

Book Title: An Unexpected Journey (Discovering Reformed Christianity)

Author: W. Robert Godfrey

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Reviewer: Pastor Cheah Fook Meng

This is an unexpected book. Robert Godfrey is a scholar, a theologian, a distinguished professor in History at Westminster Theological Seminary California. But here in this book of just about 150 pages, he tells us about his high school and college spiritual experience.

The greatest discovery, he tells us, during those youthful days was his encounter with the Reformed faith. In this book, he calls that discovery “an unexpected journey”.

The journey started with a new found friend in the neighbourhood who attended the Christian Reformed Church. Dr Godfrey was then a Methodist. They had a common interest in reading, politics and other matters. But their conversations were especially engaging when they talked about religion. It was through this Christian Reformed friend that Dr Godfrey first knew something about the sovereignty of God.

The next step was to discover this doctrine and truth. Dr Godfrey started reading, and visiting the friend’s worship on the Lord’s Day. There were no contemporary worship, bands, solo items, etc. But the worship was nevertheless a new experience for Dr Godfrey. The psalms were sung, the preaching was systematic, the truths were profound, the catechisms were referred to, etc. Unlike the Methodist church, families trained their children to be still in worship to listen to the preaching. Gradually his interest in the Reformed faith grew. He became a member, struggled with God’s will about the ministry, and eventually took a doctorate to mature his understanding of this wonderful theology.

But this book is not just about his personal journey. Readers will also unexpectedly find in this book an introduction to Reformed theology and worship. In between his testimony, Dr Godfrey opens up the new truths that he discovered. He writes about what Calvinism is. He said, “I believe that one particular part of Calvinism’s message that appealed to me. It was the teaching of a great and sovereign God who was truly in charge of all things.” He writes about what true worship ought to be: “We must see public worship as essentially the meeting of God with his covenant people. Worship is not primarily about evangelism, teaching, or entertainment. It is not primarily a time of human fellowship. It is a time for the congregation as a community to meet with God.”

The last chapter of the book is titled “Passion” appropriately. Here Dr Godfrey tells us what puts fire into his soul. He tells us that the Reformed emphasis of Psalm singing has given him a new passion. He takes Psalm 66 as an example. In this Psalm, the writer celebrates the sovereignty of God. And the psalms are full of such celebrations. He writes, “As Calvinists, we find the sovereignty of our God empowering and energizing. All reality is his, and so we may participate in service and study in relation to any aspect of God’s creation. We do not seek isolation or shelter from the life of this world; rather, we seek to honor God by showing his purpose for and claim over all spheres of life.”