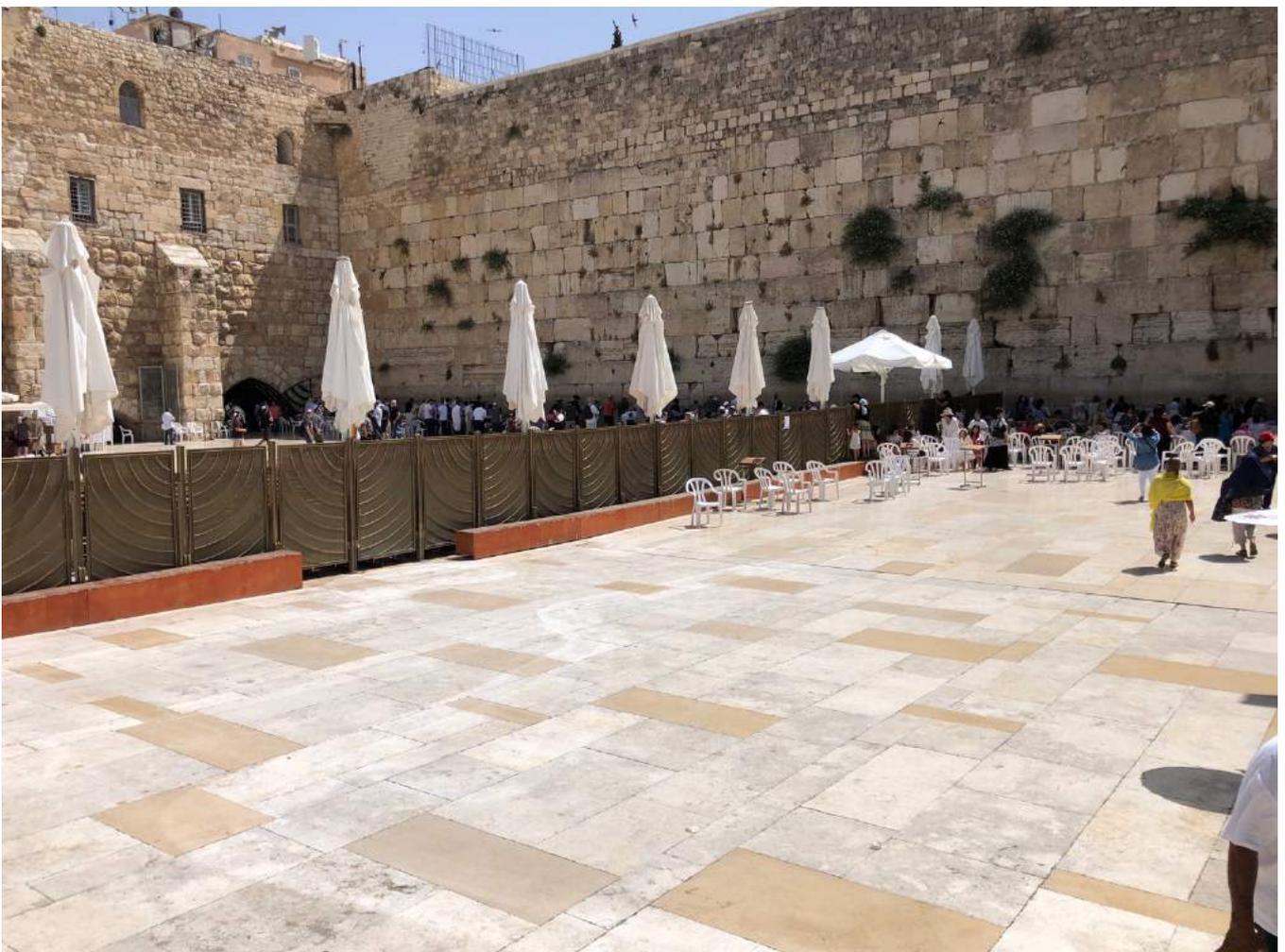


# The Presbyterian Banner

July 2019



**The Western (or Wailing) Wall at Jerusalem being part of the platform on which the Second Temple was built**  
Viewed from the women's area looking toward the men's area. The temple proper was destroyed in AD 70.

*Contents:* Editorial (UK impressions) : How to Begin the Day (Psalm 5) : Prodigal Daughter : The Nashville Statement : The Altar of Burnt Offering & the Laver : Making Urgent Medical Decisions for Loved Ones : Search Work : Congregational News



## FROM THE EDITOR

I'm writing this editorial from Northern Ireland where Anna and I have been for the past week as we come to the last leg of our visit to the UK via Israel. The ecclesiastical scene in the UK is complex. So far as Scotland is concerned, secularism has a great hold and the Church of Scotland is continuing major decline. A dozen or more conservative C of S ministers have moved to the Free Church since the change in worship practice in 2010. I'm not sure that the Free church is showing growth otherwise because of the change but there is a more positive attitude in many places. We were happy to worship in our old congregation of Leith, the only one of now six or seven Edinburgh congregations, where there used to be three, that retains the old form of worship. The services in two other Free churches we visited were positive experiences too. We were able to catch up in Lanark with Marie-Christine Lux (now Glancy), whom the PCEA supported in ministry in Peru and elsewhere years ago. It was also good to catch up with John Nicholls and his wife Sarah at Avoch near Inverness, and the Mackay family in Edinburgh.

The Free Church has given up much of its significant overseas mission work which at one time was, I think, 15% of its total budget. Financial restraints are a factor and changing needs in previously supported churches. We were sorry to see support for Rev Manuel Reaño in Columbia is being phased out on 30 June 2019. On the other hand, there is a very single-minded effort to plant new churches in Scotland. While some may think insufficient attention is given to existing work, it is showing promise. Significant help from the USA is

being received for this work.

In Ireland the scene is rather different with the Church of Ireland (Anglican) now much more evangelical than earlier years. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland with over 500 congregations in an area not much larger than Tasmania was in a worse state theologically in the 1970s than the Church of Scotland. With a number of conservatives committed to work patiently for reform using Presbyterian processes, the situation has now turned around. The church is largely evangelical and, with a faculty on Biblical lines, continues to move in a confessionally Reformed direction. Ministry training is thorough and well-funded. I was invited to preach in an old (1703) but now growing congregation of Vinecash near Portadown. Yesterday evening (30 June) we attended the Dromore Reformed Presbyterian congregation where Rev. George Ball has relatives. The singing was hearty, the message both thoughtful and challenging.

The Brexit debate about which we hear so much continues. If the UK leaves and Scotland breaks away (surely a bad idea) there will be a border between England and Scotland as between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. England will not want to retain Northern Ireland and the argument for a federated or united Ireland will press. That is indeed a possible scenario given the discrediting of the Roman Catholic Church over recent years due to widespread scandalous behaviour. The Republic is now in effect a secular country and that provides a challenge and an opportunity. Significant leaders of the RCC in Ireland have no confidence in the present papacy and there is a significant evangelical movement within the church. Official conversations with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in the last two or three years show RC appreciation for the confessional position of the PCI: some have said it is either Trent or Westminster. Interesting times!

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# How to Begin the Day

## Psalm 5

George Ball, Taree PCEA

The use of the Psalms in public worship is eloquently advocated by Athanasius, who was Bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century, in a lengthy letter to his friend Marcellinus. Here's a snippet, "*Whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you not merely hear and then pass on but learn the way to remedy your ill. If you want to declare anyone to be blessed; you find the way to do it in Psalm 1, and likewise in 32, 41, 112, 119 and 128. If you want to rebuke the conspiracy of the Jews against the Saviour, you have Psalm 2. If you are persecuted by your own family and opposed by many, say Psalm 3; and when you would give thanks to God at your affliction's end, sing Psalm 4 and 75 and 116. When you see the wicked wanting to ensnare you and wish your prayers to reach God's ears, then wake up early and sing Psalm 5*".

As Athanasius indicates, David in this psalm is again ensnared by enemies. The background may still be the period of Absalom's rebellion. The weapons David faced were not only spears and arrows, but deadly and deceptive words. David teaches us how to pray when we are in dangerous circumstances.

### 1. God Listens (1-3).

He prayed in the morning. **'In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice'** (3). The day for David was full of challenges and dangers. Prayer was his first activity of the day. It has been well said, 'we are fittest for prayer when we are at our freshest.' And, 'before we meet the challenge of the day we should meet the Creator of the day'. And, 'no musician tunes his instrument after the performance'. Begin the day with prayer.

His prayer was more than words. He also sighed and cried. He says in Psalm 38: 9, **'my sighing is not hidden from You'**. Paul writes, **'we who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies'** (Romans 8: 23). The Lord understands our sighs and cries, just as a mother understands the cry of her child, or as a mechanic understands the sound of an engine.

His prayer was personal. **'Listen to my prayer for**

**help, my King and my God'** (2). Prayer is not the soul speaking within itself, but a conversation with the personal, living, triune God. The Father lovingly receives and encourages His children in prayer (Luke 11: 13).

His prayer was prepared. David compares his praying to the way a priest prepares the sacrifices on the altar in careful accord with God's Word. He says, **'in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you'** (3). It should encourage us to be more orderly in our praying, especially in public. Jesus gave us a pattern prayer (Matthew 6: 9-13).

His prayer was expectant. **'I will look up'** (NKJ. 3). **'I . . . wait in expectation'** (NIV). It's as though David said, 'I'm going to place the needs of the day into the Lord's hands and see what He will do'. We pray, but do we really expect an answer? Think of the believers praying when Peter was in prison (Acts 12: 5). When Peter knocked on the door in answer to their prayer they didn't believe it.

### 2. God Loathes (4-6).

David gives reasons for his expectancy. He lists seven things about the character of God. He takes no pleasure in wickedness. Evil can never dwell with Him. The arrogant can never stand in His presence. He hates all evildoers. He destroys those who tell lies. He detests murderers and deceivers.

The Lord is no bland, domesticated, tame, or sanitised God. He's not like Baal, or Marduk, or Moloch who endorsed all these things and worse. God is good and such goodness is incompatible with evil. **'You are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong'** (Hab. 1: 13). **'Vengeance is mine; I will repay. And again, The Lord will judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'** (Heb. 10: 30-31). Evil cannot dwell in God's presence any more than a piece of paper can survive in a fire.

J.A. Alexander comments, 'Sin is not only opposed to God's will, but repugnant to His nature. By ceasing to hate it, He would cease to be holy, cease to be perfect, cease to be God'.

### 3. God Loves (7).

The wicked are barred from God's presence but David has access into the presence of God. How? Is it because he is made of better material? Has he a better character? A better record? We know that can't be true. He tells us the reason; **'But I by your great mercy will come into your house'** (7). He appeals to the covenant mercy of the Lord. Bowing down towards God's temple, he places his faith in the atoning sacrifices offered there for sin, anticipating the great fulfilment in the cross of

Christ. This is what gives him confidence. This is what makes prayer ‘work’. This is why we can approach the throne of grace with confidence (Heb. 4: 16). David doesn’t come presumptuously or carelessly. He says, **‘I will bow down toward your holy temple in fear of you’**. Dale Ralph Davis writes, ‘David is both lured by grace yet sobered by fear – just the right packaging for worship.’

#### 4. God Leads (8).

**‘Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make straight your way before me’**. David’s enemies were lying in ambush watching him like a hawk, bent on his destruction. Hence his request for guidance, **‘lead me in your righteousness . . . make straight your way before me’**. This petition is at the heart of the Psalm. ‘Like soldiers clearing a path through a minefield, David asks God to clear away all the dangerous obstacles that he might tread safely’ (Eveson). He testifies elsewhere, **‘He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake’** (Ps. 23: 3). **‘In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths’** (Prov. 3: 6).

#### 5. God’s Law (9-10).

He describes his enemies, **‘Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit’** (9). He prays that the Lord would pronounce them guilty. **‘Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you’** (10). You don’t hear many prayers like this today! This is the first imprecation (curse) in the Psalter. Some can’t cope with statements like these and refuse to sing them. They reject them as sub-Christian and vindictive. They say it contradicts the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament where we are counselled to, **‘Love your enemy’**. **‘If your enemy is hungry feed him; if he is thirsty give him something to drink’**. But to reject these words is to misunderstand them. Jesus endorsed these words by singing them. To reject these words is to read them selfishly and naively.

You may not have enemies like this. But some people do. J. Clinton McCann writes, ‘Could the use of these prayers remind us and bind us to all those in the worldwide church who are suffering in faith and for faith? All may be well in our place. There may be no trouble for the present that corresponds to tribulations described in the Psalms. But we need to remember such places as El Salvador, North Korea, China, Pakistan, etc., and remember that there are brothers and sisters whose trials could be given voice

in our recitation of the Psalms . . . The apostle said that, **‘If one member suffers, all suffer together’** (1 Cor. 12: 26). And, **‘Bear one another’s burdens’**. Can these prayers become a way of doing that’?

#### 6. God is Loved (11-12).

Because God will exercise judgement on His enemies and defend His own like a hen protects her young under her wings (Ps. 91: 4), David rejoices. When we know and love the Lord as our Saviour we have every reason to ‘rejoice’, ‘shout for joy’, and ‘be glad’. **‘For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous one, with favour You will encircle him with a shield’** (12). David is confident that all who place their trust in the protective care of God may know gladness in the midst of a dangerous and deceitful world.

We cannot read or sing this psalm without thinking of Jesus. No one was surrounded by more deadly and deceitful enemies than Jesus was (vs. 5-6 and 9). No one prayed like Him. **‘And rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place and there he prayed’** (Mark 1: 35). No one worshipped like Him: with fear and reverence. It was said of Him, **‘The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD’** (Isa. 11: 2-3). No one trusted in God as He did. No one had the joy He had. No one was righteous like Him.

How can we sing the Psalm? Christopher Ash says strikingly, ‘The reason I cannot make this my personal psalm is that by nature I am among the wicked. Paul cites verse 9b in Romans 3: 13a amongst his proof texts that all human beings are wicked by nature. The first thing this Psalm does, therefore, is to convict us afresh of our sin (Rom. 3: 20); it should make us tremble with fear’. Strange how we tend to place ourselves among the righteous!

It’s only by virtue of faith in Christ that that we are righteous. Only in Christ is there pardon, peace, protection and joy. When He is our LORD and Saviour we are safe for time and eternity. **‘For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’** (Rom. 8: 37-39). #





## Prodigal Daughter

Mary York

**H**onesty usually comes easily to me, but telling this story has not. It's hard to admit that I, who was raised in an Orthodox Presbyterian church, brought up in a Christian family, steeped in good doctrine, and surrounded by Christian friends, fell away from the faith.

I didn't expect to. I'm an obsessive rule-follower. My skirts go to the knee, and I still address adults as "Mr." and "Mrs." The only tattoo I have is a Czech phrase taken from the statue of a martyred Reformer that stood in the village outside Prague where I served for two years as a missionary associate for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I may have struggled with aspects of my Christian walk, but my faith had never wavered. Not once.

### Prague

I had never felt closer to my Maker than in Prague. It was clear to me that I was where God wanted me to be, serving him in a beautiful place with wonderful people. Even though it was by no means a simple two years, God's presence was so tangible and his provision so evident that I felt refreshed and revitalized daily.

While there, I frequently hosted friends and acquaintances who were meandering their way through Central Europe. The routine was the same: we'd meet up, I'd show them the city, and sometime between the hot coffee or the spiced wine and the sweeping views of majestic castles and steeple spires, we'd talk about God.

The story was often the same: they were struggling. They didn't feel connected to God or the faith of their parents. They were afraid to tell their families or people in their church about their doubts. Feeling like hypocrites, many of them were considering leaving the faith altogether because it would be easier to slip away unnoticed than to cause a public stir.

At the time, I didn't understand. I told them that they should talk to someone, seek accountability, pray, *draw near to God*. After all, I had a great relationship with the Lord, so clearly it could be done.

Many of those friends are no longer in the church.

### San Diego

I think I left a lot of my relationship with God in Prague. Almost immediately upon returning home to San Diego, I was swept up into college and work and making new plans for the future. And I was lost. There were no road signs from God, no clear direction. It seemed that he had just backed away completely, that he didn't need me anymore.

My Bible reading was the first thing to go. It was followed closely by poor decisions at school—worldly choices, things that drew me away from the Lord rather than to him. Small sins became habitual, big sins began appearing.

I wanted to see how far I could push myself down the wrong path before something went *really* wrong. Like the prodigal son, as I began to recognize the trouble I was getting into, I assumed I could work my way out of it. If I hadn't witnessed my own progression, I would never have recognized the person that I had become—a rebel still parading around as a put-together Christian, leading youth group events and explaining to my non-Christian friends that "my faith is everything to me."

What a lie.

I kept it up for two years. Late one night, I came home from work, sat on the floor, and opened my Bible, my soul feeling particularly unsettled. I did not know where to begin, so I reached for a devotional tucked in the back cover of my Bible and read the first page. A voice in my head interpreted every line with bitter, cynical mockery. It was a voice I had never heard before—certainly not mine!

I closed the book and tried to pray, only to find my heart empty of words and my mind doubting that I had a listener. God wasn't there. For the first time in my life, I found myself cut off from my Saviour.

The doubt that hit was the worst part. Sin I knew I could be forgiven of, but if there was no God, then there was no hope and no purpose. The world as I knew it was wrong, and everyone I loved and trusted was a fool. *I was a fool*. Had God just been a figment of my imagination this whole time? Had I been brainwashed by a group of nice but narrow-minded people?

Those were agonizing days. Two years later, I understood at last what my friends travelling in Prague had been going through.

### Two Options

That night on the floor with my Bible, I realized that I had two options. The first, of course, was to give in to the despair and walk away for good. In so many ways, it would have been easier. I was so far into the world already, and I desperately wanted what it offered—status, opportunities, fun, romance, and relationships. I had plenty of sympathetic friends who would have been happy to welcome me into a world without God.

I don't know why, but by God's grace I took the second option. Crying on the floor, unable to even look at my Bible, writhing in the physical pain of my spiritual loss, with the clock on my wall blinking just past one o'clock in the morning, I picked up my phone and sent one text message to three believing friends: "I'm doubting my faith."

They all responded before morning with verses, prayers, and promises to meet up. And for the next three weeks, they were God's living witnesses, displaying his faithfulness, his kindness, his mercy, his strength, his love. And they held me tightly with arms, like his, that would not let me go.

One friend met up with me in person multiple times—a half hour before work, a quick cup of coffee at the end of

the day—to pray and read Scripture together. She sent me articles and told me to meet with godly people at my church to broaden my circle of accountability. She also encouraged me to seek out the wisdom of our elders. (I did. It was both terribly difficult and terribly rewarding.)

Another friend sent me Scripture verses, almost daily. He challenged my doubts and questioned my devotional habits with unbending tough-love. It was uncomfortable and humbling, and I needed it.

The third friend—my prayer warrior—messed me daily: “How are you doing? I’m praying for you.”

God still felt far away, but I began reading Scripture every day. I began to fight the sin that had built up. I began to pray again. I was drawing near to God—toddling closer with the clumsy steps of someone learning to walk for the first time. This time, I understood what was hanging in the balance. I understood why we refer to our Christian walk as the “good fight”—because it is a fight. It is spiritual warfare that we must consciously engage in, and we *must win*. And only by the grace of God do we.

### **Prodigal Daughter**

I share this story not because I am proud of any of it—not the fall from grace, nor even the return. Rather, I share because I know that I am not alone. I know that those who grow up in the church will one day be put to the test, if you haven’t already, and I want you to know that you are not alone in this fight. Fellow saints and believers are struggling too, and they are here to pick us up as we stumble—in sin, in doubt, in fear, in grief, in loss.

I also share this story to encourage the church to be honest. It is easy for us to waltz into church on Sunday in our best clothes while hiding the sin, hurt, and pain welling up inside. If we do not confess it to each other, we cannot build each other back up. God uses a broken church to work out his sovereign grace.

The three people I reached out to were not randomly chosen—they were friends who had confided in me their own struggles with faith and obedience. They were the people I thought might know how to help, not just judge or pity or condemn.

Finally, I share this story in order to shatter my self-crafted image as a poster child for the Christian community—me, the missionary associate, the youth leader, the camp counselor, the school evangelist, the Christian blogger, the proverbial older sister of that parable with prodigal siblings. No, *I* am the prodigal. I am a sinner, ransomed and redeemed, lost and found. And like the prodigal’s story, my story is all about the father. What a father. What a God! His grace is sweet, and his mercy is free.

Even though the road home can look long and feel empty, we will not be walking it alone. Christ will be shepherding our footsteps all the way, until we reach the end and find our heavenly Father waiting to receive us with open arms.

*The author is a member of Bonita OPC in Bonita, California. New Horizons, June 2019.*

## ***THE NASHVILLE STATEMENT A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality***

*This statement was drawn up in 2017 by the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and signed by a large number of representative Christian leaders and writers, including J. I. Packer, Ligon Duncan, Rosaria Butterfield, John Piper & R. C. Sproul. Some thought it was not adequately pastoral but a proposal to endorse it passed in June 2019 at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America 803-50. Some criticised Article 7 which touches the way celibate Christians who identify as gay wish to allow that homosexual desires are not sin only the yielding to them. A Dutch version added a pastoral section and the PCA plans to produce its own statement as well.*

***“Know that the LORD Himself is God;  
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves...”  
- Psalm 100:3***

### **Preamble**

Evangelical Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century find themselves living in a period of historic transition. As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, it has embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being. By and large the spirit of our age no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God’s design for human life. Many deny that God created human beings for his glory, and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female. It is common to think that human identity as male and female is not part of God’s beautiful plan, but is, rather, an expression of an individual’s autonomous preferences. The pathway to full and lasting joy through God’s good design for his creatures is thus replaced by the path of short-sighted alternatives that, sooner or later, ruin human life and dishonour God.

This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church. Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? Will she maintain her clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin?

We are persuaded that faithfulness in our generation means declaring once again the true story of the world and of our place in it—particularly as male and female. Christian Scripture teaches that there is but one God who alone is Creator and Lord of all. To him alone, every person owes glad-hearted thanksgiving, heart-felt praise, and total allegiance. This is the path not only of glorifying God, but of knowing ourselves. To forget our Creator is to forget who we are, for he made us for himself. And we cannot know ourselves truly without truly knowing him who made us. We did not make ourselves. We are not our own. Our true identity, as male and female persons, is given by God. It is not only foolish, but hopeless, to try to make ourselves what God did not create us to be.

We believe that God’s design for his creation and his way of salvation serve to bring him the greatest glory and bring us the greatest good. God’s good plan provides us with the greatest freedom. Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it in overflowing measure. He is for us and not against us. Therefore, in the hope of serving Christ’s church

and witnessing publicly to the good purposes of God for human sexuality revealed in Christian Scripture, we offer the following affirmations and denials.

**Article 1**

WE AFFIRM that God has designed marriage to be a covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is meant to signify the covenant love between Christ and his bride the church.

WE DENY that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship. We also deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant made before God.

**Article 2**

WE AFFIRM that God's revealed will for all people is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage.

WE DENY that any affections, desires, or commitments ever justify sexual intercourse before or outside marriage; nor do they justify any form of sexual immorality.

**Article 3**

WE AFFIRM that God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, in his own image, equal before God as persons, and distinct as male and female.

WE DENY that the divinely ordained differences between male and female render them unequal in dignity or worth.

**Article 4**

WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God's original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing.

WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome.

**Article 5**

WE AFFIRM that the differences between male and female reproductive structures are integral to God's design for self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that physical anomalies or psychological conditions nullify the God-appointed link between biological sex and self-conception as male or female.

**Article 6**

WE AFFIRM that those born with a physical disorder of sex development are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth equal to all other image-bearers. They are acknowledged by our Lord Jesus in his words about "eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb." With all others they are welcome as faithful followers of Jesus Christ and should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known.

WE DENY that ambiguities related to a person's biological sex render one incapable of living a fruitful life in joyful obedience to Christ.

**Article 7**

WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture.

WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption.

**Article 8**

WE AFFIRM that people who experience sexual attraction for the same sex may live a rich and fruitful life pleasing to God through faith in Jesus Christ, as they, like all Christians, walk in purity of life.

WE DENY that sexual attraction for the same sex is part of the natural goodness of God's original creation, or that it puts a person outside the hope of the gospel.

**Article 9**

WE AFFIRM that sin distorts sexual desires by directing them away from the marriage covenant and toward sexual

immorality— a distortion that includes both heterosexual and homosexual immorality.

WE DENY that an enduring pattern of desire for sexual immorality justifies sexually immoral behaviour.

**Article 10**

WE AFFIRM that it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism and that such approval constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness.

WE DENY that the approval of homosexual immorality or transgenderism is a matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christians should agree to disagree.

**Article 11**

WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times, including when we speak to or about one another as male or female.

WE DENY any obligation to speak in such ways that dishonour God's design of his image-bearers as male and female.

**Article 12**

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ gives both merciful pardon and transforming power, and that this pardon and power enable a follower of Jesus to put to death sinful desires and to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ is insufficient to forgive all sexual sins and to give power for holiness to every believer who feels drawn into sexual sin.

**Article 13**

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ enables sinners to forsake transgender self-conceptions and by divine forbearance to accept the God-ordained link between one's biological sex and one's self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ sanctions self-conceptions that are at odds with God's revealed will.

**Article 14**

WE AFFIRM that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners and that through Christ's death and resurrection forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available to every person who repents of sin and trusts in Christ alone as Saviour, Lord, and supreme treasure.

WE DENY that the Lord's arm is too short to save or that any sinner is beyond his reach.

**OF RELATED INTEREST**

*In March 2019, Jamie Shupe, the first American to obtain non-binary status under the law, renounced this status and wanted to return to living as the man he was. Shupe had served in the US Army for nearly 18 years when he retired as Sergeant First Class. He had post-traumatic issues, ultimately persuading himself he was really a woman, then a year later obtaining a decision from a judge in Oregon that he was neither male or female – thus non-binary. He now renounces this. Instead of getting the counselling he needed, health professionals were eager to go along with his claims, but the confusion was not in his biology but in his own head, he says.*

\*

*About 200 ex homosexual and transgender people participated in the second annual Freedom March on 25 March 2019 in Washington DC saying it was not a move from gay to straight but from being lost to being found by Jesus Christ in the Gospel.*

**THE TABERNACLE Part 3**  
**The Altar of Burnt Offering**  
**and the Laver.**

Rev. S. N. Ramsay (PCEA)

**Exodus 38:5 “And he made the altar of burnt offering... Verse 8 “And he made the laver of brass...Verse 9 “And he made the court”.**

In our meditation of the Tabernacle we have seen how the way of reconciliation opens from within - God, reaching out from the innermost recesses of the Holy Places to make a way of return for his erring sons.

When the Christ of God set out on that journey which was to open up the ‘new and living way’ – the way of salvation through the atonement, - it was from the Holy of Holies in the heavenly places that He stepped forth, leaving behind Him the glory that He had with the Father before the world was; and that road He trod right to the place that is called Calvary, and not until His human nature had been laid upon that altar of supreme sacrifice would He draw back...no, not until there should be wrung from that tortured human frame the great and final cry of TRIUMPH - *‘IT IS FINISHED’*.

To-day we would again present ourselves at the Tabernacle in the wilderness, to see what further lessons and instructions it may afford. But on this occasion, we will view it from the aspect of the common man. We see the fine and gilded hangings...we see the gate of the court, full twenty cubits wide and we hear the call to worship in the place of God’s own appointment.

Yes, the work of Bezaleel the son of Uri, and of his partner Ahiolab son of Ahisamach is at last completed, and the Tabernacle stands resplendent in all its varied colour and its shining magnificence. The work is done, and we are called upon to enter in. **But before we can take any part in the worship of this house, we must first pass through the gate. Not one single item of all that is represented there, can be of any real and true significance until we are within the gate and standing in the courts.**

Now we must understand that in dealing with the lessons of these types and symbols, it is not always possible to be dogmatic in our assertions. We may see clearly the lessons, but still be just a little uncertain of their application.

We come to the gate, and within the gate the outer court. One commentator would suggest the outer court represents the *visible church* – consisting of a mixture of saints and sinners as the tares and the wheat. The Holy Place represents the church invisible, i.e. the body of God’s believing people, while the Holy of Holies represents heaven itself, of the church in glory. Another commentator, equally

respected, would aver that entering the gate of the tabernacle is typical of our coming to Christ as our only Saviour, as to Him who says ‘I am the door; by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved...’

*...the way into God’s presence can be only by the way of the altar of sacrifice and the laver of cleansing.*

But whatever our view on this detail – and I prefer the former, because it is not our association with the church that can save us, nor is it our formal submission to the sacraments, nor is it by any accident of birth, but only ‘repentance toward God and faith in the finished work of Christ our Saviour. But whatever our view, the essential truth remains that the way into God’s presence can be only by the way of the altar of sacrifice and the laver of cleansing. And the way to these things must of necessity be by way of the gate. I would suggest therefore that the gate itself signifies clearly the MEANS OF GRACE – the ways and means which God has so graciously set before us for FINDING OUR WAY into and among the things of God.

As the Catechism says, ‘...the Word, the sacraments and prayer, all of which are effectual to the elect for salvation.’ **If you would find Christ then you must put yourself in the way of those things God has appointed to bring us to Him** and, praise God, He has extended ‘*exceeding great and precious promises*’ to all who truly seek to know and to do His holy will. *‘ASK...SEEK...AND KNOCK for he receives and finds and to him it shall be opened.’*

Come with us then through the gate, and behold **the altar of sacrifice**. Here at least, there can be no doubt as to its significance and meaning. The Divine record begins with the Holy of Holies, and brings us last of all to the altar of sacrifice; but the order of *worship* brings us face to face FIRST OF ALL with the brazen altar.

For it is to the altar of sacrifice that we must come to begin to meet God.’ **IT IS THE FOUNDATION OF ALL THE WORSHIP OF THE INNER SANCTUARY’.**

*‘Together let my saints unto Me gathered be,  
Those that by sacrifice have made a covenant  
with Me.’ (Ps. 50:5 Psalter)*

**And the great lesson of the altar for Israel, as indeed it must be for us too, is that we must be reconciled to God...and that such is only possible by the way of sacrifice.** ‘A Christianity which does not start from the altar of burnt offering will never get into the Holy place, nor ever reach that inner shrine where the soul lives and adores silent before the manifest Jehovah who dwells between the cherubim.’ (McLaren)

How did Israel come to that altar, and what were the

ceremonies there performed?

- (i) The sins of the people were to be typically laid upon the head of the offering.
- (ii) The blood of the sacrifice would be shed.
- (iii) The offering would be burnt with fire upon the altar.

Thus, we see prefigured, the way in which Jesus Christ, the *'Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world'* would come to *'bear our sins in His own body on the tree'*, or, as said Isaiah, *'the chastisement of our peace was upon His, and with His stripes we are healed.'*

We see secondly, the blood of the sacrifice poured out... *'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death'*. And *'the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from all sin'*.

*'This is My body broken for you. This cup is the blood of the New Covenant shed for you for the remission of sins.'*

And now we see the body of the offering laid upon the altar fires, and there consumed in the flames. But the victim having been slain why would it be necessary to burn the remains with fire? What is the meaning here?

Surely, we **must** see the idea of **substitution** is fundamental to the whole transaction. And the concept of substitution is just as evident here as in the beginning. For **in the fire that consumes the offering is typified the consuming wrath of God against those who have sinned against Him.**

This was the fire that was not kindled by Moses or the priests, but which came by direct act of God...the fire that was to be ever burning. And the fire, coming as it did from God Himself was their assurance that God was satisfied; it signified that God would accept their obedience. And it pointed to God's **final acceptance of the finished work of Christ the Saviour the Prophet Priest and King of all who put their trust in Him.**

But we must pass on! 'The ground is well-trodden around the brazen altar.' I well remember a shining Christian character musing sadly on the way of so many – as she put it – 'walking round and round the brazen altar'. At that time, I was at a loss to know what she meant, though I understand more clearly now. At the brazen altar, *'being justified by faith we have peace with God...'* Are you satisfied with that? When the way has been opened to those things that lie beyond...to the laver of cleansing...to the Holy place of **service**, yea, even to the Holy of Holies itself, **are you content to remain just** inside the gate?

'They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.'

Do we compass the altar or **go forward?** Amen. #

### The Doctor May Ask You

## MAKING URGENT MEDICAL DECISIONS FOR LOVED ONES



Dr Kathryn Butler

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-doctor-may-ask-you>

*With effect 19 June 2019, Victoria's 'assisted dying' laws came into effect, Australia's first. Adult persons, resident in Victoria for at least 12 months, with incurable, advanced and progressive diseases, and who are expected to die within six months, can initiate discussions with health workers. They must be of sound mind and make three requests. There is a special process and many safeguards but it remains to see how it operates. It is expected to be used by about 150 persons a year. Dr Butler's article is a very relevant one but rather than advocating what we might call 'assisted suicide' brings out some Biblical and practical points that cover the broader issue of medical care for the critically ill.*

She groaned at the touch of her abdomen, and in dismay I withdrew my hand. The CT scan showed that her intestines had blackened. Speckles of air signalled rents in her intestinal wall through which bacteria seeped into her bloodstream. Those same bacteria now dragged her blood pressure dangerously low.

I felt a knot tighten in my stomach. An operation to remove her dead bowel was her only chance for survival. Even with an operation, however, her likelihood of leaving the hospital was slim. She had advanced dementia, and prior to this calamity was bedbound, emaciated, and failing in health despite 24-hour nursing care. Her current unstable blood pressure placed her at high risk for dying in the operating room.

*“When people cannot direct their own medical care, the hard decisions fall to family members.”*

If her fragile body withstood the surgery, she then would struggle with a litany of infections from the bacteria swirling in her abdomen. If we could usher her through *those* hurdles, removal of so much of her intestines would leave her chronically malnourished, stricken with diarrhea, and dependent on artificially-administered nutrition that would place her at risk for liver failure. I could foresee the long, awful trajectory to which we'd commit her if we operated, a debilitating and painful course that promised suffering, but offered little hope of returning her home.

But to decline surgery meant her family would have to accept her imminent death. In one instant, without time to pray and reflect, they'd have to decide whether to press on and risk suffering for her without benefit, or bid goodbye to the one they cherished. How could they weather such a tragedy?

How can we make such weighty decisions with no time to process and prayerfully contemplate, all while our hearts are breaking? Sadly, far too many of us will find ourselves in just such a harrowing situation.

### Asking the Impossible

People facing a threat to life can rarely voice their own wishes. Severe illness disorients, befuddling sufferers with confusion and paranoia. Medical technology further silences the ill, as a breathing tube through the vocal cords or sedating medications eliminate speech. When critical illness so plummets people into silence, they cannot consent to or refuse treatments on their own. The dilemma is common, with one study of people over sixty showing that seventy percent had no capacity to make decisions for themselves at the end of life.

When people cannot direct their own medical care, the hard decisions fall to family members. As “surrogate decision makers,” our role is to honour a loved one as a unique image-bearer of God, and to discern how he would answer, had illness not stolen his voice. The process requires us to step outside of our own wants, to put aside the agony churning in our hearts, and to think about the unique attributes of those for whom we care. In other words, our goal is to be the voice of our loved one, to answer as he would if he still had the power to speak.

### Fallout of Such Decisions

When we act on behalf of a loved one in this manner, we live out our call to love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34–35). And yet, making urgent medical decisions for loved ones takes a heavy toll on the heart. In the best circumstances, our loved ones will have completed an advance directive (a living will) prior to illness, or at minimum discussed with us their views on suffering at length.

*“Making life-or-death decisions for loved ones cripples many with feelings of guilt and doubt.”*

The unfortunate truth is that many don't have these discussions. Only about one fourth of Americans complete advance directives outlining their wishes for the end of life. Without such guidance, when tragedy hits we're left rudderless, struggling to piece together answers. Making life-or-death decisions for loved ones cripples many with feelings of guilt and doubt that persist for years, and which can progress to depression, complicated grief, chronic anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder.

So how do we make compassionate, Christ-honouring decisions about our loved ones' care when the unthinkable happens? How do we discern the right path when time to reflect is non-existent, and when the mind balks at the ramifications of our choices?

### How Does God's Word Guide Us?

As with all facets of life, God's word provides us with a lamp for our feet (Psalm 119:105). Leaning into God's word *before* calamity strikes can help guide us through urgent medical dilemmas with peace and discernment. In particular, attention to the following biblical principles can anchor us when the tempest rises.

#### 1. Mortal life is sacred.

Life is a gift from our Lord that we're to steward and cherish, glorifying him in everything (Exodus 20:13; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 14:8). We are made in the image of God, and each one of us has inherent dignity and value (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 139:13). The sanctity of mortal life requires that when struggling with an array of medical options, we consider accepting treatments with the potential to *cure*.

#### 2. God has authority over life and death.

This side of the fall, no one escapes death (Romans 5:12; 6:23). As believers we know that death is not the end, yet while we await Christ's return, it descends upon us all. When we blind ourselves to our own mortality, we ignore that our times are in his hands (Psalm 31:15; 90:3), and disregard the truth that our Lord works through all things — even death — for the good of those who love him (John 11; Romans 8:28).

#### 3. We're called to love one another.

God calls us to love our neighbours as ourselves and to minister to the afflicted (Matthew 22:39; John 13:34; 1 John 3:16–17). As God so loved us, so we must extend ourselves in empathy and mercy toward one another (Luke 6:36; 1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 4:7; Ephesians 5:1–2).

*“Leaning into God's word before calamity strikes can help guide us through urgent medical dilemmas with peace.”*

While mercy never justifies the *active* taking of a life (as in physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia), it does guide us away from aggressive, painful interventions if such measures are *futile*. To pursue treatments in such circumstances may be to strive after the wind (Ecclesiastes 1:14) and to discount our one, true hope — Christ crucified (1 Timothy 4:10; 1 Peter 1:3). Scripture does not compel us to chase after medical interventions if the torment they inflict exceeds the anticipated benefit.

#### 4. Our hope resides in Christ.

As Christ's disciples, we need not fear death! Even as our lives draw to a close, we cherish the promise of new life (Psalm 23:4; 1 Peter 1:3–4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 2

(Corinthians 4:17–18). We rest assured in Christ's sacrifice for us and in the awe-inspiring depth of his love (Romans 8:38–39; John 11:25–26). Christ's resurrection transforms death from an event to be feared into an instrument of God's grace as he calls us home to heaven.

God's word guides us to *preserve life* when illness is recoverable, to *accept death* when it arrives, and to *extend compassion and mercy* toward the suffering. These tenets guide us to seek treatments when they offer hope of recovery, but they do *not* compel us to undergo interventions that prolong death or inflict suffering without benefit. And our greatest hope supersedes any medical technology: it springs from our faith in Christ, and from the grace imparted to us through his sacrifice and resurrection (Psalm 124:8).

### Questions to Ask a Doctor

Equipped with the above biblical principles, the next step in navigating medical dilemmas is to unpack the clinical situation at hand. The first task is to determine whether treatment offers promise of recovery, or only prolongation of death. To achieve such discernment, we can ask the medical team the following questions:

- What is the condition that threatens my loved one's life?
- Why is it life-threatening?
- What is the likelihood for recovery?
- What about my loved one's previous medical conditions influencing his likelihood for recovery?
- Can the available treatments bring about cure?
- Will the available treatments worsen suffering, with little chance of benefit?

These questions are basic and can be explored briefly in an emergency situation. In all circumstances, the key question is this: *Is the life-threatening process reversible?* When recovery is possible, organ support may offer life, and pursuing treatment is appropriate. In contrast, when a disease cannot be cured or even improved, aggressive measures — surgery, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, breathing machines, and more — can inflict suffering needlessly.

"In all circumstances, the key question is: Is the life-threatening process reversible?"

When the efficacy of treatment is ambiguous, our task becomes more difficult. These moments demand the most courage, patience, and insight from us, even while we flail in grief. The goal is to hear our loved one's voice, to discern which treatments he wouldn't endure, and which he would embrace despite the detriment to his comfort, independence, and lifestyle. Such an approach requires that we view our loved one as God sees him: cherished, forgiven, wonderfully made, and *unique*, with no precise equal on earth (Psalm 139:13–14; Ephesians 1:7; John 3:16; Romans 8:35).

### Questions to Ask Ourselves

As the responsibility staggers our minds, another series of questions can guide us:

What matters most to my loved one? What drives him in life?

What comments has she made in the past regarding end-of-life care, if any?

What are his goals? In the short term? For his life in general?

What is she willing to endure to achieve those goals? What would she be unwilling to face?

How well in the past has my loved one tolerated pain? Dependence? Disability? Fear?

*If he could speak for himself, what would he say about the current situation?*

Such questions, which mine for the unique attributes and values of those in our care, often require stillness and time to explore. In an emergency situation, however, such luxuries evaporate. Our minds race to process all the information hurled at us, in terminology we don't understand, while our own turbulent emotions cloud our thinking. To assemble a plan under such pressure seems impossible.

### Persevere in Love and Prayer

Ideally, we manage to sort through the chaos and discern the path clearly, based upon what a loved one has divulged to us in the past. But if, in the whirlwind of a loved one's critical illness, we're just not sure, it's appropriate to accept treatments in the moment, and then afterward, when matters calm, to deliberate more thoroughly upon how to proceed. Thankfully, in Christ we are forgiven. And God is sovereign even over these terrible moments.

Our responsibility as surrogate decision makers can seem too crushing to withstand. Yet when we seek to hear our loved one's voice after it has fallen silent, we honour and love him. In so doing, we also honour God the Father. Although the burden threatens to crush us, when we persevere in love and prayerfulness to support our loved ones in their critical moments, we live out the gospel.

*Kathryn Butler is a trauma and critical care surgeon turned writer and home-schooling mom. She is author of *Between Life and Death: A Gospel-Centered Guide to End-of-Life Medical Care*. She lives north of Boston, and writes at *Oceans Rise*.*

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### SEARCH WORK

*Mrs Irene Steel has prepared Search Work for children for many years. It has not appeared this year as it was not received and unhappily not many were doing it. However, Mrs Steel is happy to supply sets of Search Work questions. Email your request to: [iesteel@gmail.com](mailto:iesteel@gmail.com)*

## NEWS

### **BRISBANE**

The Brisbane congregation have had several reasons for encouragement and thanksgiving over the past few months. On Sunday 9th June Hainian Yu, a young Chinese student, received the sacrament of baptism on confession of his faith. Rev. Jim Klazinga preached that morning from Psalm 87, reminding us that though we may come from various cultures and different countries, in Christ we are all born in Zion.

Prior to that, at the communion service held in March it was a joy to welcome 5 new members into the congregation. Two of them, Beth Anderson and Jill Abbott are older ladies who usually receive the service over the phone. The other three were young people who had grown up in the fellowship, Jessie Carswell, Aimee Carswell and Isaac Klazinga. Two other young people, Christopher and Iain Buckingham, also professed faith and requested membership and they received the sacrament of baptism a few weeks later.

At the end of March we were very sad to learn that Mrs. Innes Anderson, widow of our former elder and treasurer, Ken Anderson, had passed away in Toowoomba. We rejoice with her family that she is now with her Lord and Saviour.

Over the Easter long weekend many of the young people in the congregation attended the P.C.E.A. Youth Camp in Maclean. The speaker for the camp was Rev. John Forbes, who gave some stimulating talks on creation and the flood. (These can be found on the P.C.E.A. website.) They all enjoyed the fun and fellowship and were very grateful to Mr. and Mrs. John Greensill for providing a wonderful venue for the camp on their property. – B. Schmidt

### **INDUCTION AT NARRE WARREN**

On Saturday 1 June the Southern Presbytery met for the induction of the Rev. Andres Miranda to the Narre Warren Congregation which had been vacant since the Rev. Sjirk Bajema had concluded his ministry in January 2018 and moved to the Reformed Church of Oamaru, New Zealand. The Call was unanimous.

The Rev. Tut Wan Yoa, as Moderator of Presbytery *pro tem*, led the service with elders participating in prayer and reading. Dr Ward addressed the prescribed questions to Mr Miranda and the Formula was signed. Mr Yoa gave the charge to the newly inducted minister, and Dr Ward to the Congregation. After the service concluded greetings were brought from other congregations and from the Christian Reformed Churches. Suitable presentations were made, and a delightful afternoon tea was enjoyed by those present.



*Andrea and Andres Miranda*



*Narre Warren Session  
Stewart Loudon, Andres Miranda, Terry Buck*

### **KNOX**

The Congregation raised no objection to the call proposed by the Narre Warren Congregation. Dr Ward was appointed Interim-Moderator and Mr John Loudon, emeritus elder, agreed to be added as an assessor elder.