

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE

Three Spiritual Dangers for the
Post-Lockdown Church - Page 3

The ethics of DNACPR decisions
Page 9

From the churches
Page 17

In Spirit and in Truth

(Page 5)



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Philippians 1 v 9-11

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Theme verses

Philippians 1:9-11



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CONTENTS

03

First word

05

In Spirit and in Truth

09

The ethics of Do Not Attempt Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) decisions (Part 3)

13

Conversations with the King

17

From the churches

21

Praise & Prayer

22

Book reviews

24

Best of the blogs

FIRST WORD

Three Spiritual Dangers for the Post-Lockdown Church

Bath time can sometimes be quite an ordeal in the Hambleton household. Especially during the summer months when our son Elliott can play outside in the evenings, he can be very reluctant to come inside and go to the bath. However, after five minutes in the warm water and bubbles he becomes quite accustomed to it, thank you very much. He's comfortable there, and wants to stay in a bit longer. In the end, getting him out of the bath can be even more difficult than it was to get him into it!

What bath time is to Elliott, lockdown is to the church. Going into lockdown was something done with a deep sense of reluctance; I'm not ashamed to say that I shed tears over the decision to suspend certain aspects of our ministry for those months. However, seeking to bring the church out of lockdown is an even more tricky path to negotiate. As I speak to ministers not just here in Northern Ireland but in other parts of the world as well, it is clear that so many are facing exactly the same challenges. One minister I know commented that after 35 years of pastoral ministry, he has never known pressure like the last year. These are difficult days for churches, and in this article I want to mention three spiritual dangers which face the post-lockdown church.

Apathy

Let's be honest: in some ways lockdown made Sundays a more relaxed day for many. I don't know who wrote the lyrics for Lionel Richie's song, Easy Like Sunday Morning, but whoever it was they certainly weren't used to getting a young family ready for church and out the door on time each Lord's Day. Lockdown changed all that, for a while. For those Sundays when 'church' went online, people could sit at home watching from the comfort of their own sofa and slippers.



However, now that churches have (in most places) reopened, there is a strong temptation for people to become apathetic about the spiritual discipline involved in setting aside Sundays as God commands: for resting from needless activity and gathering together for the public worship of God together with his people. Some may have become accustomed to the 'luxury' of lazy lockdown Lord's Days. But skipping church is always a false economy: whatever time it frees up for us, it also robs us of spiritual refreshment, growth in grace, communion with God and his people, and the comfort, joy and encouragement of fellowship.

Apathy is the silent killer of churches: it lacks the heat of scandal and the noise of heresy, but nonetheless causes churches to dwindle and die a slow death. To those feeling apathetic about attending church at the moment, the words of Hebrews 10:23-25 are as pertinent as ever:

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Anger

A second spiritual danger for the post-lockdown church is anger. Lockdown (with its accompanying restrictions) has had a polarising effect in society, and it is hard to find a congregation where this polarisation has not reared its ugly head in some way or another. People have strong feelings about the legitimacy, effectiveness and necessity of the restrictions we have lived under in recent months. On these issues, good and godly Christians may disagree. Take the controversial issue of masks in worship, for example. There is, I believe, a variety of legitimate approaches that Christians may take to masks in worship. For one person, it is our duty to obey the authorities and love our neighbour by wearing masks at church. For another person, they may feel that the state has over-stepped its remit by meddling in acts of Christian worship. That's fair enough – let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

A far more pressing matter, though, is how we relate to brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we disagree on

these things. Will we allow the angry, divisive polarisation that has come to characterise today's society to become a characteristic of the church as well? As Paul points out in Ephesians 4:26-27, our anger is not necessarily sinful (though it often is), but it is a way that Satan seeks to get a foothold in the church and divide Christians from one another by setting them against one another. To the Christian feeling angry about things at the moment, the grace of the gospel is the remedy we all need:

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Anxiety

A third and final spiritual danger for the post-lockdown church is anxiety. For many people, the last 15 months have been an anxious time – especially for those who already struggled with anxiety, or who are vulnerable due to poor health, or who are caring for elderly relatives. Many are still anxious about being out and about once again, including coming out to public worship and taking a full part in the life of the church.

The bible acknowledges that Christians may struggle with feelings of anxiety, and many do. Space here does not allow for a full treatment of the complex issue of anxiety, but suffice to say that the New Testament sets before us four main helps for the Christian struggling with anxious thoughts: the **providence** of God the Father (Matthew 6:25ff), the **presence** of the Lord (Philippians 4:5), a life of **prayer** (Philippians 4:6), and the **peace** of God guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

As we gradually emerge from lockdown, may God protect us and our churches from the spiritual dangers of apathy, anger and anxiety. May he give us renewed zeal for his glory, grace in our relationships with one another, and peace in our hearts.

Right, I'd better go. It's bath time...



In Spirit and in Truth

Jesus said, 'God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth' (Jn 4.24). While many Christians tie themselves up in knots over what they think worship is all about, we would do well to stop and reflect on what God has to say – not least because Jesus prefaces this statement with the words, '...for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.'

The Bible teaches that all of life is worship. This comes out in what Paul says as he applies the gospel to Christians: 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to

God – this is your spiritual act of worship' (Rom 12.1). All that we are and all that we do as Christians – individually and together – must be 'for the praise of his glory' (Eph 1.12). But this is not all the Bible has to say about worship. It also speaks of special times when God's people gather together to praise him as we hear his word and respond to him in worship. These times are nothing less than our being caught up in Christ to taste the joys of heaven in advance and pour out our hearts in praise and adoration to God in all his triune glory (Heb 12.22-24). In the light of this we can appreciate why Eugene Peterson has said, 'The four most important words we can ever hear in any given

week are: "Let us worship God!" Public worship is the high point of Christian experience.

What follows in this article is an attempt to summarize briefly what is involved in public worship in a way that reflects the views and practice of Reformed Churches through the ages to help us understand more fully what we do and why, when we come to meet with God. In the words of David, it is that we might truly, 'Shout with joy to the Lord', 'Sing the glory of his name' and 'Make his praise glorious' (Ps 66.1-2).

The Spirit and Context of Worship

We cannot properly understand worship without thinking about its context. God has provided that context by setting apart one day in which he is to be its special focus. From the very beginning in creation, we are told that as God himself rested when his work of creation was complete, so he set one day in seven apart for his creation to rest (Ge 2.1-3). This was not merely the rest of stopping work, but the rich rest found through savouring the 'very good' work of his hands and also to allow his creation – and humanity especially – to enjoy communion with our Creator.

The principle of this rest was enshrined in the Fourth Commandment in relation to Israel's Sabbath and then elevated in the New Testament to the Sabbath rest of the First Day of the week – the 'Lord's Day' – as the celebration of God's New Creation, inaugurated by Christ's resurrection. God's special day of rest finds its deepest fulfilment in its being the day for public worship. There is no better way to make the most of that day than by beginning it and ending it as the family of God gathering to praise his name.

When God's people do gather, it is not simply to worship in a way that pleases them. Our main aim should be to worship God in the way that pleases him. Worship must be shaped and moulded by what he has said in his word. Again, this comes out in the Ten Commandments. The first

commandment tells us whom we are to worship, and the second how we are to worship. Whatever we include in worship must have clear warrant from the Bible and be neither mere tradition nor the latest fad or fashion in the church.

Jesus makes it very clear that the spirit in which we worship is also of huge importance. As quoted already, we are to worship God 'in spirit and in truth' – that is, with heart and mind engaged and aligned with what God has revealed. Isaiah's warning about those who worship God with their lips, but with hearts far from him (Isa 29.13) is a challenge to every generation.

This leads into a second crucial element in the way we worship God: we come to him with 'reverence and awe' (Heb 12.28). Even though we have the joy of intimate

communion with God, that does not mean that we should come to him with a careless or casual attitude.

The best way to keep these aspects of worship to the forefront of our minds as we gather for a service is that it should begin with a call to worship. In these words, God himself invites us through his Son and by his

Spirit to come to him and offer him our praise. To hear his voice calling us to come to him fills us with a sense of awe and fires us in heartfelt adoration.

The Component Parts of Worship

There are seven main elements in worship – each of them contributing in its own particular way to making our praise pleasing in God's sight and a blessing to us as we offer it.

The first is God's Word. The Bible is crucial to worship because it is God's way of speaking to us clearly. Through it we discover who he is, what he is like and what he wills. As we listen to him speaking, we respond in worship to all he has revealed. Supremely it is in God's word that we come face to face with Jesus who is the living Word in human

Even though we have the joy of intimate communion with God, that does not mean that we should come to him with a careless or casual attitude.

flesh. So, in worship, we hear the Bible read, preached, prayed and sung – it shapes the praise we bring to God.

The second major component of worship is music and song. Just as the worship of heaven is filled with music, so our praise on earth is musical as well. We are to worship God using psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Col 3.16) – making the most of the inspired book of praise that we have in the Psalter as well as the best expressions of the hymns and songs composed by the church through the ages. Sung praise has the double effect of honouring God and instructing those who sing.

When we worship, we also pray. If the Bible is God's speaking to us, then prayer is the most obvious way by which we speak to him in response. Prayer should not just be holy rambling, but is best shaped by the patterns and examples we find in Scripture. Those who lead in public prayer pray with and for the congregation and so should use the language of 'we' and 'us' to include all present. The congregation as a whole can also join together in prayer in the words of the Family Prayer that Christ himself taught his disciples. Bible-shaped prayers involve adoration, confession, intercession and thanksgiving.

One element of worship that is often not appreciated as much as it ought to be is the sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ gave these holy rites to the church in part as a visible and tangible portrayal of the gospel; but more than that, as 'signs and seals of his covenant of grace'. That is, as guarantees of all God has promised in salvation through his Son. There is a solemnity about the way the Bible speaks of baptism and communion that is bound up with the intimacy they provide in our fellowship with God.

The place of money in worship is also often misconstrued. Many people see the giving of tithes and offerings as a kind of church taxation; but that is not the case. Paul's instruction about giving is linked to 'the first day of the

week' (1Co 16.1) – the day for worship. It was the means by which God's people could express in a tangible way their gratitude for all he provides for them. How much should we give? In the Old Testament a tenth was what was required; in the New Testament the principle is that we should give as we have been given: 'thoughtfully and generously' in response to Christ who is God's 'indefinable gift' to us (2 Cor 9.15).

He sends his people out into the world assuring them of his grace and favour.

It would be very easy to think of worship as being largely passive; but that would miss the point of all that has been said so far. To worship 'in spirit and in truth' means that we must be engaged and not switched off in worship. So, singing and praying are means by which we participate. But one little detail in the biblical pattern of worship is often overlooked: it is the people of God saying 'Amen!' to all that is going on. It is there in the Old Testament (Ps 106.48) and is there also in the New (Rev 19.4). It is a wonderful way of us as the family of God showing we are united in our praise and response to God.

God has the first word in worship and he also has the last, so the seventh and final major element of worship is the Benediction – God's words of blessing pronounced upon his people. He sends his people out into the world assuring them of his grace and favour.

Things that are Flexible in Worship

There are many things about worship that will vary from culture to culture and in its different expressions throughout history.

The Bible does not fix the times of services! Each congregation should decide on what is most suitable for most of its people. But when those times are agreed, everyone ought to make a God-honouring effort to respect those times. Arriving late for worship is not only distracting to other worshippers, it is disrespectful to God.

The issue of musical accompaniment in worship is often a matter of debate. The instruments used in worship that are mentioned in the Bible were instruments of Bible times – many of them no longer exist. On the other hand, the organ and piano, used by so many churches, are not mentioned at all in the Bible. There is no prescribed list of instruments that are appropriate for worship; but in the light of the broader principles stated already, any instruments used should serve to accompany the singing and not become the focus of attention themselves. Indeed, there are times when unaccompanied singing can be the best means of expressing worship without distraction.

Some Areas where our Worship may seem Different

In 21st Century churches worship practice varies enormously and the norm (if there is a norm) tends to have quite a different flavour to what we do in Reformed churches. Given that there are reasons behind our particular approach to worship, it might be helpful to spell out what lies behind our practice in some of these areas.

There is a measure of formality in our services that may feel different to the more relaxed and casual approach of many other churches. Our belief is that since we are coming to the King of kings and Lord of lords in worship, then it is entirely appropriate that we do so in humility and with reverence before him.

This in turn affects the choice of what we sing. Alongside the Psalms as the core component of its sung praise, the church throughout its history has built up a rich heritage of hymns and spiritual songs that express the great truths of God and the gospel. They also reflect a richly diverse musical repertoire that encompasses the whole range of emotion bound up with the variety of truths and experiences found in those hymns. Each generation adds to that body of sung praise, but does so, not by ignoring what has come before, but by augmenting it. This means our sung worship ought to incorporate hymns that are shaped by biblical truth and drawn from both ancient and modern traditions.

The main focus of our services is geared towards those who are Christians engaging with God, hearing his word and responding to him in praise. That does not mean that people who are not yet Christians are either unwelcome, or will find nothing in their search for salvation as they join with us. As Paul says to the Corinthians, the one thing that should stand out for everyone who attends public worship is that God is really present with his people (1 Cor 14.25).


When it comes to the sacraments and how they are administered, we follow the time-honoured principle in the church that those who lead communion and administer baptism must be ordained ministers. The sacraments must always be accompanied by biblical explanation and application so that those who receive them clearly understand what they are and how God's people benefit from them.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul makes it clear that true worship always involves understanding. He says, 'I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind' (1 Cor. 14.15). This means that the more we grow in our knowledge and love of God, the more we enter into true worship and give him the honour he deserves.

Our prayer as a church is that God would lead us into a deeper knowledge of himself and experience of his grace that we might 'make his praise glorious' in our lives and as we worship.



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**The ethics of
Do Not Attempt
Cardio-Pulmonary
Resuscitation (DNACPR)
decisions (Part 3):
The Sanctity of Life**

In the first article in this series, we considered what cardiopulmonary resuscitation involves and the clinical factors that determine if it is an appropriate treatment in given circumstances. The second article described how clinicians make ethical decisions. In this article, we turn to the topic of sanctity of life. Sanctity of life is a term that is frequently invoked in debates surrounding withholding or withdrawing potentially life-saving treatments. It is a term that is held in contempt by many. In 2009, the prominent bioethicist Peter Singer wrote

"During the next 35 years, the traditional view of the sanctity of human life will collapse under pressure from scientific, technological and demographic developments. By 2040 only a rump of hard-core know-nothing religious fundamentalists will defend the view that every human life, from conception to death, is sacrosanct."

Is he correct? I wish to analyze this statement and its implications for the Christian approach to ethics of cardiopulmonary resuscitation. As with all such discussions, we must first be careful to define and clarify our terminology. It may come as a surprise to most readers that the expression 'sanctity of life' did not originate in ancient Christian writings. Rather, it arises first in the 1950s in the title of a book by legal scholar Glanville Williams - *The Sanctity of Life and the Criminal Law*. Williams' purpose in writing was to

demonstrate the weakness of the position and to offer an alternative view of the value of human life, arguing for more liberal laws on abortion, infanticide, suicide and euthanasia. To this end, Williams sets up sanctity of life as a 'straw man' and misrepresents both Christian and non-Christian thinking along the way. For Williams, sanctity of life has more in common with vitalism (discussed below) than Christian thought.

Despite these dubious origins, it was not long before the term was adopted by religious writers as a way of expressing their views. However, it remains loosely defined and open to a range of interpretations - and misinterpretations. One extreme position is illustrated by Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, who wrote about the "attribution of infinite value to every human life. Since infinity is, by definition, indivisible, it follows that every fraction of life, however small, remains equally infinite." This position is echoed by Alison Davis writing in the Journal of Medical Ethics: "I believe that each human life is of infinite value." As Christians we certainly uphold an extremely high view of human life, but is a view of 'infinite' value supported by Scripture? This is a point we will consider later.

We are all familiar with the sixth commandment stated in Exodus 20:13 and repeated in Deuteronomy 5:17. This is variously translated "You shall not murder" or "You shall not kill." Clearly, there is a prohibition

against taking a human life. Also, it is clear that God hates murder; 'hands that shed innocent blood' are among the abominations that God hates listed in Proverbs 6:16-19. But why is human life precious? In our contemporary culture life is described as a 'right' enshrined in law and based on the intrinsic value of the person. The Biblical view is very different. We read in Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And again in Genesis 9:5-6

And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

God has made man in his own image; not only are we his creation, we are his image bearers. Whatever defaces the image of God in man is an affront to God himself. (We will be picking up this theme again in the next article when we consider the concept of personhood.) But for the moment we can see that human life is valuable for no lesser reason than that it is valued by God.

Defining the terms of debate

At this point it may be helpful to look at the word sanctity in more detail. Sanctity is derived from the Latin

sanctitas. This word can be used to convey two concepts:

1. inviolability, sacredness
2. holiness, purity, virtue, chastity, and piety

As time has gone on, it is the latter concept, holiness and piety that is more closely associated with the word. Ethicist David Gushee suggests that a better concept for what we are trying to describe is sacredness. The adjective sacred is derived from the no longer used verb *sacere*, the meanings of which include to consecrate, hallow, or dedicate an object or person to a deity. Today we see it more commonly in its negative form - when something holy has been desecrated, or made unclean. So, rather than intrinsic holiness, sacredness implies that something is devoted or dedicated to a deity or to some religious purpose, or is entitled to veneration. When we consider human life theologically, we realise that, as described in the texts above, it is sacred because God has made it so. Human beings, as God's image bearers, have been set apart from the rest of creation for his glory. This then covers every human life - regardless of perceived worth or any judgements about an individual's 'quality of life'.

So, whilst the term 'sanctity of life' has passed into common use in Christian circles, it can be seen that its origins are more associated with 'straw man' positions, which opponents put forward only to knock

down, and its linguistic provenance is questionable. Indeed, Christian ethicist David Albert Jones is so dismayed by the vagaries of the term he describes it as 'an unholy mess' which should be abandoned. Legal scholar John Keown prefers the term inviolable - human life is inviolable. It is a basic intrinsic good and the right not to be killed is enjoyed, regardless of inability or disability. He contrasts this with vitalism - the belief that life should be maintained at all costs, and with the commonly espoused quality of life position where life is deemed to be of value only so far as it is of a sufficient quality to benefit the person whose life it is. The perception may be that of the individual concerned or sometimes that of their family, carers or physician. Although the value of human life is not absolute, human life is a basic good. The inviolability of life means that it should not be taken intentionally and should be preserved and protected. However, it does not require that life be preserved at all costs. Indeed, we need to balance the value of life with the inevitability of death. Consider the following:

After the flood, God limits the maximum human life span to 120 years.

Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.

Although, as Moses notes in Psalm 90, the usual life expectancy is

closer to 70 or 80 years

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty. Psalm 90:10

Everything happens as it is appointed

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

Including death

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement. Hebrews 9:27

God's plan is personalised for each individual,

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:16

As the apostle Paul realised when he wrote to Timothy

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy 4:6-7

Human life is sacred to God, but God also sets its course and boundaries.

As to the concept of each human life having infinite value:

Health economists and sociologists attempt to calculate the value of life in monetary terms, for example, the value of a prevented fatality. Clearly, this is not what is meant. For an individual, life is of more value than the whole world:

For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Matthew 16:26 (NRSV)

But whilst life is precious, its value is not infinite. As Christians, we know that a mere human could not have paid the debt at Calvary. We also know that this life is not all there is. Indeed, in chapter 15 of 1st Corinthians, Paul reminds us "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." We have a future hope. In the same chapter Paul also reminds us that we look forward to a resurrection with Christ when death shall be swallowed up in victory.

So, how do we factor this in to our discussion about cardiopulmonary resuscitation and indeed any therapeutic decision? Firstly, we recognize that God has given life, and has made man in his image. He has set man over his creation as his representative. Because of this, human life is sacred. Also, because of this God has commanded us to preserve and protect life and has forbidden the taking of life. This is important to emphasize in our present culture where increasingly the value of a human life is seen to be

defined by its 'quality'.

Secondly, we must remember that death is inevitable and that God determines our length of days. So it is equally important to recognize when a life is coming to its end. At this stage, the more godly course of action may be to plan for death rather than attempt to escape it by any means. In circumstances where any treatment, including CPR, is unlikely to work, it is legitimate to withhold it. We must steer a course between vitalism (along with an unreasonable expectation of the powers of modern medicine) where CPR must never be withheld, and a culture that bases such decisions on perceived quality of life, where the weak, disabled and other vulnerable groups are denied a treatment that may offer benefit and extend the life of an individual precious to God. Human life is truly sacred and inviolable but it is finite and death is inevitable.

We return to Peter Singer's statement at the beginning of this article. We can see that, if by "the traditional view of the sanctity of human life" he means the straw man of vitalism, then such a view should collapse; not because of science but because it is un-Christian. However, it may fall to us as 'a rump of hard-core' (but hopefully not "know-nothing") religious fundamentalists' to defend the view that every human life is sacrosanct, that is sacred to God, and so should be seen as inviolable and worthy of

our protection. However, we must also remember that in God's plan, there is a time to die. I conclude with the words of physician John T Dunlop.

Let us pursue life for Christ with all of the wisdom and strength that he allows us. Let us speak out against any forces that would devalue life. At the same time, when death is inevitable, let us see it as the defeated enemy it is and not seek to resist it. Let us be careful that in our effort to preserve life we do not move into a position where we are resisting the call of God in death. Let us not allow our actions to contradict the fact that in Christ death has been defeated.



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Conversations with the King

Ben-Israel conducts the third of 4 interviews with Solomon, king of Israel.

King Solomon

Ben-Israel, I have to say that I'm impressed with the scope of your readership! Your report on the kingdom has gone far and wide, and now I have visitors from all nations. It seems like all the kings of the earth want to come and get a piece of the LORD's wisdom. The word of what the LORD has done for us His people has gone viral; the world is hearing of His glory.

Ben-Israel

I really don't think it's all down to my articles your Majesty, although I have thoroughly enjoyed writing them after our interviews together. The nation is genuinely captivated by what's going on at present. Most of our people have been to see the temple and they are blown away by the structure of it and the even the theology of it! There's a happiness abroad in the nation and not just because of the material prosperity which the LORD has given us. That, I'm sure, has its part to play, but so many people are simply talking about the LORD! Your candour in our very first interview has set a wonderful example for us. It is truly an inspirational thing when you declare that you love the LORD, and a truly humbling thing when you go to lengths to give the LORD glory for all that is happening in the land. These are glory days, but you have taught us to say, 'To God be the Glory!'

King Solomon

It is all of Him, Ben. The LORD is the High King, I am merely His servant, His Vice-regent. Although I'm pleased if my own example has helped our people to talk more openly about the LORD and all that He has done for us. However, I am more pleased when these visiting kings come and I get to hear the reports that they have heard. It is said that they come looking for my wisdom, but when they come, they don't speak about my fame, they speak about the fame of the name of the LORD. Moreover, they have not only heard about the blessings of the LORD, they have been told about the love of the LORD. This thrills my heart, and I'll tell you why. Ordinary people throughout this land of promise are gossiping the gospel. They're not all writing articles for widely read magazines, but they are delighting in how the LORD has loved us and blessed

us; and His name and His love are on their lips! And I get to hear this through kings who come from all over... and queens!

Ben-Israel

Yes, I heard about her arrival! The Queen of Sheba! She came to Jerusalem with a very large entourage, with camels carrying spices and gold and precious stones! None of my visitors bring quite so much! Tell me about her visit please.

King Solomon

She came with more than that Ben! She came with hard questions. She really wanted to test the wisdom of the LORD. I made many silent "arrow payers" to the LORD as she questioned me, and the LORD gave me the wisdom to explain and answer every perplexing and difficult problem. After the grilling it was clear to me that she had also come with another very precious thing – an open heart. She did more than grill me, she listened and she believed. She believed the report that she had heard about the LORD and His delight in us. She confessed that before she came, she didn't really believe the different reports she had heard, they were too good to be true! But she left believing that she hadn't heard the half of it, her parting words were wonderful: "Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness." I pray that she truly knows this blessing in her own heart and soul, I pray she went home believing in the LORD, trusting in the righteousness that He alone can give. Indeed, I pray she brings this blessing home to her own people, for this sharing of God's blessing is exactly what the LORD promised to our forefather Abraham. Remember those words recorded by Moses, that wonderful promise of the LORD: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The LORD is doing it Ben! The fame of the LORD is being spread abroad by the people of God, and even kings and queens are hearing and believing! I hope we never lose the wonder of it all Ben, the wonder that the LORD loves us.

Ben-Israel

Amen O king. By God's grace we'll keep "gossiping the gospel" as you so wisely put it. It's clear to me that you take delight in speaking about the LORD, speaking about His love and His wisdom; speaking about His worship and the temple; and speaking about the coming Messiah, the final glorious King who will reign forever! Such things are glorious! But I'm sure you're also kept busy with many other not-so-glorious duties as king. Maybe you could give our readers a little insight into the sort of day-to-day running of the kingdom in these days of glory.

King Solomon

Days of His glory Ben, days of His glory – don't forget it! But, yes, you're right, there are many other matters that I have to see to as your king. There's the whole world of politics as we relate to other surrounding nations. I'm blessed to have a special relationship with the king of Tyre; Hiram has been supplying wood and gold for the construction of the Temple and he's just sent another 4 tonnes, even though I think I offended him by offering him 20 Galilean cities as payment for his supplies for the building projects. He called them "good for nothing," which is sadly a typical attitude abroad towards our people in the north. Nobody expects anything good to come out of Galilee, but let me assure your northern readers that their king doesn't share that view! Maybe, one day Ben, even your little home town of Nazareth will hit the headlines!

Ben-Israel

That would be something, your Majesty! But I'm bit shocked by your willingness to give us away! Even we northerners are part of the Promised Land! Far be it from me to question your wisdom, but I'm just glad it worked out the way it did. Maybe you had some heavenly wisdom or foresight that undergirded the offer of our cities, and maybe I don't understand all the political manoeuvres that are necessary for kings to make, but sometimes they do seem to go beyond what is normative for us as the people chosen by God. For example, you've also taken another wife – the daughter of Pharaoh. I've always been taught that God made one wife for Adam, and that's our pattern from the very beginning; marriage is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman for life. I've also been taught that we ought to marry within Israel, within the people whom God has chosen and called. Please give us an insight into these things.

King Solomon

As you said Ben, God has given me wisdom and as king, I put that wisdom to use in securing the kingdom. We now have a strong political alliance with Egypt, one of our militarily strongest neighbours, he'll not be burning our cities any more. Our people are safe through such things, and other alliances are likely to follow; it's all for the sake of the kingdom, the LORD's kingdom. You have no cause to be alarmed Ben, the kingdom is secure. Some of your readers might have their suspicions about their king using forced labour from the nations of the Ammonites, Hittites, Perizzites and so on; but these are conquered peoples Ben, and while they are kept in subjection for our security, God's people are free. I never used forced labour for any of our own people, indeed I've made them officers and captains and commanders! And have you seen our army at present? We've had to build cities to house our stores, cities to house our chariots and even places to keep a ready cavalry. And I'm sure you've heard the buzz from Ezion Geber, where I've built a fleet of ships. They're not warships, they're for trade; and with the help of Hiram's men who know the sea, we've already acquired 14 tonnes of gold, and we're just getting started! That is a special relationship worth fostering!

These are glory days Ben! Please don't think I'm losing faith – you know me better than that! The most important relationship that every Israelite must foster and nurture is our relationship with the LORD Himself. That's why I've set in our national calendar 3 specific festivals, that every Israelite can be part of. And every year it is my plan to be there myself to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem. Yes, in our last interview we celebrated the completion of the Temple and all its furnishings, but in truth the work of the Temple has only just begun. This is the LORD's kingdom and His presence is among us Ben; we are to rejoice in all these things, they are blessings sent from the LORD.

Ben-Israel

Amen O king, and forgive me if you felt I was firing a shot across the bow of one of your new ships! As your father once said, "If you O LORD, should mark our iniquities, O LORD, who could stand?" All this political talk just doesn't cut it the same with me, as when you speak of your walk with the LORD. It was your spiritual words that resonated

most with our readers, and I'd like to get us back onto that theme. Can I be so bold as to ask the question "How's it going with the LORD?"

King Solomon

I'm much happier in this vein as well Ben, and I'm glad you asked me this because a wonderful thing has happened to me since we last sat together. The LORD God appeared to me a second time! He was wonderfully gracious and said to me: "I have heard your prayer" – the prayer that I offered at the dedication of the Temple. The LORD said: "I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My heart will be there perpetually."

He promised to establish the kingdom forever and commanded that I walk before Him as my father David walked: in integrity of heart, in uprightness and in obedience. And that's the challenge in all of our lives, not just the life of the king. He desires to walk with us Ben, with sincere hearts, with righteous living and with readiness to obey our High King. The challenge for me is to apply that sincerity, that righteousness and that obedience into the nitty gritty of kingdom life. Whether it be politics, or national security or order in worship; the LORD wants that sincere, righteous, obedience in all that we do. He wants it from you Ben, as you write this article up and publish it. Do your work while walking with the LORD. Do your work as a reporter – with sincerity, with righteousness and with obedience to God's standards. It's a huge challenge alright, but it is a challenge in which our God walks with us. He is willing and able to sustain us and keep us.

But the LORD Himself also gave me a warning, a shot across my bow, as you put it. He also said if we turn away from following Him, if we disobey Him and run after other gods – then He will cut Israel off from this land, He will cast the new Temple out of His sight, and He will make our nation a byword. Instead of people coming from other lands to marvel at the Temple and the wisdom of God – they will come only to hiss and say "The LORD has brought all this calamity on them, because they ran after other gods."

To be honest Ben, the warning from the LORD was more than a shot across my bow, it was frightening. All our army and good relations with other nations; all

our gold and all our outward forms of religion, will mean nothing if we forsake the LORD and come under His holy indignation. As He proclaimed to our forefather Moses "LORD, the LORD God is merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." This is our God Ben, He is not safe, but He is good; He's the King I tell you!

Ben-Israel

May the LORD give us the grace to walk closely with Him. What a wonderful God we serve O king, as He said to you: His name is with us; He has revealed Himself to us, we know His name, we know Him, and knowing Him is the greatest blessing we will ever know. His eyes are with us, watching over us as a faithful Shepherd, just like your father sang about. And best of all His heart is with us perpetually, His love for us is a wonderful, never-stopping, never-giving-up, unbreaking, always and forever love.

King Solomon

Amen Ben, wise words. Words from our God which we must never forget. May He give us all the grace to heed His warning and walk faithfully in the warmth of His unfailing love.



Robert Johnston is minister of Knock congregation in East Belfast. He is married to Julie and together they are blessed (and kept busy!) with three children; Ben (14), Luke (13) and Sophie (10).



Service of installation for Rev. Mark Johnston

Six months ago, this magazine contained the happy news that Rev. Mark Johnston had accepted the call from Presbytery to become the minister of Trinity Church (EPC), Richhill. It is with further happiness that we report on the service of installation which took place on Saturday 24 April.

The Moderator, Rev. Jeff Ballantine, led the opening worship, after which Ernest Brown gave a narrative of the call. He spoke of the establishment of the work in Richhill in 1983 in response to local interest, followed by a ten year period when Mark Johnston was first minister there. The next 20 years or so saw the work continuing under two ministries and two spells of vacancy and with the usual ups and downs of church life. Ernest then outlined a phase of perseverance from mid-2017 when the decision was taken to suspend services owing to the decline of the cause. However, as documented in a previous issue, this did not mean the end of prayerful efforts to continue the work in Richhill, with monthly evening services resuming the following year, leaflet drops in the area, a children's mission in 2019, more local people attending and over 20 ministers preaching at services, which grew to two afternoon meetings per month. This progress and the faithfulness of those attending motivated the Church Development Committee and Richhill interim session to believe that better times lay ahead, and to seek a man sent by God to carry on the work. Now, with Mark's acceptance of the call to resume ministry in Richhill, the rebuilding phase has been entered. A Sunday afternoon service and Tuesday evening prayer meeting are held weekly, with plans to commence morning and evening services in due course. Ernest expressed thanks for all who have given support by their presence and prayers. He reminded us that we look to the Lord in confidence.

At this point in the service, Rev. Marcus Hobson, clerk of Presbytery, put questions to Rev. Mark Johnston, and the act of installation was carried out. Jim Stevenson read God's word and David Watson led the prayer of thanksgiving and intercession, before Pastor Steven Curry gave the charge to the minister and congregation.

Pastor Curry, a long-time friend of the Johnston family, prefaced his sermon by speaking of Mark and Fiona as people of commitment, conviction and community, referring to them as Mr and Mrs Great Heart.

'Christ risen and reigning' was the message of the sermon, preached from 2 Timothy 2:8-14. These words, written by Paul to Timothy, were a call to remember Jesus Christ in a very difficult situation, a call to courage in a time of persecution. Timothy was to remember: the Person he served, a risen Saviour, King over all; the Purposes of God being executed in the world as the elect obtain eternal salvation, even in suffering; the Principle that death gives way to life and enduring gives way to reigning in His glory.



We pray that Mark and Fiona, but indeed all who were present, have been strengthened and nourished by the message—to remember Jesus, to think more of heaven and to take courage from the paradigm that the call to self-denial, sacrifice and crucifixion gives way to resurrection.

The singing of Psalm 67:1-7 was a fitting close to the service:
 God be merciful and bless us;
 shine upon us with your face,
 that the earth may know your actions
 and all lands your saving grace.

Presentations were made to Mark, Fiona and Lindsay and the congregation enjoyed a time of renewing friendship and fellowship in the sunshine of the carpark.

EPC Junior Camp

Age 8-11

A group of children wearing hats are sitting on the floor, focused on a craft or activity involving blue containers. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting.

Dates: Friday 9th & Saturday 10th July, and Friday 27th & Saturday 28th August

Venue: Crumlin EPC

Plan: Registration 10am, Collection 8pm

Cost: £12.50 / day or £45 if attending all four days. Spaces are limited so please apply early.

To book: Please contact Julie Johnston on epcjuniorcamp@gmail.com or 075 1989 6063.

A group of people are gathered around a table, looking at something on the table. The scene is brightly lit, possibly outdoors or in a well-lit indoor space.

SAVE THE DATE:
Saturday 7th August!

To register your interest: Please contact Andrew Johnston on epcinterscamp@gmail.com or 077 7367 2449.

EPC Inters Camp

Age 11-14

EPC Senior Camp

Age 15+

A group of people are sitting on a rocky or sandy ground, possibly outdoors. They are looking towards the camera. The background shows a landscape with hills or mountains under a clear sky.

Dates: Saturday 28th August

Venue: Stranmillis EPC

Plan: A 'day at camp', including talks, meals & indoor & outdoor activities!

Cost: £25 per camper

To book: Please contact Jacqui Thompson on epcseniorcamp@gmail.com or 077 4634 5389.

Andrew Lucas Installed as Moderator



On Monday 14th June, Presbytery held a meeting over Zoom at which Rev. Jeff Ballantine's time as Moderator came to an end, and Rev. Andrew Lucas was installed as the new Moderator of Presbytery. During the handover, Rev. Ballantine also announced his plans to retire from the ministry in October this year. We give thanks to God for Jeff's leadership as Moderator over the past year, which has been a challenging time

for everyone, and also for his faithful ministry over many years in Bangor. We pray for him and Sheena, and also pray for the Rev. Lucas, that he would know the Lord's help as he leads us in the months ahead.

Save the date!



EPC Autumn Conference

Saturday 18th September

Stranmillis EPC

Speaker: Jonty Rhodes

Booking forms available through your local congregation over the Summer

REVIVAL

CONFERENCE 2021

14-16th Oct | Newcastle

(Newcastle on Tyne)

Geoff Thomas Iain Murray Warren Peel

Maurice Roberts Bill Schweitzer

Peter Naylor Brian Edwards Jeremy Walker

For more information and booking visit
reformedconferences.org

“A revival means days of
heaven upon earth.
D Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Obituary of Mrs Audrey Drew



Audrey Drew, nee Preshaw, grew up in the Oldpark area of Belfast, marrying her beloved Eddie at Lynn Memorial Methodist Church some fifty years ago. They would live in Glengormley where together they ran a lawnmower business, before retiring and moving to smaller accommodation in Ballynure.

In recent years Audrey's health had been very difficult with major heart surgery to replace a valve and then, with her kidneys failed, constant attendance for dialysis at the Renal Unit at Antrim Area Hospital. Indeed it was at the Renal Unit that Audrey died, suddenly, on the morning of Friday 7 May.

Audrey was greatly loved by her family with Eddie, daughter Deborah, son-in-law Roger and her two grandchildren, Sarah and Daniel, all very much a part of the Ballyclare congregation. Audrey was a wonderful conversationalist and listener to people's stories and difficulties and all this despite her ongoing health issues. She was greatly loved in our Mums' & Tots' Group where her willing ear and gentle encouragement were a help to many and won a readiness to confide. We miss her greatly. There was also the example of Audrey's faith. Quiet, reserved in many ways, but leaning upon her God and often heard to say, 'We'll pray about it.'

We send our deepest sympathies to Eddie, Deborah, and all the family who had faithfully attended the many needs associated with her failing health with joy, and who miss her so much. Their comfort, like ours, is that she is with Jesus, which is far better.

SR

PRAISE & PRAYER

Give thanks for Jeff Ballantine's faithful service as Moderator of Presbytery.

Pray for Andrew Lucas taking over the position, that he will know God-given wisdom and strength for the task.

Pray for all the ministers and elders who serve in Presbytery and on sub-committees, that they may do all with a desire for God's glory.

Thank God for the leaders of Senior, Inters and Junior camps and for their commitment to outreach among children and young people despite restrictions. Give thanks for the Camp Days planned for July and August and for the children who have booked to attend. Praise God that his plans are not thwarted by COVID and that he is still the God of grace and mercy who has promised to build his church.

Pray that the eight and nine year-olds attending a Camp event for the first time will have a happy experience. Ask God for protection in travel and activities. Uphold in prayer the leaders and cooks, remembering those who will bring God's word through talks and memory verses.

Praise God for young people in our congregations who profess faith and show evidence of growth in grace and knowledge of Christ. Pray for those receiving exam results, preparing for university, or entering the world of work. Pray that they will be kept from worldliness and will make good choices based on spiritual priorities.

Pray for the many missionaries who, because of the pandemic, find themselves in uncertain situations.

PRAISE & PRAYER

Pray that they will know peace of heart and clarity of purpose as they deal with travel restrictions and changing regulations.

Praise God that he has his people in all lands and pray for the work of his Spirit in the hearts of men and women who have not yet responded to the gospel invitation.

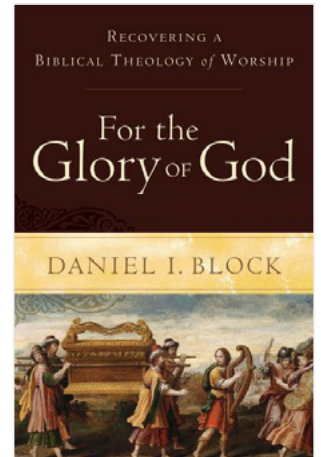
Remember before God his children who are in care homes, adjusting to limitations in health, independence and surroundings. May they find comfort in the certainty of knowing the one in whom they have believed and who does not change.

Pray for congregations as plans are made to resume church activities in September. Pray for God's blessing in reconnecting with young people and others in the community and for wisdom in how to organise meetings and outreach events. Pray that church members will be united, diligent and prayerful in their efforts and that God will be glorified.

Thank God for those who have been attending Trinity EPC, Richhill, and continue to pray for numerical and spiritual growth in this fledgling work. Pray for wisdom for the session in moving to morning and evening services.

Praise God for freedom in our land to worship as Christians. Pray against efforts to curtail freedom to witness as Christians, especially in the area of morals. Pray that God's people would be faithful in meeting for public worship and courageous in speaking the truth of God's word, even when it is not popular.

Title: *For the Glory of God*
Author: Daniel I. Block
Publisher: Christian Focus
RRP £7.99
Our Price £5.99



The issue of how we ought to worship God is one which has often troubled and even divided churches. For those who want to grapple with this matter in a biblically robust way, Daniel Block's book *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical*

Theology of Worship is an excellent resource.

In the opening three chapters of the book, the author helpfully lays the groundwork for our approach to the topic of worship, setting out a holistic, biblical understanding of worship, before discussing the object of worship and the subject of worship, God and man respectively. The definition of worship to which the author refers throughout the book helpfully summarises this: "True worship involves reverential human acts of submission and homage before the divine sovereign in response to his gracious revelation of himself and in accord with his will."

The subsequent chapters then move from a broad understanding of worship, dealing with daily life, family life and work as aspects of our worship, before the majority of the book focuses on the worship of God's people as they gather together. Block deals comprehensively with matters such as the 'ordinances', preaching, prayer, music, offerings, and even the design and theology of what he describes as 'sacred space'. Each chapter follows a similar pattern, starting with Old Testament worship, before looking at the worship of the New Testament church, and finally applying these things to the church today.

It needs to be said that the author's theological standpoint is different to our own (he describes himself as an Anabaptist). Presbyterian and Reformed readers will therefore not always be on the same page as the author, and this needs to be kept in mind. For example, the author's belief that we ought not to say that we love God, and his preference for churches to be facing Jerusalem sound a little strange to our ears! However, the vast majority of the book is extremely helpful and concurs with a Reformed view of worship. Thoughtful, serious readers will benefit from this book as they seek to grow in their understanding of how and whom we worship.

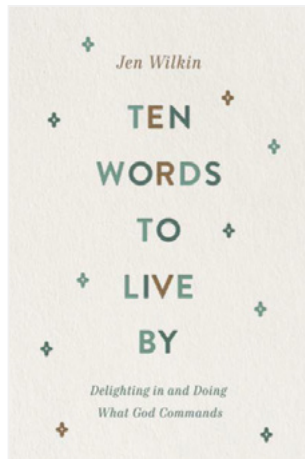
Title: [Ten Words to Live By - Delighting in and Doing What God Commands](#)

Author: [Jen Wilkin](#)

Publisher: [Crossway](#)

Pages: [166 pages](#)

RRP £11.99 [Our Price £8.99](#)



The 'Ten Words' are the ten commandments, and this book is worth reading for the introduction alone: the relationship between law and grace is helpfully addressed and the call is issued, not to legalism, but to lawfulness. In the author's words, 'There are good works to be done by the people of God, not out of dread to earn his favour, but out of delight because we already have it.' Drawing on a parallel with the children of Israel at Sinai, she invites us to 'a feast of righteousness spread in the wilderness, fortifying our hearts for the journey home.' The introduction is followed by ten chapters dealing with the commandments in turn. This is a short book dealing with a big subject, but Jen Wilkin writes well, and no words are wasted. It would be easy to read it quickly, but that would be to miss the fresh insights packed into every page. I disciplined myself to read the book with a pencil in hand to allow literal and metaphorical underlining of the many helpful points. In her efforts to bring new understanding to a familiar topic, Wilkin, in a few places, omits to make the obvious application, but this is more than compensated for by the skilful and penetrating way in which she uses the Bible to get to the essence of each commandment. Wilkin often draws on Christ's teaching to call us to examine our hearts and point us to an expansive obedience. For example, under commandment eight: When it comes to matters of wealth, do you perceive yourself as a terminus or a distribution point? If a terminus, you will labour without rest to acquire that which you cannot keep. If a distribution point, you will labour to give away that which was never truly yours to begin with. Each chapter culminates in a heart-warming and inspiring section entitled On Earth as in Heaven. I found profit in using the verses for meditation and questions for reflection, but particularly in the suggested prayer outlines. I recommend this book and believe that readers will find their complacency challenged and their zeal increased as they heed the invitation to love the law because we love Jesus.

Heather Watson

Title: [Aging with Grace](#)

Authors: [Sharon W. Betters and Susan Hunt](#)

Publisher: [Crossway](#)

RRP: £13:99 [Our Price: £10:99](#)



Is old age an experience to be dreaded? Are we on the scrap heap when we have reached our three score years and ten? Is there, in fact, nothing we can offer to society when we are deemed elderly? This book answers those questions with an emphatic "NO" and seeks to show that, although we live in a world which tells us youth is everything and aging is our enemy which we should fight, this book reminds us that "Wisdom is with the aged and understanding in the length of days." (Job 12:12). In the western world which exalts the culture of youth this book is a breath of fresh air which emphasises the biblical and counter-cultural attitude to old age. The authors' intention is to show that the Bible promises us we can not only bear fruit in old age but we can also flourish and discover our true identity in a way we could not in the first half of life. Whilst flourishing might look different as we age (our children do not need us in the same way and we do not have paid employment) yet, the authors assert, we must not judge usefulness in those terms and our identity is not based upon what we do but on who we are in Christ. Heart-warming and challenging real-life stories of women today interspersed with examples of godly women such as Elizabeth and Anna from the pages of Scripture stir the reader from any lethargy she might feel towards a right to an inactive old age. Warnings about the destructive nature of bitterness and regrets in later life are a timely reminder to remember God's faithfulness and His all-sufficient grace for each time and experience in our lives. The chapter on Flourishing and Fruitfulness is especially helpful, as is the constant thread running through the book of the application of Psalms 95 and 71. Each chapter ends with really thought-provoking questions for reflection and discussion which make it suitable for both private meditation and small group study. Considering the importance and universality of this topic, however, it seems a pity that there is no male input into the book, although there are a number of very positive endorsements from men mentioned on the flyleaf. An additional male writer would have provided an even better balanced and all-round perspective. This is a book to be read by all ages: younger people will be challenged to keep running the race and older folk will be challenged to remember that the race is not over until the line is crossed.

Sheila Steele

Best of the Blogs

A selection of online blogs and articles to challenge and encourage you in your walk with God and his people...

[How not to debate ideas in the public square \(Kevin De Young\)](#)

www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/how-not-to-debate-ideas-in-the-public-square/

"There will always be people who disagree with each other. That's not necessarily a problem. And there will always be people who make bad arguments. That's inevitable. But if we are interested in debating ideas (not just destroying people) and interested in persuading (not just performing), we will try our imperfect best to speak and write in a way that aims to be clear, measured, and open to reason."

[Your Weird Church is "Plan A" and there is no "Plan B" \(Jared Wilson\)](#)

<https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/your-weird-church-is-plan-a-and-there-is-no-plan-b/>

"I'm not an old man, but I've been in churches for going on 45 years now, and I think this is the weirdest time to be a churchman in my lifetime. I've been in plenty of weird churches too. In fact, I don't think I've ever been a part of a church that wasn't weird in some way. I bet the same is true for you."

[Charles Haddon Spurgeon and his struggle with Depression \(Simonetta Carr\)](#)

www.reformation21.org/blog/charles-haddon-spurgeon-and-his-struggle-with-depression

"Charles Spurgeon is known as one of the greatest preachers in history. Not everyone knows about his ongoing battle with depression. Even fewer people know about his advocacy for people who lived with the same – or a similar - condition."

[Congregations of Bruised Reeds \(Benjamin Urbicek\)](#)

<https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/congregations-of-bruised-reeds/>

"What is God to do with wounded, bruised people like us? If you have a plastic grocery bag that gets a hole, you don't save it. You don't try to fix a disposable grocery bag. You throw it away and get a new one. Seven billion other, better grocery bags fill our world. Why duct tape a ripped and ruined one? Thankfully, that is not how God treats us. His ways are not our ways. In Isaiah 42 we read about the compassion of our healer. "A bruised reed he will not break," Isaiah writes, "and a faintly burning wick he will not quench" (42:3)."

[How to Pray for Your Teen When You've Run Out of Words \(Michele Morin\)](#)

<https://michelemorin.net/2021/05/05/how-pray-teen-youve-run-out-words/>

"For one short season of our parenting journey, my husband and I felt as if we were hanging on to the reins of a runaway horse. Daily battles over curfews and negotiations around boundary lines had taken the place of warm conversation and laughter around the table. We mourned the loss as we searched for words to pray over family life in what felt like a war zone."

[Preparing for the Stewardship of Persecution \(Kyle Borg\)](#)

<https://gentlereformation.com/2021/05/07/preparing-for-the-stewardship-of-persecution/>

"Since becoming a pastor I've been convinced that one of my most important responsibilities is to preach and pray in a way that prepares people to suffer for the glory of God. Suffering – which is a wide and broad biblical category – is a stewardship given to Christians and the church which must be stewarded well. Seasons of suffering, no matter how dark and difficult, don't free us from our responsibilities to God. Rather, a great part of Christian discipleship is learning how to suffer in obedience to him."

