

WANTED



**WANTED:
Mature Young Men**

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Editorial

The age in which we live and move and have our being, seems to be very far removed from the days when our forefathers walked upon this earth. Their time was one of different attitudes, a time when a boy grew into a young man and a girl into a young woman, without the teenage phase in the transition from child into adulthood.

Our society, by comparison, seems to be childish and immature; and it has been steadily progressing along that path for the last 60 years or more. There have been many factors which have led our society in that direction, with the sad consequence that it has affected God's people in the church as well. You have heard the old adage – "when it rains in the world, it drips in the church".

What I am getting at is the fact that there are young men and maybe not-so-young men in our churches who seem to think that life is about fast cars, motorcycles, PlayStation, TV, movies, rugby, four-wheel driving, fishing etc.,. Even after hearing godly instruction from the pulpit and the home in regard to growing in maturity in Christ, there still seems to be an acceptance that life for the boys is about their toys.

With our society being exceedingly materialistic, and more people having more wealth than at any other time in history, it appears that buying boys' toys is an absolute necessity – it's what you do! I suppose the young men are only doing what the older men, who have a disposable income, do. Whatever happened to mature Christian men - and for that matter - mature young Christian men?

Don't get me wrong. I am not in opposition to any of these pastimes/interests in their proper place. However, I am against them when they stifle spiritual growth in those who profess Christ. Today, so much time is taken up in frivolous pursuits, some of which are quite dangerous, when it seems that the most important things in life are neglected.

It is worth considering the words of the Apostle Paul – "We proclaim Him [Christ], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete [mature] in Christ".

Our contributors have written three thought-provoking articles which address the lack of maturity in our young men. I hope all our readers will be provoked into action by these articles.

Mr Michael Willemse writes about training for godliness and life.

Mr Daniel Wilson describes the Christ-like man.

Mr Andrew de Vries takes a fathers' role as he addresses "my son".

Mrs Franci Hoyt pens us a Letter from America.

Mrs Jenny Waldron communicates about something uninvited and unwanted – depression.

World in focus gives a snapshot of some current events.

Mr and Mrs Scott and Deb van Oostveen review the last family camp.

Mr David Waldron writes about tearing down and rebuilding their church building.

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that we thank Sergei for helping us in this way.

Wanted – mature young men (1)

Godly training for life

Michael Willemse

In the mid-eighties, singer Bonnie Tyler lamented the disappearance of a stand-out kind of man, a hero, a man she could depend on when she sang “where have all the good men gone?” These words could serve as a meme for the age in which we live. Jane Butterfield used the same words to title an article in which she says “Why aren’t normal men yearning to be good men? Good men devote their lives to serving their families as dependable loving husbands and caring fathers. Where have they gone? ... Good men are faithful. Good men love their wives with every fibre of their being, and good men make good hus-

bands, good fathers and godly leaders. It is a heavy calling, and a mighty responsibility.”

Once boys aspired to adulthood. They looked forward to growing up and becoming a man like their father. Nowadays men aspire to boyhood. They dodge responsibility and defend their right to play. This attitude is demonstrated in expressions like “boys never grow up they just get bigger toys” and “he who dies with the most toys wins.” It is little wonder that many young men aspire to do little with their lives.

So how are fathers to raise their sons to be men? Ephesians 6:4 says “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead raise them in the training and instruc-

tion of the Lord.” So what does it mean for men to raise their sons in the training and instruction of the Lord and not to frustrate them? “The training and instruction of the Lord” is a broad term which takes in all of Scripture but I want to suggest six specific things dads need to teach their sons. These six things must be taught “life on life.” In other words, our sons must not simply hear us saying these things – they must see these truths lived out in our own lives. Failing to teach our sons these things will exasperate them – so will teaching them but failing to live them.

Teach them about grace

The most basic thing a dad must teach



“For better or for worse, our sons often end up emulating us – their fathers. Let us pray that God will help us to become more Christ-like – to model a faith that is bold, sacrificial, joyful and hopeful.”

his son is that he is a sinner in need of grace. We must share with our sons, the big story of the Bible. That a good God created a beautiful, perfect, world and that He placed man there as His appointed ruler over all He had made. “We were made to rule on God’s behalf, son – second only to Him. But we wanted the top job, so we rejected God’s command and tried to seize power for ourselves. This shattered our relationship with God, with each other and with the world He had made.” Dads must teach their sons how sin has profoundly affected every part of our lives. It has made us proud, selfish, greedy, angry, irritable, violent, jealous, deceitful, lustful, discontented and disobedient.

We need to do more than simply correct wrong behaviour. We also need to probe underneath the behaviour to show how it springs from hearts that love and worship the wrong things. But we do this in order to show our boys their desperate need for God’s grace in Jesus and to assure them that this grace is given to all who repent and trust in him.

Fathers also need to teach their children that receiving God’s grace is not a one-off. They need God’s grace every day afresh. There will never come a day this side of heaven that they can get by without Jesus. We need to teach our boys to be quick to repent and seek forgiveness, assuring them that God’s grace is able to cover every sin and restore every relationship. This is probably a harder lesson for young men to learn. God has made them to initiate and lead, to press on and to endure, and this will often mean that they are more stubborn and headstrong than our daughters. If they are to learn to be quick repenters, we will need to show them what this looks like by being quick to own our own sins and failings and seek their forgiveness. Also, when they seek our forgiveness, we need to be quick to show grace. Teach them about grace.

Teach them all of life belongs to Jesus

When we teach our boys about God’s grace in Jesus, we need to guard against a self-centred view of salvation. This goes along the lines of “I’m a sinner worthy of God’s judgement – Jesus has paid for my sins and I have a place in heaven – problem solved, now I can live as I please!” Teach your son that Jesus is now King of kings who claims “all authority in heaven and on earth.” We, as redeemed people are citizens of his kingdom, living under his rule and bringing that rule to bear on all of our lives. As his representatives, every part of our lives will tell people something about Jesus.

This means that we cannot divide our lives up into “me time” and Jesus time. It is all His time! “So whatever you do, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). But our sons need to see that this is an exciting adventure – we are God’s people, through whom He is taking back the world from the evil one, who are already beginning to enjoy the life He has in store for us now. Living under Christ’s rule is not a burden but a joy – it gives meaning and purpose to even the smallest things we do.

If there is one thing that captures a biblical view of manhood, it is loving self-sacrifice (think Eph 5:25). Jesus – the perfect man – laid down his life in service to his Father and he calls us to do the same. As dads, we need to offer our lives to God gladly as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). One of the simplest ways

we do this is by gladly giving ourselves to our wives and children. When we come home after a hard day’s work, we need to engage with our families, enter into their lives, find out where they are at with the Lord and lead them in His ways – not zone out in front of the telly.

Dads also need to particularly teach their sons to resist the spirit of the age which tells them they are entitled to play. It is nothing short of tragic that young men waste some of the most productive years of their lives in front of a screen – however large or small – consuming entertainment, playing games or wrapped up in social media. These activities consume huge amounts of time and produce absolutely nothing. We need rest and recreation, so that we can press on in following Jesus but leisure should not become an end in itself – and dads need to show this by example! All of life belongs to Jesus.

Teach them the church is precious

The Bible teaches us that God is gathering a *people* for Himself from throughout human history and from every tribe, nation and language. Fathers need to teach their sons that Christ died for *the church* and that, in His grace, God has made them part of Christ’s body. When people who by nature are very diverse come together as one body and are united in praising God, this is a powerful testimony to the truth of the Gospel. It’s worth noting that Eph 2:1-10 which speaks about individual salvation is immediately following by vv11-22 which speaks about Christ gathering one people in whom God dwells by His Spirit. Our sons need to know that they are part of that body. It is in the church that they will experience a foretaste of heaven. It’s in the church that they will grow in holiness. It’s in the church that they will form relationships which will endure for eternity. Full participation in church life is vital for healthy Christian life.

As fathers, we need to show our sons that the church is precious. We need to show it by our active participation – worshipping twice each Sunday, taking part in a home group, serving as we are able and ministering to brothers and sisters in need. We also need to show we love the church in our speech – speaking well of the church leadership and of fellow members. A great way to do both of these is to find ways in which we can serve the church together – participate together in a church working bee, go to a Bible study group together, go to-

gether to help clear a widow's yard etc. Our sons need to know that the church is precious.

Teach them faith is for sharing

Another way that we can shrink our view of God's work in Jesus is to act as though our faith in God is only a personal thing between us and Him – and what other people believe and choose to stake their lives on is their own business. There is a huge contradiction when we tell our children that believing in Jesus is a life or death issue and then show no concern for our neighbours who do not know Jesus. Our sons will rightly ask whether we believe what we are teaching them! As fathers, our task is not simply to do all we can to make sure that our children come to believe in Jesus. We are called to disciple our sons in such a way that they are prepared to disciple others. As we share what it means to be a follower of Jesus with them, we want them to learn how to do the same with their friends, fellow students and colleagues. The Gospel is too good to keep to ourselves, we need to constantly look for ways to give it away!

The best way dads can prepare their

sons to share their faith is by letting their sons see them doing it. Let them hear us praying for opportunities to share the Gospel with our neighbours. Let them see us speaking naturally of Jesus and life with him in our conversations over the fence. Let them see us caring for those around us out of a desire to show Jesus. Tell them about Gospel conversations you've had at work. If our sons catch this vision, they will begin to see that they, too, are caught up in God's glorious mission to rescue people from darkness and bring them into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Col 1:13.) They will begin to understand that Christ is appealing through them to those they know "Be reconciled to God." (2 Cor 5:20). Teach them faith is for sharing.

Teach them to expect suffering

One of the ways that we can exasperate our sons and set them up for failure is to give them the expectation that Christians have a right to a trouble free life. We would never teach them a health and wealth gospel, yet in subtle ways we can convey the idea that God owes us a better life now (defined in human terms) because we believe in Jesus. The

Bible does not teach this and, in fact, many times life becomes harder when we commit ourselves to following Jesus.

We need to teach our sons that we live in a world under the curse. This is a world where bad things happen and everybody dies. Christians too suffer bankruptcy, spend a lifetime struggling with chronic pain, lose loved ones to disease, are let down or betrayed by those we love as well as all manner of other things. To teach our kids otherwise is to prepare them for a huge crisis of faith. This world is not heaven. Many of their dreams will not come true or will be dashed, and there is nothing surer than the fact that they will share in the general suffering of men living under God's curse.

In addition to the suffering which is part of living in this world, Christians will also suffer in particular ways because of their faith. Even in the West – and more so as time passes – Christians will be persecuted for their faith and marginalised for their beliefs. The time may come when we lose our jobs and even our possessions because we belong to Christ. Our sons need to know that this is not a bad thing. In fact, it is a testimony to

Leaves galore

Poetic Reflections
by John Goris

This delightful collection of poems by John Goris is a testimony to his love for the beauty of our Creator, and His wonderful tapestry surrounding us. This is poetry about our green environment from a Christian perspective! Through these poems, he reminds us of our God and Saviours' work of creation, redemption, re-creation, preservation and His ongoing eternal plan. This wire-bound collection of 71 poems, colour images and sketches is a must.

... read ... observe ... and praise him who created every tree and saved his people by the sacrifice of his person as he hung on one of them.

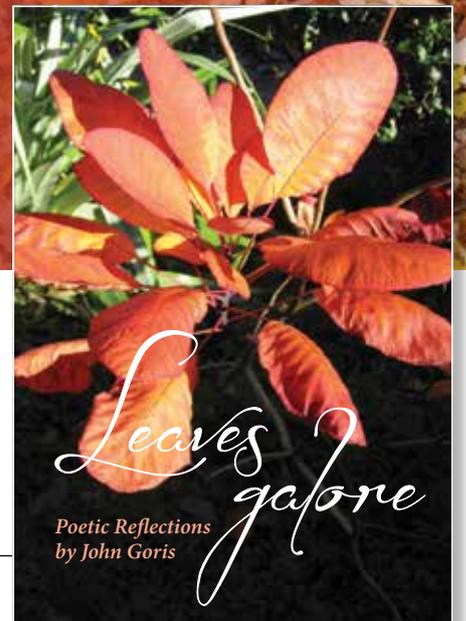
– Dr Joel Nederhood (Retired minister of the Back to God Hour, USA)

These poems ... a great collection full of food for thought!

– Marit Flinn, (Wellington)

*The Wordsmith's craft, he in his sermons hones,
Now bent to write of nature's coloured tones.*

– John Westendorp, Minister Emeritus, Christian Reformed Churches of Australia



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the fact that we belong to Christ. “No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (Jn 15:20). Fathers need to teach their sons to expect suffering as part of following Jesus.

Teach them about the life to come

There is one final thing we need to teach our sons and that is a robust hope in the life to come. They need to know that Christ has come to drive back every effect of the curse and that, when he returns, the world will be made new. Those who have hoped in Christ will live on a renewed earth with renewed bodies and renewed minds. There they will receive the crown which does not fade away. There they will rule with

Christ and live in perfect relationship with God in a world without suffering or sorrow or pain. As Christ passed through suffering into glory so, too, will those who have trusted in him.

Our sons need to know that this world is not their home. The battle is now, the reward is to come. If they place their hopes in this world which is passing away, they will be disappointed but if they place their hopes in the world to come, their wildest dreams won’t anticipate half of what God has in store for them. The best way for them to learn these things is to see them in their fathers!

Conclusion

For better or for worse, our sons often

end up emulating us – their fathers. Let us pray that God will help us to become more Christ-like – to model a faith that is bold, sacrificial, joyful and hopeful. May God help us not simply to teach our boys what following Jesus looks like but also to model for them a robust faith which is anchored in Christ’s work on our behalf and looking forward to the life to come. May God also lead our sons to a life of full-blooded discipleship in which they give themselves wholeheartedly to the one who gave himself for them!

Mr Michael Willemse is the minister at the Reformed Church of Hamilton.

Wanted – mature young men (2)

The picture of the Christ-like man

Daniel Wilson

So, someone just handed this article (or this issue of *Faith in Focus*) to you and asked you to read it. If that is the case, then I can probably guess a few things about you. You are one of three kinds of reader: (1) you are a young man who needs to read this and learn something, or (2) you are a father or friend of such a young man, or (3) you are an older man who never stopped being a young man.

If you belong to categories 1 or 3, you may or may not know what all the fuss is about, and you are probably asking yourself, “Why should I read this?” Well, let me answer that question for you, right at the outset. This article is intended to give you a picture of what the godly man should be. You are probably not what you should be, or perhaps your focus in life is wrong. Therefore, people who love you have given you this article to help you refocus on what is actually important in life.

If you belong to category number 2

(a father or friend of a young man who needs to read this), then this article is intended to help you begin those hard conversations about purpose and maturity. It is also intended to clarify what you are supposed to be as an example to the young men in your life. **NONE of us have arrived at spiritual maturity – we all need to pursue it!** Here is a summary of what is important, and the goal toward which we all should aim.

Firstly, and most importantly, the ultimate goal for all Christians is that we be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29 & 12:2). That means that we are supposed to think like Christ, speak like Christ, react in attitude like Christ, and do all our work and recreation to the glory of God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit – just as Christ did while He was on earth! Now, that is such a tall order that most of us want to give up before we begin! Too often we simply take the road of least resistance, and it isn’t long before we find ourselves and our young men

being lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, uncontrolled, rough, lovers of evil, reckless, lustful, swollen with conceit, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God¹ Some of you recognize yourself in that list, or at least you would if you took the time to actually think it through. Too many of our Christian young men are wasting their lives pursuing worthless hobbies, games, speed, fame or filth. They walk with a swagger and they talk with a sword, cutting and crushing others with their words. But that is not what God requires of you! There is much more to life than cars, power, girls, and games.

So, you might be thinking, “Okay, then – What am I supposed to do? We can’t all be preachers!” If that is what you are thinking (or something similar), I totally understand. When I was younger, I “struggled” in the same areas. But that doesn’t make it okay. Most men were stupid and foolish when they were younger, but the point is – you

“The Bible tells you what you are supposed to be and do as a Christian man, therefore it must be a part of your daily life.”

are supposed to grow out of that and stop being a child! In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul argues that temporary things are fine until permanent things arrive. He says, “... when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways

behind me.” Now, Paul isn’t talking about young men growing up here,² instead he was assuming that everyone knew that young men should eventually grow out of the games, thoughts and speech patterns of childhood. That leads us to our first element of our picture of the Christ-like young man: Christian young men recognize when it is time to put away childish things and become mature. Having said that, I believe adults are still allowed to play games/sport, or watch movies or have fun. Of course they can, once the work of daily life is done! The key being that the godly man recognizes that life isn’t only about games and entertainment.

To be a mature Christian man, you need to know that the only way you can balance the pressures of work, family, and your own desire for entertainment/fun is to keep your focus on God. You need to be daily in His Word, listening to Him and learning from Him. Think about it! If you wanted to be a great rugby player and you had the opportunity to talk to and hear from Richie McCaw or Jonah Lomu – you would be a fool to be “too busy” to talk to them! If you want to be a Christian, you can’t ignore talking to Christ in prayer or hearing from Him in His Word! The Bible tells you what you are supposed to be and

do as a Christian man, therefore it must be a part of your daily life.

The goal for every Christian man is the description given in 1 Timothy 3. Every one of us should aspire to serve the Lord in His church and fit the description given for elders and deacons. Do you fit that description yet? That question isn’t just for the young men reading this, but for EVERY man reading this article – Do you fit this description? Are you even trying to do so? Too many of our fathers and elders fall short here – and that provides an excuse and a stumbling block to our young men. The first part of that description is the commendation of desiring to serve as an elder. Too often being an elder isn’t even on men’s radar – they don’t want to be one! But God says it is a noble task, a good desire. This kind of godly maturity demands you to be “above reproach” – that means, when people look at you they shouldn’t have any doubts about your faith or commitment to the Lord. They should be able to see your faithfulness in your attitude and actions, your clothes and character! Self-control is another major element of maturity. One that men all too often lack. Manliness is not being able to do whatever you want whenever you feel like it. The epitome of manliness is being ready and willing to do what is necessary



Is this you?



Or is this you?

when and how it is needed. The real man is willing to work hard all day, and then when he comes home he is ready to help cook or clean or play with the children and all with a kind and godly spirit of gentleness! We are normally too proud or selfish to serve others like that, which is why we need humility.

In 1 Peter 5:5, after telling elders/pastors to be humble servants under Christ, Peter specifically charges young men: "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" So, what does that mean? Pastors and elders will one day give an account to Christ, the Chief Shepherd of God's people, and Peter says that in the same way, young men are to be submissive to those who are older. A major part of being a mature Christian young man is to listen when older men and elders speak to you. Be humble enough to listen and take on board what others have to say. They might not know everything you are going through, but I would wager that they know more than you realize. I can't tell you how many times young men have been surprised to hear what I went through when I was younger. In God's providence I went through some highs and lows which helped me understand a great deal. And there are older men who have "been there and done that" in probably every congregation in our federation. Therefore, you need to learn to listen to them and obey their advice. Put away childish things and pursue maturity!

In order to do that, you need to love God more than this world. In 1 John 2:14b-17, John says, "I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world, or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." Recognize that while music and movies and games have their place – that place should be small in the life of the believer! Young men are strong, and they often want to be seen as strong – but indulging in the sexual pleasures of this life, or "got to have more" materialism, or proud boasting of accomplishments in sport, are not strengths, they are weaknesses! The greatest strength is found in the quiet, humble rejection of the evil one and all his subtle attacks. Strength is found in restraint and self-control.

Based on these ideas and principles, let me summarize some goals for our young men. They should aim to be as well-educated as they can be, both spiritually and scholastically (education and knowledge help them be good members of God's church and influential Christians in society as well). They should be diligent and hard-working – ready to support a family and/or contribute generously to God's kingdom at an early age. Being a husband and father is demanding on time/energy, and

so young men should seek to be fit, healthy, and take care of themselves in diet and exercise. They should be active at church, helping where they are able, ready to serve, and desiring to be leaders in the church. Elders and deacons don't start serving when they are elected and ordained. They should simply be those who were already serving and caring for others and whom the congregation recognizes for their gifts, electing them to the appropriate offices!

Young man, this has probably been a pretty intimidating article. If you have recognized your immaturity, you might not know where to begin. I would begin first by confessing your immaturity to the Lord in prayer, and then reading through 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Sit down with an older man or elder in your congregation and ask him what you need to work on first. Trust that the Lord will lead through His Word, Spirit and Church.

Notes

- 1 2 Timothy 3:2-4 Sadly, this description of those whom we should avoid all too well describes many of our own children and young people!
- 2 I believe Paul was explaining that the supernatural gifting of the early church was meant to be temporary, not permanent. Those gifts were meant to be temporary supports until the church was established, and then they were put away as the mature elements of the word and sacraments and Christian love took over. Just as a child grows up to be a man and puts away childish things, so the church should put away the childish/temporary focus on tongues and charismatic gifts and focus instead on the greater gifts of maturity: Faith, hope and love.

Mr Daniel Wilson is the minister in the Reformed church of Nelson.

Wanted – mature young men (3)

My son, we need to talk

Andrew de Vries

I was praying with my son recently. After I petitioned the Lord to make him into a man who loved Jesus and his church, my son was disturbed. It took a while

for him to spit it out, but it turns out he didn't want to grow up to be a man. He wanted to stay a boy. I've noticed that this is an attitude that is shared among many of the young men in our churches. Instead of moving towards spiritual

manhood, they are stuck in spiritual infancy. I know that some of our young men are not disturbed by this. But that is not the case for you. You want to grow up. You want to move into spiritual manhood. You don't want to be

an infant tossed back and forth by the waves, but you want to grow up into him who is the Head, Christ. I hope you will allow some of my questions to help you in that quest for growth.

My Son, what is your delight?

I've noticed that there are a lot of things that delight you. The All Blacks, your four wheel drive, the new Bunnings catalogue, and pretty much any meal with meat in it. But there is something that hasn't captured your delight like it should. Something which the Psalmist says: 'is sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb'. It is the Word of God. There is simply no way you can grow into Christian maturity if you are not immersing yourself in the Word of God. I realise you go to church twice on Sunday and you get a good dose of Scripture then. But you can't survive on that. That is like gorging yourself on a meal once a week and not eating the rest of the time. I know you certainly don't do that.

I realise that reading the Bible is not an easy thing for you. However, being a follower of Christ means that you are called to love him with all your mind. This means you will have to discipline yourself to concentrate long enough to

get through more than the verse from the *Today* booklet. This means you will have to learn to follow a Pauline argument. I know you can follow arguments quite easily when they involve other matters, so I'm confident that you'll eventually be able to navigate your way through a book like Romans if you work at it. I'd encourage you to work through a Bible reading programme instead of Bible dipping. If you just can't get into the habit of reading (after working hard at it for at least a month), there are some good audio Bibles out there you might want to try.

There really is a world of delight once you become more disciplined at Bible reading. You'll come to see connections between books of the Bible that you've never seen before. Passages that you are familiar with will speak to you in fresh ways as you grow into maturity. You'll be surprised to find how God providentially orders that a Bible passage you've read in the morning is directly applicable to a situation you face later that day. What's more, you'll be building a firm spiritual foundation for when the tough times come. It's very hard to develop a theology of suffering when you're in the middle of it. You'll discover that the Word of God really is a lamp to your

feet and a light to your path in the darkest of times.

My son, what are you playing at?

Son, I've noticed that you tend to play a lot. I know you've got a job, and you've got your studies, but your 'play dates' do seem to take up a lot of your schedule. Is it possible that your 'play-time' is stunting your spiritual growth? The video games into the early hours of the morning, the DVD collection, the weekends away motorbiking or tramping, the fitness regime Monday through Saturday (and just a light workout on Sunday of course). Isn't that an excessive play regime? Please don't think I'm opposed to such activities. These are all legitimate pursuits to play at. I have no interest in binding your conscience with a list of what is good and what is bad, or rules about the appropriate amount of time that you should be spending on these pursuits.

But you have to ask yourself the question, 'are these things really helping to further your spiritual growth?' Are these things enabling you to draw nearer to Christ? Are these things helping you to grow in holiness? Or have they become distractions which are keeping you in spiritual diapers when by now



“But how well do you know Christ? ... I’m talking about developing your relationship with Him by growing in your appreciation and wonder at his person and work.”

you should have been able to put childish ways behind you. The writer to the Hebrews says ‘let us throw off *everything* that hinders, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us (Heb 12:2)’. Perhaps it is time for the play station to go? Perhaps it is time to say goodbye to one of your many cars? Perhaps it is time to use play for what it’s meant to be used for. To refresh and revitalise you for Christian service.

My son, what are you putting into the church life?

Maybe you think I’ve got this question the wrong way around. Maybe you think it should read ‘what are you getting out of church life’. What ministries are there devoted to meeting your needs? What social opportunities is the church devoting to your age demographic? How is the preacher making his sermons relevant to you as a Millennial (as if a preacher has to make the gospel ‘relevant’)? But these are not the questions that I hope you are asking. You are not a consumer of religious services that the church needs to dispense to keep the customer satisfied. As a Christian, you are part of the body of Christ. Believe it or not, you

have a vital part in the functioning of that body. You need to be functioning in the body in order to grow and develop. As the old saying goes ‘use it or lose it’.

So I commend to you the virtue of committing to a local church. Don’t shop around for the church or service that suits you best at your particular ‘stage’ in life. That will only help you develop that all too common male malady of commitment phobia. Commit to the body of believers where you are – get to know them – invite them around to your flat (even if it is just some nibbles after church) – get outside your age demographic. My greatest times of growth in the church have been when older and wiser Christians have walked alongside me. What a wealth of experience and maturity we have to tap into in our congregations. More than anything, I commend you to serve in the church. I do believe that the Lord has given you many gifts. Some of them may be well hidden, but they are there. Try some avenue of service in church life. If you can’t find a job to do in the church you are not looking very hard. Once you start serving you will be surprised how it stretches you, and how it also gives you the sense of belonging that you seem to lack at the present time.

My son, what are you doing about sexual purity?

Paul’s command to the Ephesians churches was that among them there mustn’t even be a hint of sexual immorality. Not even a pinch. I understand that this is terribly difficult in the environment in which we live today. There’s the pornography that just appears on your Facebook stream. There are the revealing pictures that pop up even on the most innocent of internet sites. It’s hard to even watch TV these days without being confronted with some spicy scenes that aren’t going to help you maintain your sexual purity. Be assured, that there is nothing like pornography to stunt your Christian growth. In fact, pornography has a great capacity not just to stunt growth, but to destroy spiritual life altogether. So the thing I wanted to talk to you about, was whether you had a plan. A plan to deal with this problem.

Perhaps it’s a little late for a plan for you. Perhaps you are already living in bondage to pornography. Perhaps you know the cycle of guilt and remorse, of losing the fight against temptation (again), of enjoying the fleeting pleasure of sin, and then the resultant guilt and

self-loathing that follow. I can sometimes see that there is no joy in your life with Christ, you have a glazed look in your eye during worship, and you just don’t seem to be able to move forward in the Christian life. Those are often signs that accompany an addiction to pornography. I don’t tell you this to make you feel miserable, but to explain to you that this is a normal way to feel once this soul-sapping sin has you in its grip. The wonderful thing is that we have a Saviour who can break the power of cancelled sin. You are going to need help as you look to him to lift you out of this dark valley. Why don’t you give me a call (or one of your elders), and we can begin to bring this sin out into the light. It never thrives well once you start to deal with it.

Now, back to the plan. It would be useful for you to have some accountability software on your computer and other electronic devices. Something like covenant eyes is helpful. Please don’t be so foolish as to think you can have your phone or computer in your room. That’s like going to a nudist beach and promising to keep your eyes closed the whole time – I simply don’t think you are able to do it. When you are on-line, set yourself up in a public space. You may also need to give up your smart phone for a season (or permanently) if you are already struggling. Yes I’m serious. People were able to survive in the world prior to the advent of constant internet access. I realise it might be painful, but I think this is the kind of situation Jesus had in mind when he said ‘if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.’

Most of all, you need to start cultivating your relationship with Christ. You won’t maintain sexual purity by simply avoiding temptation and having good accountability structures with others. You need to displace one pleasure with a truly great pleasure. You need to be what one good book title suggested: ‘captivated by a better vision.’ You need to come to appreciate that there are more pleasures in Christ than there could ever be in a few pixels in a screen. And that leads me to my final question...

My son, what are you doing with Christ?

I know you’ve got a lot of theology under your belt. You can crack out the five points of Calvinism, you can blast your way through the Canons of Dort, and you were up there with the best

of them at school on the Bible knowledge quizzes. But how well do you know Christ? If Paul confessed 'I want to know Christ', then surely we ought to be pressing on to know him better. I'm not simply talking here about filling your head with more facts about Jesus. I'm talking about developing your relationship with Him by growing in your appreciation and wonder at his person and work. By delighting yourself in his incarnation and self-humbling. By adoring his mercy and compassion. By sitting under his teaching and submitting to his Lordship. By being humbled as you consider what he did on the cross for you. There

is nothing in this earth as magnificent as knowing Christ. Make him your magnificent obsession¹, and you will inevitably grow into his likeness and image.

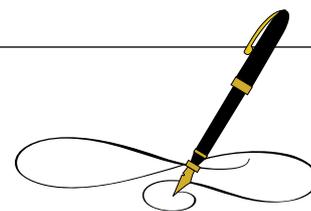
Kenny Sailors was a famous American basketball player. He is *credited* with inventing "the jump shot as an alternative to the two-handed, flat-footed set shot." He won an NCAA championship, and he played in the NBA. He was married for sixty years to his beloved wife. He was being interviewed and he was asked, with all his accolades and achievements, what the most satisfying thing in life had been for him. And he replied: 'I'm an old man, 90yo, I've experienced much.

One thing that has stood the test of time is God. He has satisfied me in a way that all the fame and success could never do. Nothing does compare with my experience I have with Christ and the life in him. There is nothing in this world that can even come close to it.' I pray that this will be your experience as well.

¹ *Magnificent Obsession* is the title of a book by David Robertson. It is a great book and well worth a read.

Mr Andrew de Vries is a minister in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.

Outward focus



Letter from America

Franci Hoyt

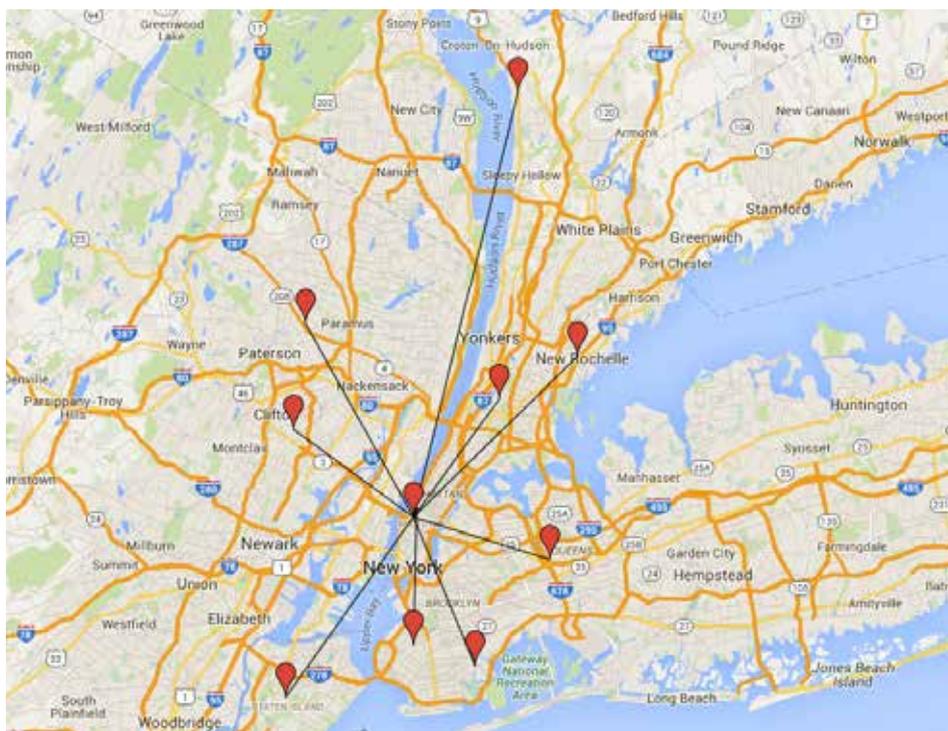
I'm at a women's retreat weekend with my friends Jennifer and Karen. We were invited by a sister URC congregation to their retreat and we did everything we could to be here. It is March on the East Coast of the US, and outside the sunshine is bravely fighting off the cold, trees are coming back to life and sprouting buds. For us, being here in the fellowship of other women and receiving solid teaching and studying the Word alongside them is as warming to our souls as the sunshine outside on our skin.

We attend a small URC congregation in Manhattan, which we love and are committed to serving. However, one of the most challenging things of our church is that we're a commuter church, not a community church. Back when I lived in Christchurch, there was a family in our church that for a long time commuted from Ashburton, a town an hour away. Half of me thought they were crazy and the other half greatly admired their commitment. Here in the city however, an hour's commute to church is not bad – in fact, it's pretty normal, and many people travel longer.

The biggest challenge of being part

of a commuter church is how difficult it is to get together outside of Sunday worship. As a result, our Sundays are usually very full: two services back to back (as you can imagine, if you already had to travel and hour each way for the morning service, it would be very tiring

to do it again for a traditional evening service time), followed by a shared lunch. We eat lunch together every Sunday because for most of us it's the only time we see each other and have opportunity to fellowship all week. We do have a few activities during the week, but the attend-



ance can often be low because for many travelling an hour to get to Bible study and an hour home is just not feasible.

Having said all that, lest you think our church is filled with a bunch of sad and lonely people, we have some great things going on! We have monthly meetings for our Young Adults Fellowship, and we have a number of Bible studies that often get squeezed into Sunday; and once a month we have a big fellowship meal after church (a bigger deal than our usual Sunday lunch together which is just bagels and coffee) on our Lord Supper Sundays where everyone lingers and hangs out



Worship in homes during Hurricane Sandy.



Elders and Deacon being ordained.



Women's Bible study group.

and sings over good food till late afternoon. For the rest we get creative – we have a monthly women's prayer meeting over the phone, our council (session) have weekly conference calls and recently went away for a weekend planning meeting so they could get a lot done at once. We try to do fun things like go on church picnics and barbecues so that we can get a chance to just hang out. These things are great and they fill in a gap, but even so, it's not quite the same as regularly being together physically and digging into the Word together.

District meeting, weekly women's Bible study, Saturday Men's breakfast... luxury! It is true that you don't know what you have until you lose it! I'm not saying this to make you feel bad, but to open your eyes to gifts and opportunities that you have because you own a car and your church is not a big commute away. This also means that you have much more opportunity to serve at your church too, and when you think about inviting people to church at least distance is not an obstacle!

The communion of the saints is a beautiful thing – it takes lots of hard work and commitment, yes – but it is also a necessary thing. Necessary for the wellbeing of the church and the wellbeing of your own soul. After all, it is not good for any of us to be alone.

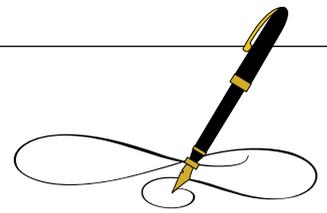
And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. – Hebrews 10:24-25



Welcoming new members.



Young adults Bible study.



Uninvited and unwanted!

Every day, depression silently creeps into people's lives, steals their strength and warps their thinking. Sometimes it starts with an event or series of happenings, but other times depression just seems to overwhelm a person, robbing them of their energy and joy in life. And yes, sadly, Christians who love the Lord do suffer from depression. This is not an illness that they can "positively think" their way out of. Saying to them "take a "concrete pill and harden up" or "snap out of it" is not going to be of any help either.

Charles Spurgeon suffered his first (of many) episodes of severe depression when "Satan's kingdom was being assailed and [Satan] struck back by means of the great disaster at the Music

Hall in 1856. Evil men shouting "Fire!" created panic in the auditorium and several people were killed when they were crushed to death as they ran madly down the stairs. For weeks afterwards Spurgeon was in such sorrow and distress that he was quite incapable of preaching and his whole ministry appeared to be finished."¹

Several months ago I suffered from depression and this is what it felt like to me: "Depression came like a thief in the night and settled on me like a heavy sodden blanket, sapping my strength, smothering me, rolling over me, dragging and pinning me down. Who knows what the trigger was this time? Tiredness, busyness, taking criticism to heart, who knows? No matter, it came, uninvited,

unwanted and seeped its gloomy way into my whole being.

Where there was talking, there is now silence. Where there was joy there is abiding sadness. Where there was laughter, now there are tears. Where there was movement there is now stillness. Where there were smiles there are now frowns and lines. Where there was creativity there is now mundane greyness. Where there was togetherness there is now aloneness. Where there was neatness and order there is now mess and chaos, both physically and emotionally."²

The scope of this article is to see how depression changes a person's thinking and perceptions and to offer some biblical counsel to help you through a dark time.



“My identity is in Christ. No matter what lies depression tells me, I will not heed them. I will not listen to them, rather I will live as the heir of my heavenly Father that I am.”

“Why is it that some people who experience these circumstances [such as death, misery in work, physical ill health, death of a loved one] spiral into depression and others don’t? It is because these circumstances do not cause depression by themselves These circumstances must also connect with an internal system of beliefs or an interpretive lens that will then plunge you down into depression.”³

As Charles Spurgeon once said, “Trials teach us what we are; they dig up the soil, and let us see what we are made of.” Trials and suffering bring to the surface our attitudes, emotions and often the lies we have come to believe. Sometimes throughout our suffering we walk in the strength of the Lord knowing that as it says in Psalm 23, “though I walk through the valley of shadow and death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me and Thy rod and staff, they comfort me.” Other times God seems far away and we give into our doubts and become spiritually vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. Satan wants to take a Christian’s focus off God and he uses our own doubts and worries and magnifies them and turns them into lies that seem plausible and believable. Satan is the Father of Lies and he lies to us to lead us further

and further from God. It is part of his battle against God, and you are a pawn he is using at this time. When you are spiritually vulnerable, your emotions are so powerful that they skew your interpretations, Satan attacks and you swear allegiance to your most pessimistic interpretation, no matter what others say.⁴ And yet, even though our thinking is warped and awry, and we believe lies, God’s promises and truth remain true. Even when we are at the bottom of the pit, when all is darkness and doom, God is still there. Nothing changes that fact that the Truth still stands and that His promises remain firm and solid and uphold us.

What can you do when such blackness threatens to drown you?

Do not let depression define you

Often we feel so overwhelmed, so down, so black that depression seems to us as if it is “the whole of us”. But it is not! Despite the lies and wrong thinking that Satan encourages, the Truth remains. God is still God. If you loved God before you became depressed, you are still a child of God after you suffered from depression. You are still loved by God so much that sent His only Son to die, for you, so that you could have eternal life; life with Christ. He has promised to never leave you nor forsake you, not even when you are down in the pit of despair. It may *feel* like He has gone, but He has not. Although our depression changes the way we perceive things around us, it cannot alter the truth. It cannot change what is unchangeable. God loves you, O child of God, and in His wisdom allows you to suffer for this period of time so that He may be glorified and exalted.

We are to take up our cross, daily, and follow Christ. In the midst of depression, Christ is still there. His Spirit is still working in our lives. “The Lord graciously sustained [Charles Spurgeon], and though scarred by the memory of the tragedy for the rest of his life, he resumed preaching and indeed for several years the services at the Music Hall continued to be richly blessed by God in the salvation of many souls.”⁵

Read the Bible

Our emotions play havoc with us, and we don’t “feel like” reading the Bible. Read anyway. Be in the habit of keeping the Word of God close to you. Read the Psalms, particularly. The psalmists express so well what it is like to be down in the

pit, and to be rescued and restored by God. Even in Psalm 88, the blackest of the Psalms, the psalmist has hope. Spurgeon puts it this way, “the writer has salvation, he is sure of that, and God is the sole author of it. While a man sees God as his Saviour, it is not altogether midnight with him. While the living God can be spoken of as the life of our salvation, our hope will not expire.”⁶

Allan Harman writes, “While the afflicted psalmist cannot understand his present experiences, he still knows that his only possible source of help is the Lord. He hangs on desperately to the truth that God alone can deal with his situation. Relief is not yet in sight, and he still feels rejected by his God.”⁷ As you read the Bible, look for the comfort of God’s salvation.

Pray

Cry out of God. He hears you.⁸ He will set your feet upon a rock and make your steps secure. He has even promised to put a new song in your mouth! He is allowing this suffering at this time, but He is near you and will redeem you from the pit and renew your strength.⁹ In Psalm 88, all looks black and the author is way down in the pit, yet he prays and cries out to God day and night. “Distress had not blown out the sparks of prayer, but quickened them into a greater ardency, till they burned perpetually like a furnace at full blast.”¹⁰

Use your experiences

Allow God to use your suffering to help others. Because you have been down in the very pit of depression, you are able to help others. “I would go into the deeps a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit. It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might know how to speak a word in season to one that is weary.” – Spurgeon gained from illness a wealth of knowledge and sympathy which he could not have gained elsewhere. In the realm of sorrow he was blessed.

Do not despair

Stand on the promises of God. Stand on the Rock that is steadfast and sure. Stand on the Truth that always remains. Stand on the fact that Christ has died to save sinners like you and me.

Be thankful

Begin by looking for the small things that you can be thankful to God for. A warm bed. A hot shower. The sound of the

birds. A hot cup of coffee. The shining sun. Be thankful for the bigger blessings like family (both your own family and church family) and God's daily provision, and be thankful of the biggest blessing a person can have, the gift of Christ, and his work on the cross for you.

Depression lies to me

Depression lies to me that God has deserted me, when He is right there beside me.

Depression lies to me that life is not worth living, but I have life abundant through Christ.

Depression lies to me that I will never feel joy again and yet I will.

Depression lies to me that death would be welcome, yet my days are numbered by the Almighty God and today is not that day! And not by my hand.

Depression lies to me that I cannot do anything right, yet my children love me and my husband praises me.

Depression lies to me that I should hide from the world, yet my friends would surround me with care and love, if they knew that I was suffering.

Depression lies to me that my prayers, the feeble ones I do manage to get out, bounce off the ceiling, and yet my God hears my most desperate whispers in the darkest of the night.

Depression lies to me that I am worthless, yet I am a child of the living God.

My identity is in Christ. No matter what lies depression tells me, I will not heed them. I will not listen to them, rather I will live as the heir of my heavenly Father that I am. I will look for all the wonderful things that I can be thankful for. Small and large, and I WILL be thankful. For I am blessed. I have life.

Now and eternally. God alone has lifted me out of the pit and raised me up onto high ground. Praise be to God!¹¹

Notes

- 1 <http://www.spurgeon.org/heathbio.htm>
- 2 <https://womenmentoring.wordpress.com/2015/05/12/depression-is-a-liar-a-robbber-and-a-thief/>
- 3 Edward T. Welch: *Depression – A Stubborn Darkness* (Punch Press) p.111
- 4 *Depression – A Stubborn Darkness* p.65
- 5 <http://www.spurgeon.org/heathbio.htm>
- 6 C.H. Spurgeon – *The Treasury of David* Vol.II (The Old-Time Gospel Hour) p.2
- 7 Allan Harman – *Psalms A Mentor Commentary* Vol.2: Ps 73-150 p.653
- 8 Psalm 40: 1-2
- 9 Psalm 103: 1-5
- 10 C.H. Spurgeon – *The Treasury of David* Vol.II p.2
- 11 <https://womenmentoring.wordpress.com/2015/05/12/depression-is-a-liar-a-robbber-and-a-thief/>

World in focus

Calais church shows migrants' 'gigantic' faith

The church, which has been named St. Michael's, 'clearly brings a lot of comfort to many of the Christians', said *Songs of Praise* presenter, Sally Magnusson. A "contentious" church built in the midst of a makeshift refugee camp in northern France was featured on the BBC's flagship Christian worship programme, *Songs of Praise*, on Sunday (16 August).

The episode, available in the UK for 30 days on the BBC's iPlayer, focuses on the "faith aspect" of Europe's so-called "migrant crisis", which so far this year has seen 200,000 migrants land on European shores.

Around 3,000 of those migrants are currently living in a refugee camp (nick-named "the jungle") on the outskirts of the French port town of Calais, from where they hope to travel to the UK.

The majority of the camp's inhabitants are Muslims, explains presenter Sally Magnusson, but there are also "significant" numbers of Christians from countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Syria.

"Amidst the canvas and corrugated

iron, they've clung to the thing most precious to them – their faith," Magnusson explains.

"A symbol of that faith is plain to see – the church. It's surrounded by rubbish, it's clearly makeshift and temporary, but it is a church and there's something rather striking about it, and it clearly brings a lot of comfort to many

of the Christians who live here."

"The first thing they wanted to do was to build a church. They wanted a church before they even wanted a home." – Maya Konforti, *L'Auberge des Migrants*.

One Sudanese Christian, named Daniel, says he left his homeland because he was persecuted for his faith.

"I'm Protestant but it's not accepted



The church, which has been named St. Michael's, 'clearly brings a lot of comfort to many of the Christians', said *Songs of Praise* presenter, Sally Magnusson. – BBC

in my country," he said.

Several Christian volunteers are also interviewed, including Maya Konforti from *L'Auberge des Migrants*, who helped to build the church, which has been named St. Michael's.

Konforti referred to the Christian migrants' faith as "gigantic".

"The first thing they wanted to do was to build a church. They wanted a church before they even wanted a home," she said.

French volunteer Pierre Gobled from *Secours Catholique* said he wanted to help "human beings who have lived through difficult times" to live with "dignity".

"I've had faith since my childhood. I live in good conditions, so I feel I should put this into practice and come to help [these] destitute people, people who live through difficult moments in their life," he said.

Susan Pardo, a British volunteer, said she was "very sad" that some disagree with helping the migrants.

"That's not how the Church feels," she said. "The Church is here on earth to give compassion and love to the strangers, the refugees, the widows, the lost children. That's what the Church is here for – to reach the lost, the poor and the hopeless."

World Watch Monitor, August 2015

Death threats target Turkey's Protestants

Fifteen Turkish Protestant congregations and their leaders have been targeted since 27 August by a strident campaign of death threats sent to their Facebook, email, websites and mobile telephones.

The threats followed the style and jargon typically used by the so-called Islamic State (IS), vowing to kill, massacre and behead apostates who the messages accused of having "chosen the path that denies Allah" and "dragged others into believing as you do As heretics you have increased your numbers with ignorant followers".

"Threats are not anything new for the Protestant community who live in this country and want to raise their children here," the Association of Protestant Christians in Turkey said in a press release on 1 September. "But with the recent increase in systematic threats, from this country's west to east and north to south, in different cities, we think that these messages, coming close together

and resembling each other, are coming from the same source."

A copy of one message seen by *World Watch Monitor* displayed the IS flag and called itself "those who go to jihad". It warned: "Perverted infidels, the time that we will strike your necks is soon. May Allah receive the glory and praise."

Most of the messages included a direct quote from the Al-Ahzab chapter of the Quran, which threatens "those who spread false news Accursed, they shall be seized wherever found and killed with a horrible slaughter."

A link was also posted for an Arabic video subtitled in Turkish on *YouTube* entitled, "The religious proofs why apostates should be killed".

One pastor attacked over both email and SMS messages told *World Watch Monitor*, "They are saying things like they had been waiting for us to return to Islam, and that we are responsible for other Muslims turning to Christ, that our time is up and that Allah will give them our heads".

The majority of Turkish Protestant congregations are former Muslims who have converted to Christianity. In contrast to most Muslim-majority nations, Turkish citizens have the legal right to change their religious identity or leave blank the religion column on their IDs.

Church leaders who received the messages were encouraged by the association to notify the police and public prosecutors in their local area regarding the threats.

"They are saying things like they had been waiting for us to return to Islam, and that we are responsible for other Muslims turning to Christ, that our time

is up and that Allah will give them our heads." – *Turkish pastor*

Turkey's stance towards IS

Turkey's apparent ambivalence over the past year towards the Islamic State fighting on its borders for control over large sections of neighbouring Syria and Iraq remains under the international spotlight. But in early August, the state-controlled Religious Affairs Directorate issued its first condemnation of the jihadist group as a "terrorist" organisation, officially declaring it "non-Muslim".

Condemning the self-proclaimed IS Caliphate for its "twisted" portrayal of Islam and the Quran, the Turkish government then released a detailed report to inform the public about the group's tactics, slogans, operations and interpretation of Islam through weekly sermons, fatwas (religious edicts) and Quran courses.

Within just 10 days, IS responded with a new video directly threatening Turkey and its president, warning the people of Turkey against "atheists, crusaders and devils who fool them and make them a slave of the crusaders". Vowing to conquer Istanbul soon, the speaker, using the alias Abu Ammar, called on the Turkish people to abandon democracy, secularism and human rights and instead follow Sharia.

Speaking in fluent Turkish on the seven-minute clip, which was distinctly amateur in comparison with the jihadists' usual slick videos, the man was later identified as a 47-year-old Turkish citizen who had taken his wife and children to Syria to join IS in 2014.

Published: September 2015 by Barbara G. Baker



Islamic State vowed to conquer Istanbul soon, in an August video. Image: Robert Anders / Flickr / CC

Call to the European Church to stand with refugees

As Europe struggles to manage the migrant crisis, some church leaders in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq are saying that some refugees are 'fed up with Islam' because Gulf countries aren't offering them help. These leaders' message to the European Church is 'be prepared' to welcome the many Muslims who are impressed by finding that, rather than countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, it is the West that is offering help.

The leaders do, however, express surprise that countries that are home to so many Christians are willing to accept what they see as a faith that has persecuted so many of the Middle East's Christians. They caution that the West should be prepared for dangerous elements among the refugees.

An estimated four million Syrians have left their country with many headed for Europe, while seven million others are internally displaced.

A pastor, who prefers to stay anonymous, has been helping hundreds of Syrian families in the Syrian city of Homs, says: "I see thousands going to Europe. I would like to urge the [European] church to open its eyes, to wake up, to find a way to care for these people They see that [Christian] nations help them when Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar do not. They are fed up with Islam. Now is the time to work with them and show them what true Christianity is about. However, if the church [in Europe] doesn't stand up now, the refugees will, in twenty years, destroy Europe.

He is convinced that, right now, churches in Europe should seize the opportunity to extend a hand to thousands of Muslim believers. "If the churches don't, they will face big problems within a few years," he says.

Another leader, based in Lebanon, says: "I have two opinions about the refugees coming to Europe. From my human perspective I would say don't take them in. But as a Christian my message to the West is different. The coming of many refugees to the continent is a great opportunity that should not be ignored by the Church.

"The Church in Europe needs to be ready: train your people, make them culturally aware, teach them Arabic, and teach them how to deal with Muslims. Reach out to the refugees, do commu-

nity service, and organize youth meetings. This is a blessed challenge for the Church.

Helping the refugees will be a sacrifice, believes another pastor. "Our church is just a small church. When we started, many were against us, including the local authorities. But they couldn't stop us. Churches in the West can do so much more. If the West tries to understand how these refugees feel, it can reach them. But the refugees can turn into a future problem if the Church does not act now, while they are now on its doorstep."

Several of these leaders wonder

why it is that Europe is open to Syrian Muslims? "They open their borders for the people who made Christians suffer," says a pastor from Aleppo.

A pastor from Damascus says: "It is great to see how Germany is welcoming the refugees. But I also have my concerns. For example, I am concerned about fanatical Muslims spreading into Europe too. Europe should welcome the refugees; they are in desperate need. Show them the love of Christ".

Several pastors quote Colonel Gaddafi, the former Libyan leader. To validate their fears he said on Al Jazeera TV in April 2006: "We have 50 million Muslims in



ROM Response Prayer Group volunteers distribute food to migrants in central Europe. ROM Response



Much of the city of Homs, Syria has been destroyed by years of heavy fighting, May 2014. www

Europe. There are signs that Allah will grant Islam victory in Europe – without swords, without guns, without conquest. He will turn Europe into a Muslim continent within a few decades.”

Pastors working with refugees in

and around Syria know from experience how easy it is to approach them: it has a predominantly Muslim population. “You cannot just walk into [other people’s] lives in their own country, but now they are coming to us. Now we

have the opportunity to reach out. Now Muslims are out of their own context, and that means a wonderful opportunity for Christians [to serve them].”

By World Watch Monitor. September, 2015

Ethiopian Christians cleared of holding ‘illegal meetings’

On 26 August, four months after their initial arrest, a judge dismissed all charges against the seven Christians charged with holding “illegal meetings in secret locations” and ordered that their bail costs be refunded.

“The Lord is always good and He can turn everything into the good of His people. Imprisonment for the name of the Lord is not a curse. The Lord can turn it into a source of strength and courage,” said one of the Christians, who wished to thank those who had been praying for them.

WWM



An Orthodox church cut out of the rock in the town of Lalibela. North Ethiopia was one of the first Christian nations in the world – from the 4th century.

Courtesy Open Doors International



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

Teacher Vacancy

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

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

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

The Thought of God – Maurice Roberts – pgs134-136

We must not only watch our weaknesses, but our strengths as well. The vices of our virtues are more generally harmful to the cause of Christ than our observed vicesIt goes without saying also that wise leadership should always realise that it is capable of carrying a good thing too far and giving a handle unwittingly to the common adversary of our souls. Our universal folly as sinners is to become too much like ourselves, to the point where we love ourselves even for our own extremes. But this is an infirmity, and one which Satan will assuredly exploit to hurt the general cause of Christ. A paraffin lamp gives a tolerably good light if the wick is adjusted correctly. But if the wick is turned up too far it sends forth only smoke. Even so do our strong points help our brothers and sisters greatly. But, if strained and stretched too far, our helpful emphases only darken the fellowship and offend the believers. Happy are we if we distrust our own hearts enough to accept correction from those who love us in the Lord.

Back issues of *Faith in Focus* can be found
on the RCNZ Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Family Camp 2014/2015

“Deb, I think you and Scott would make a great team leading Kid’s Club at Family Camp, would you be interested?” asked our neighbour Maria. Shoulder tapping at its finest – we all know the drill.

“Uh oh. What is Maria getting us into, and what is Family Camp?” I thought to myself. Little did we know, we would be thanking her later.

Sure enough, a few weeks later, we were signed up. Kid’s Club was our ticket to Family Camp. With no idea what to expect, we started to prepare.

Like all things, Family Camp came quickly. Scott and I stayed in a cabin overlooking the lake at Finlay Park. The camp was beautiful. With the sun shining and birds singing, we were ready for Camp to begin.

Kids club was exciting for both us and the kids. We

had picked the theme “The Armour of God.” It was great to be able to teach 60 eager kids about their need of Jesus and how they can be equipped with God’s armour to fight sin and Satan. Our mornings were full of songs, skits, drama activities, Bible studies, and crafts. Who can argue with tie-dye shirts?

If Kid’s Club did not keep us engaged, afternoon activities sure did. We spent our afternoons playing volleyball, soccer, boating, canoeing, swimming in the pool, jumping on the blob and riding on crazy slides. Well, I didn’t go on the slide. I prefer to keep all my limbs intact.

After an action-packed day of family fun came dinner time. Wow! We had some fantastic chefs. It doesn’t get better than all-you-can-eat breakfast, lunch and dinner!

We really appreciated meal-times not only for the food, but also for the fellowship. Knowing few other campers when we arrived, by the time we left, we knew almost everyone by name. What a blessing it was to get to know so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Although Scott and I missed the morning studies, we were able to attend the night studies. Pastor Andre Holt-slag led a study titled “Christ in the Psalms.” It was amazing to learn about God’s use of the writings of his servant David to point to our wonderful, Saviour, Jesus Christ.





At Family Camp we had a “first ever” experience. Being Canadian and all, Scott and I had never seen glow worms. We signed up for the glow worm trip and we were not disappointed. Late, one crisp night, we gathered with many others down by the docks. Each of us decked out in warm jerseys, headlamps, and life jackets. We loaded the barge, and off we went. The stars were shimmering in the clear night sky and the glow worms

were stunning. It was a night to remember.

It is an incredible blessing to live and learn among men and women who are passionately pursuing a stronger relationship with Jesus for themselves and their families. Our time at Family Camp will not soon be forgotten. We went home spiritually refreshed, encouraged and thankful for the new friendships we had made.

Scott and Deb van Oostveen

RCNZ Family Camp

26th Dec - 2nd of Jan

Finlay Park
Cambridge

Morning Studies
Murray Capill

Evening Devotions
Albert Couperus

For info and to register:
www.rcnzonline.com/familycamp

A time to tear down and a time to build

David Waldron

The Reformed Church of Christchurch was instituted on 10th March 1953 and is a founding church of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. From 1963 until 2011 the church worshipped God from its property on Cornwall Street, St Albans, near the city centre. During the February 2011 earthquake the church building was badly damaged and is no longer able to be used for worship or other church activities. Since that time, the congregation has been renting facilities from a Seventh Day Adventist group about 3kms further north in Papanui.

Through challenging years of ministry, and in the aftermath of the earthquake, a significant number of members have left the congregation for a variety of reasons. In 2012 the Christchurch Session seriously questioned the viability of continuing as an instituted church, given the decline in membership over the previous three decades; due in part to the planting of

the Bishopdale and Dovedale churches and, more recently, the establishment of a group in Rangiora. The possibility of combining with another Reformed Church in the city was carefully considered. However, neither Bishopdale nor Dovedale had sufficient capacity to incorporate the 'Cornwall Street' congregation, even in the short term.

After much careful and prayerful deliberation and consultation, the Christchurch Session made the following announcement to the congregation on 12th August 2012:

"Are we a viable church?" When we consider the demographics and ages of our congregation we see our numbers dwindling in recent years, and we anticipate a significant number leaving us for glory in coming years. Our concerns are not only physical, but spiritual. Some describe our congregation as "over critical". Some carry memories of the past that they are unable to let go and unable to

resolve. We continue to struggle to find men willing to serve in the offices of Elder and Deacon. There are few new members joining, yet a number of existing members have expressed dissatisfaction and an intention to leave.

A special Session meeting was called to address the question of our viability in the last month. This was a hard meeting, yet we believe the congregation needs to hear about it. The outcome of this meeting was unanimous: Yes, we believe we are a viable church. However, this viability is provisional on the character and witness of our church changing. And it is provisional on the commitment and unity of our current members. Session is still working through what this means, and we don't have all the answers.

The next question to ask was whether to repair the damaged structure or to completely rebuild. The answer to this was straightforward once engineering



reports and pricing options were received. The cost difference between repairing and strengthening the building to be code-compliant and a 'clean site' rebuild was negligible. A new church building with a design optimized for the present and planned ministries of the congregation was clearly the way forward.

A series of congregational meetings followed, together with ministry group workshops where members wrestled with other questions like: "Is construction of a building really the right use of our resources?", "Is Cornwall Street a relevant location to build a church?", "What sort of building should we build?" as they considered needs and opportunities for gospel in-reach and out-reach.

Congregational consultation continued with district meetings, design concept presentations and written feedback. Through this process it became very clear that the congregation as a whole desired to return to the Cornwall Street site. It was recognized that this location has significant strategic advantages for inner city ministry in an area of Christchurch where there is no intention to rebuild many of the church buildings which have been demolished after the earthquake by their respective congregations.

Specifications for the proposed building included: a street frontage that is welcoming and inviting, an entrance that is intuitive for visitors, a sense that the building is occupied and open on Sundays and throughout the week. It also needed to have an area that is welcoming, friendly, informal, comfortable, and able to be used for multiple functions, e.g. fellowship around coffee, men's breakfasts, marriage courses, and community use.

The auditorium would need to be

worshipful, serene, symmetrical, ordered, distinctive with a central pulpit symbolic of centrality of the Word. Acoustics would be designed to emphasise volume from congregational singing rather than from instrumental accompaniment. These specifications were then incorporated into concept development drawings which were prepared at a cost of almost \$28,000.

In August 2014 the congregation voted to proceed with detailed design and costings for a building with a maximum seating capacity of 220, somewhat less than in the 1963 auditorium. A budget of \$220,000 was approved for this work, which was subsequently completed for the lesser sum of just over \$183,000.

Grace builders, a company owned and operated by two brothers in the Reformed churches in Christchurch, quoted a very competitive price for the construction, significantly lower than an independent Quantity Surveyor's costings, which had been obtained by the Building Committee. Grace Builders were then offered the contract to construct the new church building.

The total cost for the demolition of the old structure and the rebuilding of the new is currently estimated at \$2.7m (in addition to the design development expenditure of approximately \$211,000). Special donations have been received which are tagged for specific use. The insurance payout on the earthquake damaged structure and donations for rebuilding collected over the past 4 years total a little over \$2.1m. There is therefore a shortfall of just under \$600,000.

We therefore do not currently have sufficient funds to complete the rebuild at Cornwall Street. With our current levels of giving we are not able to service

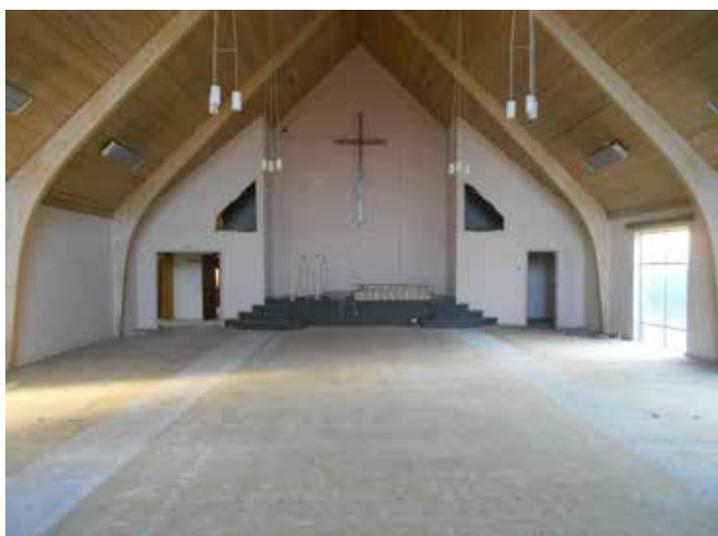
any significant level of borrowing. The Christchurch Session sees the wisdom of being cautious about burdening our congregation with financial obligations which might constrain the present and future spiritual ministries of our church. However, we also recognize that others in our own congregation and in the wider RCNZ church federation may wish to contribute now that the actual need is known.

The Christchurch Session is therefore optimistic that the Lord will provide the means for us to complete the rebuild at Cornwall Street, whilst not being sure of the detail at this stage! Session is also conscious that any significant delay in commencing the building project will, most likely, result in increased construction costs, a loss of momentum in the process, potential discouragement to our congregation and little additional financial gain from the relatively low interest we accumulate on our current bank deposits. There is, however, a need to balance an active trust in our God with prudence as wise stewards of our Lord's gifted resources.

The Christchurch Session therefore recommended to the congregation on 16th August 2015 that *"we proceed with the rebuild on Cornwall Street up to a maximum expenditure of \$2.7m and that the work continue up to the point when available funds have been used up, without borrowing any funds without prior congregational approval"*.

This recommendation received an overwhelming majority vote from the congregation and demolition commenced 8 days later on 24th August, some 4.5 years after the February earthquake!

As a congregation we have been working through a preaching series in



the book of Zechariah. The exiles returning from Babylon had to wait 70 years and there was opposition to the rebuilding of the city wall when they began reconstruction. You can read about the trouble caused by Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod in the book of Nehemiah. These enemies were angry against those who had returned to the land and they plotted and schemed to try and halt the work. These were the days of the 'trowel and the sword', the builders carried materials in one hand and a weapon in the other. Through many challenges and disappointments God encouraged his people through the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to keep trusting Him and he drew their attention to what He was doing in their midst. The Lord called his people to repent of their sins of the past and to return to Him. In turn, he confirmed that He would return to them and that the work would be completed. In the midst of their rebuilding work, God pointed them to the promise of the Messiah to come, 'My

Servant, the Branch' who would ensure that the light of God's presence in the midst of His people would never go out.

Today, we are not rebuilding a temple, but we have seen more than the exiles in Zechariah's day of 'small things'. By faith we have seen Christ, full of grace and truth. We have seen the temple of his body brought down at the cross and then 'rebuilt' three days later. The church is now the Body of Christ, being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

Within the spiritual life of the Cornwall Street congregation we see many encouraging signs of growth. At our last Annual General Meeting we 'counted our blessings one by one' and came up with a long list including: The harmony and good heart of the congregation, a number of regular visitors, people enjoy the fellowship of the church (it's hard to get folk out of the building after the service!).

We have been blessed this year with

the birth of covenant children, and more are expected soon. We have enthusiastic and committed teachers in Sunday school, catechism, Cadets and Gems, Bible study and a vibrant music ministry in the church. We are seeing more young men zealous for the Lord and a desire to reach out and connect with our community, one conversation and one person at a time, as we talk to visitors and strangers about our love for Jesus, our Saviour. We have been blessed with some new members over the past year and a number of young people desire to profess their faith.

The Lord is at work in His church, there is much yet to do, but by God's grace we continue to trust and obey.

For more information about the rebuild of the church at Cornwall Street, visit our website: <http://rcnz.org.nz/christchurch/rebuild/>

Pastor David Waldron
Reformed Church of Christchurch
63 Cornwall Street
St Albans





The worship hall, partially intact, showing the laminated timber framing.



The final remnants of a once sturdy structure.