

SALT

JOEL 3:16 MATT 5:16

SHAKERS

"Having a special needs child is one of those unique trials that presses out joy through pain... Joy comes too as we learn over and over again that God is faithful to His promise to bless those that care for others and that it is more blessed to give than to receive."

- *Special In Every Way*

"We have the assurance and confidence that our Father will always provide for us."

- *Work Ethics: True Riches*

"Our help has to come from a deep-rooted love and concern for our friend or family member, a love that is based on the very love that Christ showed us when He died on the cross for our sins."

- *In Darkest Day and Blackest Night (II)*



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Chairman's Note

Dear readers,

With another issue of *Salt Shakers* comes two announcements.

First, the *Salt Shakers* staff has been discussing the possibility of going fully digital with our magazine, distributing only a PDF version of our magazine. Although much literature has been made available online, we understand there are some readers who prefer to read hardcopies. Your feedback, whether you prefer online or hardcopies, will be greatly appreciated!

Second, as said at the beginning of this year, *Salt Shakers* would publish four regular issues and one issue commemorating our 10th anniversary. DV, we will revert back to six issues, where you may digest edifying content on a more-frequent basis!

As COVID-19's grip weakens in Singapore, and normalcy seems to be returning soon, let's not return to a busy, frantic life that forgets the meditations of God's Word day and night. A spread of articles examining and applying God's Word awaits. Read, and pass the salt!

In Christ,
Yang Zhi

Salt Shakers is a bi-monthly Reformed magazine published by Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. In each issue, we strive to bring readers quality articles discussing Reformed doctrine as well as practical theology and Reformed viewpoints on recent issues.

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God, Our Goodly Heritage (2)



Lim Yang Zhi
Salt Shakers chairman

In the last editorial, we established that the single confession of *Salt Shakers* is that God is our heritage. That God is our heritage means that He is our God. As our God, He has redeemed us from our sins and brought us into His fellowship to live for Him. That salvation is our heritage. To know, to believe and to live in thankfulness for that salvation is our heritage. God, God, is our heritage.

Hence, doctrine, *doctrine*, is our heritage as well. Because true doctrine is the complete teaching of God's Word; because through doctrine, God teaches us who He is and what He has done for us in Christ; because upon doctrine, God established traditions for CERC to uphold; doctrine, *doctrine*, is our heritage.

God is our heritage – *Salt Shakers* exists for to maintain that heritage in CERC.

To uphold, maintain, and stand fast in our heritage is grueling. David did not make his confession in an easy life. No: David made his confession, starting like this: *Preserve me, O LORD (Ps. 16:1)! Preserve me, because I am afflicted!*

That prayer is a prayer that God strengthens David. That prayer is a prayer that God strengthens David *through* the afflictions God sends to David. David does not specify what that affliction was; nevertheless, we can be sure, David was afflicted.

So was CERC. God never withheld afflictions from CERC. Right from the start of our history, we faced trouble in the release of our first minister. Add to that the death of another pastor in 2005, and the release of yet another in 2012. There was sorrow in all these experiences, because God established the office of a minister to care for His flock. Yet, our good God repeatedly took away men from that office.

Then the years of learning the Reformed faith led to the painful split of the ERCS over divorce and remarriage. It was a necessary split, as the doctrine at stake was not just that of marriage. The question splitting the denomination had been, "Can anything besides death break the marriage bond?" Soon after the

split, the question for CERC became, "Is God's covenant breakable?" To both questions, our answer from God's Word was, and still is, NO!

That answer came with a cost – the loss of a denomination, a sister-church, and members, with whom we had once stood together as the salt and light of this earth. With this controversy, all of that was not to be – great sorrow!

Through our years, as we grew in our understanding of the truth, we faced criticism for our narrow stand for the truth. Statements like, "You talk too much about doctrine", or, "You talk too much about what's wrong with the doctrine of other churches" have been heard. Offence was taken by our biblical desire to hold fast to the truth.

Such were the afflictions of the past. What afflictions surround CERC now? Presently, our church faces no controversy. And though we are vacant, we did not become so through death or a release. Presently, our church is afflicted with serious temptations.

There are present temptations regarding against the truths for which we stand – divorce, marriage and more. There is the temptation, as briefly mentioned in the last editorial, of holding the truth with hearts far away from God (Is. 29:13) – hearts that know the truth but refuse to walk in it in some way. There is the temptation of avoiding doctrinal controversy (whether in fear or disinterest), because Satan tempts the church to think, after all the sorrow, grief, and trouble a controversy brings, there is no worth to debate and argue about those doctrines. There is the temptation of not learning, discussing, and searching the truths of God's Word with one another, because we forget these truths form the unmovable foundation of our Christian lives.

There is the temptation, for us members, to be disunited with our office-bearers, even to disregard or minimise their work. After all, we have had so much trouble with office-bearers through our history. We can't possibly have a lively, submissive relationship with our office-bearers, can we? There is the temptation among men, especially those of the second generation, to fear the

office. After all, our session has had to weather so much trouble throughout our church's history. What makes us think we are up to the task? There is the temptation to make a golden calf out of a minister. After all, our session is so busy – they can't help us with this problem, that concern, or those conflicts. Let's just wait for another minister to bring back some peace in our church.

At the root of all these temptations is sin. To sin against our inheritance, our lot, our cup, and our goodly heritage, is the ongoing temptation in CERC. Do you and I not see how grievous it is, when you and I fall into any of the above temptations?

And make no mistake: we have fallen. We have neglected the truth. We have striven bitterly with our leaders and one another. These temptations, beloved readers, are our present afflictions. I am sure no one is so oblivious to think our church is "all good". Troubles brew!

That brings Daniel's prayer in Babylon close to home, doesn't it? *O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him...we have sinned* (Dan. 9:4-5)! Daniel, knowing Israel's sins, went to God in prayer.

David, knowing his afflictions, went to God in prayer.

What shall be our prayer to God?

Turn to David once more. *Preserve me!*

No, David was not asking for mere, continued existence on this earth. David knew that life was far more than what he saw, smelt, tasted, heard and felt. David knew that life for the child of God is a life led along the *path of life* to God's presence, where the fullness of salvation's joy abides (Ps. 16:10-11).

In his prayer, David sought the LORD to strengthen his love and delight in the LORD, David's goodly heritage. To David, to *set the Lord before himself* always was most important (v. 8). To David, to love and delight in God was most important, because God, the God of his salvation, was his precious heritage. To be delivered from his affliction was not important. To be at ease all his life was not important. But to know God through all these afflictions was more than life – that was important. To know God in Jesus Christ was *eternal life!*

What has been most important to us through our doctrinal controversy over divorce and remarriage? Has it been most important to grow in our love for God

who never breaks his covenant, as pictured in marriage? To grow in that love is to grow in our knowledge of God's teaching of marriage – has that growth been our priority? To grow in that love is also to grow in walking in that knowledge – to be a leading husband, a submissive wife, godly parents, obedient children, maturing teens, wise grandparents and faithful church-members. To grow as such – has that been our priority?

Has it been most important to take that grand truth of God's unconditional covenant, and search its depths? To study the depths of Scripture regarding marriage, family-life, missions, singlehood, friendships and church-life; to study Scripture through reading Christian literature, listening to sermons, holding meals and discussions about the Word with others – has such study of Scripture been most important?

What has been most important to us through our loss of ministers? Has it been important to humble ourselves before God, confessing with Daniel that all men are weak? Has it been important to grow in our trust in God for the defense and preservation of this church? Trusting in God, has it been important to be of the same mind with our leaders *in the Lord*, so that we may stand fast in this ungodly world (Phil. 4:1)? Fellow young men, has it been important to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of our first-generation leaders, so that we grow in their strengths, learn from their flaws, and equip ourselves for the office in due time?

Has it been important to you, dear readers in CERC, to *pray*?

In seeking to know God as his goodly heritage all the days of his tumultuous, grief-stricken life, David prayed. David knew that to know God was not first of all an act of his power, will, and desire – if it were so, David would not have prayed. David knew that to know God was not first of all an individual effort in times of affliction to discipline himself in reading, meditating and memorising the Scriptures – if it were so, he would not have prayed. David, having fallen into temptation, knew that to know God was not about him first being able to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength – if it were so, David would not have prayed.

David knew that to know God was first of all the work of God, his goodly heritage – the sanctifying work of turning his sin-cursed heart into a heart for God all through his life. David knew that, even though he so desired to know God, any hope of knowing God rested not on David himself. All hope of knowing and experiencing the goodness of God, his goodly heritage,

is in God himself.

My brothers and sisters, in the present troubles of CERC, have we prayed? Take a glimpse at our church, and we see all too clearly how we have failed to grow in our love for God, even after coming out of a controversy that taught us more about God. But don't just look at the failures. Look to God and cry, "Preserve us, O LORD!"

So, where does *Salt Shakers* fit in all that has been said?

As said in the previous editorial, *Salt Shakers* must maintain this heritage. *Salt Shakers* must encourage and exhort CERC to love God, and truths of God's Word that make up her heritage. *Salt Shakers* must sound out the temptations besetting our church (those listed above, and more); *Salt Shakers* must not be afraid to sound out where our church has fallen.

Will you maintain that heritage with us?

Will you maintain that heritage with us by reading our articles? Will you maintain that heritage with us by encouraging those who have written to keep it up?

Perhaps the Lord would ultimately lead you to write an article for us. Will you maintain our heritage in that way as well?

Will you maintain that heritage with us by discussing what has been written? Walking in the Word explained in those articles? Searching more into that Word? Reading other articles about that Word? Calling on God to sanctify you? Delighting in that Word?

Praying for the staff, that God continue to use us to strengthen our love for Him, our goodly heritage?

Salt Shakers is for you, CERC. Read, and confess with us: "The LORD is our goodly heritage".

Lessons from God's Letters to the Churches (1)



Prof. Herman Hanko

Emeritus professor of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA and frequent contributor to *Salt Shakers* since its inception.

The staff of *Salt Shakers* has agreed to a series of articles on the seven churches located in the province of Asia in the larger land called Asia Minor. These letters were directly inspired by God and the churches to which they were written were chosen by God. Because these letters were infallibly inspired by God, they were understood by the church to be written to the entire New Testament Church and therefore included in the sacred Scriptures. It would be well if at this point you would consult the map of Paul's missionary journey to find these seven cities. They are all located in the western part of Asia Minor, the whole of which is now called Turkey. They are clustered around Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia. In Acts 19:9-10 we are told that Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus for two years, by which instruction the Word of God spread through all the province of Asia. Apparently, the church was established in Ephesus, and that church sent out men to preach the gospel throughout the entire province. This work resulted in the establishment of the six churches to whom Christ sent these letters, other than Ephesus

itself, to which the first letter of Christ was directed.

The letters are extremely important to the church today, and we must pay close attention to them. These seven churches represent the whole church of Christ here on earth. They represent this church that is the true church, not the false church. The true church is the church in which the Scriptures are faithfully preached, the sacraments are administered according to the command of Christ, and Christian discipline is exercised properly. It is the church militant called to fight a spiritual warfare against its enemies. It is the church bought with the blood of Christ. It is the church victorious and triumphant, but still on the battlefield. It is the church that testifies of Christ and is God's means of gathering His elect. It will someday all be in heaven with Christ its Head.

But it is on earth and therefore is not always perfect according to the Scriptures. It has weaknesses from which it is called to repent. These weaknesses are very

dangerous. They, unless confessed and forsaken, will eventually make her the false church. The Lord pictures this church in the last verses of chapter 1, verses 12-20 as a candlestick with seven branches. This candlestick has seven arms and Christ is in her midst. The Lord repeatedly warns in these letters that, unless the church repents, its place in the candlestick will be taken away.

For more on the figure of a candlestick, read Zechariah 4 where the same figure is used. In Revelation 1 there is also a star among the seven branches of the candlestick. The star represents the “angel” of each church. The angel is its pastor. Special attention is called to the minister and each letter directed to him, not to bypass the congregation. Rather, because the primary figure in maintaining the truth and righteousness of the congregation rests in him, he must bring the Scriptures complete as the “whole counsel of God”. Preaching is the lifeblood of the church. For by the preaching of the truth, Christ Himself is in the congregation.

The letters therefore point out both the strength and the weaknesses of the church here on earth. In only two congregations is there no word of admonishment: Philadelphia and Smyrna. Five churches have weaknesses and Laodicea has such serious weaknesses that it is ready to become the false church. Laodicea stands at the end of the 7 churches, because all the

weaknesses are so serious that, if they are not confessed and taken away, every church will in time become Laodicea.

Generally speaking, Christ points out the chief weakness in a congregation, which is really the cause of other weaknesses; and in each case these weaknesses, taken together, can be found in the church here on earth, sometimes more than one weakness.

The power of these letters for you and me is, therefore that when we study each letter, we examine ourselves and our congregation to learn whether the weakness or sin Christ mentions is directed to us. Don't forget: each letter is Christ's letter to us! To Thyatira, of course, but to us as well – and to the whole church of Christ. We must hear these letters read and explained, and we must sincerely and honestly ask ourselves the question: Is Christ speaking to me? You will find that He is! You will find that Christ's commendation of most of the churches are true of our church, and we will rejoice in the approval of our King. But you will also find that the reproofs made to five of the seven churches are sharp and pierce our hearts. If we take them seriously, as we ought, they will bring us to our knees in humble repentance. And you will also find that the punishments of impenitence are awful, while the blessedness that comes to the faithful are wonderful beyond compare.

Teleios¹ Academy (2): Reading and Writing



Cheryl Lim
Member of CERC and *Salt Shakers* staff

Letters Room | Master Self-Discipline

From the previous issue... 'You will begin your journey of maturity in this Academy', Headmaster Alexios introduced as he walked. 'Each of these rooms', he said, sweeping his arm out in a wide arc, 'offers a different means of growth, which our good King gives his citizens.'

The second room smelled distinctly of papyrus and ink to Galen. Sure enough, as he stepped in, he saw that it was filled with students reading and writing at their

desks. They all sat facing a wide shelf that ran along the entire length of one of the walls in the room. Upon this shelf were rows and rows of neatly-organised parchment scrolls.

A reverential, meditative silence enveloped the room, barely interrupted by the occasional footsteps of a student walking over to the shelf to return or retrieve

¹Thayer's Definition: That which is perfect; of men – full grown, adult, of full age, mature.

a scroll.

The Headmaster quietly led the children to the back of the room, where Master Self-Discipline – a lean, bespectacled man – sat at a desk littered with parchments. Master Self-Discipline had a pensive, faraway look on his face, completely oblivious to his approaching company. So deep in thought was he that he jumped when the Headmaster lightly rapped on his desk.

‘Oh! Sorry Headmaster, I was just pondering another one of the great sayings in our King’s letters’, he explained, slightly abashed.

The Headmaster waved his apology aside. ‘It is us who have interrupted your excellent exercise.’

‘Aha, newcomers’, observed Master Self-Discipline, squinting at the youths through his glasses.

‘Yes, these are Niko and Galen. They have come to learn more about this room.’

‘The pleasure is mine!’ Master Self-Discipline replied, eyes sparkling.

Coming around from behind his desk, Master Self-Discipline introduced, ‘This room we are in, teaches and cultivates the spiritual disciplines of reading and writing letters. And mind you, children, these are no ordinary letters. The parchments on those shelves’, his voice dropping to a whisper of suppressed excitement, ‘are letters from our King himself!’

The children’s eyes widened in disbelief. ‘The very words of our King?’ Niko marvelled.

‘Yes, the letters themselves testify of this truth’, Master Self-Discipline assured.

‘In these writings’, he went on, ‘our King reveals himself to us so that we may know him and his mighty works. They tell us all that is necessary for our journey here, until we are called to his side. They teach us how he will have us live and order our lives in his Kingdom.’

‘These letters speak to us in every circumstance. They encourage and build up, direct and instruct, admonish and reprove, comfort and soothe’ Master Self-Discipline explained. ‘The King’s word is also, you know, our weapon against the Enemy. Our King himself used it too!’

‘And that is not all’, Master Self-Discipline went on passionately. ‘In this room, you may also write to our King, as you see some of them do now.’

‘Wr-write to our King?’ Galen was incredulous.

‘That’s right’, Master Self-Discipline replied. ‘It is the chief means of expressing our gratitude to our King for his goodness to us. Reading and writing, we walk close to him. We have communion and fellowship with him, as it were.’

‘How delightful!’ Niko exclaimed. Niko had been ecstatic when she first received the King’s summon to Teleios Academy. To think she could now write to thank him for such favour. She had almost started composing her letter when Master Self-Discipline interrupted her thoughts.

‘Sadly though, not all our students feel the same delight. Look out there’, he pointed towards a window on the side of the room. ‘See the groups of people frolicking in the garden? Many of them, despite their years in the Academy, have hardly ever stepped into this room. And so, they miss out on these important activities in one’s journey of maturity.’

Master Self-Discipline sighed. ‘Reading and writing – ‘tis hard work, it surely is. It is exercise! Without the grace of our King to mould our discipline, we would all certainly be pleasure-making instead.’

At that moment, a melodious chime sounded in the distance, the signal for the students to move on to a different class. Thanking Master Self-Discipline for his time, the trio filed out of the Letters Room with the other students.

For a few moments, they stood in the middle of the dome watching students leaving and entering the

various rooms. As Galen observed, a certain curiosity came over him.

'Umm... Headmaster Sir?', he ventured.

'Yes, my child, what is it?' the Headmaster asked.

'Well, I see that there are a good many young boys and girls as us here. But I see also a great many aged and gray-headed students. Have they not completed their course?' Galen queried.

Headmaster Alexios smiled. 'There is no graduating from Teleios Academy, Galen. For we do not attain perfection until we are called home to the King's side. Keep this in your hearts children, and never think yourselves too good for these rooms, as we are prone to.'

Galen and Niko nodded solemnly.

'Come now, there is more to see yet', said the Headmaster, starting off towards the third room.

"Just Friends"



Cassia Lee
Member of CERC

One of the most controversial questions about an opposite gender friendship is: can a man and a woman ever really just be friends? If a man and a woman are friendly enough and like enough things about each other, then why can't they just date? What prevents them from getting romantically involved with each other?

A typical romantic relationship usually starts out with both parties as friends and later transitioning into something more upon mutual agreement. But what happens if this friendship stays as it is and neither party is interested in becoming more than "just friends"? Some of us are familiar with the term "friendzone". Others might recognize it as platonic friendship. Regardless of terminology, is there place in a Christian's life for opposite gender friendships?

Proverbs 4:23: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life". Let us take heed to God's holy, inspired and infallible Word as we explore what it means to have opposite gender friendships amongst fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Multiple kinds of friendships exist between a man and a woman. They are listed below as follows:

1. A single woman and a single man.

2. A single woman and a married man.
3. A married woman and a single man.
4. A married woman and a married man.

In this article, only the first option will be covered – friendship between a single man and a single woman. For the married, seeking *improper*, *inappropriate* friendship with someone of the opposite gender outside of marriage will only bring doubt, grief and sorrow. In other words, trouble! Therefore husbands, love your wives just as Christ loves His Church; and wives, submit to your husbands even as the Church submits to Christ. Married people, stay out of trouble! For the singles, do not go looking for trouble. Rather, exercise wisdom and discretion as you seek to be a good friend to each other.

Humans long for companionship. Be it in marriage or friendship, this longing is perfectly normal and it is a part of our human nature. God understood the needs of Adam, therefore creating Eve as a helpmeet for him. God understands our needs as well! He does that by giving and establishing good, godly Christian friendships in church. Everyone has a tendency to form friendships with others who are similar to them. As children, finding friends is straightforward and easy. Progressing into adulthood, forming friendships is no longer a simple task. We may also find that our circle of friends gets smaller as we age. This may be due to various

reasons such as differences in personality, more young adults marrying off and starting families, jam-packed schedules of the young working adults, etc. No matter the reason, this is a fact that will not change. Hence, some may find themselves with a large circle of friends, or some may find themselves with a small circle of *close-knitted* friends. There is no reason to feel ashamed of the number of friends we have. Whether you are someone with many friends or whether you are someone with few friends, God gives and takes away friends in His own good timing. For those struggling with loneliness, find contentment and peace in Jesus Christ, the True Friend.

In His providence, God may provide a friend to you. At first glance, this friend may be someone who shares many common interests with you. As time passes and as this friendship grows, this friend may become someone to whom you share your personal struggles with. A friend who understands. A friend who is able to offer wise, godly counsel. For some, this friend may be someone of the same gender. For others, this friend may be someone of the opposite gender. For the latter scenario, you might be wondering: What is the big deal with having a close friend of the opposite gender? Well, it is a big deal. It becomes a big deal when intentions are not clearly defined and proper boundaries are not carefully put in place.

As with all friendships, God has to be centre of it all. This means re-evaluating our friendships every now and then.

Dear reader, this article is not written to discourage opposite gender friendships. In fact, we are to continue in brotherly love and show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

As with all friendships, God has to be the centre of it all. But especially for platonic friendships, this means re-evaluating our friendships every now and then. This means denying ourselves and fleeing to the cross when we sin in our friendships. This means fully submitting to His will for us in our friendships. Here are 3 questions for us to consider:

1. What are some of the possible risks this friendship might face?
2. What kind of essential and loving boundaries must we implement?
3. Is God glorified throughout this friendship?

The possible risks

First, every platonic friendship risks unreciprocated feelings. Party A can have completely innocent or friendly intentions but Party B falls in love. This may happen to a married person and forging such friendships between a married person and anyone other than their spouse signals danger and must end immediately.

But even among single people, the dangers are significant. An opposite gender friendship always brings the possibility for awkwardness, conflict and heartache. Someone may think, "Is this *going* somewhere?" while the other person does not. This is known as the "friend zone", and it is very easy for the old man of sin to desire

an exciting and heated friendship. In fact, that heat is caused by motivations of moving in opposite directions. Whether or not we are the ones desiring or the ones being desired, we have to be honest with ourselves. Do we both *really* want the same thing from this friendship? If we ignore this question, someone will eventually suffer the consequence of heartache.

Second, an opposite gender friendship risks sexual temptation. If we blindly wander into an opposite

gender friendship naively thinking that it is no different from same-gender friendship, we are dangerously mistaken. They are very different. God created man and woman as sexual beings. He created man and woman with different sex drives. Study after study shows that men's sex drives are not only stronger than women's, but much more straightforward. What a woman sees in a man may not be what he sees in a her. Patterns of one-on-one intimacy between persons of the opposite sex *naturally* sows the seed of intimacy that leads to romance.

When questioned, do we say things like: 'We are not fooling around, there is nothing to worry about. We are just friends, nothing more, nothing less'? Beloved, this is the wrong attitude. The tragedy of fornication almost always occurs suddenly, unknowingly.

Solomon writes, "A wicked man . . . forwardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually, he soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy" (Pro. 6:12, 14-15).

Before we "*suddenly shall be broken without remedy*", the question we must honestly and consistently ask ourselves is: "Does our friendship have the potential to ignite the fire of sexual immorality?" Dear reader, be warned. Reject all forms of sexual temptation and let us not be slack concerning this.

Third, opposite gender friendships risk undermining potential relationships with others. When a fellow brother or sister desires to be in a relationship with someone in an opposite gender friendship, asking her/him out may be complicated. Questions such as: "Are the two of them already in a relationship? How am I to approach her/him if he/she is constantly by her/his side? Is he/she romantically interested in her/him?" may arise in the minds of the ones desiring a relationship. Therefore, he/she might be hesitant in approaching the one whom they desire to be in a relationship with.

While this may not be wrong per se, what kind of impression are we setting for that fellow brother or sister? Are we causing that fellow brother/sister to fall into the sin of jealousy? Will we continue to be selfish

and ignore the feelings and confusion of that particular brother/sister? To sum it up, in our opposite gender friendship, are we being a stumbling block to others? There is much wisdom to be exercised in this regard.

As the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth".

Let us build one another up in love and charity, always seeking the good of our neighbour.

So, can a man and woman ever just be friends? We will explore more on that in the next article, DV.

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Work Ethics: True Riches



Celina Ho
Member of CERC

As more young adults enter the workforce, the temptation of a materialistic thinking grows more apparent and stronger for our young adults. This article hopes to address this thinking and shows how we may have fallen into this temptation in the present day. This will be the last of three articles concerning a Reformed work-ethic, aimed towards the young adults who have been in the work-force for some years, and young people who are nearing the end of their education.

Growing up, I was often asked these questions: “What’s your ambition? What do you want to be when you grow up?” There were definitely some “model” occupations that would cause the adults to beam from ear to ear when they heard my answers. Coincidentally or not, these occupations tend to be those that are very well paid and hence are deemed prestigious or “model” career options. Don’t get me wrong, there’s nothing wrong with these career options; what’s wrong, was the over-emphasis and focus on the size of the pay cheques because the follow up response from these adults would be “Wow that’s good, next time can earn a lot of money!”, rather than the merits of the occupation itself.

Worldly Riches

Our meritocratic education system has caused us to feel a constant need to stand out, to do well. We might start to feel that we are being defined by our qualifications, our achievements and that more is always better. Some of us may end up mindlessly chasing achievements and worldly status; sometimes working over-time or taking on many projects in order to stand out so that we might be considered for a promotion or larger bonuses. For me, being a financial consultant, weekends are the best time for me to meet my clients as most of them would be busy with work during the weekdays. I would be lying if I said that I wasn’t tempted to work on Sundays so that I could meet more clients and earn more. Thankfully

though for me, God has put Christian mentors and colleagues in the workplace who showed me through their godly examples that it is still entirely possible to still fulfil my calling within a 6-day work week.

Let’s also look at Singapore’s work environment.

Meritocracy does not exist only in education but also in our workplaces. The focus on productivity and KPIs are a real and tangible threat to our livelihood if we fall short compared to our peers, as most companies also have a peer-review system when bosses are contemplating who to give a bigger pay cheques to, or who to fire during downsizing exercises, like what’s happening now in corporations globally during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a major side effect, excessive comparison of ourselves against our peers may also cause us to be discontented with whatever that God has given us and hence presenting the temptation to chase the bigger pay cheques to acquire more earthly possessions. Many also have the tendency to job hop purely based on salary considerations. Unconsciously or worse, consciously, many of us end up making an idol out of earthly achievements and riches. This makes us no different from what we read in biblical warnings of the destruction of the heathen who worshipped idols made of wood and stone, silver and gold (the Egyptians in Deut. 29:17, and the world in the end times Rev. 9:20).

Apart from productive workers, bosses also generally favour employees who are well-liked and influential among their co-workers. As such we might also feel pressured to join our co-workers during their after-work drinking sessions. Often, one session leads to another and over-time we might end up making this a daily affair, leading to us succumbing to the vice of alcoholism, or even prioritising our social life much higher over our church life and personal time with God, or worse – both of these actions.

These thoughts and actions, if we dig deeper, exposes the sin and discontent in our hearts, ultimately revealing our rebellion towards God and hijacking what He has given us for ourselves, instead of obeying God's commands and using it for His kingdom.

True Riches

As Christians, we should never forget that our reward is in heaven, Christ gave us True Riches when He gave us our salvation, the only riches we need.

While still on earth though, God blesses us with material things through the means of our earthly labours, allowing us to provide for our families. However, sometimes, material wealth may cause us to forget our need to rely on God, the source of our daily bread. Material wealth may also cause us to become over confident in our own abilities, forgetting that our ability and motivation to labour all comes from God since we are all sinful and lazy creatures by nature. Worldly riches may bring us momentary enjoyment, but it does not guarantee nor contribute to our salvation. Worldly riches cannot offer us peace and quietness in our hearts and soul as well. On Judgement day, God doesn't differentiate His elect based on how wealthy they were during their earthly sojourn (Pro. 11:4). All worldly riches are temporal, but spiritual riches are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). As we busy ourselves with the things of this world, we tend to forget that the elect are spiritually rich because Christ had paid the most "expensive" price in exchange for the assurance of our salvation.

True riches also comes in the form of being at peace with God our heavenly Father. Amidst all the hustle and bustle at the workplace, the child of God is comforted knowing that all things are in the sovereign control of our God. No matter what trials and difficulties we may face at work or in our daily lives, we have the assurance and confidence that our Father will always provide for us (Matt. 6:26). Our confidence lies not in our own capabilities, but in God alone.

Personally, I am self-employed, and my income is fully dependent on how much sales I bring in for the month. Are there times that I would worry that I might not have a single sale in the month and hence resulting in zero income? Yes, many times in fact. But I'm thankful

to have a husband who constantly reminds me to cast my burdens and worries to the Lord and points out my over reliance on my own efforts, when I should be trusting God in all that I do. For many times we forget, that it is God who place the desire to work in us, it is God who places opportunities in our lives; none of all these can we truly claim credit for (Phil. 2:13).

True happiness also comes in the form of being able to use the gifts that God has blessed us with in our daily lives and work. Even though work may be tough, work may cause us to feel overwhelmed temporarily, we look forward to the complete and heavenly rest on the Sabbath day.

As Christians, we should never forget that our reward is in heaven. Christ gave us our salvation when He gave us our salvation, the only riches we need.

Our Attitude

Now that we have established that the true riches that we need lies in heaven, from now till we meet our Father in heaven, does that mean that we abandon all our earthly responsibilities? No, our desire to work comes from God and hence our purpose of work should be God-centric. Through labour, God gives us the means to provide for our families (1 Tim. 5:8). Through our work, He also gives us the means to support the work of His kingdom and to care for the poor in the congregation (Eph. 4:28). As such, it is very important to frequently examine the motivation behind our career decisions at every phase of our career path and seek God's will on how our career would bring glory to Him.

Different phases of our career path:

1. Preparing to enter the workforce

We need to do our due diligence and pray fervently to ascertain God's will regarding our career choice; praying that may God's will be done, not ours. Just as what was described in the Parable of the Talents, we should seek a career that would allow us to use God's gifts to us. We should bear in mind that our desire to do so should not

be to glorify ourselves, but to honor God through our work. God may at times equip us with gifts in areas that we may not have a natural inclination towards. For example, an introvert may be blessed with the gift of good public speaking skills. God gave differing powers of intellect and ability to men. He places different opportunities in our paths. This is a reminder that all things are from our sovereign God and may we seek to do His will and not our own (Rom 8:28). Neither should we be jealous about how our peers may seemingly have better opportunities handed to them on a silver platter.

Here are some practical tips which you can use in your job search.

Don't ever forget that our Lord gave us True Riches as our salvation, the riches we need.

For a start, we should be avoiding a job and company that requires us to work on Sundays (unless you are in healthcare or other essential services. Even so, try to work it out with bosses and colleagues on a schedule which frees up your Sundays to keep the Lord's Day). Also, before deciding which company to join, researching on the culture of the company is something that a lot of us might overlook especially in a grim job market. Speak to people who are already in the company, looking up reviews about the company online (e.g. via Glassdoor) could be some of the ways that we can find out more about the culture of the company. The last thing we want would be to join a company that constantly requires you to compromise on our Christian values.

Don't be fearful to be upfront with your potential employers about your non-negotiables. This helps to avoid future potential conflicts that might force you to compromise on your Christian values. I have found this over-communication of boundaries to be exceptionally useful in my work as well. For example, I make it a point to let my managers and also all my clients know that I don't work on Sundays and they're very understanding

when I can't meet them on Sundays or my lack of response on Sundays. As Christians, our confidence in getting the job should never be stem from our assurance in our own abilities but assurance that God will use us in a way that would best glorify Him.

2. Having been in the workforce for a few years

After being in the same role for several years, many of us fall into the trap of being too comfortable with where we are. Just like how we don't just dedicate some time at the start of the day for worship and go about the rest of our days without God in mind, we need to constantly look to God to guide our every step in our career path. We don't just pray about our first job, but we need to also pray about our second or third job, if it's God's will for us to move on to another company.

Are there days that we just feel like throwing in the towel simply because we aren't having the best of days? We get faced with rejections after rejections, one bad news after another, one angry boss or client that scolds you for something that wasn't your fault? I'm sure all of us have had such days. In such situations, many of us might be tempted to use our emotions to make the decision to leave our jobs, rather than to seek God in our decision making process (Prov 3:5-6). For the child of God, we take comfort in knowing that it is all part of God's plans to put us through trials to strengthen our faith and to draw us closer to him even during times of hardship. God might have also put us through such trials to humble us and to deflate our swollen ego and pride that might be pushing us further away from Him.

Some of us might be tempted to leave our jobs purely based on pay considerations as well. Some of us might desire to join in the climb up the corporate ladder in order to obtain bigger pay cheques. However, the Bible warns us very clearly about the love of money being the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:9). Larger pay cheques often come with more responsibilities and more time being spent at work, which might take time away from our families and fellowship with God. Therefore, it is important to constantly evaluate and honestly assess our intentions behind all these decisions.

Conclusion:

Given all the temptations of the secular world, it is

definitely not easy to constantly set our sights on spiritual things; sometimes we get temporarily blinded by the material joys that a large pay cheque can provide. Many of us also devote all our energy and attention to our earthly responsibilities, just like what Martha did (Luke 10:41), in the midst forgetting our spiritual responsibilities. However, knowing that God is our guide even in death (Ps. 48:14), why are we mindlessly chasing the things that are temporal?

In addition, whatever God gives, He can take away too (Job 1:21). And if He does take it away, it would be for our own good and. Even though it might be hard to accept it immediately, we should pray for God to help us to find peace. That's why as a Christian, it is even

more important that we should always set our sights on Christ, who is eternal, because all our efforts will come to nought if we seek not the will of our God.

Finding a vocation that is in harmony with our qualifications given of God helps us to be at peace with ourselves and more importantly, with God. As Rev. George Lanting wrote in the Standard Bearer (Volume 32/1956, Issue: 1, 10/1/1955), seek to choose a vocation that harmonizes with you; knowing yourself physically, mentally and above all, spiritually. Find a vocation that would allow you to exercise and enjoy your freedom to serve God in love, with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

Grandparenting



Jean Lim
Member of CERC

God's faithfulness is shown in His grace towards us and our children's children (Ps. 103:17, 128:6; Deut. 7:9). In Scripture, we can find God's Word not only teaching us to be godly parents but also exhorting godly grandparenting (Ps. 78:5-6; Pro. 13:22, 17:6; 2 Tim. 1:5). Like parenting, godly grandparenting is also an important calling in the church of Christ. When we fulfil our grandparent calling in a right manner, we will provide godly examples and encouragement to the young parents. Having said that, young parents ought to provide opportunities for their parents to perform their roles of grandparenting. When all this is done in the love of Christ and for the glory of God, God will bless our church richly.

This article will cover three points:

1. The world's view of grandparenting
2. Biblical grandparenting
3. Place of the church in biblical grandparenting

The world's view of grandparenting

Since we are children of God, you may ask if there is a need for us to examine the world's view of grandparenting. I would say yes, in order for us to be godly grandparents.

We were once in the world, bearing the traditions of our fathers in our conversations (1 Pet. 1:18). These old traditions still linger in our old man and hinder us from the renewal of our spirit (Eph. 4:22-23) to perform godly grandparenting.

Here are two areas for our study:

Grandchildren as a measurement of blessedness

The Chinese believe that if I have plenty of grandchildren, I am a blessed (有福气) person. Unknowingly, these non-believing grandparents make their grandchildren their idols. This ungodly view can be found not only in the world but in the church too. It is good to exhibit sacrificial love to our grandchildren, but if this love for our grandchildren becomes our goal and purpose in life, it will cause us to neglect the other callings which God has given us. We have other callings in our marriages, in the church, and in our personal times of communion with God. We may not let this ungodly view affect our walk with God and also affect our fellowship with others (Ps. 92:13-15). Our identity is found in Christ, and so is our blessedness, which is found in the salvation from Christ alone (Ps. 32:1-2).

Pride in grandparents or lack of confidence in our grandchildren's parents

Many parents have the notion that they are better caregivers of their grandchildren than the grandchildren's parents. Some grandparents presume that the parents of their grandchildren may run into marriage problems because they cannot cope with childbearing. As a result, they feel obliged to take over the role of taking care of their grandchildren. They may perceive this as showing love to their children and grandchildren. However, they do not know that they are depriving their children of the opportunity to learn how to be parents of their grandchildren and how to be a husband and wife in their marriage. Sometimes God may give difficulties to our children, but we know that in all difficulties, God will not let them be tempted beyond what they can bear. God's grace is sufficient in their marriages, as well as in their childbearing. As Christian grandparents, we ought to trust God to be our help and our children's help (Ps. 46:1). We ought to cast all our worries and fear upon God and ask Him for wisdom to guide us in providing the proper help to our grandchildren. We do not want our children and our grandchildren to miss out on the opportunities to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ if we are always there to shield them from their difficulties. They and their children need to learn how to depend on God in their lives.

Biblical grandparenting

Psalm 145:3-4 tell us that "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts."

Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons."

Job 1:5 speaks of Job's earnest prayers for his children daily.

Psalm 78:3-7 and many other passages in the Scriptures give us the purpose of biblical grandparenting. These verses have the common theme that grandparents have

a role to play; but we need to use God's wisdom to play this role. Here are five ways we can do that.

Pray

Like Job, we ought to pray for our children and grandchildren (Job 1:5). We must pray that our children's marriages will be Christ-centred. Pray that God will give them wisdom to perform their callings in their marriages and wisdom to teach our grandchildren the fear of God. Pray that our grandchildren will be obedient to their parents and will grow "in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

Be present

Grandparents must take the initiative to be involved in our grandchildren's lives. This does not mean we should be overbearing, overly critical of our children's decisions and parenting choices. Positively, it means we must be willing to take the lead in initiating time spent together. We may discuss with our children our need to be with our grandchildren. Beware of those traditional ungodly views in our culture which stumble us in our calling - my children and grandchildren must initiate the visit because this is honouring their grandparents. It does not matter who initiates and where we meet; what matters is that, as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ (though we are in a relationship as earthly parents and children), we have fervent charity among ourselves above all things (1 Pet. 4:8).

If there are sinful reasons (pride) that stop us from doing our calling to be present in the lives of our grandchildren, we ought to bring them to the feet of Jesus with our children and let the peace of God rule in our hearts and in our children's hearts (Col. 3:15).

Tell stories to our grandchildren

God reveals Himself in the creation, and there are many great opportunities for us to tell stories about God through the creation. Sing psalters and Christian songs with them. When they are older, we can share about good times, funny times, and the hard times in our lives. Tell them how God's Word gives us wisdom to go through our struggles and answer our needs. Our wisdom can help our grandchildren learn what we have done wrong so that they know what not to do! Also, what we have done right so they can emulate it

(Ps. 78:6-8).

Be a godly example

Proverbs 17:6 teaches us that the glory of children are their fathers. We can be the glory of our grandchildren by our love for God and His church. They learn from us the way to serve in the body of Christ and the way we honour our officebearers and other brethren in the church. Godliness and contentment are great gains for us and a great inheritance for our grandchildren too.

Listen to our children

Being a godly grandparent means we should take time and effort to understand the needs of our children so that we do not provide too much help that inconveniences them. We also must humble ourselves to understand their views when conflicts arise between us regarding our grandparenting. Sometimes if one of the spouses (grandparents) struggles to abide in this calling, the other spouse must counsel and pray for his/her wife/husband (Ecc. 4:12). In this way, peace is maintained in the covenant family and in the church too.

Place of the church in biblical grandparenting

Our calling as grandparents does not restrict us to only

our 'seed' but also to the grandchildren in the church. We can use our time, strength, and gifts which God has given us in the following areas:

- To serve in the Sunday school
- To babysit or provide meals to the needy young parents
- To provide spiritual guidance and encouragement to the young parents
- To support the homeschooling families in whatever need God has shown us

How about letting other church members partner in our grandparenting? Young parents can consider letting the other church members take care of their little children on Sundays too. They can even invite other church members to their homes on weekdays so that the little children are familiar with other members in church.

In conclusion, the purpose of grandparenting is to support the young parents to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord so that these little ones, by God's grace, grow up to love God and love His church.

In Darkest Day and Blackest Night (2)



Beverly Tan & Jemima Lee

Members of CERC. Beverly is a psychologist with over 8 years of working experience in the social and mental health services. She has worked with adults that have family and relationship problems, workplace and financial stressors and even health issues.

In our last article, we explored what depression was, highlighted that Christians do suffer from depression, and provided some encouragement for the depressed saint.

How about the rest of us who may never have gone through depression but have encountered people in our lives who are suffering from this debilitating mental illness? How can we help? There are many times when we know someone who has depression, but we just do not know how to help him. Sometimes we fear to even reach out to the person because we do not know what to say or do. We end up not rendering any help because

we do not wish to be caught in an uncomfortable conversation or situation with the depressed saint. As difficult as it is to reach out to someone who is depressed, we are called to show love to our brethren and share this burden with them, and it is certainly *not* through inaction. We should enter into other people's sorrows. In fact, we are *exhorted* to enter into other people's sorrows: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15); "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). This is what it means to have empathy – to be able to feel and understand *what* the other person

feels. This is a stronger feeling than sympathy, which is only to feel *with* other people.

We can learn from the example of our very own Saviour Jesus Christ what it means to empathise with a fellow saint. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. When He heard that His close friend Lazarus had died, He went to the funeral *knowing* that He would raise Lazarus from the dead. And yet, what did Jesus do when he arrived at Lazarus' tomb? He wept. He participated in the sorrow of his other friends who were weeping. This takes grace. Jesus was not called a man of sorrows for nothing. He is very well acquainted with our sorrows and grief (Isa. 53:3).

Nonetheless, a negative aspect of wanting to help a depressed saint is the possibility that we do it in the wrong way. However well-intentioned our help and advice may be, there is still a way to go about doing it. The Bible warns us against such unhelpful or even hurtful advice: "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart" (Prov. 25:20). One might think that singing a happy song might uplift a depressed soul. However, that might not always be the case. Imagine stripping away a coat from someone who is shivering in the brutal cold during an especially hard winter's night. Or pouring vinegar to nitrate, which gives off an explosive reaction. These examples illustrate the hurt and pain someone might bring to his depressed friend when he tries to help in the wrong way. We also do well not to learn from Job's friends, who judged that God sent such hard trials to Job because he had sinned against God. This wounded Job even more. It is easy for those who have not gone through depression to offer cold, empty advice.

These are some phrases you may wish to avoid when helping a depressed saint: "Snap out of it!" "Get over it!" "Cheer up!" "Think positively!" "But you look fine." "It can't be that bad since you are a Christian." "It could have been worse." "It's all in your head." "This too shall pass." "Don't think too much."

How then can we help a depressed saint? It does not take one to have depression to help another.

First, let us consider our motives for helping a depressed saint. Our help has to come from a deep-rooted love and concern for our friend or family member, a love that is based on the very love that Christ showed us when He died on the cross for our sins. We have to pray fervently that Christ will show us the way to love deeply and sincerely from our hearts. Sometimes we will grow weary in loving. This is especially true when showing love to a depressed saint. A depressed person can be very passive and unenthusiastic about everything in life. This causes the relationship with the depressed saint to be mostly one-sided and non-reciprocal. Imagine trying to engage with someone who hardly responds. Many of us would be tempted to give up and not commit to such a long-term unilateral arrangement. However, we have to remember that helping a depressed saint is not a sprint. It is a marathon. One text message sent to a depressed saint showing our love and concern does

We should not be afraid to remind depressed saints of the spiritual realities that Scripture has taught.

not make anyone's depression go away. It takes patience and persistence, borne out of love, to help. Moreover, we should not take things personally when the relationship no longer seems reciprocal. A depressed person is simply in too much pain. The pain removes all other feelings, which may disable their emotional capacity to reciprocate. We are encouraged to persevere in our love for the depressed saint instead: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). Therefore, show your Christian love by *being present* for the depressed saint.

Second, we should not be afraid to remind depressed saints of the spiritual realities that Scripture has taught. We must impress on our depressed loved ones the truth of Christ. The main goal is always to point them to Christ

and the cross. Someone who is depressed may cling very tightly to his worldviews or pessimistic interpretations of his life. On our part, we must cling to Christ-centred interpretations of life and direct the depressed saint to them. Look for opportunities to pray with the depressed saint and show him the Spirit's work in our everyday lives. If possible, comfort the depressed saint with the Word in a way that is personal, meaningful, and concise, since depression can affect one's ability to focus.

Third, do not be afraid to direct a depressed saint to seek treatment from a mental health professional. Just as a physically sick person would go to a physician, it is vital for someone who feels unwell in the mind to see a mental health professional (counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist). We use the means that God has provided. And these means may also help a Christian to be more stable to receive the Word of God and spiritual encouragement.

Last, do not hesitate to request assistance from fellow believers for the benefit of the depressed saint. One mistake that many of us make is that we want to help someone alone. Over time, we can get emotionally spent helping a depressed saint alone. Let us remember that we are the body of Christ. Hence, we should come together to help one another as members of the same body, and not be isolated in rendering help to others.

Above all, we have to remember that this is ultimately

God's work that we are doing. There will be times when we feel that the process of helping a depressed saint becomes seemingly futile. However, do not let feelings of disillusionment or discouragement set in or fester over time. Be heartened to know that because this is God's work, He will definitely preserve us when we serve Him in this very important calling. Pray fervently for strength and grace. Furthermore, because Christ is our only source of comfort, we know that we do not need to rely on our own strength to show love and encourage a depressed saint. Take comfort in the fact that God will also certainly preserve and give grace to the depressed saint during this very difficult trial. Therefore, let us be emboldened to press on for His kingdom!

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

Resources:

Bloem, Steve and Robyn (2005). *Broken Minds: Hope for Healing When You Feel Like You're "Losing It"*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

Welch, Edward T. (2011). *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press.

Special in Every Way



Lisa Potjer

Member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan, USA. Lisa is the daughter of Rev. & Sherry den Hartog, and spent a good portion of her childhood in Singapore whilst her father was missionary to the ERCS. Lisa is married to Russ Potjer and they have four children. Isabella, their eldest daughter, was born with Pyruvate Dehydrogenase Deficiency, a rare metabolic disorder.

God gave the privilege and the burden of a special needs child to my husband and me in the year 2007 with the birth of our dear daughter, Isabella Ruth. When I tell someone that we have a special needs daughter my heart feels both pain and joy. My heart hurts as all of the pity I have for our dear daughter in her condition and the daily burdens of caring for her come to mind. But, by God's grace, my heart is also filled with joy because

we have been given a special way to serve Him and she has taught us so many important lessons. Because she is such a special gift, we want to invite and encourage the church to take part in this gift by coming alongside us and other special needs families.

"Special needs" is a label we give to children who have one or more disabilities causing them to need specialized

help with learning or other activities. This label started in schools and ended up being widely used. Because the label covers a large number of disabilities, the needs of those children vary greatly. Our response to their needs is also going to be different depending on whether the disability is purely physical, purely mental, or some combination of both.

The two basic needs that all children, including special needs children, have are the needs of the heart. These needs are not “special” in the sense that they are limited to certain children. The first need is to be spiritually fed. The second is to be shown the love of Christ. For most children, these two needs can be more easily met. But it is harder to meet those needs for special needs children. For example, our daughter is non-verbal and rarely interacts with others. She has a hard time focusing on anything. She doesn't move around much independently. Her lack of social skills and limited independent mobility makes it much easier for her to be ignored and forgotten. Isabella doesn't feel this hardship because at her level of mentality she doesn't feel a strong need to have friends, but for other special needs children, the lack of friendship and inclusion in social settings is much harder. Still all children at every age are created in the same image of God with the need for a growth in the knowledge of God and a need for fellowship with the saints.

In meeting those two needs of the heart, one must have a certain determination to succeed. Reaching out to special needs children often requires extra patience as you wait for your words to be processed and then a response given. It requires that patience as you slow your walk to come alongside someone who has difficulty moving. You will need to bear with what might normally be unacceptable social behaviors. Sometimes, even after all the effort you put forth, it may seem you get nothing from your attempt at a conversation or a demonstration of Christian love. Remember then that the main goal, to bring glory to God's name, is still reached by your actions. And God, being the good God that He is, promises to bless those that do His will by thinking of others. I know you will find that in giving of your time and energy for one or more of these children, you will be blessed.

A church concerned with the spiritual growth of all her children, will work to ensure that special needs children are also being spiritually fed. How can the church overcome limits in communication and spiritually feed special needs children? First, remember that God does not need words to communicate to His children. Secondly, even the expert linguist will not be able to grasp the amazing truths of the word of God unless the Spirit first works in his heart. Use the word that God has given to His people and trust the power of His Spirit to work some level of understanding in the heart of even the simplest mind. With these things in mind, each parent should consider what is appropriate for their special needs child. In our situation, our church has been thoughtful and kind by continuing to offer assistance if we thought it would be appropriate for Isabella to go to catechism or Sunday school. For several reasons, we don't send her to either. She does go to Heritage Christian School where she sits with the rest of her peers in Bible classes. She joins us in our family devotions at home and I have devotions with her alone in the morning before she goes to school. When you have to work hard to teach the beautiful truths of scripture to a special needs child, you will actually end up feeling that they have taught you more than you have taught them.

Church members who take seriously the command to love each other (“For by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples.” John 13:35) will see to it that special needs children know that they are loved. How can the church show brotherly love to its special needs children? It must start with the right heart. Before reaching out, we need to look inside and see our own brokenness and remember what God has done for us. Then we will come to serve with humility and out of gratitude to God for what He has done. There are simple ways to show love including smiling and saying hello as often as you can. Sending cards is another simple way. We have stacks of cards from many different brothers and sisters in Christ. Remember when planning events to think about how you can help them participate. I am so thankful for the girls from Isabella's class who've had a birthday party or friends over and have asked if it would work for Isabella to come—even if it was just for part of the time. What a joy these events have been for Isabella and I! Our wonderful church family asks if they can help make it possible for her to be in Sunday school



programs. Even though we have not taken them up on their offer, I really appreciated being asked. When you work to show love and spend time with special needs children, you will understand more and more how great the love of God is for you who was more than disabled and He who has taken the time to reveal Himself to you at your level.

Parents of special needs children face many difficulties. I will speak from my own experience, knowing it is similar to the experiences of other parents. Because of the many needs of our disabled child, we are often short on time and energy. From regular doctor visits, to medical bills, to insurance phone calls, to staying on top of medical supplies at home, to the time it takes to help our daughter with every daily living activity...we stay busy. The physical and emotional demands of raising a special needs child and the stress over medical issues take their toll on us too.

One of the emotional demands on every parent is discipline. This demand is significantly more difficult with our daughter. In many ways, Isabella has the mentality of a two-year-old. When raising a child without mental disabilities, we can assume she'll learn as we discipline her. She'll grow out of that tantrum phase as we teach her with spankings and talks about what is not acceptable. But Isabella doesn't learn or grow out of this phase, so my patience often wears out, and I grow weary of disciplining her. Sometimes when Isabella has an outburst we have resorted to bringing her to her room and waiting for her to tire out. This isn't easy either. It becomes an internal fight against an attitude of bitterness towards her and a fight to forgive when the outburst passes. Another aspect of the difficulty in disciplining her is the constant possibility that she could be in some kind of physical pain or discomfort that she can't communicate to us. This possibility makes me hesitant to punish her. Because of these struggles, we often work at avoiding things we know will trigger a tantrum and distracting her with something if a tantrum starts. The fear of an outburst always has me planning ahead to have a distraction ready or to make quick exit if we are out anywhere.

Another concern that we and other parents share is for our other "normal" children. Every godly parent wants

each child to understand that he/she is loved equally. We want to avoid making the others feel less loved as a special needs child requires a lot more time and energy. We try to examine our parenting regularly and openly discuss many of the needs of Isabella with our other children in the hopes that they will understand the disproportionate amount of time and energy spent on her. Isabella's condition also limits what we can do as a family. We definitely stay home more, avoid going out to eat, and have low key vacations. While we have found that these restrictions are actually good lessons in keeping our hearts from being consumed with the things of this world, it is still a hard lesson in self-denial and we have to watch that our children don't resent Isabella for the limitations she sets on our family. We have felt it to be beneficial to do a few things without Isabella, especially since she seems unaffected by our short absence and enjoys the attention of a sitter at home anyway.

Some of my most difficult times are when Isabella is around other children her age. It is then that her disabilities are much more obvious to me. I also usually have a hard day or two around her birthday. It is hard to think about how her and my life would be different if she didn't have her disorder. I have to remind myself then that what we see in this life is not true life. True life is simply communion with God. Isabella and I share that blessing. After these periods of struggle, how real that becomes to me and how much more I am encouraged to commune with God and find my joy there! Then I am inspired to help Isabella and our other children find that same true and lasting joy in communion with Him.

Perhaps one of the hardest aspects that most parents of special needs children face is the fact that this is a life-long burden for them and their children. It is not something that will pass. This thought can be overwhelming. But I bless the Lord for it because it causes me to learn to look for grace from Him just for the day and each day He has given me the grace to care for Isabella again. When I don't look to Him, I fail in some way. I learn and relearn my complete dependence on Him. Because the burden is lifelong, the temptation to be jealous of those that live without an obvious burden and become bitter against God for giving this burden is also great. It takes work on my part to trust that God

has a good goal in mind. Remembering and meditating on what Jesus did for me also helps to give me a willing heart.

The church has a calling to support families with special needs children, just as she is called to care for the sick, the widowed, and the poor. Sometimes, it is hard to know how to help. As members of a church, it is important to remember to intentionally look for ways to help our brothers and sisters in Christ. You could begin by asking families of special needs children questions about what they did last week or how the week ahead looks. It may open the door to an opportunity to help. That help can be something as simple as asking if they would like to be exempt from some kind of work all church members are asked to do, realizing they have little time or energy left for it. Or that help can be something more complicated like setting up a schedule of volunteers to sit in the back of church with the special needs child while the parents and any other siblings sit in the sanctuary. A big help could simply be a listening ear. As you listen to the struggles of the family, you may learn valuable lessons in spiritual growth with them as they struggle for the right perspective on things or work to come to a decision about a medical issue or come to acknowledge their complete dependence on God again.

In our experience, having a special needs child is one of those unique trials that presses out joy through pain. These joys, for us, outweigh the difficulties. There are the little things that never fail to bring smiles to our faces: like the way Isabella always giggles when we brush her

teeth or the way she loves to hear her Dad shout "BOO!" when she calls him into her room. There is the joy of watching her learn a new skill after years of teaching and practicing. Joy comes too as we learn over and over again that God is faithful to His promise to bless those that care for others and that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Then there are the deeper joys of the spiritual growth of the entire family through the many aspects of life with Isabella. I like the "special" part of the label "special needs". By God's grace, we have found Isabella to be a very special and important part of our family. I hope you will see the role of special needs children to be very important and special in the church too.

There are many more lessons I could share that we have learned from Isabella. Lessons from God about God and about ourselves that I know we would not have learned any other way because of the weak sinners that we are. If this is what God chose to do to teach us about Him and in teaching He drew us closer to Him – what amazing evidence she is to us of His love for us! He ordained this way to bring us out of our own foolishness and into the light of His glory. If He has done this for us as Isabella's family, I know that He is doing the same for her too, through every detail in her life. Then together we live each day walking with Him in this special journey and trusting in His almighty, wise, and loving care. Together we look forward to the fullness of true life in heaven someday when Isabella will lose her special needs label that has served its special purposes here on earth. Come walk this special journey with us!

Reaching out to special needs children often requires extra patience. Remember then that the main goal, to bring glory to God's name, is still reached by your actions.

Grace



Daisy Lim
Member of CERC

I like good acronyms, for they are profound in meaning. Thus, I would like to share a number of them gradually and support them with relevant Bible verses. In this way, I wish to promote meditation of God's Word among us.

God's Riches At Christ's Expense

(1) God is the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10)

The God whom we worship is the God of all grace. We must recognise and acknowledge this fact; then we will draw near to Him. A little child knows that his/her parents love him/her and will turn to them always, and especially when in need. Now, grace is God's unmerited favour to His children. God desires to show grace to all His children. In every one of Paul's epistles, he ends with a prayer that God's grace be upon us, His children. God is gracious to all His children, and we, His children, need to constantly implore His grace. We must remember that God's riches which He supplies to all His children freely are due to what Christ has done for us. He paid for our redemption from sins and reconciliation to God by His crucifixion and resurrection. We ought to flee to the cross to obtain mercy and grace from our God of all grace.

(2) Election of grace (Romans 11:5)

It is the grace of God that brings us our salvation (Tit. 2:11). Without His grace, we are all under His wrath and condemnation. We are saved by His grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). Faith is a gift of grace. We must never take the slightest tinge of pride that we are able to believe in Christ and to obey His commandments.

(3) God's grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Under all circumstances of life in our earthly sojourns, we must believe that God's grace is sufficient for us. He is the true and living God. He is the everlasting Almighty God. He is a God of mercy, compassion, and grace.

Why do we doubt Him?

All we need to do is to commit all our needs to Him and trust Him that He will deliver us in due time according to His promises. He allows trials, tribulations, and persecutions in our earthly lives for our sanctification. We are full of dross, sins, and iniquities. Our God of grace wants to prepare us for our role in heaven. When we have physical sicknesses, we need to have them cured through surgery or otherwise. So God is continually working in our lives to remove our dross, that we may live victorious Christian lives to His glory. Give thanks even when we are in a state of trials. God gives grace always (Ps. 84:11).

(4) Grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18)

God gives grace for all our needs. But He requires us to exercise active faith to implore His grace. Thus we are to do whatever is necessary to grow in grace.

What should we do to grow in grace?

The plants we grow need sunlight, water, fertilizers, etc. Our children need physical and spiritual food, physical and spiritual exercise, tender loving care, etc. in order to grow to be wholesome individuals.

So how are we to grow in grace? Some suggestions:

- a) Give diligence to build our faith.
- b) Read and meditate on God's Word daily.
- c) Order our lives aright in every aspect.
- d) Worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

(5) Be strong in grace (2 Timothy 2:1)

We not only grow in grace but must ensure that we are strong and remain strong in grace.

Let us meditate on 2 Timothy 1 and 2 to find out what needs to be done.

1. 1:1 & 1:10 - We must appreciate God's promise of life. Our Lord Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through His gospel.
2. 1:3 - We must pray without ceasing and pray for one another.
3. 1:5 - We need to exercise unfeigned faith. God knows our inner thoughts and motives. So don't be a hypocrite. There are two important truths in our Christian walk: Orthodoxy – Believe in the right doctrines. Orthopraxy – Live out the right doctrines.
4. 1:7 - God has given us the spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind. We have the power of God working in us to be strong in grace.
5. 1:13 - We must hold fast the form of sound words to exercise faith and love in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of Christ who lives in us will work in us to do God's pleasure.
6. 2:3 - We need to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. We live in a dark and sinful world. We can expect persecutions from the ungodly (Gal. 4:29). We are not to resist the ungodly nor take revenge nor follow their examples. We are to endure and commit our trials to God and wait for Him to take vengeance on the wicked.
7. 2:15 - We must study God's Word to show ourselves approved unto God. The Holy Scriptures are our spiritual food and sword of the Spirit. A hungry

person is a weak and angry person. So regularly feed on His Word through personal devotions and through the hearing of the preaching of His Word in order to be strong in grace.

8. 2:19 & 2:22 - We need to depart from iniquity. Our God is a holy and righteous God. He hates our forms of sins.

What is sin?

- Transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4)
- All unrighteousness (1 John 5:17)
- Sin is of the devil (1 John 3:8)
- Whatever is not of faith (Rom. 14:23)

Thus we must avoid all appearance of evil in our lives. We need to flee all youthful lusts, such as immorality, love of the world, lusts of the flesh and eyes, the pride of life, etc.

The summary of it all is found in the last few verses of 2 Timothy 2. Follow righteousness, faith, charity, and peace. Call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Be a gentle and faithful servant of the Lord.

Thus may we all learn to exercise ourselves in godliness, that we may taste of God's grace and be strong in grace!

Rest



Ishu Mahtani
Member of CERC

Are you bearing a burden so great? Are you heavy laden with care? Are you going through a spiritual low in your life? Perhaps you are witnessing some dark clouds in your life now. Clouds that overshadow your peace with God and cause you to feel lonely and miserable. A time when you feel that no one cares or understands you.

I believe many of us have experienced such storms in our lives. Troubles in various forms, such as a time of sickness, or loss of a job, or losing a loved one. These physical afflictions may at times leave us spiritually

lost. During these times, one may go through times of spiritual darkness. Weaknesses may creep in and take hold of us. Strength will suddenly become something beyond our imaginations, despite the fact that in the past we may have had so much strength and courage. Or that we may even have encouraged a brother or sister with the Word. Now, it may be a time when the Word does not speak to you as strongly as it should.

I once knew a Christian who had gone through a time of illness in his life. He was himself a very strong believer

and read the Bible every day. This Christian had even helped others overcome their anxious moments while bringing to them the Word. But alas, during this period of darkness, this Christian could not find the same deep inner peace. It was a time when, one could say, this Christian was heavy laden with care. He was going through a spiritual low, and was looking for a way out of the turmoil and storm in his life.

If you know someone going through such times of spiritual weakness in his or her life, this verse may bring a huge comfort to the brother or sister.

Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

He says this to you and me and anyone who is going through a particular time of spiritual unrest in his or her life. He is always present and ready to relieve those

with burdens to share. We need to come before Him with our cares and burdens. He will give us the rest you need. Jesus knows it all. The trials which we are going through, Jesus had gone through as well. He is God, come down in the human flesh so that He can feel what we feel. He knows what it means to be sad, to be sick and what it means to go through pain and suffering. We need to just look at the Cross for there He bore it all for us.

Whilst we remain on earth, Jesus will give us the rest we need. We only need to look to Him and wait upon Him. We may not depend on man to obtain spiritual peace and rest. The things of this world may provide temporal, illusionary relief, but our Lord gives us eternal rest. May the Lord cause us to look to Him for this rest. Amen.

Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Sexual Assault Victims



Marcus Wee

Member of CERC and second-year student in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Michigan, USA.

Sexual assault. Why the need for a book on it?

For one, to address misconceptions. Sexual assault is far more prevalent than one might think, with one in four women and one in six men likely to be assaulted at some point in their lives (31). (This figure is probably lower due to underreporting.) Sexual assault is also far more likely (80%) to be committed by acquaintances than by strangers (21).

Given its prevalence, it is important that we grow in our awareness of how to prevent it and respond to it. It is for this latter purpose that this book is written. *Rid of My Disgrace* will profit sexual assault victims as they grapple with their trauma, and equip loved ones to empathise and help. It will also prove helpful to those who struggle with other traumatic experiences. It will point victims to the healing and hope found only in the

gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rid of My Disgrace is written by Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, a husband and wife pair. Justin is an Episcopal priest and an adjunct professor of theology at the Reformed Theological Seminary. Lindsey has worked at a sexual assault crisis center and a domestic violence shelter. Both have many years of experience counselling sexual assault victims, and are qualified authors on the topic of sexual assault.

The book is divided into three main sections. Part 1 (Disgrace) examines sexual assault and its effects. Part 2 (Grace Applied) presents six different stories of sexual assault and explores six common but devastating emotions that victims experience. Some of the stories can get a little graphic. While this may make the reader uncomfortable, it also portrays the horrible reality, that

is sexual assault. Part 3 (Grace Revealed) lays down a theology of sexual assault, identifying it within a framework of sin and grace. The reader will find the two short appendices (210-213) useful in helping sexual assault victims.

The title of the book was derived from the question that Tamar asked her half-brother Amnon, before he wickedly raped her, taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible in 2 Sam. 13:13: "Where could I get rid of my disgrace?" (2 Sam. 13:13, ESV). This disgrace, or "one-way violence", is sexual assault. The authors offer a broad definition of sexual assault: "*any type of sexual behavior or contact where consent is not freely given or obtained and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abuse of authority*" (28). This definition is intentionally broad, and rightly captures a spectrum of inappropriate sexual behavior to which victims are subjected, without their consent.

It is important for victims to be able to name and describe the evil that has happened to them, which is the first step in healing. Trying to dismiss or minimise the event can only intensify the hurt and disgrace experienced.

To make the issue of sexual assault concrete, the authors include the personal testimonies of six individuals who had been victims of sexual assault. Allen was molested by his own grandfather when he was an eight-year-old child. Barbara was continually raped by her own husband throughout what appeared to others as a model marriage. Nicole was betrayed by an older woman from church who took advantage of her vulnerability to molest her. In each story, one's heart sinks as one reads the heart-wrenching trauma experienced, and then is gladdened as the individual finds peace and comfort in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The authors work through some of the common but devastating emotions with which sexual assault victims wrestle:

1) Denial. The victim tries to deny the reality of the sexual assault, or the significance of its impact.

2) Self-disgust. The victim feels filthy, like damaged

goods, because of the sexual assault.

3) Shame. The victim feels exposed before others, and often tries to cover it up by living an externally perfect life.

4) Guilt. The victim (wrongly) feels responsible for the assault in some way, and engages in self-blame.

5) Anger. The victim burns with repressed anger, turning it towards others, or at oneself.

6) Despair. The victim feels helpless in the face of the assault, and descends into a cycle of hopelessness.

The authors show that some of these emotions are not wrong in themselves, and even good and healthy. It is natural to feel shame and anger at sexual assault. Yet, when these emotions are not properly experienced, they fester and eat away at the victim.

Others, like self-disgust and guilt, while understandable, are mistaken emotions. The victim is not vile and disgusting; he/she is the victim of a vile and disgusting act. The victim is not responsible for the sexual assault; he/she may have sinned before it and in response to it, but the perpetrator is solely responsible for this wicked act.

After examining these emotions, *Rid of My Disgrace* then points to the only, lasting hope that is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, carefully applying its soothing balm to the victims' wounds.

The book presents God as a merciful, compassionate Father, who sees His people's afflictions, hears their cries, and knows their sorrows (Ex. 3:7). In Jesus, God suffers with His people in solidarity (58-59).

Sexual assault, while being a part of the victim's identity, is not the final, defining word of his/her identity. The identity of the child of God is precisely that: he is a child of the Father. She is a daughter of the king (75-79). We are so, in Christ, as those who belong to Him: "And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:23).

There is hope for victims of sexual assault, not only in the future, but also in the present. Even in the present,

God gives grace to break free of anger and despair. As victims experience that grace, they will also be able to forgive their perpetrators, something that would otherwise be impossible.

The authors provide wise cautions not to minimise the trauma of a loved one, as if he/she should just get over it and move on. They warn against using self-help statements to encourage the victims (16, 45, etc) which serve only to worsen matters. They also expose destructive tendencies of loved ones to blame the victim (40, 168), silence the victim for the sake of outward peace (55), and reinforce negative emotions (72).

One disappointing feature of the book is its light treatment of the relation of God's sovereignty to sexual assault. While the book acknowledges the fact of God's sovereignty (152-154), and focuses on how God can use sexual assault for the victim's good, it does not explicitly assert that God is sovereign over the sexual assault itself, a truth that victims of sexual assault would surely have to wrestle with, and apart from which they would have questions left unanswered. That aside, *Rid of My Disgrace* is a superb, sensitive, and Scripturally sound book, gently guiding sexual assault victims through their own trauma, or helping others to empathise with

and help their loved ones who are victims of sexual assault.

Those who wish to learn more on sexual assault may consult Professor Russell Dykstra's speech entitled "Sexual Abuse in Christ's Church", which can be found on Sermon Audio at this link: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=916192315224544>. In it he accurately describes sexual abuse, recommends strong measures for preventing it in the church and school, provides practical advice for parents to guard their children. He lists other valuable resources besides.

May we grow in our awareness of this evil of sexual assault, that we may guard against it in our church and home, and be equipped to empathise with and counsel those who have been devastated by it.

Holcomb, Justin S. and Lindsey A. Holcomb. *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault*. Crossway: Wheaton, Illinois, 2011.

Rid of My Disgrace is a superb, sensitive, and scripturally sound book, gently guiding sexual assault victims through their own trauma, or helping others to empathise with and help their loved ones who are victims of sexual assault.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES



Singapore

We are thankful that the COVID-19 situation in Singapore has stabilized and in light of that, the government recently announced further easing of restrictions allowing religious organizations to host up to 100 people for services. We look forward to being able to worship physically in church more regularly and to see fellow saints in church once more.

CERC recently celebrated her 33rd anniversary. Although there were no big celebrations or gathering of the church physically like previous years, we are still thankful for the Lord for providing and preserving us thus far. May the Lord continue to grant us grace and strength to remain faithful to Him and in doing His will till He comes again.

USA

A new Protestant Reformed School (Redeemer Christian School) is being planned in the West Michigan area. Lord willing, it will start out as a Pre-K through 8th Grade and grow into a High School as well by God's grace. If you would like to find out more, please visit www.redeemerchrschool.com

The Reformed Witness Hour now publishes each month's messages in an attractive booklet. These booklets are distributed all over the world, including to many prisoners in the U.S. and have been a great blessing to many. If anyone wishes to receive these, please contact RWHC and they will add you to the mailing list.

Ireland

Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland have resumed worship in person with Rev A. Stewart leading services. Missionary-pastor Rev. M. McGeown continues to bring the work in Limerick, Ireland until he is allowed to enter the USA and be installed as Providence PRC's pastor.

India

Super Cyclone Amphan hit Kolkata a few months ago causing much destruction and water and electricity to be cut off. Due to lockdown restrictions, many could not get necessary help. Two members of the fellowship have also caught COVID-19. Despite the difficulties they face, our brethren in the Kolkata fellowship continue to worship and have Bible studies via online means. Membership class has also been planned and Pastor Emmanuel has begun training some brothers to prepare them for the offices of Elders and Deacons. We pray that the Lord continues to uphold them in these difficult times.

COVENANT LIFE IN PICTURES



Joyous new additions to CERC!
From left to right: Judah Lee & his family;
Jacob Tan with his older siblings; Seth Lim;
and Jayson Ong with his parents



From left to right: Worship service during COVID-19, no more than 50 people + social distancing; Ordination of Deacon Chin, officiated by Prof. Dykstra via livestreaming; Elder Paul Goh, Elder Chew Lap Meng and Deacon Chin Yuh Bin who were ordained/installed last month

