

REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

NO HOPE WITHOUT IT!

By Pastor Brian De Jong

Everything was riding on it. If it happened as predicted, then many would rejoice. If it proved false, then everything would come undone. The stakes were high – what would happen?

Though very few had any real expectation that Jesus would rise from the dead, at least they had his word. On multiple occasions He predicted that not only would He suffer and die, but that He would arise again on the third day.

Thus, the whole of Jesus' ministry hung in the balance. If He didn't rise as promised, He would go down in history as a fake who led his followers astray. By being so very specific, He locked in the exact day He would emerge from the tomb – the third day. If He appears on the second or the fourth, He is again discredited.

Not only did Jesus' messianic credibility lie on the line, but our eternal destiny hung in the balance. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, "*and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*"¹⁹ *If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.*"

If Christ did not rise, we possess a worthless faith that does nothing to take away our sins. We are pitiful fools who have been duped into believing some-

thing that only has value for a few short years – that is what Paul suggests.

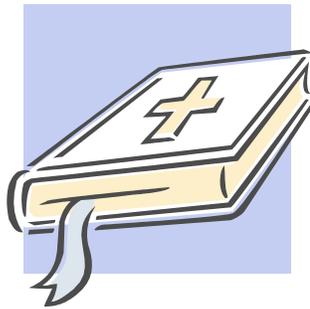
But as Paul points out later in the same chapter, Christ did indeed rise. Thus our faith is not worthless – it is entirely worthwhile. Because Christ rose

we have been freed from our sins. Those who have already died in Christ are at home with Him right now. We have hope – for this life and for the life to come. For this reason we are of all men most to be envied – not pitied!

The established fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the great turning point of history – especially as regards salvation. When Jesus rose, He triumphed over the tomb and was vindicated by God.

Our salvation is therefore secured and assured. We abide in His hand and no one can snatch us out of that grip. And as soldiers in the "Lamb's Fair Army" we follow the Captain of our salvation from victory unto victory. The risen, victorious and ascended Christ is leading a campaign to subdue every enemy under His feet. When He finally finishes His grand task, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So you see, dear friends, you have every reason to be hopeful – Christ has risen! What more do you need?



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April 2012

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Mnemonics...

- *Casual Fellowship Lunch, 1st*
- *Session Meeting, 10th*

The Lord's Garden

by J. C. Ryle

The Lord Jesus Christ has a garden. It is the company of all who are true believers in Him. They are His garden.

Viewed in one light, believers are Jesus Christ's spouse. They are all joined to Him by an everlasting covenant that cannot be broken; wedded to Him by the marriage of faith; taken by Him to be His for ever, with all their debts and liabilities, with all their faults and imperfections. Their old name is gone, they have no name but that of their Bridegroom. God the Father regards them as one with His dear Son. Satan can lay no charge against them. They are the Lamb's wife: "My Beloved is mine, and I am His" (Cant. 2:16).

Viewed in another light, believers are Christ's sister. They are like to Him in many things. They have His Spirit; they love what He loves, and hate what He hates; they count all His members brethren; through Him they have the spirit of adoption, and can say of God, "He is my Father." Faint indeed is their resemblance to their elder Brother! And still they are like.

Viewed in a third light, believers are Christ's garden. Let us see how and in what way.

I. Jesus calls His people a garden, because they are altogether different from the men of the world. The world is a wilderness: it brings forth little but thorns and thistles; it is fruitful in nought but sin. The children of this world are an untilled wilderness in God's sight. With all their arts and sciences, intellect and skill, eloquence and statesmanship, poetry and refinement, -with all this they are a wilderness, barren of repentance, faith, holiness, and obedience to God. The Lord looks down from heaven, and where He sees no grace, there the Lord can see nothing but a "wilderness" state of things. The Lord Jesus Christ's believing people are the green spot of the earth; the oasis amidst barren deserts; they are His garden. He calls His people a garden, because they are sweet and beautiful to His mind. He looks on the world, and it grieves Him to the heart: He looks on the little flock of His believing people, and is well pleased. He sees in them the fruit of His travail, and is satisfied. He rejoices in spirit when He sees the kingdom revealed

to babes, though the wise and prudent receive it not. As in the day of Noah's sacrifice, He smells a sweet odour and is refreshed. It is very wonderful, very mysterious! Believers are vile in their own eyes, and feel themselves miserable sinners; yet Jesus says, "Thou art all fair,---sweet is thy voice,--thy countenance is comely,--beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, fair as the moon, and clear as the sun" (Cant. 1:15, 4:7, 2:14, 6:10, etc.). Oh, the depths! It sounds incomprehensible and almost incredible; but it is true.

He calls His people a garden, because He delights to walk among them. He sees the children of this world, but He mingles not with them. His eyes are on all their ways, but He does not come down to talk with them, as He did to Abraham, like a man with his friend...

He calls His people a garden, because they are useful, and bear fruit and flowers... The heavens declare the glory of God,--the trees, the corn, the grass, the flowers, the streams, the birds speak forth His praise,--but the man of the world does nothing to show that he cares for God, or serves God, or loves God, or feels grateful for Christ's redeeming death.

The Lord's people are not so. They bring Him some revenue of glory. They bear some little fruit, and are not altogether barren and unprofitable servants. Compared to the world, they are a garden.

II. The Lord's garden has a distinctive peculiarity about it. It is a garden inclosed. There is an inclosure round believers; or else they never would be saved. This is the secret of their safety. It is not their faithfulness, their strength, or their love, it is the wall around them which prevents their being lost. They are a "garden inclosed."

They are inclosed by God the Father's everlasting election. Long before they were born,--long before the foundations of the world, God knew them, chose them, and appointed them to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. The children of this world do not like to hear this doctrine proclaimed. It humbles man, and leaves him no room to boast. But whether it is abused or not, the doctrine of election is true. It is the corner-stone of the believer's

Ryle Continued...

foundation, that he was chosen in Christ before the world began. Who can rightly estimate the strength of this inclosure?

They are inclosed by the special love of God the Son... He invites all, but He quickens whom He will, and brings them to glory. He prays for them: He prays not for the world. He intercedes for them, that they may be kept from evil, that they may be sanctified by the truth, that their faith fail not. Who can fully describe the blessedness of this inclosure?

They are inclosed by the effectual working of God the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of Christ calls them out from the world, and separates them as effectually as if a wall were built between them and it. He puts in them new hearts, new minds, new tastes, new desires, new sorrows, new joys, new wishes, new pleasures, new longings. He gives them new eyes, new ears, new affections, new opinions. He makes them new creatures; they are born again, and with a new birth they begin a new existence. Mighty indeed is the transforming power of the Holy Spirit! The believer and the world are completely put asunder, and everlastingly separated. You may place a believer and an unbeliever together, marry them, join them under one roof, but you cannot unite them any more into one piece. The one is part of the "garden inclosed," and the other is not. Effectual calling is a barrier that cannot be broken.

Who can tell the comfort of this threefold wall of inclosure! Believers are inclosed by election, inclosed by washing and intercession, inclosed by calling and regeneration. Great is the consolation of these threefold bands of love around us, the love of God the Father, the love of God the Son, the love of God the Holy Ghost! A threefold cord is not easily broken.

Does any reader suppose for a moment that all this was not needed? I believe that nothing short of this threefold inclosure could save the Lord's garden from utter ruin. Without election, intercession, and regeneration, there is not one soul who would get to heaven. The wild boar out of the wood would break in and devour; the roaring lion would come in and trample all under his feet. The devil would soon lay the Lord's garden level with the ground.

Blessed be God for this, that we are "a garden inclosed!" Blessed be God, our final safety hangs not

on anything of our own,--not on our graces and feelings, --not on our degree of sanctification,--not on our perseverance in well-doing,--not on our love,--not on our growth in grace,--not on our prayers and Bible-readings, --not even on our faith. It hangs on nothing else but the work of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. If this three-fold work inclose us, who shall overthrow our hope? If God be for us, who can be against us?...

Let believers open their sleepy eyes, and try to understand the value of their privileges! This is the most blessed part of the Lord's garden. It is a "garden inclosed." I believe if there was no election, there would be no salvation. I never saw a man who would be saved if it depended in any wise on himself. Let us all thank the Lord Jesus, every day, and thank Him from our hearts, that His people are a chosen and guarded people, and that His garden is nothing less than "a garden inclosed."

III. The Lord's garden is not empty: it is always full of flowers. It has had many in time past, it has many at the time present. Believers are the flowers that fill the Lord's garden.

I will mention two things about the flowers in the garden of the Lord Jesus. In some things they are all exactly like one another. In some things they are as various and diverse as the flowers in the gardens of this world.

(a) In some things they are all alike.

(1) They have all been transplanted. Not one of the Lord's flowers grew naturally in His garden. They were all born children of wrath, even as others. No man is born with grace in his heart. Every believer among the Lord's people was at one time at enmity with Him, and in a state of condemnation. It was the grace of God that first called him out of the world. It was the Spirit of Christ who made him what he is, and planted him in the garden of the Lord. In this the Lord's people are all alike: they are all transplanted flowers.

(2) The Lord's flowers are all alike in their root. In outward things they may differ, but underneath they are all the same. They are all rooted and grounded on Jesus Christ. Believers may worship in different places, and belong to different churches, but their foundation is the same,--the cross and the blood.

Ryle Continued...

(3) The Lord's flowers are all at their beginning weak. They do not come to full maturity at once. They are at first like new-born babes, tender and delicate, and needing to be fed with milk, and not with strong meat. They are soon checked and thrown back. All begin in this way.

(4) The Lord's flowers all need the light of the sun. Flowers cannot live without light. Believers cannot live comfortably unless they see much of the face of Jesus Christ. To be ever looking on Him, feeding on Him, communing with Him,--this is the hidden spring of the life of God in man's soul.

(5) The Lord's flowers all need the dews of the Spirit. Flowers wither without moisture. Believers need daily, hourly, to be renewed by the Holy Ghost in the spirit of their minds. We cannot live on old grace, if we would be fresh, living, real Christians. We must be daily more filled with the Spirit. Every chamber in the inward temple must be filled.

(6) The Lord's flowers are all in danger of weeds. Flower-beds need constant weeding. Believers need daily to search and see that they do not let besetting sins grow on undisturbed. These are the things that choke the workings of grace, and chill the influences of the Spirit. All are in peril of this; all should beware.

(7) The Lord's flowers all require pruning and digging. Flowers left alone soon dwindle and grow small. No careful gardener leaves his roses alone all the year round. Just so believers need stirring, shaking, mortifying, or else they become sleepy, and incline like Lot to settle down by Sodom. And if they are slow about the work of pruning, God will often take it in hand for them.

(8) The Lord's flowers all grow. None but hypocrites and wolves in sheep's clothing, and painted Christians, stand still. True believers are never long the same. It is their desire to go on from grace to grace, strength to strength, knowledge to knowledge, faith to faith, holiness to holiness. Visit a border of the Lord's garden after two or three years' absence, and you will

see this. If you see it not, you may well suppose there is a worm at the root. Life grows; but death stands still and decays.

(b) But while the Lord's flowers are all alike in some things, they are various and diverse in others, even as the flowers in our own gardens. Let us consider this point a little.

Believers have many things in common, one Lord, one faith, one baptism of the Spirit, one hope, one foundation, one reverence for the Word, one delight in prayer, one newness of heart. And yet there are some things in which they are not one. Their general experience is the same, and their title to heaven the same: and yet there are varieties in their specific experience. There are shades of diversity in their views and feeling. They are not so altogether and completely one that they can quite understand each other in all things, at all times, and in all points. Very important is it to bear this in mind! Believers are one in genus, but not one in species, one in great principles, not one in all particulars, one in reception of the whole truth, not one in the proportion they give to the parts of truth, one in the root, but not one in the flower, one in the part that only the Lord Jesus sees, not one in the part that is seen of the world...

(1) Some that grow in the Lord's garden are like the flowers which are brilliant and showy in colour, but not sweet. You see them afar off, and they attract the world's eye, and their tints are beautiful, but you can say no more.

These are frequently the public Christians,--the popular preachers,--the speakers on platforms,---the lions of listening companies,--the people talked of, and pointed at, and run after. Such persons are the tulips, and sunflowers, and peonies, and dahlias of the Lord's garden, wonderful, gaudy, bright and glorious in their way, but not sweet.

(2) Some are like those flowers which make no show at all, and yet are the sweetest. These are the Christians whom the world never hears of; they rather shrink from public observation. They hold on the even tenor of their way, and pass

*“They
are the
Lord's
flowers,
beautiful
in their
place and
in their
way.”*

Ryle Concluded...

silently on towards home; but they sweeten all around them.

These are they that are rare and hard to find: but the better they are known, the more they are loved. Ask their true character in their own homes, and in their families,--ask husbands, wives, children, servants, their character, and you will soon discover that not a tenth part of their beauty and excellence is known by the world. The nearer you go, the more perfume will these dwellers in the Lord's garden give out. These are the Lord's violets,--valued by only few, but to those who know them, oh, how sweet!

(3) Some in the Lord's garden are like those flowers which cannot live in cold weather.

These are the Christians who have but a little strength, who faint in the day of adversity, who only flourish when everything around them is smooth and warm. A cold wind of trial, and unexpected frost of affliction, nips them and cuts them down. But the Lord Jesus is very merciful; He will not suffer them to be tempted above what they can endure. He plants them in sheltered and sunny places of His garden. He protects them and hedges them round by strong plants, to break the cold. Let no man despise them. They are the Lord's flowers, beautiful in their place and in their way...

(5) Some in the Lord's garden are never so sweet as after rain.

These are the Christians who show most grace under trial and affliction. In the day of sunshine and prosperity they become careless: they need the shower of some sorrow to come down on them to make their full excellency appear. There is more beauty of holiness about their tears than about their smiles: they are more like Jesus when they weep than when they laugh. These are the roses of the Lord's garden: lovely and sweet and beautiful at all times, but never so much so as after rain...

And now let me wind up with a few words of practical application.

There is one thing about the Lord's garden, which I see nothing like in this world.

The flowers of this world all die, and wither and lose their sweetness, and decay, and come to nothing at last. The fairest flowers are not really

everlasting. The oldest and strongest of nature's children comes to an end.

It is not so with the Lord's flowers. The children of grace can never die. They may sleep for a season; they may be taken away when they have served their generation, and done their work. The Lord is continually coming down to His garden and "gathering lilies," laying flowers in His bosom one after the other; but the Lord's flowers shall all rise again.

When the Lord comes again the second time, He shall bring His people with Him. His flowers shall live once more, more bright, more sweet, more lovely, more beautiful, more glorious, more pure, more shining, more fair. They shall have a glorious body like their Lord's, and shall flourish for ever in the courts of our God.

(1) Reader, are you in the Lord's garden, or are you in the wilderness of this world?

You must be in one or the other. You must take your choice. Which have you chosen, and which do you choose now? The Lord Jesus would fain transplant you.

He strives with you by His Spirit. He would fain add you to the number of His beloved ones. He knocks at the door of your heart by word and by providence. He whispers to your conscience, "Awake, arise, repent, be converted, and come away!"

Oh, turn not away from Him that speaketh! Resist not the Holy Ghost. Choose not your place in the wilderness, but in the garden. Awake, arise, and turn away from the world.

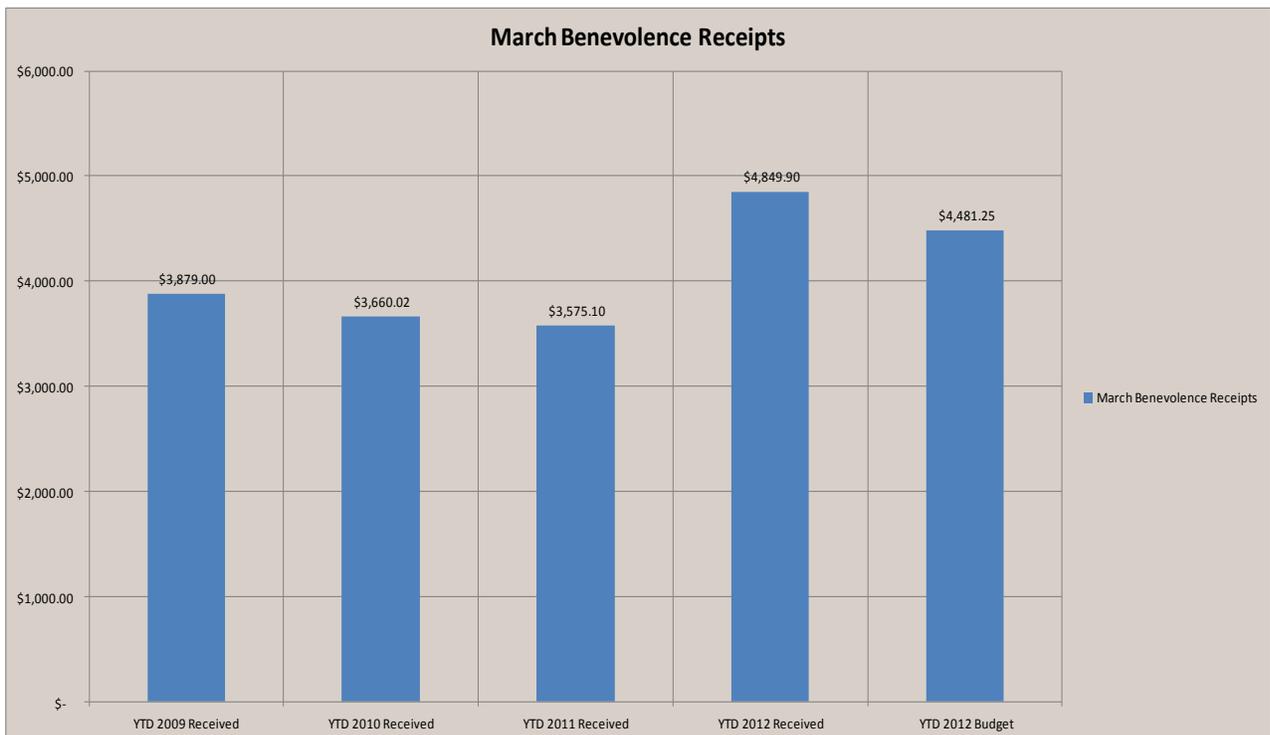
(2) Reader! the wilderness or the garden! Which will you have? If the wilderness, you will have your own way, run wild, grow to waste, bring forth fruit and flowers to yourself, become a barren, unprofitable, useless plant, live unloved and unlovable to yourself, and at last be gathered in the bundle with the tares, and burned!

If the garden,--you will not have your own way. But you will have what is far better, you will have God and Christ for your own. You will be cultivated, watered, tended, moved, pruned, trained by the Lord Jesus Himself; and at last your name shall be found in the bundle of life.

April Birthdays



Financial Graph for March

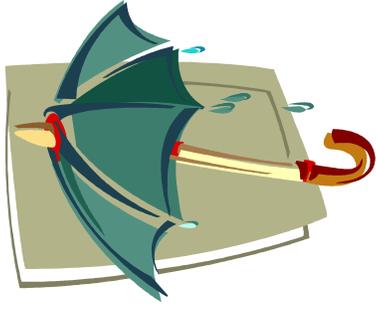




Grace OPC

April 2012

*Showing forth the
excellencies of
Jesus Christ*



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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Casual Fellowship Lunch	2	3	4 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	5	6	7
8 Missions Sunday	9 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m.</i> Theology Class, 3:30 p.m.	10 Session Meeting, 6:30 p.m.	11 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	12	13	14
15	16 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	17	18 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	19	20	21
22	23 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m.</i> Theology Class, 3:30 p.m.	24	25 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	26	27	28
29 Lord's Supper, (p.m.)	30 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.					

My Favorite Things

by Shary De Troye

Gardening is one of “My Favorite Things”. Why? Could it be because my ancestors worked the soil for a living since they arrived in America in 1848? Or, do I just like to play in the dirt for fun? After pondering this for the past month, I’m realizing one of the true reasons for my love of gardening....the joys of new life and SPRING! This year, March was... well, just plain wonderful! With the unusually warm weather, new life has been popping up everywhere giving us hope for an early and warmer spring. However, in Wisconsin, you never know what to expect!

I love spending time outdoors in God’s creation. By early March, my honeysuckle vine pushed forth some tiny leaves. Mid-March brought out my daffodils, and now my apple trees are just waiting for a little more warmth to send their leaves out! I have the seed packets waiting on the countertop, and I can hardly wait to turn that soil and plant!

I like how God’s Word gives us word pictures. Just take a look at John 15 for yourself. In vs. 5, it tells me of how God is like the vine and I’m one of the branches. As I look at my vining plants as they grow each year, I am reminded of just how dependant this little branch is on the main vine! Remaining in Him – spending time in His word, meditating on it and then

applying it to my life – is critical to my spiritual health. I can’t bear fruit without my connection to God. What fruit should I be bearing? Going to Galatians 5:22, I found the fruit that God desires... the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. My human efforts can’t produce those things in and of itself. Only with the Holy Spirit living in me - being connected to God – can I produce and experience the real fruit!

Those types of wonderful, Biblical illustrations are one of the reasons I keep gardening. God reveals His word to me through His creation while I labor outdoors. And, that’s why it is one of “my favorite things”.

I know so many of Grace OPC’s congregation are avid gardeners. You may enjoy flower gardening or raising vegetables. Maybe you just have fond memories from years ago or love to take pictures. I and many others would love to hear why you love to garden and how it brings you closer to God. Write those thoughts down and share them with us in the Reflections! It will be fun to have many participating in all seasons throughout the year!

Happy Gardening! ☺



Camp Calvin

Camp Calvin will be held June 18-23. Registration is due by May 20th. The camp is for youth entering grades 4-9 in the fall of 2012. Brochures can be found at church.



Frozen Peanut Butter Pie

Crust:

- ★ 1/2 cup butter or margarine
- ★ 1/4 cup chocolate chips
- ★ 1 1/2 cup Graham Cracker Crumbs (or Chocolate Graham Crackers)

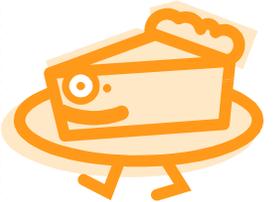
Melt butter & chips and mix with crumbs. Press into pie pan.

Filling:

- ★ 4 oz. cream cheese, softened
- ★ 1 cup powdered sugar
- ★ 1/4 cup milk
- ★ 3/4 cup peanut butter
- ★ 2 tsp. vanilla

Mix together and fold into 8 oz. Cool Whip. Freeze and serve with Hot Fudge Sauce.

Phyllis Nyhof



“The eyes
of all look
to You,
And You
give them
their food in
due time.
You open
Your hand
And satisfy
the desire of
every living
thing.”



Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ

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Spurgeon Corner

*“It is time to seek the Lord.”
(Hosea 10:12)*

This month of April is said to derive its name from the Latin verb *aperio*, which signifies *to open*, because all the buds and blossoms are now opening, and we have arrived at the gates of the flowery year. Reader, if you are yet unsaved, may your heart, in accord with the universal awakening of nature, be opened to receive the Lord. Every blossoming flower warns you that *it is time to seek the Lord*; be not out of tune with nature, but let your heart bud and bloom with holy desires. Do you tell me that the warm blood of youth leaps in your veins? then, I entreat you, give your vigour to the Lord. It was my unspeakable happiness to be called in early youth, and I could fain praise the Lord every day for it. Salvation is priceless, let it come when it may, but oh! an early salvation has a double value in it. Young men and maidens, since you may perish ere you reach your prime, *“It is time to seek the Lord.”* Ye who feel the first signs of decay, quicken your pace: that hollow cough, that hectic flush, are warnings which you must not trifle with; with you *it is indeed time to seek the Lord*. Did I observe a little grey mingled with your once luxurious tresses? Years are stealing on apace, and death is drawing nearer by hasty marches, let each return of spring arouse you to set your house in order. Dear reader, if you are now advanced in life, let me entreat and implore you to delay no longer. There is a day of grace for you now—be thankful for that, but it is a limited season and grows shorter every time that clock ticks. Here in this silent chamber, on this first night of another month, I speak to you as best I can by paper and ink, and from my inmost soul, as God’s servant, I lay before you this warning, *“It is time to seek the Lord.”* Slight not that work, it may be your last call from destruction, the final syllable from the lip of grace.



Evening, April 1, Morning & Evening, by C. H. Spurgeon

Camp Westminster

The presbytery’s Camp Westminster at Green Lake Conference Center will be July 30-August 3. The Rev. John Hartley will speak on *Pilgrims Toward Dawn - Living by Faith in the Season of Unseen Things*. Families and



individuals of all ages are all welcome. See the poster and brochures on display for detail. Please don’t call GLCC directly. Contact Joe & Judy Lewandowski for reservations