

# REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

## PROMISES GOOD & BAD

*By Pastor Brian De Jong*

In my daily devotions this year I've been using a wonderful resource called The Valley of Vision. This thin volume is a collection of prayers from the Puritans. It is published by the Banner of Truth Trust. Each day I read aloud one of the prayers, and make it my own communication to God.

Several weeks ago I ran across one line in one of the prayers that stuck in my mind. The sentiment was, "Lord, forgive me for putting my confidence in my own promises to avoid future sins."

When I pondered this, I realized how often I do this. I sin and my conscience bothers me. I confess my sin and ask God's forgiveness, and then I pledge that "I'll never do that again..." Now in and of itself, there is nothing wrong with "endeavoring after new obedience," as our Westminster Confession puts it. Promising to fight against sin in the future is not a bad thing.

But here is the rub: promising to avoid future transgressions is no ground of confidence or hope for eternity. I cannot rest upon my resolve alone, as if that were enough. It's not enough for me, and it's not enough for God either.

How many times don't we make such pledges, and then violate our promise within weeks, days or even hours. "I'll never do that again" becomes, "Well, I've done it again..." Aren't we like the "weak believer" who keeps sinning, and keeps repenting, and keeps asking for forgiveness, and then sins the same sin again – seventy times seven times!

Furthermore, how will my promise to be good in the future do anything to alleviate my guilt from past actions? Doing better tomorrow does not erase what I did yesterday!

So if my hope for eternity rests upon my own promise to not sin in the future, I skate on very thin ice! My resolutions for the future are a shaky foundation that can bear little weight at all. I need something surer – I need bedrock.

The solid foundation we seek is found in such Scripture promises as these:

*Matthew 1:21 "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

*Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

*John 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*

The plain truth is this: our hope for eternal happiness is always, only, completely and exhaustively in Christ alone. His finished work is the sure foundation. His promise can bear the weight of my future joy. Don't trust yourself – you will fail you. Trust Jesus instead, who will never leave us nor forsake us, and cannot fail us or disappoint our hopes!



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September 2013

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### Mnemonics...

- *Presbytery Fall*  
*Stated Mtg., 13th-14th*
- *Literature Distribution in*  
*Shawano, 21st*
- *Hospitality*  
*Sunday, 29th*

# ***A Remedy for Wandering Thoughts***

## **Chapter 7, Sections 1-6**

*by Richard Steele*

### **THE EVIL OF DISTRACTIONS**

#### **SECTION I**

#### ***SINS AGAINST THE FIRST TABLE***

The evil of distractions, is, 1. In their nature; 2. In their effects. Behold the former in these demonstrations.

1. These distractions in God's worship are sins against the first table. And these proportionably are always greater than those against the second, yet they are a violation of every precept of the first table.<sup>1</sup> For how doth he acknowledge God, that in his very presence offends him? or how dost thou honour, love, and delight in him, as the chiefest good, when thou startest aside from converse with him, to parley with the world and sin? There is the first commandment broken. Do you worship him according to his will, that thus worship him. If material images be cast off, and spiritual fornication committed, ye are still breakers of that commandment. A graven image in the mind, a worldly or wicked fancy there, where Christ should be, cannot but provoke him to be very angry. There is the second commandment broken. And these manifestly break the third commandment, being a palpable "taking his great name in vain." To speak of God, and think of the world; to hold discourse with him, and to think of your lusts, is a high taking his name in vain. As if the wife should be speaking busily with her husband, and at the same time looking at the picture of a paramour, what rage would this excite in her husband's heart? To make the name of God a cloak for the things of the world, for the worst thing sin, is the saddest sacrilege; and for which he will not hold you guiltless if he find you griefless. And then the fourth commandment is broken by a direct theft committed of God's holy time; that which you consecrate at your kneeling down to his service, is purloined away by these roving thoughts, especially when they invade the sabbath. For when you seem to give him much, in effect it comes to nothing; sift out

the bran of your wandering thoughts, and the flour of holy service will be next to nothing. And so your time is lost, your duty lost, and danger of your soul's loss after all. And thus you see the first table broken at a blow; it is a sad blow which breaks four commands at once.

#### **SECTION II**

#### ***DISTRACTIONS ARE HEART SINS***

The second evil in their nature is, that they are heart sins.<sup>2</sup> "There is no faithfulness in their mouths, their inward part is very wickedness." Psalm 5:9. As wounds in the internal parts of the body are most dangerous, because hard to come at and cure. Hence, it is easier to cure a swearer of swearing, than a roving heart of its distractions. And as these sins are more dangerous, so are they very displeasing. The heart is God's field, the inclosure he keeps for his own walk and delight. He hath said, "My son, give me thy heart." Prov. 23: 26. Now to injure him of his peculiar, to thrust him out of his mansion-house on earth, the heart, is no small injury, affront and unkindness. And such a "backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways," if he fill not the sacred bottles with his tears. And they are more heavy to the conscience, in that they meet with no shame or trouble without, which is the ordinary lot of other sins, but are begun and perfected in the heart within; and their guilt is greater because their shame is less. And they do thereupon leave, as such other sins do, a deeper sting of remorse, and horror of conscience, when the conscience is awake. There is much evil in these. "I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me." Zech. 6: 9.

#### **SECTION III**

#### ***THEY ARE SINS IN THE SPECIAL PRESENCE OF GOD***

The third evil in the nature of them is, that they are sins in the special presence of God. We read of God

## Wandering Continued...

showing the prophet, with infinite wrath, "five and twenty men at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east, and they worshipped the Sun towards the east." Ezek. 8: 16. This he highly resented, that in his temple they should have their faces towards the sun, and turn their backs on him. This is the manner of a roving heart. In God's own presence he turns his back on God, and his face to the things under the sun, and those he worships. O infinite patience! that turns not such a soul into a pillar of salt; yea, throws it not into a pit of brimstone!

"Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord God, surely, see how he binds it with double strength, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thy abominations, therefore I also will diminish thee. A third part shall die with the pestilence." Ezek. 5:11.

Which of all thy detestable sins but thou hast committed in the sanctuary and presence of God? now a proud, now a wanton, then a worldly thought. Ah, says God, I cannot bear it. He that provokes me to my face, shall feel it. Few think these sins have brought the plague, any more than the Corinthians did their unworthy partaking at the Lord's table. In his special presence he looks at thee. "He sets all our iniquities before him;" but he places these "secret sins in the light of his countenance." Psalm 90:8. O this is an evil thing, and a bitter, that thou shouldst provoke the Lord to his face, and that his fear doth not awe thee. "Yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord," Jer. 31:11; this pollutes it with a double stain. "I am God Almighty, walk before me and be thou perfect." Gen. 17: 1. To believe that you are sitting, standing, kneeling before God should make you perfect. How seriously doth the child stand before his father, the scholar before his master? and shall the child of God only forget himself the poorest scholar, before the best masters? Remarkable indeed was that execution. — Two of

Aaron's sons came with their censers, "and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not; and there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." Lev. 10:1,2. Behold the dreadful hand of God! before him was their sin, before him they were punished. Lord, how terrible art thou in thy holy place! If no place will deter them from sin, no place shall be a sanctuary to them from judgment. What are distracted thoughts but strange fire? and a strange punishment may the workers of iniquity have, if timely repentance prevent not.

*“What are  
distracted  
thoughts but  
strange fire?  
And a strange  
punishment  
may the  
workers of  
iniquity  
have...”*

### SECTION IV DISTRACTIONS ARE SINS ABOUT THE MOST SERIOUS BUSINESS

The fourth evil in their nature is, that they are sins about the most serious business.

The grandest affairs <sup>3</sup>under the sun are transacted in an ordinance. I have read of a nobleman of this nation, that when his cause of life and death was trying, though he had a pardon in his pocket at the same time, he was irrevocably sentenced, being during that time asleep; he was sleeping while the judge was passing sentence.

Was not this a gross neglect, and did not he, suppose ye, bite his nails, and beat his head, that could not watch when his head

was in question 1 Sinner, thy head, and life and soul, and all are in question; thy eternal happiness is completing, or thy dreadful sentence passing, and is this a time to trifle and wander away from God? If you should come to the elbow of a counsellor pleading at the bar, much more of one impeached for treason, and tell them, such a companion hath sent for them to the tavern, or that the cattle have broken into such a field, or that such a game of chess is likely to be lost; with what disdain and indignation would they reject such a message, and cry, Is this the time to trouble me with these things? when the very hearing of such an errand may lose my cause, or hazard my life.<sup>4</sup> Are com or companions equal to

## Wandering Continued...

immortal souls? What are these to the things between God and me? If the dead must not be hurried when Christ calls; nor a man stay to take leave of his friends, how greatly doth he trespass that runs riot after toys and sins, when the great God calls and calls again? We have a clear instance. The preacher was at Martha's house, and serious in his sermon: Martha, good woman, was cumbered and distracted with much serving; Mary sat at her Saviour's feet, and heard his word. Saith Martha, I think it much that my sister must have all the dainties, and I all the distractions; master, rectify this inequality. Ah, saith our Lord, "Martha, Martha, thou art cumbered, or as the word signifies, distracted, about many things; but one thing is needful." Luke 10:41, 42. Mary is embarked in a most necessary affair, and worldly cumber is improper for a heavenly business. She that is working for her soul, hath work enough at that time. Salvation, eternal salvation! Eternal salvation of soul and body; these are not things to trifle about.

### SECTION V DISTRACTIONS ARE SINS OF HYPOCRISY

The fifth evil of these roving of heart, is, that they are sins of hypocrisy. And there can be no little evil in the sin of hypocrisy. What is hypocrisy, but the honour of the lips, and the distance of the heart, Matt. 15: 7, 8, as it is said of the nightingale, a sound of words, and no soundness in the heart, that is hypocrisy, of all sins most odious unto God and man. And though the purpose of the heart be wanting to make it formal, and full hypocrisy, yet a custom in these will produce that at length, and he that useth to lie in jest, will come at length to he in earnest. "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies." Hos. 11: 12. Oh, how often may the Lord say over us. These people compass me about with lies. What a generation of vipers are here! like the viper that is speckled without, and poisonous within! Moses took a veil

when he spake to Israel, and put it off when he spake to God. But the hypocrite doth quite contrary, he shows his best to men, his worst to God, but the Lord sees both the veil and the face; and it is hard to say, whether he hates more the veil of dissimulation or the face of wickedness. This is a disappointing of God, in a sense deceiving him. "Cursed be the deceiver, that hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to God a corrupt thing." Mai. 1: 4.

Yea, saith God, you have in your flock a male, you can be serious when you will, but a corrupt thing, it seems, will serve my turn; you disappoint me, you deceive me, you appoint a meeting between your heart and me, and here I come, and the heart is gone; you knock at my door, with great earnestness, and when I come, the heart is gone; you are deceivers, and deserve my curse. If this be not repented and reformed, such deceitful hypocrites must carry away no blessing of mine, but a curse.

A prayer, though but of forty words, sincerely made and every syllable felt, shall prevail more with God, than a long oration with half a heart; and the meanest sermon heard with a prepared, humble, and attentive heart, shall receive a greater blessing, than a better sermon with a worse heart; for God is a spirit, and appearances are nothing with him; he that seems to serve him, and doth not, provokes him the more. An eye to heaven, and a heart for hell; and humble knee and a haughty spirit; a serious posture and a frivolous soul, are abominable to the Lord.

### SECTION VI DISTRACTIONS ALIENATE THE HEART FROM DUTIES

In the next place, the evil of distractions is seen in their effects, whereof these are some.

First, they alienate the heart from holy duties. <sup>56</sup>

*"An eye to  
heaven, and  
a heart for  
hell; a  
humble knee  
and a  
haughty  
spirit... are  
abominable  
to the Lord."*

## Wandering Concluded...

When we miss of God, we have small mind to his service again. It is the comparison of a learned divine, when there is no marrow in the bone, we quickly throw the bone away; even so when the sweet enjoyment of God is not found in an ordinance, which is lost by the roving heart, we shall ere long cast away that ordinance, except shame or custom restrain us. Now when the soul cares not for prayer, or other ordinances, it is a sad effect; the Lord may say to thee, with more right and reason than Delilah did, "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?" Judges 16: 15. What love is that without a heart? Where the affection is, there the thoughts will be also. I may truly invert this and say, where the heart is not before, there love will not come after. Let the whole soul be seriously engaged in any duty of prayer, singing, reading, or hearing, and you will be loth to leave that duty, and wanting to be at it again. O the sweetness therein and love there- unto! "I shall never forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me." Psalm 119:93. Oh, when shall I come and appear before God! that every day were a sabbath, then should I be well, as said that famous instance of practical piety, Mr. Bruen, of Bruen Stapleford. Hence, with a gracious heart, one duty prepares, and gets a relish for another. But you shall find, when the heart is out of tune, and boating about the bush, and but little of it with God; then, it is the most wearisome employment in the world! A man had rather thrash than pray, that hath his heart in the barn, when he is in prayer. And there is no lively desires, or longings of soul to that business, wherein he felt so little of God. Hence it is so hard to get a worldly family together to prayer; alas! the duty is a distraction to them; when they come, they still leave their hearts behind them; you cannot make them enjoy an ordinance, whose hearts usually run out of an ordinance.

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<sup>1</sup> It would be an heinous offence among the incense offered to God, to have put brimstone. Thy prayers are thine incense, but thy distractions are brimstone, that stink in his nostrils. — Chrysostom.

<sup>2</sup>God forbids us to find our pleasure on his holy day.

Isaiah 58:13. And do we not find our pleasure by our thoughts ? — Angier.

<sup>3</sup> A greater curse goeth with an evil thought in God's service, than if it were another time; times of blessing perverted, are times of greatest curse. — Jingier.

<sup>4</sup> Consider what a prayer is worth; every thing is worth, according to what we can have for it; why a man may have grace and glory for a fervent prayer. If you should sell that for a trifle, when another had thousands for the same, wouldest thou not befool thyself? — White.

<sup>5</sup> Thy wandering duties Satan keeps as bills of indictment against the great day; what is good in them, he lays before thee now to quiet thy conscience, but miserable comforters are those which pacify the conscience, but purify it not. — White.

<sup>6</sup> In this sense they are a curse; for what is a curse but separation from God. Think then when wandering thoughts come to us in holy duties, the curse comes, and when they stay with us, the curse stays. — Angler.



# September Birthdays



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## New Number





Grace OPC

# September 2013

*Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ*



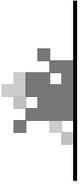
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	5	6 Church Camp-Out	7 Church Camp-Out
8 Missions Sunday	9 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Pine Haven Study,</i> <i>1:30 p.m.</i>	10 Session Meeting, 6:30 p.m.	11 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	12	13 Presbytery Fall Stated Mtg.	14 Presbytery Fall Stated Mtg.
15	16 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	17	18 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	19	20	21 Literature Distribution at Shawano
22	23 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Pine Haven Study,</i> <i>1:30 p.m.</i>	24	25 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	26	27	28
29 Lord's Supper, (a.m.) <i>Hospitality Sunday</i>	30 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.					

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# Hospitality Sunday

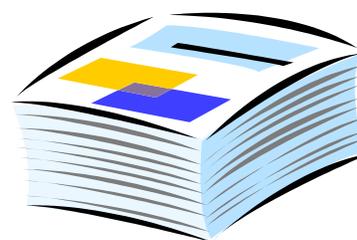
On Sunday, September 29th we will have our Fall Hospitality Sunday. A sign-up sheet is posted on the bulletin board to either host or be hosted. Groups will be assigned and notified the week prior. This is a good way to get to know other folks in the church, and to practice and enjoy Christian hospitality.

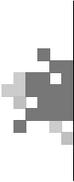


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## Shawano Outreach

Literature Distribution in Shawano, WI will take place on Saturday, September 21st. If you are free & interested, contact Pastor Gordon Oliver for details.





# Comments on Finance

by Joel Moody

**General Fund** receipts for July totaled \$13,198.20 as compared to the budget of \$13,049.60, while General Fund disbursements for July totaled \$14,174.63. July year to date General Fund receipts totaled \$98,543.31 as compared to the budget of \$97,872.10 (an overage of \$671.21), while July year to date disbursements of \$89,003.73 were \$8,868.37 below budget. Through the end of July, the General Fund has increased by \$9,593.16. The increase in the General Fund was due primarily to lower than budgeted disbursements. Year to date General Fund receipts for July were 5.1% above last year's total on an average Sunday while disbursements were 4.0% above the prior year.

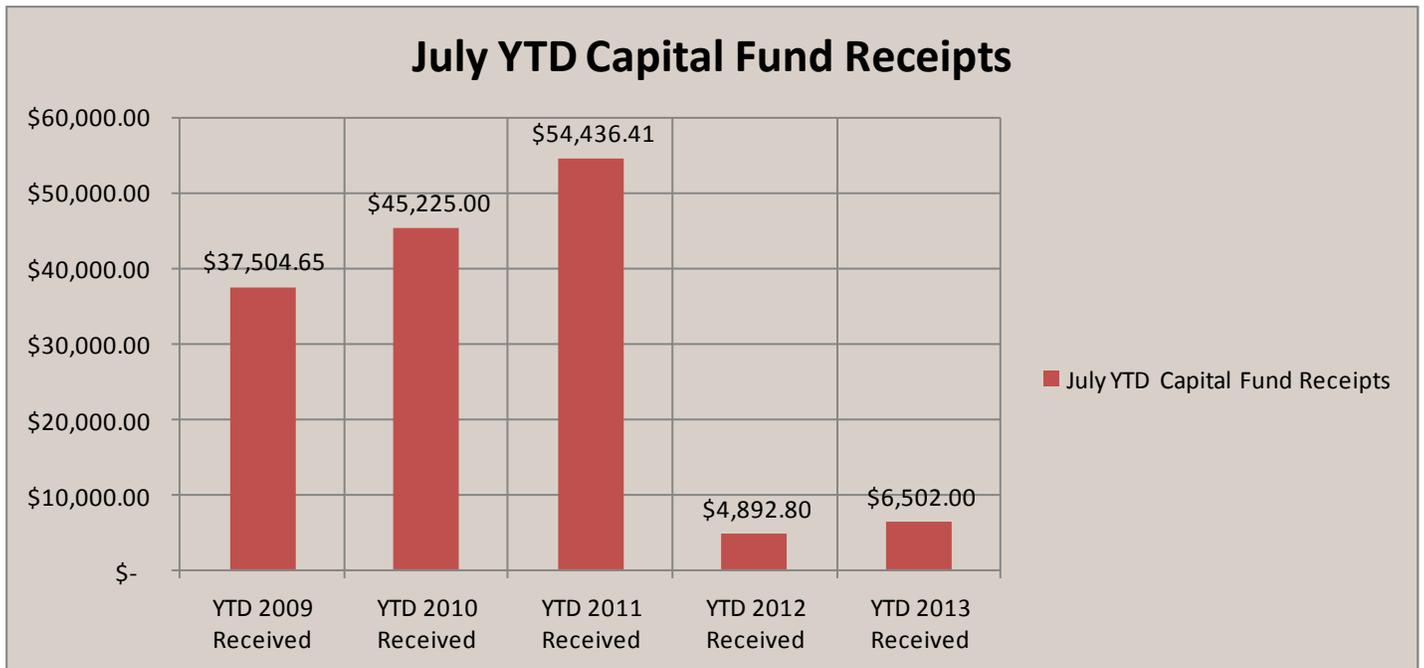
**Benevolence Fund** Receipts for July totaled \$1,430.15 as compared to the budget of \$1,493.75 (a shortfall of \$63.60). Year to date Benevolence Fund Receipts through July totaled \$10,300.15 and were below budget by \$156.10. Please refer to the graph for a historical trend of benevolence receipts as well as the current benevolence budget. ...

July Year to Date giving for the **Capital Fund** was \$6,502.00. Please refer to the Capital Fund Graph that shows the historical giving for the years

indicated in the graph. You may contribute to the Capital Fund by marking your gift as "Capital Fund" and placing it in the offering plate. Please note that the Capital Fund is used to pay for current and future needs that may exist to purchase additional equipment (such as the sound system, tables and chairs, etc.) or building-type items (such as a parking lot, driveway, furnace boiler, etc.). Through July, \$736.74 was disbursed from the Capital Fund. Two Wi-Fi thermostats were purchased for a cost of \$386.97, an office chair for a cost of \$159.99, and a baby changing station for a cost of \$189.78.

### July YTD Benevolence Receipts Actual vs. Current Budget





# Camp Westminster

*by Don & Pam Schlernitzauer*

Verdant fields, calm water, new friends, old friends, winding roads, missionary stories, instruction from God's word: all these together made for an exciting time at Camp Westminster the first week of August.

The camp is held annually at the Green Lake Conference Center, a mere 75 minutes due west of Sheboygan at a lovely 1000 acre estate on Green Lake, the deepest lake completely contained in WI. The estate was owned and developed by the Lawsons of Chicago in the late 1800s and eventually sold to the American Baptist Convention in 1946. It contains an original settler's cabin, several old water towers and bell tower, a general store, a world-wide gift shop, miles of walking and biking paths that connect the various camping spots, cabins, meeting places, all sloping down from the Highway 23 entrance and an 18 hole golf course toward the lake and main lodge, hotels and other activity buildings and houses to rent on the lakeshore.

This year 68 adults and 80 children from our presbytery met Monday evening through Thursday evening to hear ...

After the teaching sessions people congregated, making new friends and visiting with old ones. We enjoyed getting to know two young women from Gospel Life OPC in Chicago... Everyone was eager to talk and share stories of his and her spiritual journey.

We also got to spend time with old friends, the De Masters. While many of the younger families did their own cooking at the campsites, the four of us enjoyed dinner at a nearby Italian restaurant, which offered a terrific family special of pizza and pasta with plenty left over for the next day. For the last several years Howard and Audrey and Earl and Marilyn Voskuil have provided a delicious all-presbytery supper on Thursday night with Jim and Arenda Onnink assisting the last few years. It was good to see

them and the De Jongs, who also attended the final evening dinner and session. As we were riding our bikes beforehand, who came driving down the road but John and Sally Henderson for their first taste of Camp Westminster. We were happy to give them a general tour, including stopping at the original settler's cabin for a history of the area.

Camp is especially fun for the children, the biggest of whom is Pastor Carl Thompson, boisterously leading exciting activities every afternoon, climaxing with the water balloon fight on Thursday. Then there is a swimming area, playgrounds, biking, tennis, crafts, volleyball, basketball, and, of course, campfires in the evening. In the afternoon the older folks can take a walk in the prairie or a tram ride tour around the property, rest, read, sight see in the area, including replenishing the cookie jar at the Ripon Cookie Factory. People smile when we tell them we've been at camp, but you can see that Camp Westminster provides wonderful relaxation and spiritual refreshment for all ages.





“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.”

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## Pine Haven Meeting

Pine Haven’s Annual Meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. Monday, Sept. 16 at Breaking Bread. Complimentary tickets will be needed to attend. You may obtain them by calling ... The highlight of the evening will be sharing the plans and progress of the new skilled nursing facility located on the Prairie Crossing campus.





Showing forth the  
excellencies of Jesus  
Christ

Grace OPC

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## Spurgeon Corner

*“Hast thou entered into the  
springs of the sea.”  
(Job 38:16)*

Some things in nature must remain a mystery to the most intelligent and enterprising investigators. Human knowledge has bounds beyond which it cannot pass. Universal knowledge is for God alone. If this be so in the things which are seen and temporal, I may rest assured that it is even more so in matters spiritual and eternal. Why, then, have I been torturing my brain with speculations as to destiny and will, fixed fate, and human responsibility? These deep and dark truths I am no more able to comprehend than to find out the depth which coucheth beneath, from which old ocean draws her watery stores. Why am I so curious to know the reason of my Lord’s providences, the motive of his actions, the design of his visitations? Shall I ever be able to clasp the sun in my fist, and hold the universe in my palm? yet these are as a drop of a bucket compared with the Lord my God. Let me not strive to understand the infinite, but spend my strength in love. What I cannot gain by intellect I can possess by affection, and let that suffice me. I cannot penetrate the heart of the sea, but I can enjoy the healthful breezes which sweep over its bosom, and I can sail over its blue waves with propitious winds. If I could enter the springs of the sea, the feat would serve no useful purpose either to myself or to others, it would not save the sinking bark, or give back the drowned mariner to his weeping wife and children; neither would my solving deep mysteries avail me a single whit, for the least love to God, and the simplest act of obedience to him, are better than the profoundest knowledge. My Lord, I leave the infinite to thee, and pray thee to put far from me such a love for the tree of knowledge as might keep me from the tree of life.



*Evening, September 5, Morning & Evening, by C. H. Spurgeon*

# Women’s Presbyterial

The Women’s Presbyterial of the Midwest will be held Saturday, Sept. 28th at Bethel OPC in Wheaton, IL. Plan to join your sisters in Christ for an exciting day of fellowship and prayer. Pastries, coffee and juice will be served at 9:00 a.m. with the meeting beginning at 9:30 a.m. and lasting until about 3:00 p.m. ...For more information such as speaker and topics see the bulletin board in the hallway at church.

