

REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

FRIENDS

By Pastor Brian De Jong

The recent visit gave me a wonderful opportunity to deepen a friendship that has been growing over the last five years. Spending time with my brother in Christ was thoroughly enjoyable for me, my family, and our congregation. That time also allowed me to reflect upon the very concept of friendship.

This idea of friendship shows up frequently in good literature. The popular “Lord of the Rings” books by J.R.R. Tolkien provides an extended treatment to the theme of friendship – particularly between Frodo and his servant Sam.

But even more than our own experience, or good literature, we are taught about real friendship in the Bible. It is there that we learn of our primary friendship. Proverbs 18:24b says, “*There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*”

In John 15:15 Jesus reveals himself to be that friend when he tells his disciples, “*No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*”

That divine friendship reaches its zenith at the cross. Jesus explains that “*Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.*” The old hymn is certainly true when it says, “*Jesus, what a Friend for sinners, Jesus, Lover of my soul, friends may fail me, foes assail me, He my Savior makes me whole – Hallelujah! what a Savior, Hal-*

lelujah! what a Friend! Saving, helping, keeping, loving, he is with me to the end!”

Friendship involves many different components. It includes an interest in that person’s life – we are never indifferent toward our friends. It also involves a commitment to them – to help and protect and defend them. Friendship is cultivated through shared interests and common commitments. To have a friend takes an investment of time. Good friendships don’t usually happen instantly, but ripen over seasons spent relating to one another.

Friendship also necessarily requires sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed his very life for his friends – to redeem us through His death on the cross. Our friendship toward Him requires that we sacrifice for Him. If we are to be his followers, we must “*Deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Me,*” Jesus reminds us.

In that same section of John 15, Jesus tells the twelve that friendship demands obedience, “*You are My friends if you do what I command you.*” Could you imagine being a true friend of Jesus while living in rebellion against His commands? What kind of friend would that be?

But mainly and mostly, friends love one another. Again, the Proverbs help us think clearly and correctly: Proverbs 17:17 “*A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.*” Are you enjoying the friendship of Jesus in your life? What kind of a friend are you?



Volume 8, Issue 4

April 2013

Inside this issue:

<i>Pastor’s Article</i>	1
<i>Wandering Thoughts by Richard Steele</i>	2-3
<i>April Birthdays</i>	4
<i>New E-mail Address</i>	4
<i>April Calendar</i>	5
<i>Ask the Pastor</i>	6-7
<i>Deacon’s Update</i>	8
<i>Perkins Fundraiser</i>	8
<i>Camp Calvin</i>	9
<i>Church Work Day</i>	9
<i>Volunteers Needed!</i>	10
<i>Italian Night</i>	10
<i>Recipe Corner</i>	11
<i>Hospitality Sunday</i>	12
<i>Spurgeon Corner</i>	12

Mnemonics...

- *Missions Sunday, 14th*
- *Hospitality Sunday, 21st*

A Remedy for Wandering Thoughts

Chapter 6, Sections 6

by Richard Steele

The Causes of Distractions, With Their Remedies

SECT. VI.

WEAKNESS OF LOVE TO CHRIST AND HIS ORDINANCES.

The sixth cause of distractions in the worship of God is, weakness of love to Jesus Christ, and consequently to his ordinances. Love unites the soul to its object: as faith is the bond of our mystical, so love is the bond of our moral union with Christ. The more love to Christ, the more life in his service. "Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm: for love is strong as death." Song of Solomon, 8:6. Were your love more strong, it would seal up both soul and body, and unite them firmly unto Jesus Christ. Love marries the heart and eye to the object; hence it is there is not a distracting thought in heaven, for there love is perfect: they see, and love, and sing; and praise, and see, enjoy, and love, for ever and ever. The three disciples. Matt. 17:4. had but a half-quarter glimpse of that state, but their love to their dearest Lord and his presence was so heightened, that the world was forgotten, Jerusalem below, and all their friends and fellow-disciples forgotten, and they anxious to abide there. And if we could by the eye of faith see him that is invisible, and perfectly love him, O how hardly could we spare an absent thought in his presence and service! no, all the world would be forgotten, comforts and crosses should all sleep together, while God and our souls were conversing in an ordinance.

Whence is it that most men can work and care perpetually, and no distractions divert them? discourse on their business in a most orderly manner, without one other thought? drive on a bargain an hour together, and think on nothing but what is pertinent to their present business? Why, they love what they are about; they like it well, and so tongue and heart go together, and are wholly taken up therewith. The jovial band like their company, and nothing is permitted to distract them; the servant comes about necessary business; the master fumes that they will not let him alone; the child comes, and then the wife, but he frets,

and is angry. And why all this? because he loves his company, it is his delight, his heaven: even so, the soul that hath a strong love to a precious Christ, and his presence, doth most heavily bear a distracting thought. The devil cannot pluck him from Christ, but the soul smarts; and when there is this smart at parting, that soul will part but seldom. ... This business knocks at the door, that trifle tempts him; yet there he holds and frowns away all his temptations. His love is ardent. "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in that law doth he meditate day and night." Psalm 1:2. When prayer is your delight and not your task, then you will dwell therein with complacence. "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy." Psalm 43:4. Children are subject to look off their books, because they delight not in them; but when they are playing, they do it heartily. But now when thy love is cool, and weak, thou lovest Christ, and that is all; alas! there is little heart to him, the soul comes heavily to him, and having little delight, and heavenly complacence in him, is most easily drawn off with any distraction; for where the treasure is, there will the heart be also; where God and Christ are a man's treasure, his heart is with them. He wakes, and travels, and cares, but his heart is with them; he runs through his business with all the haste that may stand with good speed, that he may retreat to his heart, which he left with God, and then holy duties are the rest of his soul. And where the world, or sin, are a man's treasure, his heart is with them also; he reads, and hears, and prays, but his heart is away; the least noise, business, or whisper, can fetch him away; alas! his love is cool, and a drop of water will quench a spark of fire.

The remedies of this weakness of the love to Christ and his ordinances are,

1. Know him better; and meditate more on his real excellencies. "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" Song of Solomon v. 9. Why, v. 16. "His mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely;" or, as the Hebrew, "all of him is delights." And then mark the reply, chap. 6:1, "We will seek him with thee." The pure and orient sun is

Wandering Concluded...

no more than a glow-worm to the blind, nor the fairest face than a skeleton. It is the eye that must affect the heart. Come, then, open the eye of faith, and gaze on this heavenly object; sit down, and meditate who, and what he is; open but the sacred cabinet of his attributes, every box is full of the most sweet perfumes: each of his offices is pregnant with true and transcendent comfort. His actions, his passion, his words, his works, and above all, his heart, is as full of heaven as ever it can hold, and full for thee: the "fountain opened for thy sins and uncleanness." The treasures of his grace free for thy supplies, what heart can freeze under such discoveries? Nay, stay, and look at him on the cross calling thee, with arms stretched out to embrace thee, his heart opened to let thee in, and deny him thy love if thou canst. And if once ¹ your hearts be inflamed with his love, no small affairs shall keep you from his presence, nor distract you in it.

2. Get communion with Christ in his ordinances. As he said on another occasion, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is, thou wouldst have asked, and he would have given thee living water." John 4:10. So I say, if thou knewest what communion is with Christ, thou would ask after prayer, and long for such opportunities. "Why, what is communion with Christ? For thy spirit to fly up into heaven, among the celestial spirits, and for Christ's Spirit to descend into thy heart. And this makes a heaven upon earth; it is inexperience in this, that makes us cool to Christ and holy duties: strangeness makes company burthensome. A king and a beggar, a scholar and a clown, cannot make company of one another. So when there is a distance between God and the soul, there is little longing for his ordinance, nor true delight in it. Communion with Christ increases love, and love to him promotes communion. "that thou wert my brother," saith the spouse, "the son of my mother," — there is ardent love; "when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee," — there is communion, "yet should I not be despised." Song of Solomon 8:1. If you did but see his power and glory, "your soul would be filled as with marrow and fatness, and your mouth would praise him with joyful lips." Psalm 63:2, 5. One beam of his holiness, love, or mercy, would so charm your hearts, that you would be loth to part, and long to meet again; for how can it choose but transport a finite heart, to see and feel the

sweetest perfections of the infinite God displayed before and graven on it? When Moses was in near communion with God on the Mount, no thinking of meat or cares about his tents below, but there he is swallowed up, and is content to melt in that sun of light and heat, and come down no more; it was easy to count his distractions in the Mount. Oh, who can see the face of God, and not be ravished therewith! who can behold the beauty of the Lord, and not choose to dwell in his presence all the days of a man's life? It is communion with Christ Jesus, that will warm your love to him, and when "the king brings you into his chambers, you will be glad and rejoice in him, you will remember his love more than wine." Song of Solomon 1:4.

3. Believe verily that you can be nowhere better, nowhere so well as in an ordinance; this will content and please your minds in the Lord's service, when you can be nowhere better; for what company can be better than God's? The chiefest good must needs afford the choicest company; who can impart such rare delights and sweet content as he can? and where doth he communicate himself as ill an ordinance? Say, the world knocks at the door, and would have thee away; can vanity entertain you like felicity? can the world produce higher pleasures than he that made it? Would sin come in and steal your hearts away? can the chiefest evil create thee sweeter entertainment than the chiefest good? No, no, you are best where you are. If the world could find you such another Deity, somewhat might be yielded; or give you security of the reality, satisfaction, and duration of its toys: but, alas I there is no show for this, you are best where you are. I am conversing with the Lord of heaven and earth, who can reward each petition with a crown. I am in the next employment to heaven, in a corner of heaven, I cannot look off yonder lovely One, I will not leave, I must not come down. And this experience would enrapture you with an ordinance, and deliver you from diversions in it; "you will sit down under his shadow with great delight, when his fruit is sweet to your taste."

¹ He loves thee little, O Lord, who loves any thing with thee, which he loves not for thee. — Augustine.

April Birthdays

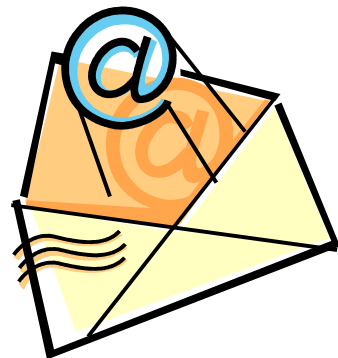


New E-mail Address

Ellen McNeese has a new e-mail address!

You can reach her at:

mcneesemac@gmail.com

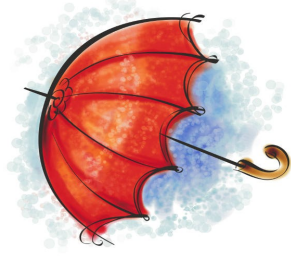




Grace OPC

April 2013

*Showing forth the
excellencies of
Jesus Christ*



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

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Ask the Pastor

by Pastor Brian De Jong

Recently I was asked, “How do you prepare sermons?” That’s a good question, and one well worth considering.

Sermon writing begins with prayer – prayer for understanding, prayer for insight into the meaning of the text, prayer for the right words. In fact, no sermon will have much value or effect without being “bathed in prayer.”

Since I preach consecutively through books of the Bible (for the most part), my text is delivered to me by the flow of the chapter I’m working in. For instance, I am working in Ecclesiastes 7 right now on Sunday evenings and will soon be moving into chapter 8. That’s how the Holy Spirit moved Solomon to write the book of Ecclesiastes, so I follow the Spirit’s organization.

As an aside, the reason I choose this method (called *Lectio Continua*) is the conviction that God has wisely arranged His word, and we learn it best when we take it in the sequence and context He has given. There is a logical flow to the Scriptures which is broken when we pick and choose a verse here or there. This method enables us to see the parts in relation to the whole, and the whole in relation to the parts. It also helps us cover many important topics that might be otherwise neglected or even avoided.

In taking a passage – such as Ecclesiastes 8 – I then break it down into preaching segments (called a *pericope*). This is a textual unit that holds together. Sometimes these units are easy to spot, and revolve around a central idea or story. Other times it is tougher to decide where to start and where to stop in the text. At times they can be exceedingly short (such as a single verse of Exodus 20). At other times they are quite long – lasting a full chapter or more.

Once I’ve chosen the section I want to preach on, I will translate it from the original language. For Old Testament passages, that means I use my Hebrew Bible. For New Testament sections, it is my Greek New Testament. With the help of my lexicons, dictionaries and encyclopedias, I try to carefully translate each verse in the chosen passage.

Often times, the study of the original language will help me slow down and carefully concentrate on the specific words and phrases. Not infrequently, new insights will arise during the translation process. On more than one occasion, a discovery in the original language has changed the way I understand the passage altogether.

Having done the translation, I then employ some literary analysis. In this stage of the study, I’m looking for patterns or correspondences in the text. Let me provide an example from John 10:14-15. It reads, “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

This is an A-B-C-C’-B’-A’ structure (called a *chiasm*). Look at this diagram and you’ll see how it works:

- A I am the good shepherd
- B I know My own
- C My own know Me
- C’ Even as the Father knows Me
- B’ And I know the Father
- A’ and I lay down My life for the sheep

So the central idea of that small section is that the Father and the sheep know Christ, the good shepherd. Christ knows both the sheep and the Father also. And the “bookends” are “Christ is the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.”

These kinds of literary structures also aid understanding of the central point of the passage. One of the most important things to discover is the main point – what is the author really driving at? What is God revealing to us here? If the sermon doesn’t have a clear main point that arises from the text, it will wander too and fro, but go nowhere in particular.

More study is done on the passage, including the use of cross references. Are there other passages that speak about the same topic? These can be

Ask the Pastor Concluded...

discovered through the use of various tools, such as concordances and computer software. The searching capacities of computer Bibles have made such studies far faster and more thorough, but they tend to produce a certain mental laziness too.

Often the passage will suggest questions that should be asked and answered. From the verses above in John 10, we might ask, “How do the sheep know the good Shepherd?” What makes the “good Shepherd” truly “good”? How does Christ know the Father and vice-versa? By asking and answering questions connected to the text, you dig deeper and deeper into its basic meaning.

Only after such study is done on the passage will I turn to my other tools – to commentaries and other resources. I prefer to do my own thinking before I listen to what someone else thought. However, I realize that my insights might be sharpened by the input of scholars, so I don’t neglect the resources available.

With all of that data swimming through my head, I begin to think about an outline for the sermon. What are the points that I want to focus upon? What is the first point? How much will I need to explain the passage itself? After I’ve provided sufficient explanation of the text, then the second point will usually drive at what it means for us today. The final point is most often the application section – where we start to consider how to put this into practice in our everyday lives.

When the outline is finished, I then start thinking about a good introduction. One of my seminary profs once said that the introduction is like the point on a spear. It is the first thing that makes contact and it leads the rest of the spear. A well chosen introduction should serve the rest of the sermon by leading the mind of the hearers to start thinking about a particular matter that will be addressed in the body of the sermon.

When I’ve chosen an introduction, I can then start writing. I compose at my keyboard of my computer, and take time to write out a rather full manuscript of what I plan to say. I then save and print a copy.

Usually this happens on Thursday (my so-called Sermon Day). If I finish my sermon manuscripts on Thursday, then I run through the morning sermon during my personal devotions on Friday morning. I do the same with my evening sermon manuscript on Saturday morning. This gives me a couple of days to mull things over and polish up any spots that need work.

On Sunday morning I wake up early and run through my sermon one last time before eating breakfast and dressing for church. That means I’ve read it through outloud at least twice, and it is largely stored in my short term memory. I don’t memorize my sermons, but I do like to have a good familiarity with what I’ve prepared.

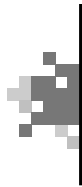
Prayer enters again when the elders meet before the service to pray together. Then, after reading my text in the worship service, I pray again for God’s blessing (do you see the importance of prayer??). Then I preach – and what I preach will bear more or less connection to what I’ve prepared. Yet I would quickly say that preaching is very dependent upon the Holy Spirit, and sometimes the Spirit rearranges what I’ve prepared. Often the Spirit will move me to emphasize a point more than I had originally intended, and sometimes the Spirit moves me on faster than I anticipated.

As the Spirit is working in and through me, the preacher, He also works in the hearers. We want your faith to rest not upon human wisdom or eloquence, but upon the Spirit and power. Good preaching recognizes that the Spirit’s role is absolutely vital for any fruit to come from the sermon.

A final step that is sometimes done is to answer questions, or to clarify and further explain points to specific church members. If someone has a question about something said in a sermon, and asks me for additional help, I am glad to discuss the sermon with that person.

So that is how I prepare to preach sermons – may God bless this good and holy work to the benefit of many here and abroad!





Deacon Update

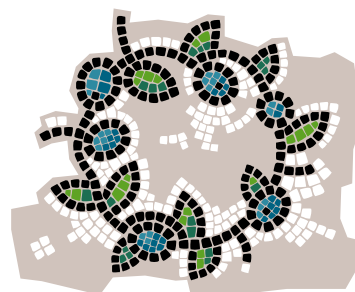
by Jeff Froh

The Lord continues to bless Grace Church....

Current balance - \$7,600

Financial assistance examples since 1-1-13

- ...
- Midwest Presbytery Diaconal Committee
- Hurricane Sandy
- Members of congregation needing assistance



Perkins Fundraiser

The Pine Haven Auxiliary is starting up the fundraiser with Perkins Restaurant again. From March 26th- June 26th, 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.



Camp Calvin

This year's Camp Calvin, "Be the Influence" will be held June 17-22 at Camp Whitcomb-Mason in Hartland, Wisconsin. It's for youth entering grades 4-9 in fall of 2013. Registration, directions, and other more detailed information can be found in a brochure in the church hallway or online at campcalvin.com



Work Day

A Spring Work Day will be held at the church on Saturday, May 4th. Help is needed with cleaning on the inside of the building & various yard projects outside of the building. Your help is needed!





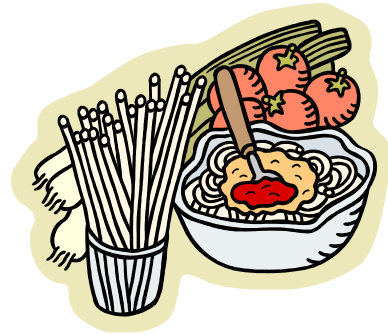
Caring, Friendly Companions Needed!

Spend quality, one-on-one time with a resident in one of our communities. At Pine Haven Christian Communities many of our residents could greatly benefit from having a weekly visitor; whether it is sitting and chatting with them, reading to them, playing board games or card games with them.

Sharing your gift of time is a very rewarding experience. You will enrich the lives of our residents and also yours! Please contact Denise Walter, volunteer coordinator.

Italian Night

Serving Chicken Alfredo, Lasagna, Spaghetti, Salads, Garlic Bread, Dessert and Beverages on Tuesday, April 16, from 4:30 – 7:30 p.m. at the First Reformed Church in Cedar Grove. Cost is by donation, with all proceeds going for projects to benefit the residents of Pine Haven Christian Communities. This event is sponsored by the Pine Haven Auxiliary.





“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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CHECK OUT THE AUDIO:

**SERMONAUDIO.COM/
GRACESHEBOYGAN**

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE:

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Spurgeon Corner

*“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”
(Isaiah 53:6)*

Here a confession of sin *common* to all the elect people of God. They have all fallen, and therefore, in common chorus, they all say, from the first who entered heaven to the last who shall enter there, “All we like sheep have gone astray.” The confession, while thus unanimous, is also *special* and particular: “We have turned every one to his own way.” There is a peculiar sinfulness about every one of the individuals; all are sinful, but each one with some special aggravation not found in his fellow. It is the mark of genuine repentance that while it naturally associates itself with other penitents, it also takes up a position of loneliness. “We have turned every one to his own way,” is a confession that each man had sinned against light peculiar to himself, or sinned with an aggravation which he could not perceive in others. This confession is *unreserved*; there is not a word to detract from its force, nor a syllable by way of excuse. The confession is *a giving up of all pleas of self-righteousness*. It is the declaration of men who are consciously guilty—guilty with aggravations, guilty without excuse: they stand with their weapons of rebellion broken in pieces, and cry, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.” Yet we hear no dolorous wailings attending this confession of sin; for the next sentence makes it almost a song. “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” It is the most grievous sentence of the three, but it overflows with comfort. Strange is it that where misery was concentrated mercy reigned; where sorrow reached her climax weary souls find rest. The Saviour bruised is the healing of bruised hearts. See how the lowliest penitence gives place to assured confidence through simply gazing at Christ on the cross!



Evening, April 3, Morning & Evening, by C. H. Spurgeon

Hospitality Sunday

Hospitality Sunday is coming soon! On Sunday, April 21st we'll have our spring Hospitality Sunday. A sign-up sheet will be 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.

