

REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

THINKING HEAVENWARD

By Pastor Brian De Jong

Colossians 3:2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

In the heat of a Presidential campaign cycle, it is very easy to get drawn into the wall-to-wall coverage of this candidate or that candidate. Who will win, and what will it mean for the future of our nation?

The ongoing “moral revolution” has a similar allure. A year ago it was all about so-called “Gay Marriage.” Now the hot topic is gender identity, and who can use which bathroom. With the lightning speed of this revolution, it is hard to ignore, and hard to keep up with.

Then there is the Supreme Court. With the passing of Antonin Scalia, and the appointment of a new justice to serve, which way will the Senate go, and who will fill the void left by Scalia?

All of this is to acknowledge that it is increasingly tempting to think only, solely, exclusively and completely about things of earth. Given the finite capacity of our brains, we must make choices about what we think about. Those choices should be driven by our true priorities. The choices we make tend to reveal our actual commitments and our real interests.

The exhortation of Colossians 3:2 is to set our minds on the things above, not on the things on earth. The reason for heavenly-mindedness is that we have died to the world, and our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. As Paul tells us elsewhere, we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

Because our lives are now hidden with Christ in God, our main focus should be increasingly on the things of heaven. God’s glory should be our chief delight. Christ’s prerogatives as Prophet, Priest and King should fire our imaginations.

God’s word should be the lamp unto our feet and the light for our path.

Such a heavenly perspective doesn’t come naturally to earth-bound men and women. We see what is in front of our noses, and we pay attention to those things that fill our field of vision. It takes determina-

tion and decisiveness to “set your mind on things above.” It won’t happen of its own accord.

So how does a believer shift his focus from earth to heaven? How does one go about “setting his mind” on heavenly things? Most basically, it involves a commitment to the “due use of the ordinary means of grace.” In other words, by prayer, through meditation on the Scriptures, with fellowship amongst other heavenly minded Christians, and even by means of the sacraments.

When a Christian spends as much time reading his Bible as he does watching the news, the perspective can start to shift. When the minutes spent in prayer are commensurate with the minutes spent on our technology, the focus moves further in the right direction.

How we spend our time tells us a lot about what is most important to us. So here is a suggestion: Take an inventory over the next week of how you spend your time. You don’t have to account for each and every second, but get at least a rough



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Ask the Pastor

By Pastor Brian De Jong

Recently someone asked me about the propriety of several statements in the hymn “And Can It Be That I Should Gain.” (TH 455) Specifically, they wondered about the refrain “How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”

The question was this: is it correct to say that God died? Apparently Dr. R.C. Sproul has questioned that concept in a recent issue of *Tabletalk*.

The question could be expanded to considering the opening of the second verse of that same hymn, which reads, *‘Tis myst’ry all! Th’ Immortal dies: who can explore his strange design?*

So is it theologically correct to suggest that “God dies” and that “The Immortal dies?”

The author of this hymn was Charles Wesley. Justin Taylor, Executive VP at Crossway Books, has written about the composition of this hymn as follows: “*According to the editor of The Oxford Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975-1983, vol. 7), ‘And Can It Be’ was written immediately after Charles Wesley’s conversion (May 21, 1738). Wesley knew his Bible well prior to this time, but had not yet experienced assurance of new birth or the fulness of grace in his life.*”

Taylor goes on to suggest that the Biblical background for the phrases in our question include the following passages:

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

Philippians 2:6-8 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by

becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Isaiah 28:21 For the LORD will rise up as *at* Mount Perazim, He will be stirred up as in the valley of Gibeon, To do His task, His unusual task, And to work His work, His extraordinary work.

So here are some considerations for how we should view Wesley’s hymn, and how we can answer the question.

First, in considering a hymn we should remember its literary form and its purpose. It is an expression of thanks and praise to God written by one individual in the hours immediately after his conversion. It is not a creed or confessional statement written by a council or an assembly. Creedal and confessional statements are typically deliberated and debated at length before they are published for use by the church. Much more review, analysis and examination goes into a statement that is intended as a doctrinal standard for the church than for a hymn. This is to suggest that we read a hymn like this differently from how we would read a chapter from the Westminster Confession, or an answer in the Larger Catechism.

Secondly, in his hymn Wesley is clearly focused on Christ’s death and its implications for Wesley’s own salvation. The first line makes that plain “that I should gain an interest in the Savior’s blood? Died he for me, who caused his pain?” He is marveling at the amazing love of Christ to die for a sinner like Charles Wesley. That first verse ends with “How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?” Obviously that is talking not about God the Father or God the Spirit, but about Jesus Christ, God the Son. So when we read “... thou, my God, shouldst die...” we understand him to mean “... thou, [Jesus Christ] my God, shouldst die...”

In this respect, we need to be careful to safeguard what theologians call “the hypostatic union.” The Westminster Confession phrases it this way:

“So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only

Mediator between God and man.” (WCF VIII.2.)

Because the two natures – the divine nature and the human nature – are inseparably joined in one person, we cannot split them apart. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, it was not his human nature dying in abstraction from his deity. There is a proper sense in which we can affirm that “The Immortal died” when Jesus died upon the cross. The Jews and the Romans crucified “the Lord of glory.”

This thought – that Jesus Christ My God died – is full of mystery and wonder. It is incomprehensible to our minds. That is exactly where Charles Wesley goes in the second verse. He confesses that “‘Tis myst’ry all!” This is no easy or simple concept. It boggles the mind. Paul also refers to the death of Christ as a mystery.

Wesley continues by asking “who can explore his strange design?” in reference to the Immortal dying. It is a strange design that even the first-born seraph cannot understand. Angel minds cannot unravel this amazing plan of God.

What Wesley is focusing on in this second verse is the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility. Again, quoting Taylor, “*In the second stanza, Wesley calls for adoration at the incomprehensibility of God’s love and mercy in this sacrifice.*”

R.C. Sproul himself defines the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility as follows: *Incomprehensibility is related to a key tenet of the Protestant Reformation—the finite cannot contain (or grasp) the infinite. Human beings are finite creatures, so our minds always work from a finite perspective. We live, move, and have our being on a finite plane, but God lives, moves, and has His being in infinity. Our finite understanding cannot contain an infinite subject; thus, God is incomprehensible. This concept represents a check and balance to warn us lest we think we have captured altogether and mastered in every detail the things of God. Our finitude always limits our understanding of God.*

So as it applies to our question, consider this sequence of statements:

1. Jesus Christ is fully, truly and thoroughly God. By virtue of his incarnation, his divine nature and his human nature were inseparably joined in the one person – Jesus Christ. He is “the God-man.” The two natures cannot be extracted nor treated in isolation, since they are without division and without separation.
2. Jesus Christ died upon the cross to save sinners.
3. By definition, the immortal God cannot die. Yet

Jesus Christ is immortal and he died.

4. Finite human minds cannot comprehend how the immortal God can die.
5. God is incomprehensible to our feeble finite minds. His plan of redemption remains a deep mystery that makes us marvel.



Al Mohler on Cremation

Excerpted from the transcript of "The Briefing" from May 27, 2015

Surge of cremation popularity in America linked to decline of Christian worldview in society

Next, when it comes to many moral issues, many pastoral questions a confront the church, there are issues in which it is very easy on a biblical authority to know what is right and what is wrong. When it comes to some other issues, it is not quite so easy. And moral judgments in some cases should be in the form of declarations, as when the church declares on the clear basis of Scripture, we understand about human sexuality and marriage. When it comes to some other issues we have to be a bit less declarative and put the issue into a larger context.

Such is true with the question of cremation. From a Christian worldview perspective cremation is not necessarily a sin, but it is according to the Christian worldview inadvisable. This comes to light in terms of a recent report that was published at *Slate* magazine, indicating that at least as many cremations as burials are now taking place in the United States. And given the trajectory of this movement, it is almost without question that by the end of this year there will be more cremations than burials in America.

Now what's really interesting in terms of this article by Andrew Khan is that he recognizes that something basic in the worldview has to have changed. And though he doesn't use the word 'secularization' that is exactly what he describes.

Looking at the radical rise of cremation as a practice in the United States he acknowledges this couldn't happen if the Christian convictions that had shaped the population in decades and centuries past had continued. He acknowledges the very basic Christian instinct against cremation because of the biblical understanding that we are created as a psychosomatic unity. And

Surge of cremation popularity in America linked to decline of Christian worldview in society

Christians are not seeking the liberation of the body (as we've discussed in the past) but we're looking forward to the resurrection of the body. That is a fundamental conviction of Christianity and respect for that body is been very important to Christianity from the very beginning as it was also very important to Judaism.

It is our belief, based in Scripture that the body is not an accident, but that God has created us as embodied creatures made in his image. And also Christians have to remember that our eternal promises are also grounded in the fact that we will be embodied even in our glorified state. Even though then we will have a glorified body. As the apostle Paul argues in 1Corinthians 15 in one of his major emphases, as Christ now is in his resurrection body so believers one day

also will be. It makes sense according to some worldviews to destroy the body by fire after death because in some Eastern worldviews this represents the liberation of the soul or spirit from the body, and in other situations it simply reflects a secular worldview that assigns no continuing importance to the body, and no divine origin of the body itself.

Andrew Khan writing at Slate.com about the

Mohler Concluded...

growth in terms of cremation in America says, “Meanwhile, spiritual views of the body and soul have also changed. Christians historically believed that the body should be preserved whole in the hopes of reunification with the soul at the end of days... [he’s there citing Stephen Prothero of Boston University who is the author of the book *Purified by Fire: A history of cremation in America*] But the ’60s ushered in a wave of New Age notions that reflected a new view of the body as subordinate to the soul, like reincarnation, karma, and transcendence.”

Kahn then writes, “As the counterculture has gone mainstream, so has cremation.” In another very interesting paragraph Kahn writes, “Cremation is more environmentally friendly than burial, and it’s easier to “customize.”

He then cites Barbara Kimmis who is head of something called the Cremation Association of North America. He goes on to say, “Cremation is more environmentally friendly than burial, and it’s easier to “customize,” as Kemmis puts it. You can enshrine cremated remains in customs urns or jewelry; you can spread them across a beloved landscape, or two, or three; you can divide them among multiple family members. You can embed them in a painting. Prothero once met a family that had packed some cremated remains into a bullet for hunting deer. “You dream it, you can do it with cremated remains” according to Barbara Kimmis. She is again head of the Cremation Association of North America. She then added, “Sorry, I get really excited about this stuff.”

Well, she may indeed get excited about this stuff,

but Christian should think very seriously about the question of burial and cremation, understanding to the Christian tradition, the Christian worldview based upon Scripture has had a very strong understanding of the importance of burying the dead with respect rather than with destroying the body.

One of the most important aspects of this story that appeared at *Slate* is the reminder that we have to think about these things as Christians, and we should think about these things as members of churches where we are in a continual moral discourse about how we are to fulfill our discipleship in Christ. And the time to discuss the implications of burial and cremation is not just at the moment when that decision becomes necessary, but rather right now when Christians should be encouraging one another to think most biblically.

As I’ve suggested the question of cremation is not a question of right and wrong in the same sense that some other issues are. But Christian faithfulness is not found that merely in being on the right side of questions that are clearly right and wrong, but being on the side of faithfulness in terms of what the Scripture would encourage us to think when we think about major issues including what should happen upon our death. But Andrew Kahn’s got it fundamentally right when he points out this radical rise in cremation in America couldn’t happen if Americans still held pervasively and overwhelmingly to a Christian understanding of both life and death.

Help Wanted: Musical Director

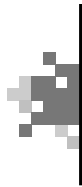
The Session is seeking a church member who is a musical person with experience in directing singing groups. With an abundance of musical ability in the congregation, all we lack is a qualified person to organize occasional special music numbers. Please speak with any elder if you're interested.



Spring Hospitality Sunday

On Sunday, April 17th, we will have Hospitality Sunday. If you've never participated before, now is the time to sign up! Everyone marks down on the sign up sheet their name, how many are coming and whether they would like to host, be hosted or both. The week before, everyone is contacted with whether or not they will be hosting (if they volunteered) or where they will be going so the individuals, couples & families can co-ordinate what everyone is going to bring in their group for the luncheon on Sunday.





April Birthdays



Wedding Anniversaries



Comments on Finance

by Joel Moody

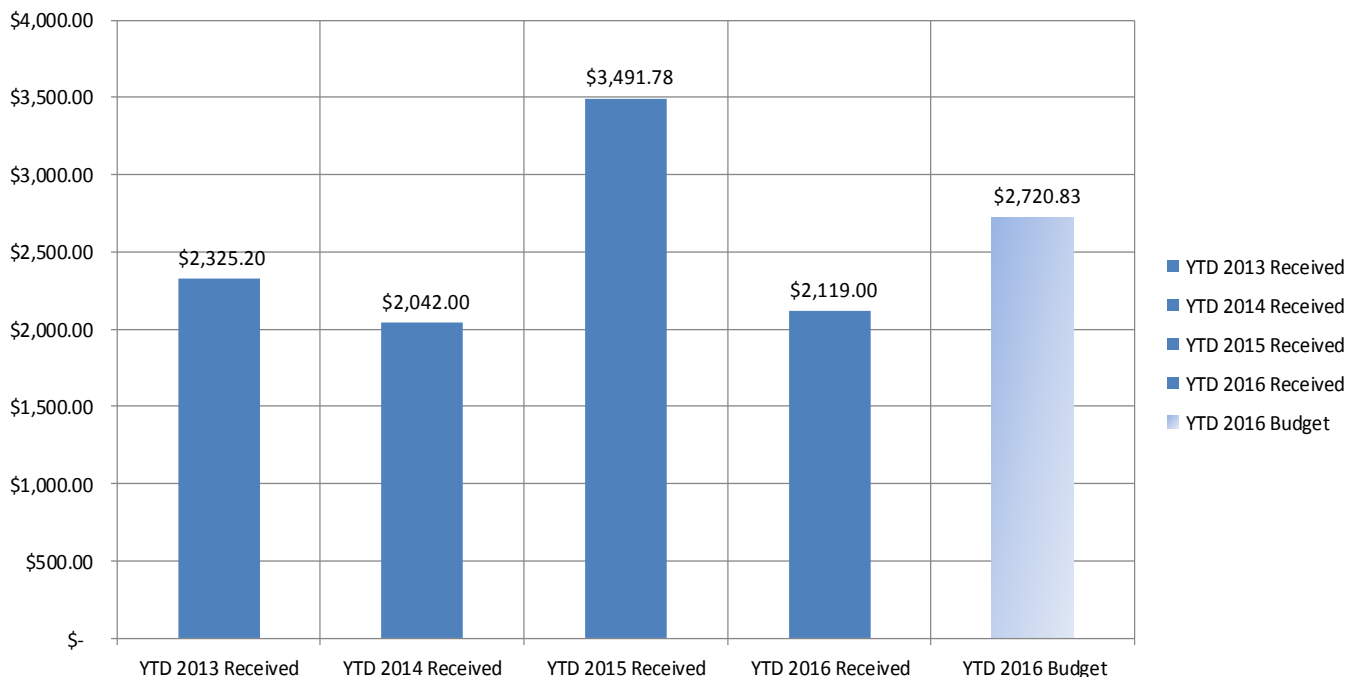
General Fund receipts for February totaled \$11,665.67 as compared to the budget of \$12,893.70, while General Fund disbursements for February totaled \$16,699.47. February year to date General Fund receipts totaled \$31,055.32 as compared to the budget of \$29,010.80 (an excess of \$2,044.52), while February year to date disbursements of \$27,526.78 were \$1,484.02 below budget. Through the end of February, the General Fund has increased by \$3,544.95. Year to date General Fund receipts for February were 40.8% above last year's total on an average Sunday while disbursements were 8.9% above the prior year.

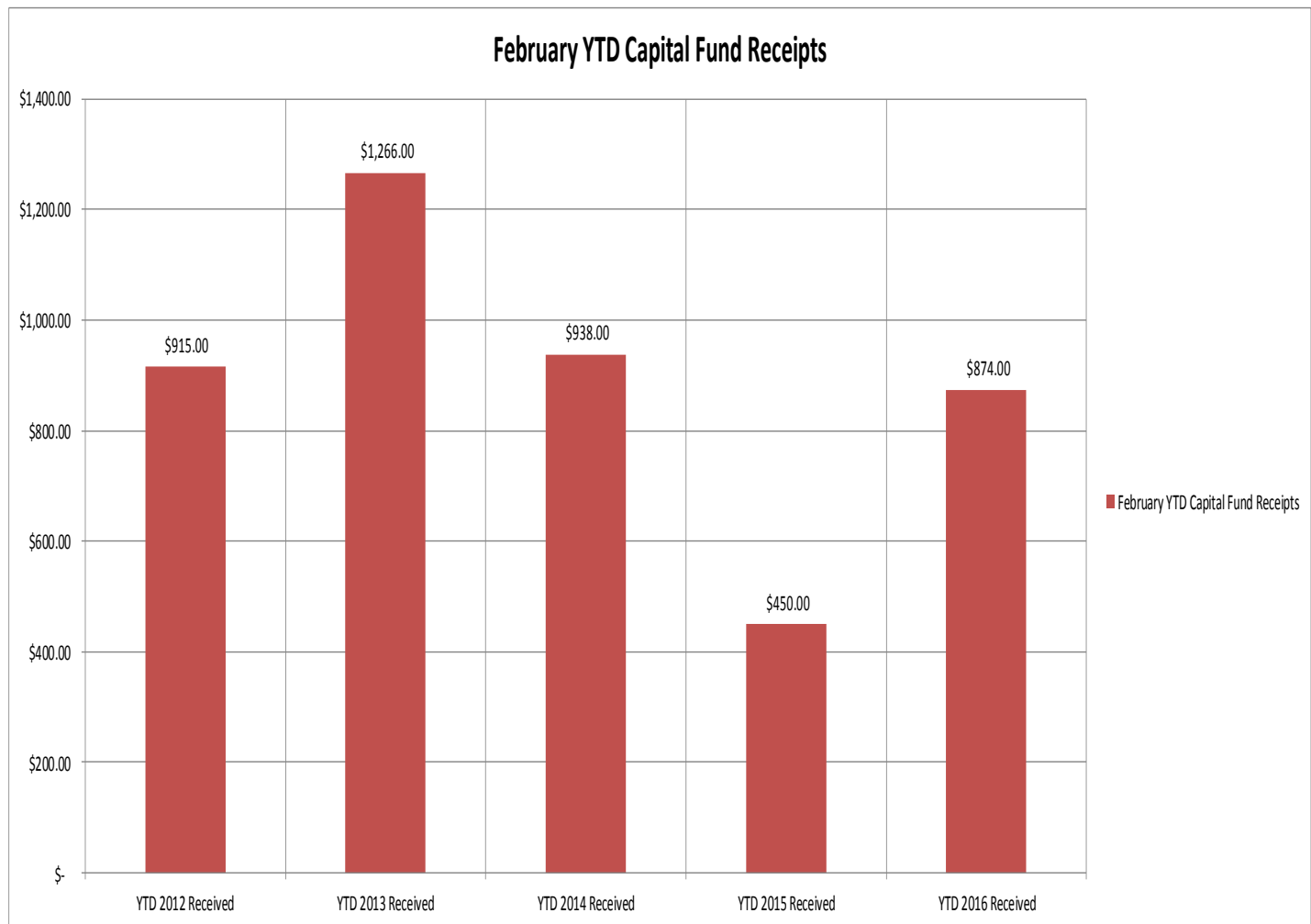
Benevolence Fund Receipts for February totaled \$1,042.00 as compared to the budget of \$1,360.42 (a shortfall of \$318.42). Year to date Benevolence Fund Receipts through February totaled \$2,119.00 and were below budget by \$601.83. Please refer to the graph for a historical trend of benevolence receipts as well as the current benevolence budget. During February, \$500.00 was sent to Worldwide Outreach (WVO) for the General Missions outreach of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and \$200.00

was sent to the Midwest Presbytery's Church Extension Committee (CHEX).

February Year to Date giving for the **Capital Fund** was \$874.00. 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 computers, the sound system, tables and chairs, etc.) or building-type items (such as a parking lot, driveway, furnace boiler, etc.). Since some capital needs are quite substantial in nature, resources to finance and pay for these projects can take years to pay for them. Even though capital needs may not be large in the current year, we should wisely allocate our giving not only to current needs, but also to these future needs as well.

February YTD Benevolence Receipts Actual vs. Current Budget





Bridal Shower

Save the date for Emile Doro's bridal shower, which will take place at the church on June 9th! All the ladies in the church are invited to attend. Emile is registered at Target. More details will come as the date gets closer.





Grace OPC

April 2016

Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ



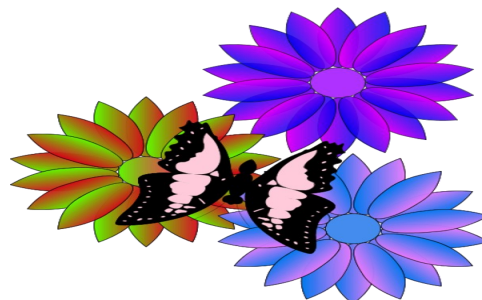
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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 Worldview Movie Night 7:00 PM	2
3 Meadowview Manor 3:00 PM	4	5	6 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	7	8	9
10	11	12 Session Meeting 6:30 PM	13 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	14	15	16
17 Hospitality Sunday	18	19	20 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	21	22	23
24	25	26	27 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	28	29	30 Men's Breakfast

New Hope Women's Retreat

The 2016 New Hope Women's Conference will be held at New Hope Presbyterian Church in Green Bay from April 15-16. The speaker this year is Dee Brestin. You can register online at www.nhopc.org. The deadline to sign up is April 7th.



Italian Night

Save the date! The Pine Haven Women's Auxiliary will again be serving their Italian Night dinner at the First Reformed Church in Cedar Grove on Tuesday, April 12 from 4:30-7:00 p.m. Please mark your calendars for this fun and delicious event. Watch for more info.



Applesauce Chocolate-Chip Loaf Cake

- ★ 1 3/4 cup flour
- ★ 1 tsp. baking soda
- ★ 1/4 tsp. salt
- ★ 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ★ 1/2 cup shortening
- ★ 1 cup sugar
- ★ 2 eggs
- ★ 1 cup applesauce
- ★ 1/2 cup raisins
- ★ 1/2 cup chopped nuts
- ★ 1/2 cup chocolate chips

Sift together flour, soda, salt, & spices. Cream shortening, add sugar gradually until light & fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time beating well. Add flour mixture alternately with applesauce in small amounts, beating after each addition. Stir in raisins, nuts, and chocolate chips. Pour into a greased, floured loaf pan. Bake at 325° for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Phyllis Nyhof

Honey-Oat Granola Bars

- ★ 1 1/2 cups rolled oats
- ★ 1/2 cup rice crispies cereal
- ★ 3 Tbsp. cornmeal
- ★ Pinch of salt
- ★ 1/4 tsp. baking soda
- ★ 1/4 cup honey
- ★ 2 Tbsp. coconut oil **or** canola oil
- ★ 3/4 tsp. vanilla extract
- ★ 1/2 Tbsp. brown sugar

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Line a 9x9 pyrex glass dish with parchment paper.
2. In a medium-sized bowl, combine the oats, rice crispies, cornmeal, salt & baking soda.
3. In a sauce-pan over low heat, melt the honey and coconut oil until combined. Remove from heat and stir in the vanilla extract & brown sugar. Then pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and mix.
4. Transfer the oat mixture to the prepared pan lined with parchment paper and press down hard (the bottom of a measuring cup works well for this).
5. Put in the preheated oven for 20-25 minutes (less time means chewy granola bars, more means crunchier). The bars will be golden on top.
6. Let the bars cool in the pan for 10 minutes. Then remove from the pan and let sit 20 minutes more before cutting. Store in a sealed container or wrapped in plastic wrap.



“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:

GRACEOPCSHEBOYGAN.COM



Spurgeon Corner

“And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.”
(2 Samuel 21:10)

If the love of a woman to her slain sons could make her prolong her mournful vigil for so long a period, shall we weary of considering the sufferings of our blessed Lord? She drove away the birds of prey, and shall not we chase from our meditations those worldly and sinful thoughts which defile both our minds and the sacred themes upon which we are occupied? Away, ye birds of evil wing! Leave ye the sacrifice alone! She bore the heats of summer, the night dews and the rains, unsheltered and alone. Sleep was chased from her weeping eyes: her heart was too full for slumber. Behold how she loved her children! Shall Rizpah thus endure, and shall we start at the first little inconvenience or trial? Are we such cowards that we cannot bear to suffer with our Lord? She chased away even the wild beasts, with courage unusual in her sex, and will not we be ready to encounter every foe for Jesus' sake? These her children were slain by other hands than hers, and yet she wept and watched: what ought we to do who have by our sins crucified our Lord? Our obligations are boundless, our love should be fervent and our repentance thorough. To watch with Jesus should be our business, to protect his honour our occupation, to abide by his cross our solace. Those ghastly corpses might well have affrighted Rizpah, especially by night, but in our Lord, at whose cross-foot we are sitting, there is nothing revolting, but everything attractive. Never was living beauty so enchanting as a dying Saviour. Jesus, we will watch with thee yet awhile, and do thou graciously unveil thyself to us; then shall we not sit beneath sackcloth, but in a royal pavilion.

Evening, March 31st, by C. H. Spurgeon

Front Page Concluded

outline of how your time is spent. Once you have collected your data, do some analysis of your schedule. If you determine that changes could or should be made, then start formulating a plan to adjust your time commitments. You might be surprised what you find, and what you can do to change your life in a more heavenward direction.

