

REFLECTIONS

The Monthly Newsletter of Grace OPC

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

By Pastor Brian De Jong

After He had sent the crowds away, Jesus went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. Matthew 14:23

One of the regular habits of our Savior during his earthly ministry was to sneak away from the crowds for times of personal fellowship and communion with His Heavenly Father. Jesus was around people much of the time. Even when He tried to take his disciples “away from it all,” large crowds pursued them and imposed on Jesus. They brought their sick, their crippled, and their demon-possessed to Jesus so that He might heal them. In this particular instance in Matthew 14, Jesus had just fed five thousand hungry men, plus their women and children. Make no mistake – Jesus felt compassion for the crowds, and He charitably provided for their needs.

But as kind and generous as Jesus always was, He would not allow His commitments to the crowds push out His personal, private times of prayer. It was extremely important that He take time to be alone with His Father – to commune with the other members of the Trinity.

Jesus’ example teaches us important things about prayer. Our Savior shows us that prayer should be a chief priority in the life of the Christian. We need to make

time and take time to spend in God’s presence. He purposely sent the crowds, and then his disciples away. He wanted to have time alone with His Father, and He took deliberate steps to achieve His goal.



Christ also demonstrates the importance of times of private prayer and communion with the Lord. Jesus went up on the mountain by Himself. No crowds, no disciples, nobody but Him and His Father. And that private time continued long into the night – “when it was evening, He was there alone.” This was not a five-minute quick-fix. Jesus didn’t rejoin his disciples in their boat until

“the fourth watch of the night” – sometime between 3 am and 6 am. He was alone with the Father from before sunset until “the wee hours” – really throughout most of the night.

While we value corporate prayer in our worship services and weekly prayer meeting, and though we encourage families, spouses and small groups to pray together, there is simply no substitute for sustained, focused and concentrated times of private prayer and fellowship with our Father. The 24/7 world all around us threatens to annihilate those quiet times of communion between a saint and his Savior. Send the crowds away and find your mountain where you can be alone with your God in prayer.

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Feb/March 2006

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Mnemonics...

- *Men’s Breakfast & Study, March 4th*
- *Youth Group, March 12th*
- *Session Meeting, March 14th*



Rejoicing Without Complaining

By Pastor Brian De Jong

In a recent sermon on joy, I urged our congregation to rejoice rather than to complain. This was obviously neither new nor original to me. Already in Philippians 2:14 we had run across the admonition to “Do all things without arguing or complaining.” Paul elsewhere warns the church from the example of Old Testament Israel: “Nor let us grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.” The admonition against complaining is God’s own message to His people, as are His many encouragements to “rejoice.”

As a direct result of that sermon, I heard some interesting questions posed. These good-faith inquiries convinced me that “more needs to be said” on this matter of complaining and rejoicing. In a question-and-answer format, let me further develop a Biblical perspective on these issues.

The first question might be, “Do these verses suggest that life on earth is really always good all the time?” The answer to that question is obviously “No, indeed!” The thoughtful Christian clearly realizes that much evil exists in this fallen world. Sin works its malignant influences throughout the earth. To be a joyful Christian does not require us to shut our eyes to the injustices and iniquities of life. Joy doesn’t blind us to reality, or force us adopt an approach of “Happy, happy, happy, happy, happy all the time.”

Another question could run as follows:

“Is it wrong to think or talk about the problems I encounter in my life?” Again, we must say, “No.” Considering the difficulties that confront us is neither sinful nor forbidden by Scripture. Neither should we shy away from ever discussing our troubles. To talk about such obstacles does not necessarily constitute complaining or grumbling. In fact, facing these dynamics in our lives can actually lead us to rejoice, rather than to complain. But several issues must control our thinking and our talking about trials.

So David turns to the Lord and pours out his troubles to his God.

The first restriction on thinking and talking about our problems would be the **recipient** of our communications. In other words, *to whom will you talk?* As we study David’s life, and read his psalms, we find him bringing his troubles to the

Lord. In Psalms 3, 4 and 5 we find David lifting his voice to the Lord. His enemies surround him and are threatening him. David doesn’t understand everything that is going on in his life – he is hard-pressed. So David turns to the Lord and pours out his troubles to his God. Whenever we encounter seemingly insurmountable difficulties in life, it is always good to “spread it out before the Lord” (see Hezekiah’s example in 2 Kings 19:14-19).

The second constraint would be the

De Jong Continued...

nature of our communication. Will we discuss the matters honestly, truthfully and objectively, or will we “embellish” the story – emphasizing our own perfect innocence and accentuating the obvious evil of our adversary? (We as human beings tend to be self-protective and self-justifying, don’t we?) Worse yet, will we indulge our sinful tendency to “charge God with wrongdoing?” It is very easy to slip over the line from calmly discussing a difficult circumstance to sinfully blaming God and criticizing Him for His providence. Satan and his agents are all around us, whispering in our ears, “Curse God and die.” We must be careful that we do not sin by complaining when we communicate regarding difficulties and challenges.

A practical check on our complaining is to ask, “Do I have any business talking with this particular person about this particular issue?” Though it seems satisfying at the time to exchange tidbits of gossip, those dangerous morsels go down into the very depths of our very souls and make us bitter. If our problems are with another person, don’t we have a duty to first go to that person and speak to him privately about the matter? Wouldn’t we want others to treat us that way, if we had done something offensive or problematic? By talking to persons uninvolved in the actual problem, we may do nothing to solve the

situation and might instead promote gossip and complaining.

Another question: *Does that mean I should never seek advice or counsel about how to handle a problem?* Again, “No.” It is good to seek advice and counsel from older, more mature Christians. There is an important difference, though, between soliciting godly advice and engaging in gossipy chatter. It is good to ask, “Can you please help me understand a godly response to a problem I’m experiencing.” It is bad to say, “You’ll never believe what happened to me...” Seeking out Scriptural wisdom is one thing, but indiscriminately broadcasting your problems is altogether different. But if you seek godly advice, you should also be ready to follow it!

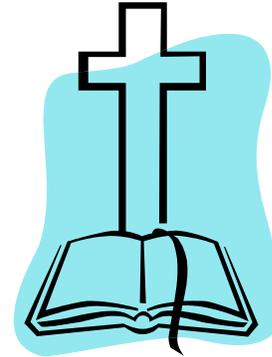
Yet again: *When I’m discussing my problem situations, how can I actively rejoice rather than lapsing into complaining?* It seems to me that at the heart of this issue is your attitude toward God and His providence in your life. Whenever you face trials of any kind, what is the attitude of your heart? Do you see the ordeal as a good gift from God’s hand, or do you view it as one more way that God is persecuting you? Do you see God’s hand working these circumstances together for good in your life? Do you see His silver lining on that gray cloud? Can you appreciate the good things that God is producing in you, by means of

**Whenever
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De Jong Concluded...

this trial? According to your attitude, so you will speak. If you can recognize and appreciate the loving wisdom of your heavenly Father, and can trust that all things are working together for your good and His glory, then you will speak forth your rejoicing. You can say, with complete sincerity, “Thank you, Lord, for what you’re doing here. I rejoice in your wisdom and grace!” But if your heart is far from the Lord, and you see this even as one more instance of God harassing you – then you will tend to give voice to complaints, grumblings and all sorts of sinful words –

“God, why are you doing this to me? It’s not fair!”



“Teach Them Diligently” By Lou Priolo

reviewed by DeLou De Jong

When Samantha was a baby, Brian and I read a helpful book on Biblical child training. As our family has grown, we have continued to use the principles of that book, to the benefit of our children. From the beginning, however, we’ve desired a tool from a more Reformed perspective. How exciting, after 15 years of looking, to receive Teach Them Diligently: How to Use the Scriptures in Child Training by Lou Priolo.

Teach Them Diligently is a quick read by the Director of Biblical Counseling at Eastwood Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Montgomery, Alabama. Priolo treats topics such as “Teaching the Scriptures” to our young and older ones, as well as convicting, correcting and training with the Bible. The appendices (A-F) include tips for developing and maintaining family worship, and a chart

of various verse for correcting specific sins toward which each child tends.

The most valuable insights for me came from Priolo’s discussion of the use of God’s word to bring conviction of sin to our children. I appreciated his emphasis on using Biblical language with the young ones to identify transgressions.

Appendix A (the above-mentioned chart) has already been useful with each of our children in the process of “putting off sin” and “putting on righteousness.” The Scriptures list is not exhaustive, so the author provides Bible study tools for parents who need help locating specific verses. Any Dad or Mom committed to seeing their children’s hearts changed will benefit from reading Teach Them Diligently by Lou Priolo.



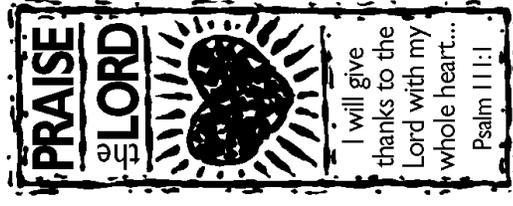
Grace OPC

March 2006

Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ

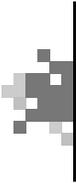


Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	2	3	4 Men's Breakfast & Study 7:30 a.m.
5	6 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	7 Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m.	8 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	9	10	11
12 Missions Sunday Youth Grup	13 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	14 Session Meeting, 7:30 p.m.	15 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	16 Spring Theological Conference	17	18
19	20 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	21 Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m. <i>Trustee Meeting,</i> 7:00 p.m.	22 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	23 Calvin College Preview Weekend	24	25
26 The Lord's Supper	27 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	28	29	30	31	



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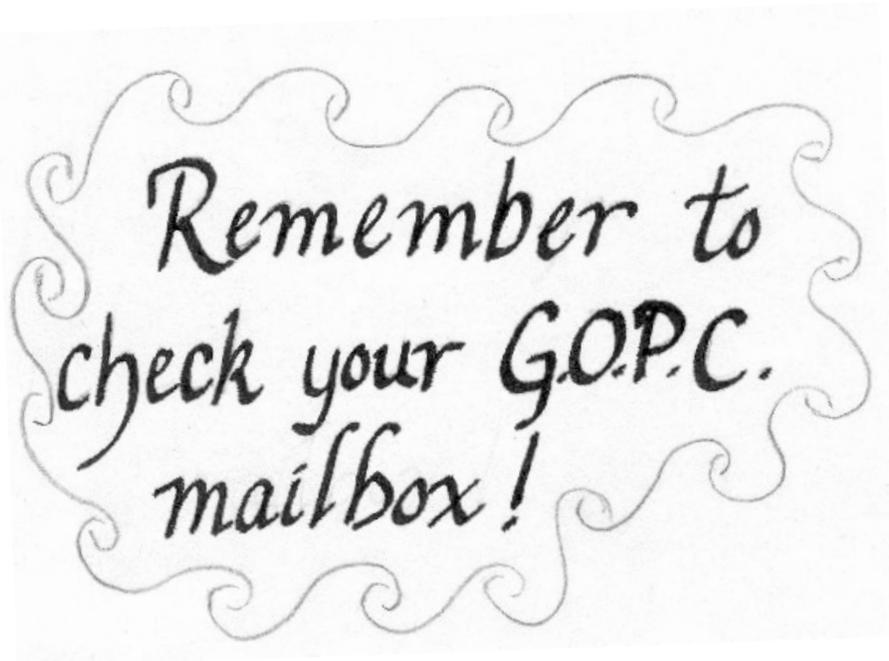
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February & March Birthdays



Happy Birthday!!!



Presbytery Missions

from Rev. Ivan De Master

Missions OPC in St. Paul is at the point of searching for an organizing pastor. After talking with 3 potential men they have invited John Shaw and his wife Anne to come the last Sunday of February and the First Sunday of March. John will preach both Sundays. They will meet the people and consider the area as a place of ministry. Then the people will decide whether they wish to pursue calling John as pastor.

This mission work is not an organized congregation at this point. Therefore, any call will have to be issued by the presbytery. It is hoped that if everything is positive a call could be issued next month

when presbytery meets.

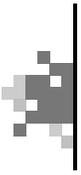
John Shaw completed his licensure exams in January being approved by the Presbytery of Ohio. He will be graduating from the PCNA Seminary in June and would be able to accept the call after that. John has also been asked to be a candidate at the mission work in Carlisle, PA. He plans to spend time with the people there also.

The Shaws would appreciate our prayers for the Lord's direction. They are very interested in church planting and there are now two opportunities before them.

Haiti Trip

Last year five men, mostly from Bethel Church in Oostburg, spent a couple of weeks in Haiti working on a building for our mission on the island of LaGanave. Much progress was made but there was much left to do. Only a little has been done since. On March 3rd they will make a second trip and try to complete this building. They have some concern about the political conditions but are trusting the Lord to enable them to do this work. Pray that all the details will work out and the work accomplished.





Reflections

continued...





THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG MEN BY J. C. RYLE

Report by Samantha J. De Jong

Years ago, when we first added it to our home library, My mother suggested that I read Thoughts for Young Men, by J. C. Ryle. I was skeptical. "But I'm a young *lady*," I thought. Finally, however, I followed her advise, and the book soon became one of my favorites. In fact, since Ryle addresses young men, not as future leaders in the church or heads of families, but simply as children of God, Thoughts for Young Men holds benefit for all Christians, young or old, man or woman.

In this book, Ryle gracefully blends honesty with love. While courageously denouncing sin, and sternly rebuking those who disregard God's commands, he also demonstrates an earnest concern for the spiritual

welfare of his readers. "I am growing old now," he writes, "but there are few things I remember so well as the days of my youth. I have a distinct recollection of the joys and sorrows,...the temptations and the difficulties,... the errors and aspirations which surround and accompany a young man's life. If I can only say something to keep some young man in the right way, and preserve him from faults and sins which may damage his well being both for time and eternity, I shall be very thankful." Today, over one hundred years after Ryle penned those words, we are the ones who have cause for gratitude. Thank God that J.C. Ryle had a heart of compassion for the young men of his day, and that he had the courage to speak frankly to them and to us through the pages of "Thoughts for Young Men"

SPRING THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

The Spring Theological Conference, "Staying the Course - Encouragement for Ministry" will be held at the Calvary OPC in Cedar Grove on Thursday evening, March 16th at 7:00 p.m. prior to the stated Spring Presbytery Meeting. The

speakers will be the Rev. Ross Graham and the Rev. Dick Gerber. The congregation is invited to the conference, and may also sit in on the Presbytery meetings on that Friday and Saturday. If you are interested in attending,



Lynn Baatz, continued...

OUTRAGEOUS COOKIE BARS

- ★ 1 stick butter
- ★ 1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs
- ★ 14 oz. sweetened condensed milk
- ★ 2 cups semi-sweet chocolate morsels
- ★ 1 cup flaked coconut
- ★ 1 cup chopped walnuts

Melt butter, stir into crumbs and press into bottom of a 9x13 pan. Pour sweetened condensed milk over crumbs. Sprinkle with morsels, coconut and nuts; press down firmly. Bake in 350 degree oven for 25-30 minutes or until light golden brown. Cool completely in pan on wire rack. Cut into bars.

Wendy Froh



“There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can have enjoyment without Him?”



**Proclaiming the
Excellencies of our
Lord Jesus Christ.**

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of Grace OPC

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Did You Know...

- ★ The Bible contains exactly 1189 chapters?
- ★ The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119 and the shortest chapter is Psalm 117?
- ★ Psalm 117 is the middle chapter of the Bible?
- ★ The middle verse of the Old Testament is 2 Chronicles 20:17 and in the New Testament Acts 17:17.
- ★ The longest verse is Esther 8:9 and the shortest one is John 11:35.
- ★ Stephen Langton was the first to divide the Bible into chapters in 1228 A.D.?
- ★ R. Nathan was responsible for dividing the Old Testament into verses in 1448 A.D. and
- ★ Robert Stephanus divided into verse the New Testament in 1551 A.D.?

Taken from <http://en.bibleinfo.com/questions/question.html?id=726>

Getting to know... Lynn Baatz

Written by Harlan Harmelink

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