farm.

The group ready to go out on the day's outings. Anna, Johan, Grace, Henny & Janelle with helpers Diky and Stephanie.

The competition was fierce - Johan, Henny, Grace and Anna enjoying a game of indoor bowls.