

REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

TALK TO ME...

By Pastor Brian De Jong

Early in his gospel, John relates an encounter between Jesus and two disciples of the Baptizer. John the Baptizer encouraged his followers to behold the Lamb of God. These disciples obeyed their master, and followed after Jesus. Seeing them, the Savior asked, "What do you seek?" They replied, "Rabbi, where are You staying?" Jesus then invited them to "Come and see." Andrew and his companion spent that day with Christ – what a glorious discussion that must have been. Andrew was so enthused that he quickly found his brother Simon and reported, "We have found the Messiah!"

From this everyday occurrence we can see several important spiritual lessons. First, if we would follow Christ, we must relate to Him. Interaction and dialogue is essential to having a healthy relationship with Jesus. This is done most plainly through the means of grace. By His word, Jesus speaks to His people. Reading your Bible = listening to Jesus. Have you ever thought of it that way? In turn, we speak to Him in prayer. Prayer is us offering up our praises and petitions, our thanksgivings and confessions to Him. He speaks to us and we speak back – it is interaction with the Savior of the world!

A second lesson gleaned from that passage is that as you interact with the Son of God, you will discover what a wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord. He reveals Himself through the Scriptures and He draws you near in times of

prayer. The more you know of Him, the more you will come to love Him for who and what He truly is and does.

Another life-lesson is that communication is fundamental to good relationships. If you don't talk, you can't really relate. The give-and-take of friendly dialogue fosters trust and builds confidence. That trust and confidence is a vital ingredient to interpersonal bonds. It is also undeniably true that open communication is needful for real understanding to take place. When people don't or won't talk to each other, misunderstandings predictably result.

We are tempted to think the worst of others, and lack of communication only fosters that distrust.

Recently I was told that someone in the congregation was afraid to talk to me. That news made me sad. I've experienced this before – Pastors can sometimes seem very intimidating to people. I've also been told by friends I know and trust that I can be overwhelming at times. That is a part of my personality that I'm aware of, and try to hold in check, whenever possible.

As I mulled over this tidbit of news, it seemed to me that honesty and openness would be the best policy. I don't desire for members of the congregation to be frightened of their pastor. I am here to serve you, and to help you spiritually. My door is open and I am available for you "whenever and wherever."

I want you to feel free to approach me, and to spend as much time as you need...

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Volume 8, Issue 1

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Mnemonics...

- *Session Meeting, 8th*
- *Missions Sunday, 13th*

A Remedy for Wandering Thoughts

Chapter 5

by Richard Steele

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

Section 1

ITS IMPOSSIBILITY

But because there is no duty so clear that our sinful hearts will embrace, if any show of contradiction can be produced, I shall wipe away all possible objections against this duty, which is the fifth general head to be handled.

Object 1. It is impossible thus to attend on God without distractions. Such is the variety of objects, such the imbecility of our nature, such the weakness of our graces, such the suddenness and swiftness of a thought, that none but angels can do this. You press that which is impracticable; it can never be.

Answer 1. Though this objection hath been replied to before, yet seeing it recurs again, I answer,

1. Perfection herein is impossible in this life; not but that a prayer or other ordinance may be attended with that intensesness, as to exclude every wandering thought that would step in; but to be perfectly free in every duty from them, is rather to be wished than hoped for in this life. That angelic perfection is reserved for heaven; this evangelical perfection may be here attained, which is the prevalence of grace against them: and not only a will, but a watch and an endeavor to be utterly rid of them.

2. And in this sense, there is no divine precept impossible: though our Lord Jesus saith, "Without me ye can do nothing," John 15:5, yet the apostle asserts, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." Phil. 4:13. If all things, then why not this? though it were impossible in itself, yet is it possible with God's help; we are prone to think that we can compass easy things by our own strength, and that difficult things are too hard for God. Have you ever tried to the utmost what God and you can do? could not you have heard a sermon better if a naked sword had been suspended by a single hair over your

bare heads; and have prayed more cordially if you had seen every word you uttered, written down by the hand of God? The same circumspection that keeps a distraction out of one sentence, might, were you faithful therein, keep it out of two, or ten, or twenty; and he that can be temperate for a day, might be temperate every day, if he did his best.

3. It is a mixture of cowardice and sloth which makes its impossible. It is an argument of a slothful heart to say, "There is a lion in the way, there is a lion in the streets," Prov. 26:13; yet if there were a lion in the way to heaven, thou must rather run upon him than run from God. There is a more powerful lion will meet you in the way to hell. No, no; it is not the danger without, but the dullness and slothfulness within, that creates the impossibility. How many hundreds out of fearfulness and idleness, have restrained prayer before God; till being soundly awakened they set about prayer, and found it both pleasing and delightful? Religion, in the power of it, is a work of pains. If you will not make an effort for heaven, you can never have it; try but the next duty with your best diligence, and you shall find that possible to the power of grace, which appears impossible to the strength of nature.

Section 2

ITS DIFFICULTY

Object. 2. It is difficult: if it be not impossible, yet it is very hard, it is a lesson for the upper class in the school of Jesus Christ. We weaker scholars need not attempt it, because we cannot attain it; as well may we sit still, as rise up and fall. This is too hard for us.

Answer. 1. This argues the excellency of it; the more hard the more honourable, and therefore this should rather increase than lessen thy courage. If you except all hard points out of the practice of piety, you will leave but few to be practiced; it is the idle scholar who skips over the hardest words of his

Wandering Continued...

lesson, but the rod must fetch him back unto them: neither must you expect that God will take any notice of your easy duties, if you turn off the hard; he could have servants enough to do his easy work, but religion must go all together, and almost Christianity will not serve any good purpose.

2. The way to heaven is hard, and this you were told at first: "because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life." Matt. 7:14. If you like it not, let it alone, but take care that you exchange for the better. To get a kingdom is not easy, though it is easy to lose one. Who gets a race without running, - or victory without bleeding, or heaven without striving. Hence Mr. Latimer said to one that objected against the duty he was pressing, which was that landlords should send for their tenants and end differences among them; that this were a good work indeed, but marvellously hard. "O," said he, "my friend, it is a hard matter to be a Christian. Heaven was never gotten yet without violence, and there is no new way found of coming there. But if Christ Jesus had not done harder work than this for thee, thou couldest never have come there."

3. And is there no hardship in attending upon sin? Is it an easy thing to serve the devil? Wise Solomon saith, "the way of transgressors is hard." Prov. 13:15. Our love to it blinds our eyes, or else he performs a hard service that gives attendance on any sin. The lascivious man swallows many difficulties, perhaps weeks and months together, to continue the pleasure of an hour. How many dark nights doth the drunkard walk, and hard words endure, and hard sacrifices make, to feed that senseless lust? Who would digest the life of a covetous worldling? Hard fare, hard work, hard journeys, for what may be consumed in two hours; to say nothing of the life of the envious, the ambitious, the malicious men, whose daily bread is mingled not only with sweet, but gall and bitterness; and yet who hears them complain of difficulty, or throw off their designs for hardness. And is it not far better to conquer difficulties for heaven than hell, and venture upon hardship for Christ

and thine own soul, than for Satan and thy damnation? especially when love to the service of God would make this yoke as easy, as the labor of transgressors is to them.

4. Though it be hard to keep off these distractions, yet it is necessary, and it must be done. Good Mary would not by any business be distracted in her attendance on Christ, and resolves therein, that she did the "one needful thing." Luke 10:42. Poor men find it hard to work six days together, but there being a necessity for it, there is no excuse; they could find twenty put offs, but it must be done, work or starve. We have the same dilemma, pray or perish; and that is not half a prayer that is filled with distractions.

5. Though it be hard, yet it is sweet; "her ways are ways of pleasantness," Prov. 8:17, and this is one of them. You may ever observe the more wandering the heart, the more wearisome the duty; a divided heart can taste but partial comfort; and fullness of joy follows, where the full bent of the soul goes before. Our common experience tells us, what peace, what joy, what confidence, what suavity, fills the heart, when we have, though with some difficulty, approached the Lord, enjoyed him, and attended on him without distraction. What is more hard to the brain

and the body than study? for labour, a scholar would choose the plough before it; the brain, the back, the heart and spirits are pained and spent; yet no employment so sweet; the mind, and brain and heart refreshed; and a good scholar would hardly exchange employments with a prince; so sweet, so ravishing is this hard employment. Even so it is with prayer or any holy ordinance; the sweetness of a watchful serious frame, doth fully compensate for the difficulty thereof.

6. Custom and practice will make it much easier. He that executes the law on vagrants, though at first he were pestered with them, will after a while with ease be delivered of them: so that resolved

*"No, no;
it is not
the danger
without,
but the
dullness &
slothfulness
within..."*

Wandering Continued...

Christian, who keeps up his watch and ward awhile, shall find it each day easier than the former one, to attend on God without these vagrant thoughts. Use and custom make the hardest things easy. As a wise man that converses in the midst of his observing enemies, by use is inured to all caution, and can easily avoid all dangerous words or behavior; though it be hard, he is used to it; so practice will wonderfully facilitate this hard duty. You once thought it impossible for you to pray, but practice hath made you perfect. The same spirit, by the same help, can and will perfect you in this. This is one of those infirmities which the spirit of God will help.

Section 3

THE COMMONNESS OF DISTRACTIONS

Object. 3. The commonness of these distractions; no man but is lull of them, all serious Christians complain of them. What is so common cannot be very evil; these vanities that every one hath, I cannot expect to be without, and therefore must be content.

Answer 1. This must be answered with grief. Every man is full of them, and every good man is sick with them. If every man's body were gone after his soul, this would sometimes be an empty congregation. Every solemn look hath not a serious heart, and there are but few that make a business of prayer; and this is a lamentable thing, that we can hold discourse with man, or crave a kindness, or drive a bargain without a wandering thought; till our face be set towards God, and that we begin a duty of worship, and then or ever we are aware, our soul is slipt off her chariot wheels, and our sight of God is lost.

2. And yet some watchful Christians, as we observed before, have got a good riddance of them; to accuse others is a poor excuse to you. As their humility teaches them to complain of the worst, so your charity should cause you to think the best; no doubt they that are sick of them, do by degrees get remedies against them, and grow better.

3. By this plea all sins might be justified; thus swearing might be advanced before praying, for it is more common than prayers; revenge is more

common than forgiveness, but this is no excuse for it. He that will do as the most do, must go whither the most go; "thou shall not follow a multitude to do evil," Exod. 23:2; no, nor to think evil. If thou wilt be Christ's disciple, thou must be serious and attentive, though the whole congregation trifle. True sanctity is not grounded on men's practice but on God's precept. Make no apologies but such as you can plead before the face of God. What a poor plea will it be to say, I was drunk for company, I wandered from God for company. Alas, if thou goest to hell for company, that will be no mitigation of your pain, nor an extenuation of your crime. If many displease the Lord, you have more need to please him; if many play, you have more need to work; and rather choose to be saved with a few, than be damned with a crowd.

4. In such an universal loitering, thy care will be more acceptable; loyalty is doubly valued and rewarded, where rebellion is general; and one dutiful child is cherished among many disobedient. "To this man will I look, to him that is of a poor and contrite heart, and who trembleth at my word." Isaiah 66:2. The great Jehovah there overlooks heaven and earth, and the house of his rest, to fix his blessed eye on this man or woman, that when he comes to a sermon doth not, dare not trifle, but trembles at his word, and that feels every sentence at his heart. When great men come into the congregation, then men look; but when the poor trembling hearer comes in, then God looks. The angels gaze at such guests, more than vain people do at silks and fashions. Oh it is a rare sight to see a Christian in earnest, to behold a humble man converse with God; the hosts of heaven rise up, and are attracted by it. If therefore it be so common to be distracted in duties, do thou disdain to be in the common fashion, but get quickly into the mode of heaven.

Section 4

GOD'S ACCEPTING THE WILL FOR THE DEED.

Object. 4. God will accept the will for the deed. I would be free from these temptations, but in this life I cannot, and therefore shall sit down content.

Wandering Concluded...

God is merciful, though you are strict. And he hath said, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." 2 Cor. 8:12.

Answer. 1. This axiom and scripture were never intended as a pillow for the lazy, but as a support to the weary ; not to exempt us from our duty, but to comfort us under our weakness. What parent will accept this answer from a negligent child? or what master will be content with this excuse from a slothful servant? Offer it now to your governor, and imagine not that will pass with God, which would be counted a mockery with men.

2. God never accepts the will for the deed, when the deed may be done; yea, and so for as the deed can be done, the will without it is but a mockery unto God. But wherein an upright heart hath done its utmost in the use of all means, and would do more, this will is accepted for the deed, even as if thou hadst perfectly obeyed: and so that scripture cited is express in the case of charity; "It is accepted according to that a man hath." So that a man must give according to that he hath, or else his willing mind stands for nothing. Now have you done your utmost against distractions? can you do no more? If death stood at the end of the duty, you could double your watch! Plead not this till you have done your best.

3. It is far from the quality of grace, to sit down content in any defect or sin, or to vouch the mercy of God to secure the soul in any transgression: who when he is dressed in his garments of mercy, "Yet will not by any means clear the guilty." Exod. 24:7. No, it is the genius of true grace, though it fall still upon him, and cry out and roar under those diseases that are incurable. After the Apostle had told us, "The good I would, I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do," Rom. 7:19, he lies not down, and resolves to let it run, but fights and strives, and cries, "wretched man that I am," verse 24. If thou once sit down, be content, and say, I will strive no

more, thou givest the field, the Spirit withdraws with grief, and Satan approaches thee with triumph.

4. The great Jehovah is so far from being content with such a frame, that he hath plainly "cursed all such as do the work of the Lord negligently, or deceitfully." Jer. 48:10. Though you neglect not the work of the Lord, yet if you do it negligently, you are in danger of the curse. Every distraction is a neglect; in each wandering you deal deceitfully with God; and for every one of these in a duty, God's law pronounceth a curse. And is the divine curse a small thing with you? Who could digest a hundred curses, though pronounced at your door by a provoked neighbor? O how much more intolerable is it, to be obnoxious to a hundred curses from heaven, justly deserved, and infallibly inflicted, if repentance prevent not! It is not the work of the Lord will excuse you; Nadab shall perish with his strange fire, as well as if he had offered nothing at all. Take heed of forgiving yourselves, when God forgives you not: a negligent duty is abomination to God.

And thus you have the most material objections answered, which was the fifth point to be handled.

*"Oh it is a
rare sign to
see a
Christian in
earnest, to
behold a
humble man
in converse
with God..."*



January Birthdays



SCCHS Pie Sale

Don't miss our annual cherry pie sale! Due to a poor cherry crop, we are unable to offer cherry pies. However, we are offering Michigan Blueberry pies in the usual 10" size (\$12.00) and the special 6" Sweetheart pie (\$7.00). These pies are ready to freeze or bake, so order enough to last all year! Order your pies online: www.scchs.com or by calling... Pick up your pies at SCCHS at 929 Greenfield Avenue, on Saturday, February 9, from 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. or Monday, February 11,

from 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. Orders are **due Friday, January 25**. So hurry, don't delay!

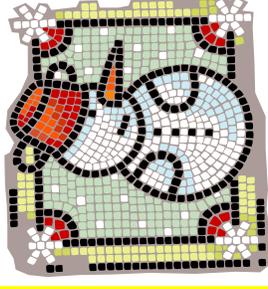




Grace OPC

January 2013

Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	3	4	5
6	7 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	8 Session Meeting, 6:30 p.m.	9 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	10	11	12
13 Missions Sunday	14 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Pine Haven Study,</i> <i>1:30 p.m.</i>	15	16 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	17	18	19
20	21 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	22	23 Congregational & Corporation Meeting, 7:00	24	25	26
27 Lord's Supper (a.m.)	28 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Pine Haven Study,</i> <i>1:30 p.m.</i>	29	30 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.			

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Apple Valley Men's Retreat

Apple Valley Church and New Hope Presbyterian Church in Green Bay are jointly sponsoring a **Men's Retreat** on Feb 8-9, 2013 at Green Lake Conference Center in Green Lake, WI. We would like to extend an invitation the men of the church who would be interested in attending. The speaker will be Rev. Bruce Hollister, pastor of New Covenant Community Church in New Lenox, IL on the subject of "Prayer, Communion with Christ, our Highest Privilege" and the cost is \$70. If you are interested or would like more information, let Pastor Brian know & he can give you a copy of the retreat brochure with more information on it. Thank you for considering this opportunity and we hope you will be able to join us in February.



Auxiliary Fundraiser

The Pine Haven Auxiliary still has the fundraising opportunity with Perkins Restaurant. Until January 15, if you bring in a voucher, Perkins will donate 10 % of your total purchase to the Pine Haven Auxiliary. The program is not valid on Sundays between 6:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Vouchers also may not be distributed on Perkin's premises. The vouchers can be found on the shelf in the foyer at church.





“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

Grace OPC

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Spurgeon

Corner

*“Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”
(2 Peter 3:18)*

“Grow in grace”—not in one grace only, but in *all* grace. **Grow** in that root-**grace**, *faith*. Believe the promises more firmly than you have done. Let faith increase in fulness, constancy, simplicity. **Grow** also in *love*. Ask that your love may become extended, more intense, more practical, influencing every thought, word, and deed. **Grow** likewise in *humility*. Seek to lie very low, and know more of your own nothingness. As you **grow downward** in humility, seek also to **grow upward**—having nearer approaches to God in prayer and more intimate fellowship with Jesus. May God the Holy Spirit enable you to “*grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.*” He who **grows** not in the knowledge of Jesus, refuses to be blessed. To know him is “life eternal,” and to advance in the knowledge of him is to increase in happiness. He who does not long to know more of Christ, knows nothing of him yet. Whoever hath sipped this wine will thirst for more, for although Christ doth satisfy, yet it is such a satisfaction, that the appetite is not cloyed, but whetted. If you know the love of Jesus—as the hart panteth for the water-brooks, so will you pant after deeper draughts of his love. If you do not desire to know him better, then you love him not, for love always cries, “Nearer, nearer.” Absence from Christ is hell; but the presence of Jesus is heaven. Rest not then content without an increasing acquaintance with Jesus. Seek to know more of him in his divine nature, in his human relationship, in his finished work, in his death, in his resurrection, in his present glorious intercession, and in his future royal advent. Abide hard by the Cross, and search the mystery of his wounds. An increase of love to Jesus, and a more perfect apprehension of his love to us is one of the best tests of **growth** in grace.



Morning, January 4, Morning & Evening, by C. H. Spurgeon

Front Page Concluded

... with me. Another reaction I often receive is “But you’re always so busy...” It is true that I keep busy about my work, but I am never too busy for a member of the congregation that needs help or encouragement. I really do like people more than books!

Back at the story in John, I see myself being somewhat like the Baptizer. Specifically, it was John the Baptizer’s purpose to point others to Jesus

Christ. Behold, the Lamb of God! May my ministry here direct your attention to the only Savior of sinners! May He increase, even as I decrease!

