

**THE BANNER OF  
SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH**

Publication Number (USPS 010584)

Official Publication of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed denomination. Typeset at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Gardner Graphics); printed at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Commercial Printers).

Subscription price for ten issues per year: \$17.50 in the United States. \$25.00 in Canada, payable in U.S. funds. To foreign countries \$30.00 surface mail) or \$40.00 (air mail), payable in U.S. funds. Rates listed are for one year subscriptions.

**Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Editor**

2919 Leonard St., N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525  
(616) 977-0599 fax (616) 977-0889  
e-mail: jrbeeke@aol.com

**Dr. Robert D. Johnson, Assistant Editor**

Raybrook Estates II, 2105 Raybrook Dr., SE, #4029  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546 (616) 464-3241

**Marvin VandenToorn, Subscription Manager**

2080 Brandon, N.W., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504  
Phone/Fax: (616) 453-1055

**Ann Dykema, Accounts Receivable**

Phone/Fax: (616) 361-8717

Copy for the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* is due the 5th of the month prior to publication. All copy (including announcements, obituaries, anniversary notices, and ads) should be sent to the editor. All announcements submitted for publication should be typed, and are subject to editorial policy. Communications relating to subscriptions should be addressed to the subscription manager. Change of address should be forwarded to the subscription manager one month in advance of moving date. Please provide both new and old address.

PERIODICAL Postage is Paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth," 2080 Brandon, N.W., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504.

**Additional Sources**

For a list of printed Reformed literature (both new and used books in English, and used books in Dutch), write: Reformation Heritage Books, 2919 Leonard Street, N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525, or visit our on-line bookstore at [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

For free sermons write: Inheritance Publishers, P.O. Box 1334, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501.

For free sermons and radio messages of HNRC ministers write: The Gospel Trumpet, 540 Crescent NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.

For tract distribution write: Banner of Truth Tract Mission, 540 Crescent St., N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503. For distribution of tapes (sermons, lectures, classes, etc.) write: "The Tape Room," 540 Crescent, N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.

For material related to theological training write: Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2919 Leonard Street, N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525.

In all publications, the Heritage Netherlands Reformed denomination aims to remain true to inerrant Scripture and its Reformed heritage as expounded in the Reformed doctrinal standards: the Belgic Confession (1561), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and Canons of Dordt (1618-1619). Though never officially adopted as such due to rootage in the continental Reformation, the Heritage Netherlands Reformed denomination is also in agreement with the Westminster Standards (1640s): the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

For additional information on HNRC ministries, please visit our website at [www.hnrc.org](http://www.hnrc.org).

**CONTENTS**

October 2002 Vol. 10, No. 8

MEDITATION — <i>Rev. J. Greendyk</i>	
<b>Taking a Stand</b> .....	<b>199</b>
EDITORIAL — <i>Dr. J.R. Beeke</i>	
<b>Herman Witsius</b> .....	<b>201</b>
PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY — <i>Rev. C. Harinck</i>	
<b>Profession of Faith and the World (1)</b> .....	<b>204</b>
FAMILY GUIDANCE — <i>Dr. J.R. Beeke</i>	
<b>Implementing Family Worship</b> .....	<b>207</b>
GUIDANCE FOR YOUTH — <i>Rev. D. Lipsy</i>	
<b>Prayer and Meditation (1)</b> .....	<b>211</b>
BOOK TALK — <i>Dr. J.R. Beeke/R. Pederson</i>	
<b>The Justification of a Sinner</b> .....	<b>214</b>
BIBLE QUIZ — <i>D. Kleyn</i>	
<b>Reformation</b> .....	<b>215</b>
STORIES FOR CHILDREN — <i>D. Kleyn</i>	
<b>Divine Protection</b> .....	<b>216</b>
<b>The Gift</b> .....	<b>217</b>
<b>NEWS &amp; ANNOUNCEMENTS</b> .....	<b>219</b>
<b>CURRENT EVENTS</b> — <i>Rev. J. Byl</i> .....	<b>220</b>
<b>FROM OUR MAILBOX</b> .....	<b>221</b>
QUOTABLES	
<b>Vital Godliness (1)</b> .....	<b>222</b>
CORNER FOR TEENS — <i>Rev. M. Kelderman</i>	
<b>The Prayer of Jabez or Evangelical Mantra (6)</b> .....	<b>223</b>
POEM — <i>J. Newton</i>	
<b>The Lord Will Provide</b> .....	<b>224</b>

---

***“Yield your understanding to be taught  
of God, yield your heart to be purified  
and educated for God,  
yield your life (to be) a sacrifice to God.”***

---

—William S. Plumer

**MEDITATION**

Rev. J. Greendyk

**Taking a Stand**

*"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter."*

—Daniel 3:16

In every age, people have always taken a stand. However, sometimes the stand taken is far from biblical. Some people take a stand to be identified with a particular interest group only because it may prove personally beneficial. These people have the label of "followers." Others side with particular persons, and/or political parties because they appreciate their leader's platform. These people have the label of "supporters." Pro-abortionists and pro-life advocates equally take a stand. One supports abortion as a free choice matter, while the other maintains life is a gift from God, and rightly so. Presently the entire world is taking a stand on an extremely volatile issue—whether or not war with Iraq is necessary. Public opinion polls abound on this issue. However, did you ever wonder how many are taking a stand for the truth because God's glory and cause is at stake? Such can be designated as "leaders." But, too often, these are leaders under fire and must take a stand even in the fire of trial.

The verse for meditation presents a life-threatening situation for men who loved God's glory and truth, but who also understood that to be men-pleasers and sacrificers of truth was worse than death. These godly men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, possessed the same conviction as the apostles of a future generation.

They dared to say, even when death was threatened by fire, "We ought to obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). How many in the world or the church today have this conviction?

The way in which these men responded to Nebuchadnezzar's final overture to bow before his ninety-by-nine-foot image is very instructive and begs personal application and practice today. "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter." What these men were saying is critical for today's world, church, and church leaders. These godly men didn't need to deliberate. They didn't need time to caucus with each other. They didn't even need time to figure out how to sugarcoat their answer. They didn't ask, "What will the king and people think, or how will people react?" They didn't worry about winning friends and influencing people. They didn't worry about riding the band wagon of popularity nor popular opinion. Simply stated, they made it clear to the king that there was no room for compromise. We will not bow!

Transplanting the above answer and situation of the three godly men to the time of the Reformation, where would we be today if our godly forefathers had bowed to the pressure of Roman Catholicism? Would we be able to humbly, dependently, and gladly commemorate Reformation 2002? Certainly not! But because our godly forefathers refused to bow to accepting justification by works and every other error of Roman Catholicism, we today may still treasure a rich, God-given inheritance.

The question is: Are we as firm

today regarding God's glory and the preservation of His truth so that God can say of us as persons, families, churches, and denomination: "This is a people that have learned My truth, love it and live it. This is a people that would rather say 'no' to evil and the compromise of biblical truth than live with watered down doctrine and principles. This is a people that would rather maintain their biblical identity in spite of what others may say, think, or do!"

Dear friends, are we afraid to be different in our world? Are we afraid to live up to Scripture's truth which designates us a peculiar people separated from the world? Is our thinking and acting flowing in the channel of sailing with the world and living as close to the world as possible? Cease from such unbiblical and unreformed thought and practice. Remember Lot's actions. He pitched his tent-door towards Sodom, was soon there and before he had escaped entirely, his family and wife were lost. Take a stand! Give heed to 2 Corinthians 6:17, "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

What did the three godly men do? They added to their stand by saying, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." These godly men did not sacrifice God's glory, cause, nor their God-given identity, but rather cast themselves into the hands of their covenant God. They believed and embraced by living faith the power of their God to deliver. Furthermore, they were convinced of the faithfulness of

their God to deliver. Compromise did not characterize their actions. The law of God was their rule of faith and life. They understood and were convinced that there was no other god like their covenant God. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" and "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," was written in their hearts and practiced in life.

Think of where we would be if our godly forefathers failed to take a stand against the wicked idolatry of Roman Catholicism. You and I might still be worshipping idols and images. We might still be seeking our salvation in our doings and not in the precious and acceptable doings of Jesus Christ. Imagine if we were still entrenched in obtaining deliverance through priest and popes. How hopeless! But thanks be to God that as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted the power of God to deliver and were convinced that He would deliver, you and I today, may and must be directed to Jesus Christ. He will not only deliver His church from sin and guilt by blood, but His perfect law-fulfilling life gives you and me, dear believer, the power to take a stand for God's glory, truth, and cause. Sometimes our fiery trials and conflicts can be so great that we can be tempted to forsake our biblical stand. Sometimes the heat from the battle can become so intense that we may be tempted to question whether we're right or wrong. Oh, what intense prayer arises at such times for God to show us the way and keep us in His way! We may be harassed by the devil to compromise for the sake of false peace and friendships. The devil may whisper and friends may say, "Is all this trouble worth it?" We may be urged by others to draw a more blurred line of distinction and separation for the sake of harmony. However, may we ever remember

and follow Christ who took the ultimate stand! He took a stand for the glory of His Father. He took a stand to establish the truth that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Christ's stand cost Him His life's blood. Why? He loved His Father's glory, holiness, righteousness, mercy, grace, and truth too much to forsake His stand. He loved lost sinners too much to see them perish by sin and the devil. The joy of redeeming the family of His Father was so great that it wasn't too much for Him to endure thirty-three years of shame, despising, and rejection which ended in His death. Because He took a stand, let us never be ashamed to take a stand. If we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth, we will be called to suffer for His name's sake. But we shall find in taking a stand that the truth of Isaiah 43:1-5 is powerful, precious, and comforting.

---

***Christ's stand cost Him  
His life's blood.***

---

Finally, these godly men didn't count their lives dear. They concluded their response to the king by informing him that they would be more willing to die in the fiery furnace than sacrifice God's glory, truth, and cause. They said, "But if not (or, if our God will not deliver), be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Great faith producing strong conviction characterized their speech and actions. Ultimately it was Jesus Christ and His grace that fortified them in this fiery trial. However, we may not lose sight of the fact that when put to the test (with what we may call a small issue of eating the king's meat) their first victory in chapter one coupled with God's blessing and favor served to more firmly

establish in them the conviction: "We must follow God, whatever the cost." The second trial in chapter two with its corresponding victory did the same, causing confirmation of the words for all believers, "Each victory will help you, some other to win." The result of the first two victories gave them courage to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering in the last trial in chapter three. These men were willing to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. They knew this to be their reasonable service. They also were convinced that they couldn't be conformed to this world. They knew the daily necessity of being transformed by the renewing of their minds that they may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Dear friends, the true Christian's life is full of spiritual and temporal skirmishes, but be encouraged by this: If we love God, His glory, cause, and truth, come what may, we will have to take a stand through testing. In our day there are many so-called fair-weather Christians who can sail smoothly as long as the winds aren't contrary. And although you, dear believer, may be tossed with tempests, have many battles to wage, be encouraged and strengthened that when we take a stand on Scripture and the Christ of Scripture as our foundation, we will find to our comfort and strength this unchangeable and unfailing truth, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).




---

**Rev. J. Greendyk** is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Church of Fort Macleod, Alberta.

## FAMILY GUIDANCE

Dr. J.R. Beeke

# Implementing Family Worship

Here are some suggestions to help you establish God-honoring family worship in your homes. We trust this avoids two extremes: an idealistic approach that is beyond the reach of even the most God-fearing home, and a minimalist approach that abandons daily family worship because the ideal seems so out of reach.

### **Prepare for Family Worship**

Even before family worship begins, we should privately pray for God's blessing upon that worship. Then we should plan for the *what, where, and when* of family worship.

1. *What.* Generally speaking, this includes instruction in the Word of God, prayer before the throne of God, and singing to the glory of God. But we need to determine more of the specifics of family worship.

First, have Bibles and copies of *The Psalter* and song sheets for all the children who can read. For children who are too young to read, read a few verses from Scripture and select one text to memorize as a family. Say it aloud together several times as a family, then reinforce that with a short Bible story to illustrate the text. Take time to teach a stanza or two of a Psalter selection to such children, and encourage them to sing with you.

For young children, try using *Truths of God's Word*, which has a guide for teachers and parents that illustrates each doctrine. For children in grade four and up, try James W. Beeke's Bible Doctrine series with accompanying teachers' guides. In any case, explain what you have read to your children, and ask them a question or two. Then sing one or two psalms and a sound hymn or a good chorus like "Dare to be a Daniel." Close with prayer.

For older children, read a passage from Scripture, memorize it together, then apply a proverb. Ask questions about how to apply those verses to daily life, or perhaps read a portion from the gospels and its corresponding section in J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*. Ryle is simple yet profound. His clear points help generate discussion. Perhaps you'd like to read parts of an inspirational biography. Don't let the reading of edifying literature replace Bible-reading or its application, however.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Holy War*, or daily meditations by Charles Spurgeon are appropri-

ate for more spiritually-minded children. Older children will also benefit from William Jay's *Morning and Evening Exercises*, William Mason's *Spiritual Treasury*, and Robert Hawker's, *Poor Man's Morning and Evening Portions*. After those readings, sing a few familiar psalms and perhaps learn a new one before closing with prayer.

Use should also be made of the creeds and confessions of the church. Young children should be taught to say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you adhere to the Westminster standards, have your children memorize the Shorter Catechism over time. If the Heidelberg Catechism is preached in your congregation, read on Sabbath mornings the Lord's Day of the Catechism from which the minister will be preaching at church. If you have *The Psalter*, occasional use can be made of the forms of devotion found in *Christian Prayers*. Using these forms at home will afford opportunity for you and your children to learn to use such forms in an edifying and profitable manner, a skill which will stand you all in good stead when the liturgical forms are used as part of public worship.

2. *Where.* Family worship may be held around the supper table; however, it might be better to move to the living room, where there are fewer distractions. Whatever room you select, make sure it contains all of your devotional materials. Before you start, take the phone off the hook, or plan to let your answering machine or voice mail take messages. Your children must understand that family worship is the most important activity of the day and should not be interrupted by anything.

3. *When.* Ideally, family worship should be conducted twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. That fits best with scriptural directions for worship—both the Old Testament economy in which the beginning and close of each day was sanctified by the offering of morning and evening sacrifices as well as morning and evening prayers, and the New Testament church which apparently followed the pattern of morning and evening prayers. The Westminster Directory of Worship states, "Family worship, which ought to be performed by every family, ordinarily morning and evening, consists in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and singing praises."

For some families, family worship is scarcely pos-

sible more than once a day, after the evening meal. Either way, heads of households must be sensitive to the family schedule and keep everyone involved. Practice the principle of Matthew 6:33 (“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness”) in establishing a family schedule.

Carefully guard this time of family worship. If you know ahead of time that the normal time will not be suitable on a certain day, reschedule worship time. Don’t skip it, however; that can become habitual. When you can keep to your appointed times, plan carefully and prepare beforehand to make every minute count. Fight every enemy of family worship.

### ***During Family Worship***

During family worship, aim for the following:

1. *Brevity.* As Richard Cecil said, “Let family worship be short, savory, simple, tender, heavenly.” Family worship that is too long makes children restless and may provoke them to wrath.

If you worship twice a day, try ten minutes in the morning and a little longer in the evening. A twenty-five minute period of family worship might be divided as follows: ten minutes for Scripture reading and instruction; five minutes for reading a daily portion or an edifying book or discussing some concern in a biblical light; five minutes for singing; and five minutes for prayer.

2. *Consistency.* It is better to have twenty minutes of family worship every day than to try for extended periods on fewer days—say forty-five minutes on Monday, then skipping Tuesday. Family worship provides us “the manna which falls every day at the door of the tent, that our souls are kept alive,” wrote James W. Alexander in his excellent book on family worship.

---

### ***Lead family worship with a firm, fatherly hand and a soft, penitent heart.***

---

Don’t indulge excuses to avoid family worship. If you lost your temper at a child a half-hour before family worship time, don’t say: It’s hypocritical for me to lead family worship, so we’ll skip it tonight. You don’t need to run from God at such times. Rather, you must return to God like the penitent publican. Begin worship time by asking everyone who witnessed your loss of temper to forgive you, then pray to God for forgiveness. Children will respect you for that. They will tolerate weaknesses and even sins in their parents so long as the parents confess their wrongdoings and earnestly seek to follow the Lord. They and you know that the Old Testament high

priest was not disqualified for being a sinner but had first to offer sacrifice for himself before he could offer sacrifices for the people’s sins. Neither are you and I disqualified today for confessed sin, for our sufficiency lies in Christ, not in ourselves. As A. W. Pink said, “It is not the sins of a Christian, but his unconfessed sins, which choke the channel of blessing and cause so many to miss God’s best.”

Lead family worship with a firm, fatherly hand and a soft, penitent heart. Even when you’re bone-weary after a day’s work, pray for strength to carry out your fatherly duty. Remember that Christ Jesus went to the cross for you bone-weary and exhausted but never shrunk from His mission. As you deny yourself, you will see how He strengthens you during family worship, so that by the time you finish, your exhaustion is overcome.

3. *Hopeful solemnity.* “Rejoice with trembling before the Lord,” Psalm 2 tells us. We need to show this balance of hope and awe, fear and faith, repentance and confidence in family worship. Speak naturally yet reverently during this time, using the tone you would use when speaking to a deeply respected friend about a serious matter. Expect great things from a great covenant-keeping God.

Let’s get more specific:

1. For the reading of Scripture

♦ *Have a plan.* Read ten or twenty verses from the Old Testament in the morning and ten to twenty from the New Testament in the evening. Or read a series of parables, miracles, or biographical portions. Just be sure to read the entire Bible over a period of time. As J.C. Ryle said, “Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.”

♦ *Account for special occasions.* On Sunday mornings you might want to read Psalm 48, 63, 84, 92, 118, or John 20. On the Sabbath when the Lord’s Supper is to be administered, read Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Matthew 26, or part of John 6. Before you leave home for family vacations, gather your family in the living room and read Psalm 91 or Psalm 121.

♦ *Involve the family.* Every family member who can read should have a Bible to follow along. Set the tone by reading Scripture with expression, as the living, “breathing” book it is. Assign various portions to be read by your wife and your children. Teach your children how to read articulately and with expression. Don’t let them mumble or speed ahead. Teach them to read with reverence. Provide a brief word of explanation throughout the reading, according to the needs of the younger children.

♦ *Encourage private Bible reading and study.* Be sure that you and your children close the day with the Word of God. You might follow Robert Murray M'Cheyne's *Calendar for Bible Readings* so that your children read the Bible on their own once each year. Help each child build a personal library of Bible-based books.

## 2. For biblical instruction

♦ *Be plain in meaning.* Ask your children if they understand what you are reading. Be plain in applying scriptural texts. The 1647 Church of Scotland Directory provides counsel here:

The holy scriptures should be read ordinarily to the family; and it is commendable, that thereafter they confer, and by way of conference, make some good use of what hath been read and heard. As, for example, if any sin be reprov'd in the word read, use may be made thereof to make all the family circumspect and watchful against the same; or if any judgment be threatened or mentioned to have been inflicted, in that portion of scripture which is read, use may be made to make all the family fear lest the same or a worse judgment befall them, unless they beware of the sin that procured it: and finally, if any duty be required, or comfort held forth in a promise, use may be made to stir up themselves to employ Christ for strength to enable them for doing the commanded duty, and to apply the offered comfort. In all which the master of the family is to have the chief hand; and any member of the family may propose a question or doubt for resolution (par. III).

Encourage family dialogue around God's Word in line with the Hebraic procedure of household question and answer (cf. Ex. 12; Deut. 6; Ps. 78). Especially encourage teenagers to ask questions; draw them out. If you don't know the answers, tell them so, and encourage them to search for answers. Have one or more good commentaries on hand, such as those by John Calvin, Matthew Poole, and Matthew Henry. Remember, if you don't provide answers for your children, they will get them elsewhere—and often those will be wrong answers.

♦ *Be pure in doctrine.* Titus 2:7 says, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity." Don't abandon doctrinal precision when teaching young children; aim for simplicity and soundness.

♦ *Be relevant in application.* Don't be afraid to share your experiences when appropriate, but do that simply. Use concrete illustrations. Ideally, tie together biblical instruction with what you recently heard in sermons.

♦ *Be affectionate in manner.* Proverbs continually

uses the phrase "my son," showing the warmth, love, and urgency in the teachings of a God-fearing father. When you must administer the wounds of a father-friend to your children, do that with heartfelt love. Tell them you must convey the whole counsel of God because you can't bear the thought of spending eternity apart from them. My father often said to us, with tears: "Children, I cannot miss any of you in heaven." Tell your children: "We will allow you every privilege an open Bible will allow us to give you—but if we say no to you, you must know that flows out of our love." As Ryle said: "Love is one grand secret of successful training. Soul love is the soul of all love."

♦ *Require attention.* Proverbs 4:1 says, "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding." Fathers and mothers have important truths to convey. You must demand a hearing for God's truths in your home. That may involve repeated statements at the beginning like these: "Sit up, son, and look at me when I'm talking. We're talking about God's Word, and God deserves to be heard." Don't allow children to leave their seats during family worship.

---

***Tell them you must convey the whole counsel of God because you can't bear the thought of spending eternity apart from them.***

---

## 3. For praying

♦ *Be short.* With few exceptions, don't pray for more than five minutes. Tedious prayers do more harm than good.

Don't teach in your prayer; God doesn't need the instruction. Teach with your eyes open; pray with your eyes shut.

♦ *Be simple without being shallow.* Pray for things that your children know something about, but don't allow your prayers to become trivial. Don't reduce your prayers to self-centered, shallow petitions.

♦ *Be direct.* Spread your needs before God, plead your case, and ask for mercy. Name your teenagers and children and their needs one by one on a daily basis. That holds tremendous weight with them.

♦ *Be natural yet solemn.* Speak clearly and reverently. Don't use an unnatural, high-pitched voice or a monotone. Don't pray too loudly or softly, too fast or slow.

♦ *Be varied.* Don't pray the same thing every day; that becomes monotonous. Develop more variety in prayer by remembering and stressing the various ingredients of true prayer, such as:

*Invocation, adoration, and dependence.* Begin by mentioning one or two titles or attributes of God,

such as, "Gracious and holy Lord...." To that add a declaration of your desire to worship God and your dependence upon Him for His assistance in prayer. For example, say: "We bow humbly in Thy presence—Thou who art worthy to be worshiped, praying that our souls may be lifted up to Thee. Assist us by Thy Spirit. Help us to call upon Thy Name by Jesus Christ, in whom alone we can approach to Thee."

*Confession for family sins.* Confess the depravity of our nature, then actual sins—especially daily sins and family sins. Recognize the punishment we deserve at the hands of a holy God, and ask God to forgive all your sins for Christ's sake.

*Petition for family mercies.* Ask God to deliver us from sin and evil. You might say, "O Lord, forgive our sins through Thy Son. Subdue our iniquities by Thy Spirit. Deliver us from the natural darkness of our own minds and the corruption of our own hearts. Free us from the temptations to which we were exposed today."

Ask God for temporal and spiritual good. Pray for His provision for every need in daily life. Pray for spiritual blessings. Pray that your souls are prepared for eternity.

Remember family needs, and intercede for family friends. Remember to pray in all these petitions that God's will be done. But don't allow that subjection to God's will stop you from pleading with God. Plead with Him to hear your petitions. Plead for everyone in your family as they travel to eternity. Plead for them on the basis of God's mercy, His covenant relation with you, and upon the sacrifice of Christ.

*Thanksgiving as a family.* Thank the Lord for food and drink, providential mercies, spiritual opportunities, answered prayers, returned health, and deliverance from evil. Confess, "It is of Thy mercies that we are not consumed as family." Remember Question 116 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which says, "God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them."

*Conclusion.* Bless God for who He is and for what He has done. Ask that His kingdom, power, and glory be forever displayed. Then conclude with "Amen," which means "certainly it shall be so."

Matthew Henry said that the morning family worship is especially a time of praise and of petition for strength for the day and for divine benediction on its activities. The evening worship should focus on thankfulness, penitent reflections, and humble supplications for the night.

#### 4. For singing

♦ *Sing doctrinally pure songs.* There is no excuse for

singing doctrinal error no matter how attractive the tune might be.

♦ *Sing psalms first and foremost without neglecting sound hymns.* Remember that the Psalms, called by Calvin "an anatomy of all parts of the soul," are the richest gold mine of deep, living, experiential scriptural piety available to us still today.

♦ *Sing simple psalms, if you have young children.* In choosing Psalms to sing, look for songs that children can easily master, and songs of particular importance for them to know. Choose songs that express the spiritual needs of your children for repentance, faith, and renewal of heart and life; songs that reveal God's love for His people, and the love of Christ for the lambs of His flock; or that remind them of their covenant privileges and duty. The words should be simple and plain, and the tune easy to sing. For example, in *The Psalter* see No. 53, "The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want." The text is simple enough for any child who has learned to talk; there are only three words of more than two syllables (righteousness, overflows, forevermore). Words such as righteousness, goodness, and mercy should be pointed out and explained before hand. Don't forget to begin by telling the children that a shepherd is someone who takes care of the sheep he owns and loves! It is unwise to assume that such things are plain enough in themselves.

♦ *Sing heartily and with feeling.* As Colossians 3:23 says, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Meditate on the words you are singing. On occasion discuss a phrase that is sung.

#### **After Family Worship**

As you retire for the night, pray for God's blessing on family worship: "Lord, use the instruction to save our children and to cause them to grow in grace that they might put their hope in Thee. Use our praise of Thy name in song to endear Thy name, Thy Son, and Thy Spirit to their never-dying souls. Use our stammering prayers to bring our children to repentance. Lord Jesus Christ, breathe upon our family during this time of worship with Thy Word and Spirit. Make these life-giving times."

---

***"Lord Jesus Christ, breathe upon  
our family during this time of worship  
with Thy Word and Spirit. Make these  
life-giving times."***

---

## GUIDANCE FOR YOUTH

Rev. D. Lipsy

### Prayer and Meditation (1)

When I delivered an address on prayer and meditation at this past summer's HNRC Youth Camp, what caught my interest about this topic was not the topic itself, but rather how it connected with the overall theme of the camp, "Living life to the fullest: Alive in Christ in a Dying World." Two words in that title jumped out at me; two words the apostle Paul wrote over a hundred times in his letters; two words that make or break our spiritual life and that spell the difference between formal, mechanical prayer and meditation and vital, living, vibrant prayer and truly profitable, joyful meditation. The two words, of course, are "in Christ." Let's talk about this a moment and see where that takes us. Let's see how our relationship with Christ, if we have one, affects public and private prayer, meditation, and any potential benefits. So our topic should really be "Living Life to the Fullest: Prayer and Meditation *in Christ*."

What does it mean to be "in Christ"? What does it mean to pray in Christ? How about meditating in Christ?

#### ***In Christ***

Being *in Christ* means being *out of myself*. What does that mean? Because of our fallen nature, we have no other love but of ourselves. That wouldn't be so bad if we weren't bad. There was once a time when we were good, before the Fall. At that time, there wasn't any difference between what God willed and what we willed. But now, apart from His grace, our will is not in line with God's. It's not that our will veers off the right track once in a while. It's *opposite* of God's will, even when we're doing so-called good and lawful things. When we live outside of Christ, we do these things only inasmuch as they suit our needs and desires. We don't do them to God's glory or out of a desire to please Him. Therefore they are not truly good works when done that way. So to be "in Christ" means to be "out of myself."

The Bible talks much about this. Paul talks about "dying daily" (1Cor. 15:31), about mortifying the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13), and about putting off the old man and his deeds (Col. 3:9). Do you know anything like this in your life? I'm not talking about a little sprucing up, paring back a little on this or that particular sin. We're talking about renouncing ourselves, denouncing our own good-for-nothing righteousness. We're talking about loathing our sin-

ful self, mourning over it before the Lord. We're talking about a daily fight, a difficult fight, a prayerful fight. That's what I mean by being *out of myself*.

But when you read this, don't make the mistake many people do. When they read this expression of Paul they think, "This is step one—misery." This is where a person goes through a prolonged time of spiritual depression, self-condemnation, conviction, confession—misery. Then, after step one, God moves us, sooner or later, into step two which we call deliverance. Then sometime later we graduate to step three called thanksgiving. Paul was not aiming at unsaved people when he wrote about mortifying the deeds of the body and putting off the old man. He was writing to Christians, to believers at Corinth, Rome, and Colosse. He was telling them to put off the old man and to put on Jesus Christ. So this putting off, this mortal fight against sin isn't just something newly regenerated Christians contend with. All believers are commanded to continue this warfare.

There are some who seem very *out of themselves*—depressed and miserable almost all the time. But this isn't the same as being *in Christ*. We can be depressed, miserable with ourselves for lots of reasons—we don't get what we want, our idols get broken or thwarted. Lots of people have this, even religious people. They wish things were different. They wish they were different. They wish they were saved. They wish they were holy. But it doesn't get much beyond *wishing* and *waiting*. But that's not what the Scripture means by being *in Christ*.

Being *in Christ*, simply put, means being united to Jesus Christ by faith and consciously living out one's life looking to Him in every way. That's saying a lot in one sentence. Let's unpack that a little to see what living *in Christ* is all about.

First, let's be plain about one thing. Faith in Christ is a sovereign gift of God. We can't give faith to ourselves, can't just do it ourselves. I don't say this to discourage you from asking, for He has said, "Ask and ye shall receive." I don't say it to discourage you from knocking, for He has promised, "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." I don't say it to discourage you from seeking, for He's promised, "Seek and ye shall find." But I am telling you faith is God's gift so that when you do ask, knock, and seek you will know who is to receive all the glory and thanks for it.

What's being *in Christ* like? How does it go? No

one can pretend to give you an exact, one-way-fits-all description. I know some believers, for example, who were led deeply into a sense of their sins early on in their Christian experience and out of those depths began to look to Christ for salvation. I know others, myself included, who were led more gently at first, seeing more of the beauty and attractiveness of our dear Lord, more *drawn* to Him with love than *driven* to Him by God's law. But however the Lord leads us, there does grow in us a knowing and a feeling sense of our need for the Savior. As His Spirit works, we become increasingly weary with ourselves and our sinful ways. All true Christians learn that their problem is more than just this or that sin problem that I can't control. As time goes on, we learn that it's me that I can't control, that my *heart* is what's wrong and that this is why I want to and do sin.

But right along with this depreciation of ourselves, our ability, etc., the Lord progressively awakens in us both a need for and a love toward the Lord Jesus Christ. It's as hard for me to describe what the experience of that need and that love toward Christ feels like as it would be for you to describe for me what your experience of love for and dependence on someone else feels like. But we do need Him, and we do love Him. So we pray to Him. We reverently speak to Him in prayer. We take very seriously and reverently what He says to us in His Word. Over the years, we learn to trust ourselves less and trust Him more. We learn that our words don't have much value—His do. We learn to pray to Him more often, lean upon Him more heavily. We may not feel our love toward Him as much as when we're first saved, but over time we learn to trust His love more and rely on our feelings of love less.

Being in Christ means our hearts thrill with joy when we hear Him exalted in preaching or in singing. Being in Christ means our hearts ache with pain as we reflect on how we've sinned against Him again and again. We sometimes long to be done with this world of sin and this *me* of sin, and we learn a little of what Paul meant when he wrote, "Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ." In Christ means learning over and over again how wretched I am apart from Him, apart from His grace. It means learning more and more how much I need Him. It means learning how beautiful, faithful, unchanging He is; how trustworthy His promises; how merciful toward wretched me He is. It means experiencing that His grace never quits, His forgiveness never ends, even though I feel increasingly unworthy of it the longer I live. Living in Christ means I learn more about Him. I study Him—who He is, who He is for me, how to please Him. I speak to Him in prayers, in sighs, in longings. I listen to Him

as I read, as I hear the preaching of His Word. With Paul, I begin to say, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11). I crave to know Him better, be nearer to Him in my affections, follow Him will closer in my life.

Am I writing things you've experienced? Are you *in Christ*? You see, prayer and meditation take on a whole new meaning when a sinner, by God's grace, flees to Christ, repents before Christ, takes refuge in Christ, and abides in Christ. Just how does being in Christ affect my prayer life?

### **Praying in Christ**

Would you mind me asking you a personal question? What is praying like for you? I don't mean so much what you say or whether you kneel or stand. I mean things like, how do you *feel* about prayer? Do you *enjoy* praying? Look forward to it? Do you look at prayer more as a *privilege* or as a *duty*? As something you want to do or something you ought to do? Why do I ask?

Let's pretend I'm single and I'm courting a special young lady. You ask me how things are going.

"Great," is my response.

"How is she doing?" you ask.

"I don't really know."

"Don't really know? What do you talk about on the phone?"

"On the phone? We only spend about three minutes a day on the phone."

"Oh, so you must e-mail or chat online."

"Right, we do. But I only e-mail a sentence or two and chat for about a minute. I run out of things to say after that. In fact, I kind of keep in touch more out of duty than desire. But things are going fine between us. Thanks for asking."

Sounds pretty odd, right? Not exactly a promising relationship, is it? Yet how many times don't we kneel down for our three minutes or less a day, say our words, and soon either run out of words or desire or both? We find in us a desire to get up and move on to other things don't we? We say words we often don't really mean or even really think about. We find prayer more of a chore than something in which we delight. But now we're not talking about some special lady or man friend—we're talking about the living God. This is the God who with a mere word brought into being all that is, the One who knows everything, is all wise, has all might and power. Yet this tremendous, transcendent God opens His heart of love and forgiveness to lost sinners through the sacrifice and death of the

only Son He ever had. This is the God who says to enemies and rebels, "Come to Me." And do we find prayer to this God a chore? For some of you it's downright boring. Isn't that a shame? A tragedy and sin? He spared not His only Son, but we can't spare a few minutes, if even that, just to speak to Him. He created all, gives us so much more than others have, feeds us, clothes us, upholds us, gives us His perfect Word. We don't want to talk to Him. Can't be bothered with saying thanks. Nice relationship, right?

This is why *in Christ* means everything to our prayer life. *In Christ* doesn't just mean I know, I learned some facts about God. It means I am united to Him, I am *into* Him. Often, when Paul writes "in Christ" he uses the Greek pronoun meaning "into." He, of course, doesn't mean believers become part of the Deity. But there is an undeniable unity that happens by faith, a unity that Ephesians and Colossians describe as that which exists between the head and the body or between a bridegroom and his bride. Even though we remain sinners, we no longer stand as an adversary of our dear Lord, but now as a penitent lover of the Savior.

Let's bring things together—being *in Christ* and prayer. Prayer for the unbeliever is speaking to a stranger who we're not sure is even listening. Prayer for the believer is speaking to One we know and love and who we are assured hears us, though our assurance about this can waver. Prayer for the unbeliever feels sort of like walking in the darkness whereas prayer for the believer, if it is not always walking in the light, is at least a walking toward the light. This is sometimes hard to describe, or talk about. How can you describe *love*—deep love and a solid trust? What kind of words can you use to describe such things?

Being *in Christ* means I've more and more given up on myself and am looking and depending more and more on Him. It means we learn by experience to trust His Name, to trust His providential dealings with us even though we may not understand. It means we long to have a sense of His favor, His nearness, dread to go on in sin any more, and our prayers will reflect these things.

Being *in Christ*, in its simplest terms, means spiritual matters are our primary reality while temporal things become secondary. Not that we don't deal with many temporal things. But we begin to see everything in terms of spiritual realities—sin, God's favor, etc. Being *in Christ* means I pray alone knowing I'm not alone. It means praying, at times, without ardent feelings yet trusting He still hears me. It means praying, at times, *with* ardent feelings, knowing He hears. It means praying with His blood covering over all our petitions. Do you ever do that? Ever consciously men-

tion in your prayers His blood and righteousness along with each individual petition? Do you ever praise Him for what He did? Thank Him for what He did? Plead what He did? Glory in what He did?

When Jesus Christ is a reality in my life, there's life in my prayers. When He means a lot to me, then there's a lot of meaning in my prayers. When His favor means a lot to me, then my prayers will be about that. When He means a lot to me, we pray that He might be so to others too.

Let me give a word or two of advice about public prayer. By public prayer I mean *any* time we might pray in the presence of someone else, whether it's one or one hundred other people. There's such a temptation to pray for the people who are listening. I don't mean we should ignore them or their needs. But labor, mentally, to make contact with God in your public prayers. Don't settle for nice-sounding phrases. Don't settle for simply "covering the bases" as they say—that is, praying about all the appropriate topics. Better by far if you've been able to experience God's listening ear, to help another be lifted up in heavenly worship, even if you forget some things on the "list."

Prayers don't have to be long nor must they be short. Rather, they need to be appropriate for the occasion. I marvel how some people think they need to pray about everything that comes to mind each time they pray aloud. If you didn't know better, you'd think they were preaching instead of praying. Don't do that. If you're called upon to pray for a blessing on the meal, pray for a blessing on the meal. If you're leading family worship, then pray about that which is relevant to the lives of the family members. If our prayers sound canned or stale or stuffy to other's ears, imagine how they sound in God's. Never, ever be flippant or casual in your prayers, whether public or private. Whenever I hear that, I can't help but wonder to myself, "How can that individual personally know the God of the Bible, the great God of Scripture who awed and overwhelmed some of the holiest saints this world ever knew?"

The same thing should be said about posture. I realize the Bible teaches different postures in prayer—standing, kneeling, even prostrate on the ground. But don't slouch or be casual, whatever posture you're in. Show respect, even as you speak respectfully. It is God, after all, to whom we are addressing ourselves.

Next month, God willing, we'll look at meditation.

---

**Rev. D. Lipsy** is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Pompton Plains, New Jersey.



## The Gift

"I know I'm going to win a prize," Edward told his friends. "I studied very hard for this exam."

Nervous-looking students filled the classroom. Today was the big day when Mr. Howard would test his history students. His exams were rumored to be very difficult. Some students, like Edward, had studied hard, and felt prepared. Others, however, had not bothered to study, thinking they would never be able to pass such a difficult exam no matter how hard they studied.

In the front of the classroom was a long table covered with books. Some books were big and expensive-looking, while others were paperbacks of various sizes. There were Bibles and small New Testaments, and books about different periods in history. These were the prizes. The better the students did on their exam, the better their prize would be. The students looked at the books on the table, asking each other which book they were hoping to receive.

Edward noticed one book in particular. It was a beautiful book about Roman history. Edward loved this period in history, and had read many books about it. He would love to own this book! Then he could read it as often as he wished, and study the detailed drawings in its pages. He set his heart on getting that prize. Several times during the exam, his attention wandered, and he had to remind himself to do his work well or he would never win the prize.

The following week, Mr. Howard handed back the exams. Edward had done very well: he had gotten the highest grade in the class. Now he was certain he would get the best prize—the book about Roman history! But instead of receiving the book he had set his heart on, the teacher smilingly presented him with a beautiful

Bible. It was black with gold letters on it. Instead of being thankful, however, Edward's eyes filled with tears as he watched the teacher present the book about Roman history to the boy who had achieved the same grade as Edward. He would have loved to trade with him, but had sense enough to realize that would be rude.

Edward's parents sympathized with him. They did not understand why Mr. Howard thought a Bible was a more valuable prize than the book their son wanted. They told Edward they were proud of his success and hinted that perhaps on his birthday he might receive a nice gift, maybe a book about Roman history.

Edward's uncle was staying with the family for a few weeks while he recuperated from an illness. He was gentle and serious, and kind to Edward. Edward soon became very attached to Uncle Luke, and they spent a lot of time together.

At the moment Uncle Luke was seated under a fine old oak tree. The countryside made a lovely scene. In the distance lay the ocean, its deep green waters contrasting with the pale blue sky filled with thin white clouds. Uncle Luke held a book in his hand, and seemed to be engrossed in his reading. Edward approached hesitantly, not wishing to disturb his uncle, yet wanting to speak with him. When Uncle Luke looked up and noticed his nephew, he smiled and beckoned him to come.

"How are you feeling?" asked Edward politely.

"Fine," answered Uncle Luke. "I love to sit here and enjoy the view."

"What are you reading?" questioned Edward.

"It is a Bible, God's Word. I love to read the descriptions of nature."

"I like reading the Bible, too," said Edward, somewhat defensively. "I won a prize for memo-

rizing a lot of Bible verses last year."

"I'm glad to hear that," smiled Uncle Luke. "But what gave you greater satisfaction, the Bible verses or the prize you won?"

Edward looked uncomfortable and did not reply.

"It is good to be happy with a prize, since you earned it," explained Uncle Luke. "I understand you won a prize today for your good grade on your history exam."

"Yes, but it wasn't the prize I wanted," complained Edward. "There was a book I really, really wanted, but I didn't get it. It was the same value as the Bible I got."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, John got the same grade I did, and Mr. Howard gave him the history book. It just would have been better to give that book to me since I would have appreciated it more than John does. John doesn't even care that much about history."

"Do you already have your own Bible?" asked Uncle Luke.

"No, but I just use the Bible in the living room."

Uncle Luke paged through his Bible and pointed to Deuteronomy 6:6. "Start reading here."

Edward read: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deut. 6:6-9).

"To whom was this command given, Edward?"

"To the Israelites."

"Yes," said Uncle Luke. "but the

Word of God is as much binding on us as on them, in everything except the sacrifices and ceremonies."

"Are we commanded to write the Bible on our hands and on our doorposts?" asked Edward in surprise.

"No, my dear boy," replied Uncle Luke, "not literally. The Lord says in Isaiah 49:16, 'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.' This isn't to be taken literally, but it is a picture of God's love for His people. What this passage in Deuteronomy says to us is that we must have the Word of God continually on our minds. And how do you suppose we get our thoughts to be so occupied with the Bible?"

"By reading it, I guess," answered Edward grudgingly.

"By reading it often, and meditating on it much," said Uncle Luke. "Without prayer and meditation and the working of the Holy Spirit, we cannot obtain any spiritual blessing, much less obey the commands of Scripture. And without reading the Bible you will have little desire to pray. We are like people wandering in the dark, while the Bible is as a bright lamp held out to direct us in the only safe path. You cannot be a child of God if you do not do His will. You cannot do His will unless you know it, and it is by the Bible that God is pleased to communicate that knowledge. Do you begin to see, Edward, that the Bible is more valuable than even that wonderful history book?"

"Yes, I do," replied Edward, "but the Bible is such a solemn book, and if I read it all the time, I will never be happy."

"There is no happiness among the lost, Edward," replied Uncle Luke. "It would be dreadful if you were to neglect your soul and the salvation that is to be found in God's Word. Besides, it is not true

at all that those who read the Bible are unhappy. It is exactly the opposite: those who love God's Word are very happy! I know people who were sad before they started to read the Bible, and have become cheerful and happy by studying it. Never in my life have I known a person who was sorry that he started studying the Bible."

Edward thought for a moment, and then said, "I remember one of the Bible verses I learned. 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her' (Prov. 3:17-18). I think the woman represents wisdom."

"That's right, Wisdom is the Lord Jesus Christ," explained Uncle Luke. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places' (Isa. 32:17-18). 'And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away' (Isa. 35:10). Does this sound gloomy to you?"

"Not at all. I often wondered why you would want to read the Bible when you were feeling sick, Uncle Luke. I thought it would be better to read something else, because I thought the Bible would make you feel sad."

"How can I feel sad when the Bible tells me that all these things are working together for my spiritual good (Rom. 8:28)? The Bible tells me that God, 'who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' (Rom. 8:32). When I think of what I deserve because of my sins, and see the Lamb of God bearing the chastisement that should fall on

me, how can I be sad? When I feel that the Holy Spirit is bringing these things to my remembrance, and enabling me to love the Lord Jesus who has done so much for me, shouldn't I rejoice? I do grieve, though, Edward, because of my many offenses against God, but I am assured that Christ's blood cleanses me from all sin, and that in Him I have a powerful Advocate with the Father. After I die, my body will return to dust, but I will enter into the presence of my Redeemer and rejoice there forever."

Edward looked at his uncle. His eyes were shining with tears, but they were tears of joy. His happiness was obvious, and for the first time in his life, Edward felt a twinge of jealousy toward God's children.

"Uncle Luke," he said. "It is wrong of me not to want to read the Bible. I see now why it is more valuable than that history book. I didn't like it when the Bible talks about sin and its consequences. But I see now how important it is to read it every day. Could we read it together every day, Uncle Luke?"

"I would be delighted," smiled the man happily. "And we will pray together that the Holy Spirit blesses our reading."

So every day, when Edward came home from school, he ran to find his uncle sitting under the beautiful oak tree, and together they read from the gift Bible that Edward had earned. Through God's grace and the working of the blessed Spirit, Edward received a gift he had not earned—the salvation of his soul. He learned about the sinfulness of his own nature and his utter inability to save himself (and this made him sad), but he also learned the joy that the forgiveness of sin gives (and this made him very, very happy).

*Adapted from Choice Readings for the Home Circle, by Martin A. Vroman*

—Diana Kleyn