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# BARNABAS

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**AUGUST 21–27, 2021**

### CANADIAN CAREY FAMILY CONFERENCE

Speaker: Glendon Thompson, senior pastor, Jarvis Street Baptist Church

Evening theme: The God who is *Still* There

Morning theme: 1 John – Differences that Matter, various speakers

Be sure to make “The Carey” part of your plans for summer 2021.

*Held at Braeside Camp, Paris, ON.*

[www.careyconference.net](http://www.careyconference.net)

**SEPTEMBER 26, 2021**

### TBS CONVOCATION

Join with the class of 2021 as they launch into a new year of biblical studies.

*Held at Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, ON.*

[www.tbs.edu](http://www.tbs.edu)

**PLANNING OR HOSTING AN EVENT? LET BARNABAS KNOW. EMAIL [JANICEVANECK@ROGERS.COM](mailto:janicevaneck@rogers.com)**



**GIFT FOR GALCOM:** Pastor Carl Muller and SGF Coordinator Benno Kurvits.

## GIFT IN MEMORY OF MERRY-LYNN HUDSON

At the last General Assembly of the Sovereign Grace Fellowship of Canada held in November 2020, the delegates voted to send a gift of \$1,000 to the ministry of Galcom International in memory of Merry-Lynn Hudson. Merry-Lynn passed into the presence of our Lord Jesus in October 2020 after her battle with cancer. One of her favourite ministries was Galcom—a ministry that builds solar-powered, fix-tuned radios. These radios are designed to carry the gospel of Christ in the heart languages of people.

To remember Merry-Lynn and her dear husband Mark, our faithful coordinator for many years, we deemed the gift to be an appropriate gesture of love and thanksgiving. The gift was passed on to Carl Muller, Merry-Lynn’s long-standing pastor at Trinity Baptist Church. May God use it to help spread the gospel to the far reaches of the world for the honour of his name.—Benno Kurvits

## NEWSBYTES

### + Pastor needed in Sudbury

Berean Baptist Church in Sudbury is looking to call a pastor, as Pastor Brad Powers is planning to step down later this year. They would be grateful for your prayers, and passing along this need to those who might be able to help. More details and contact information are available at [www.bereansudbury.ca](http://www.bereansudbury.ca).

*Do you have news to share (even a “newsbyte”) of what God is doing in your church?*

Please email your news item to [janicevaneck@rogers.com](mailto:janicevaneck@rogers.com) so we can pray for, praise God with you and encourage others by publishing it in the next issue of *Barnabas*.

FOR AS HIGH AS THE HEAVENS ARE ABOVE THE EARTH,  
so great is his love  
FOR THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

PSALM 103:11

# CHILDREN OF GOD

*The wonder, basis and fruit of knowing God as Father* BY ROGER FELLOWS

Read 1 John 2:28–3:10

**H**ow do you usually think of God? As Lord, Creator, Almighty, Saviour? He is all of these things. How do you usually address God? It doesn't always have to be the same, but there is a pattern in the New Testament. How did Jesus address God? Almost always as Father. If we are Christians, God is our Father. I would like briefly to look at what it means to be a child of God.

## 1. The wonder of being a child of God

If we are Christians, we are children of God. How much does this truth thrill us? John is certainly gripped by it: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God." Here is something important, wonderful—it ought to grab our attention—we are called "children of God." We may be called other things by the world, but God calls us his children (John 1:12). Once we were children of the devil, now we are children of God. Once we were God's enemies, now we are part of his family. We ought to get excited about that.

Then John adds a phrase: "And so we are." It is as if the apostle pauses and imagines questions or objections, especially from the Jews. Why would they object? Because it was a new concept. In the Old Testament, the fatherhood of God was national; if it was personal, it was usually Messianic. Never in the Old Testament do we find an individual addressing God in prayer as Father. But that is what we may do: we are children of God. Whatever trials we face, however depressed we feel, even when we sin, we are still children of God. What a blessing and encouragement this is!

## 2. The basis of being a child of God

What gives us this confidence? What makes us children of God? Certainly not natural birth, nor baptism. Let me suggest three things—two clearly stated here, and one understood by John.

(a) *God's love* (1 John 3:1). We don't make ourselves children. That is certainly true in a natural family. Children are the result of a loving relationship. We are God's children by grace, because he loved us. He loved



us from eternity. He planned salvation. God sent his Son to redeem us by his death, and he draws us to himself by his Spirit. He loves us still, and cares for us daily.

(b) *The new birth* (1 John 2:29). There are two ways of entering a family—by birth and by adoption. Both methods are used as illustrations in the New Testament, although birth seems to be in John's mind here: we are born of God, born again. God has transformed us and given us a new heart.

(c) *Christ's work*. This is not mentioned here, but John dealt with it earlier in 1 John 1:7 and 2:1–2. Our natural condition is so bad that it bars us from God's presence. Sin needs to be removed before we can come to God and be brought into his family. That is what happened at the cross, and only as we believe in the person and work of Christ can we enter God's family. Can you rejoice in Christ's redeeming work?

## 3. The fruit of being a child of God

(a) *The joy of knowing that we are God's children*. How wonderful to know that we have this intimate relationship with God! This should encourage us in our darkest hours.

(b) *We have God's fatherly care*. He provides all our needs! He directs our paths. How encouraging to know that he guides us, mainly through his Word, though occasionally through circumstances. He watches over us so that no hardships overtake us

except those which he permits.

(c) *We have access to God*. Here is an amazing privilege. If we wanted to make an appointment with Queen Elizabeth or even the prime minister, we would face all kinds of restrictions, yet we can come to our heavenly Father at all times with no restrictions. Do we take advantage of such access? Are we often at the throne of grace?

(d) There is one negative thing that John mentions: *we are rejected by the world*, just as Christ was (1 John 3:1). If we are God's children, we will not fit in this world; we will not feel comfortable in it. If we do, we should ask ourselves, can people see that we live like children of God?

(e) *A God-like life* (1 John 2:29). Our life pleases the Father. God is righteous, pure, holy. Those who live like that show that they have been born of God. Our children usually have a family likeness—they are sometimes very like their father—and we should be very like our heavenly Father. Too many professing Christians are not serious about godliness. They want to go to heaven, but are not overly concerned about holy living in this world. We need to remember that a mere profession will not get us into heaven. "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Holiness is not optional. Do people look at us and say: "There is a child of God"?

(f) *Hope* (1 John 3:2). Many things about heaven are not clear, but some things are very clear: Jesus is coming back, we shall see him, we shall be with him, we shall be like him. Strictly speaking, we may not see the Father, but we shall surely be aware of his presence. Fellowship with the Lord can be wonderful now, but what will it be when we are with the Lord and free from all sin? It will surely be wonderful, and the hope of that should motivate us to holiness (1 John 3:3). When a bride is united with her husband on her wedding day, she wants to look her best, and so should we want to be at our best when we meet the Lord. We don't want to be ashamed at his coming (1 John 2:28).

Are you ready for that day? Do you know the Lord? Have you been born again? Are you a child of God? **B**

Roger Fellows is a retired pastor and continues to minister at churches throughout Ontario. He attends Trinity Baptist Church, Burlington, ON.



# MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

**—AN AREA OF CONCERN FOR FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST**

**There has been a sea change in Canada with society's embrace of euthanasia. What should Christians know and how are they to respond?**

**By Alexandre Dauphin**

**T**he biblical concept of life is that it is given and it is taken away (Job 1:21). However, since the Fall, men and women as created beings want to take charge of all that exists,

including their own lives from conception to death. In utero, where one is considered securely helpless, abortion is allowed. Ex utero, where one is deemed societally useless, euthanasia is prescribed. And, to appease the horror of the latter, it is sold in the palatable form of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD).

This article is about MAiD with an attempt at its definition, epidemiology, historicity, scope of application and the perspective to be held by a Christian.

### **Definition**

Euthanasia means “good death” (if there is such a thing) and is the intentional act of taking a human life for the purpose of relieving pain and suffering. It can be *passive*, meaning withholding an actual treatment, thereby precipitating death; or *active*, meaning providing the means and information to the person on how to proceed with treatment. Some other definitions include: *Physician Assisted Suicide* (PAS) or *Medically Assisted Suicide* (MAS), a form of voluntary/active euthanasia in which a doctor or other medically qualified person

administers lethal drugs. It has also been called “self-administered medical assistance in dying” in an attempt to shift responsibility, guilt or blame. Finally, when done as a compassionate response to a protracted disease, euthanasia is called “mercy killing” or “mercy dying.”

### **Epidemiology**

Euthanasia or MAiD is not a globally rampant phenomenon. It is more prevalent in developed countries. In Canada, MAiD represented 1.12% of all deaths in 2019 (5,631), which is significant when compared to the number of deaths caused by COVID-19 in this country: 15,606 (2.6% in 2020). MAiD was ranked as the third leading cause of death in Canada in 2020 (Statistics Canada). It is now endorsed by many medical associations worldwide. The proportion of male to female deaths by MAiD is equal. MAiD is performed by physicians in 93% of cases, and in hospitals in 50% of cases (*First Annual Report on Medical Assistance in Dying in Canada*, 2019).

### **Historicity**

MAiD has been around since antiquity (*circa* 500–100 B.C.). Most ancient Greeks and Romans tended not to support it, as can be testified by the Hippocratic Oath’s *primum non nocere* (Latin, meaning “first, do no harm”) and its corollary that a physician will not use potion to terminate life. The Jews never supported euthanasia

as might be understood from the sixth commandment. From A.D. 1200–1500, Christianity seems to have embraced Hippocrates view, “Do no harm.”

It is noteworthy that in societies where the major world religions still influence societal behaviour, MAiD is less common. The Renaissance and the Reformation of the sixteenth century that had led to a “culturally Christian” Europe established common laws which condemned suicide and euthanasia as criminal acts. In 1647, the legislators of the Providence Plantations, later known as Rhode Island, were the first government in America to condemn euthanasia as the most unnatural of deaths and punishable by confiscating the deceased’s belongings, minus his land, as the king’s property.

The cultural impact of the Enlightenment (1700–1800s) in Europe failed to reverse most of the normative rules the church had on life and society, including euthanasia.

During the Great Awakenings of Christianity in the United States (1730–1755, 1790–1840 and 1855–1930), the church was strengthened culturally, education was renewed, social awareness increased and ethics developed to continue to reject suicide and euthanasia. However, in the 1930s, as the United States endured the Great Depression and its negative social consequences, some public support in favour of euthanasia did appear. Many Americans began to talk about suicide and controlled dying. A public opinion poll in 1937 indicated that 45% of Americans had been caught up with the Harry Haiselden’s

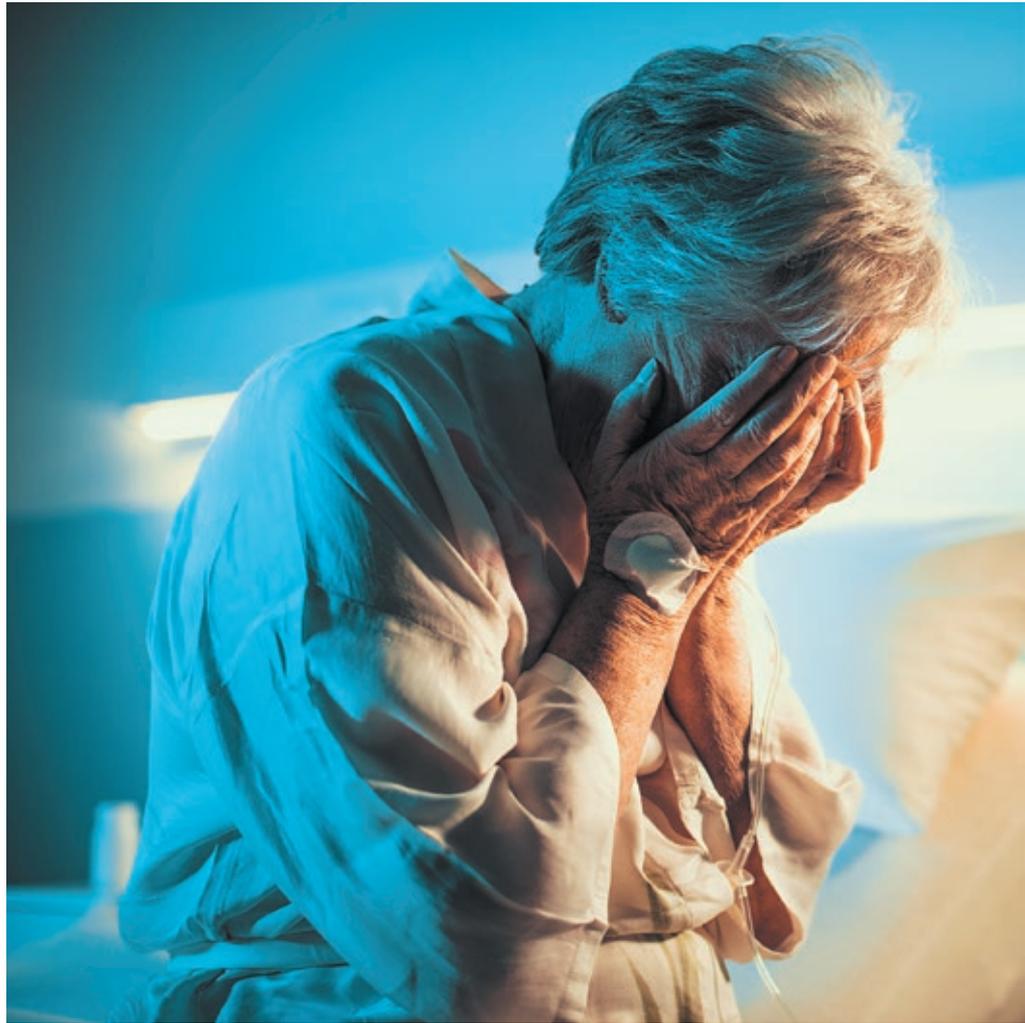
### ***In the Great Depression... many Americans began to talk about suicide and controlled dying.***

and baby Bollinger’s case and believed that mercy killing of “infants born permanently deformed or mentally handicapped” was permissible.

The outbreak of World War II in 1939, and the subsequent discovery of complicity in the Nazi death camps of extermination under the guise of “involuntary euthanasia” did quell and change public perception of euthanasia somewhat, but did not eliminate its discussion.

Until the 1950s, the World Medical Association condemned euthanasia. A poll on Physician-Assisted Suicide (PAS) at the time showed only 36% of physicians were in favour of it.

In 1952, with the advent of the human



rights movement, petition was made to the United Nations to include euthanasia as a “right.” This was further advanced by the civil rights movement of 1962. A patient’s autonomy in euthanasia was introduced by the Euthanasia Society of America in 1965, which later became The Society for the Right to Die (1972) which helped legalize it. In 1968, a committee at Harvard Medical School defined “irreversible coma” as a criterion for death, thus the phrase of “brain death.” In the 1970s, the idea of patients’ rights gained more acceptance and the right to refuse care/treatment became more prevalent.

In 1972, the United States Senate held the first national hearings on euthanasia. A special Senate Commission on Aging (SCA) held national hearings on death with dignity and quality of life entitled, “Death with Dignity: An Inquiry into Related Public Issues.” In 1973, the American Hospital Association (AHA) adopted the “Patient’s Bill of Rights” which recognized the right of patients to refuse treatment.

On May 5, 1980, Pope John Paul II issued a declaration opposing mercy killing, but permitting increased use of painkillers and

allowing for a patient’s refusal of extraordinary means for sustaining life. In December 1984, the American Medical Association (AMA) supported withholding or withdrawing life-prolonging medical treatment in certain circumstances with informed consent.

In 1987, the California State Bar became the first major public body to support Physician Aid in Dying. In the 1990s, public opinion surveys showed more than half of Americans supported physician-assisted death. By November 5, 1990, the United States Congress passed the *Patient Self-Determination Act*, requiring hospitals that receive federal funds to tell patients that they have a right to demand or refuse treatment.

In 2001, The Netherlands became the first country to officially legalize euthanasia, with Belgium following suit and going a step further in 2014, legalizing euthanasia for terminally ill and incurably ill children.

### **Euthanasia in Canada**

Until 1993, euthanasia was illegal in Canada. Although the first assisted death happened in 1994 in Victoria, B.C., (Sue Rodriguez),



Quebec became the first province to legalize doctor-assisted death on June 5, 2014. Many challenges were put forward against that law, but it was finally confirmed by a supreme court ruling in 2015 and by the federal government in 2016. That decision struck down the ban on doctor-assisted death to mentally competent but suffering and “irremediable” patients. It argued that withholding euthanasia infringed on the three privileges of life, liberty and security of the person that are enshrined in Section 7 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The recent Bill C-7 on extending this same right to disabled and mentally challenged people was passed into law in Canada on March 17, 2021.

### Arguments in favour of MAiD

The many arguments advanced in favour of MAiD are that a person has full autonomy over their life, the right to human dignity, to minimize pain and suffering, to desire an end of suffering by showing mercy and ending despair. All of this to say, there is no moral difference between taking steps to hasten death and allowing the dying process to occur. Jack Kevorkian, the American

physician who was imprisoned in the 1990s for assisting in multiple suicides (and ironically died a natural death with pulmonary embolism), believed that to prolong the suffering of a terminally ill person is immoral, and the dying person should be the one to decide when it is time for their life to end. Humans are in charge of their destiny.

### Western society

Western society, though strongly influenced by Christianity at its core, has seen a demolition of these values. Whether through biblical ignorance or perceived

### ***Seek role models in dying by recalling the biblical pattern and the experience of saints who have gone before.***

irrelevance, there has been a progressive devolution of this foundation and a moving toward acculturation to other influences such as cremation, the embrace and legalization of human rights from a human perspective and the rejection of human dignity as being inherent through being created in the image of God.

### Religions and euthanasia

All the major world religions are opposed to euthanasia. Among those historically rooted in Christianity, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations was the first to pass a national resolution titled, “The Right to Die with Dignity,” a resolution that favors aid in dying for the terminally ill.

### The church and MAiD

The Roman Catholic Church approves of passive euthanasia, but highly disapproves of active euthanasia. Protestant churches vary in their position. Pro-choice statements have been made by the United Church of Christ, and the Methodist Church on the west coast of the U.S.A. The Episcopalian (Anglican), Unitarian Universalist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Quaker movements are among the most liberal, allowing at least individual decision-making in cases of hastened death. The National Baptist Convention does not have an open position. American Baptists have adopted “advocacy within the medical community for an increased emphasis on the caring goals of medicine in preserving the dignity of the person, minimizing the suffering of the individual and respecting personal choice on end-of-life care.” Southern

Baptists state that the end-of-life option by MAiD violates the sanctity of human life. In Canada, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, alongside other interveners, actively opposed Bill C-7.

### A Christian approach to MAiD

In the context of our lives, two things are inevitable. First, our society continues to exist and evolve; and second, we will live in it and ultimately die in it. This requires us to be prepared for that anticipated and inescapable crossroad to eternity. The following are some suggestions for a safe passage on to the other side:

- 1 • Be prepared to die.** The end of life should be part of life discussion, and it must happen openly among Christians (Hebrews 9:27).
- 2 • Build a solid Christian faith** and biblical conviction by studying and strengthening one’s faith in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the new life to come (Philippians 3:20-21).
- 3 • Choose comfort in dying** by relieving suffering with appropriate medical and spiritual care to be discussed prior to its need (Jeremiah 46:11).
- 4 • Have support in dying** by combatting loneliness. Christians must belong to a local church and have a close and solid church relationship based on love (Psalm 133:1-3).
- 5 • Have dignity in dying** by encouraging humaneness and providing comfort (Isaiah 43:1-2).
- 6 • Seek role models in dying** by recalling the biblical pattern and the experience of saints who have gone before (Jesus in Matthew 27:54; Stephen in Acts 7:59-60; the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18).
- 7 • Have a living hope in dying** by fixing your eyes on Christ and on the glory to come (Revelations 21:3-4).
- 8 • Pray for dying grace** (Psalm 23:4). 

 Alexandre Dauphin MD, FRCP(C) is an anesthesiology clinical professor at McMaster University, and a member at Pilgrim Baptist Fellowship, Hamilton, ON.

JOSEPH  
AND JUDAH'S  
REDEMPTIVE  
RECON  
CILIATION  
TION

## CHRISTLIKE LOVE IS KEY TO RECONCILIATION BY ANDY OSBORNE

# W

While going through the book Genesis in our church's preaching schedule, I have enjoyed revisiting the story of Joseph. It is one of the most compelling stories I am aware of, and it brings us so fluidly into the greater story of redemption. It is a story that emphasizes God's faithfulness, his way of humbling his children before he exalts them and the sovereignty of God over the hardships of his people. At the heart of this story is the truth delivered in Joseph's memorable words in Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (ESV).

But these different themes serve a more prominent one in the story. If you want to know what the point of a story is, a good place to look is at the characters and how they change.

The inciting incident—the event that gets the action of the story moving—is the brothers' attack on Joseph and their selling him into slavery in Genesis 37. The story then progresses by developing Joseph through a cycle of humiliation and exaltation until he is both the most powerful man in Egypt and the most humble and submissive to God's will. Meanwhile, Judah also grows through the events of Genesis 38 from a man who is completely ruled by unruly passions to one who takes responsibility for his own sin and begins to understand what it means to be a righteous leader. These two instances of character development bring us to the climax and conclusion in the reconciliation of the covenant family.

The providence of God naturally works in the background to bring out the glorious theme of reconciliation, and everything that happens prepares the reader for this satisfying conclusion. It begins with a family torn apart by jealousy and ends with the family of God united, sins

repented of and forgiven and a visible realization of God's promise to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his offspring (Genesis 12:3).

to Egypt in Genesis 42. It is evident that he had accepted his enslavement and exile as God's doing (Genesis 45:8), and he had seen and recognized the visible benefits of what had

### It begins with a family torn apart by jealousy and ends with the family of God united.

However, in this process of reconciliation the tests Joseph put his brothers through may seem unnecessary. Why didn't he simply forgive and forget? Why did he take so long to reveal himself? In answering these questions, we gain some valuable insight about the nature of reconciliation among the people of God and how important it is for our churches today.

#### WHAT DOES RECONCILIATION REQUIRE?

There is no reason to believe that Joseph was struggling with bitterness toward his brothers when they first came

happened to him. It is also evident that the brothers felt the guilt of their jealous betrayal and saw the bad things that happen to them as a result of their own sin. But there is a difference between a worldly sorrow, when we perceive the consequences of our sin, and a godly sorrow that leads to genuine repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). For reconciliation to truly happen, there needs to be evidence of godly repentance. This is apparent in the tests Joseph put his brothers through to see whether that they had indeed abandoned their old jealousy.

What exactly was this repentance Joseph was looking for? Was he looking for proof that they were sorry, evidence

that they had changed, or something deeper? There is only one thing that can truthfully and unquestioningly display the repentance needed for reconciliation: Christlikeness. This is exactly what happened in Genesis 34:18–34. While all the brothers were willing to give themselves in place for their brother Benjamin, Judah specifically stepped forward in honour of the responsibility he had taken on back in Genesis 43:9. All the evidence pointed to Benjamin being guilty of theft from the most powerful man in

interactions and relationships with each other should reflect that same love. Christlike love is the only requirement for reconciliation in the church for four reasons:

**1. To be truly repentant means to conform ourselves to the image of Christ.**

If Joseph’s brothers had kept jealousy in their hearts, even if it were hidden by a false humility in the face of Joseph’s power, true reconciliation could not have been reached. But was it

**Why do we come together as believers if not to show Christ’s love in heavenly service to one another?**

Egypt and Judah willingly put himself in Benjamin’s place for the love of his father. Judah had learned sacrificial, Christlike love, and as a result, reconciliation was able to happen.

In the Christian church, reconciliation always requires a Christlikeness on both sides of the divide. This is a step beyond simply feeling sorry for the sins we have committed, and it goes beyond expressions of forgiveness on the part of the person wronged. For Christian reconciliation to happen, both parties must be committed to a Christlike love. This is the only true requirement for two estranged members of the redeemed community of faith to be reunited after any kind of hurtful wrongdoing.

**WHAT DOES RECONCILIATION IN THE PEOPLE OF GOD LOOK LIKE?**

Taking the theme of reconciliation in the story of Joseph and applying it to the twenty-first century church may seem a stretch, but with the core of reconciliation being Christlike love, the application is easier to see. Just as Judah’s love toward Benjamin was a foreshadowing of the love Christ shows us, our

enough that the brothers simply stopped being jealous? No, it was not. Repentance is much more than simply stopping a sinful practice. To repent means to turn away from an old way of life and embrace a new way, the way of Christ and his love. No matter how much someone has changed, if they have not embraced a Christlike love for their spiritual siblings in the heavenly family, they have not repented. Reconciliation requires true repentance, and true repentance is only realized in Christlike love.

**2. The main point of Christian unity is to propagate the love of Christ.**

Why do we come together as believers if not to show Christ’s love in heavenly service to one another? Why do we have the preaching of the Word if not to have the Holy Spirit graciously work it out in our hearts so that we may be further transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18) and therefore display his love? If being in Christ is the foundation of our unity (see John 17:21), then being like Christ in his love must be a necessity for the reconciliation needed to preserve that unity.

**3. Practicing Christian love shows each other more of Christ.**

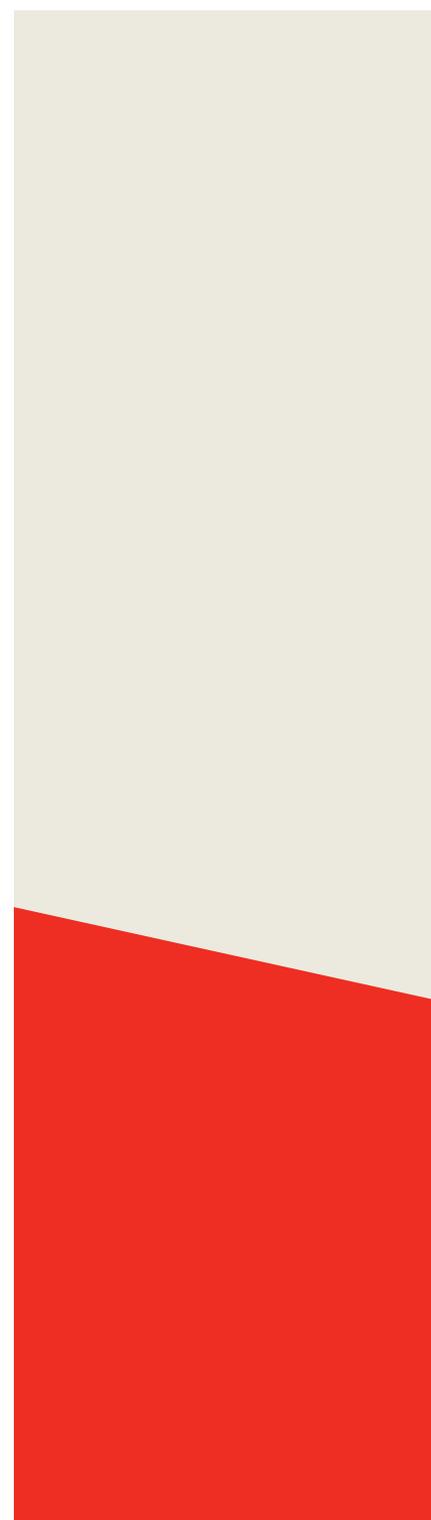
In a very real way, Christ displays his love *for* his people *through* his people. The love one Christian shows to another is not their own, rather Christ displays his love through us as instruments. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

Our brother stands before us as a sign of the truth and the grace of God. He has been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ’s stead, and he forgives our sins in Christ’s name (*Life Together*, 1954).

When applied to reconciliation, we must see our ministry to each other as a calling to be like Christ to them. If I have wronged someone, I am still called to be like Christ to them through love and if I have been wronged, I have the same obligation. When both sides are willing to do this, reconciliation can truly happen.

**4. Finally, only the love of Christ can overcome any sin.**

If we truly believe that the blood of Christ is powerful enough to remove our sins from the sight of God, it is surely sufficient to remove any sin separating two Christians. If we think there is a sin that cannot be overcome by biblical reconciliation, we would do well to remember that the same saving blood that reconciles us to a holy God is also effective to reconcile us to one another. When we also recognize, as Joseph did, the negative consequences of the ways we hurt one another do not fall outside the sovereignty of God, we can understand the attitude of Joseph as he spoke these words to his brothers in Genesis 45:5, “And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before



you to preserve life.” With the effectiveness of Christ’s blood and the power of God’s sovereignty, there is no sin between believers that cannot be overcome in Christ through his love.

**DO WE HAVE A CHOICE?**

Knowing that reconciliation is only possible and always



ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

possible where the love of Christ is present, do we have a choice? There certainly are sins a Christian can commit against another believer that can forever damage trust, weaken their relationship, and leave lasting ruin until all things are healed in eternity. Nevertheless, Scripture teaches us that reconciliation should always be pursued if at all

possible. I will give three reasons why this is the case:

### **1. It is important in our relationship with God.**

We may not draw a divide between our blood-bought place in the family of God and our relationships with others in that same family. To be reconciled to God assumes a reconciliation with each other, just

as a love for God assumes a love for each other (1 John 3:16). From God we learn the love of Christ, and we know it abides in us if we show it to others. Joseph reconciled with his brothers because, as close as he was to God, he was still alienated from the covenant community while he was apart from them. It was this community which would receive the promises of God and through them the Christ would come. Joseph recognized the need for reconciliation with those who wronged him because his

## **Joseph recognized the need for reconciliation with those who wronged him because his fellowship with them was necessary in his own walk with God.**

fellowship with them was necessary in his own walk with God. The connection between our own walk with God and our unity with those we have wronged or who have wronged us is so real that Christ commands us to reconcile before we come to God in worship (Matthew 5:23-24). If we truly realized this, how quickly we would let sins against us roll off our back, and how sincerely we would repent of our offenses, so that we might fully enjoy the presence of God.

### **2. It is a pleasure for us who have been reconciled to God to be reconciled to God's people.**

In our pursuit of the ultimate joy of knowing God, reconciliation must also be pursued. When it is achieved, old sins and offenses have been put behind us and an eternal future of communion together in Christ is revealed. A Christian will never find joy in Christ if they refuse to pursue reconciliation. Furthermore, it is a pleasure for us to act out the same redemptive graces by which we ourselves were reconciled to God. What could give a citizen of heaven more joy than

to embrace Christlikeness with another in sweet redemptive acts of unity?

### **3. It is necessary for a gospel-centred life.**

When a Christian gives little or no effort into reconciling with fellow believers, they become a living contradiction. Judah unknowingly pointed to the love of the coming Christ by embracing a Christlike love toward Benjamin rather than jealousy. Joseph pointed to Christ by loving his brothers enough to go through the difficult steps to

reconcile with them. If we are to be people whose lives are a holy theatre to display the gospel, we must be a people who are eager for unity and reconciliation in Christ.

One of the most tragic things we can witness in the covenant community today is a lack of desire for true reconciliation among Christians. This takes the form of anything from withholding affection from a sister who wronged us, to withholding church discipline from a brother (in order that he may be brought to repentance and reconciled with the body). We are bound to be wronged by other Christians, just as we are bound to wrong them in our remaining fleshly passions. God's sovereignty is no further from these situations than he was from Joseph's slavery. He brings us these painful seasons in order that we may embrace Christlikeness and so embrace one another with the same love that redeemed us. **B**

➤ Andy Osborne is a graduate of Toronto Baptist Seminary and the senior pastor at Faith Baptist Church in Scarborough, ON. He and his wife Jessica have two young children, Reuben and Eleanor.

# BISHOP CYPRIAN AND THE CYPRIAN PLAGUE

THE FAITHFULNESS OF AN EARLY CHURCH FATHER IN THE FACE OF PLAGUE AND PERSECUTION. BY DAVID HERBERT

**O**n September 14, A.D. 258, Bishop Cyprian was brought to trial before the Roman proconsul Galerius Maximus. The following exchange took place:

Galerius asked, “Are you Thascius Cyprian?” The bishop replied, “Yes, I am.”

Galerius said, “You have become an enemy of the gods of Rome and our religious practices. It has been discovered that you are not only an author but a leader of these heinous crimes. You now will become an example for all those who have followed you.”

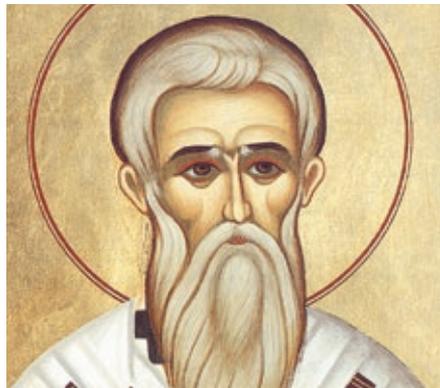
Then Galerius read the sentence. “You, Cyprian, will die by the sword.”

Cyprian responded, “Thanks be to God!”

Bishop Cyprian (A.D. ca. 200–258) was the first church leader in North Africa to be executed. Born into a wealthy senatorial family in Carthage, he was afforded an excellent education. Having been a teacher of rhetoric, he had acquired the appropriate skill set to enter the legal profession—a profession equal to his noble birth.

At the age of 46, he was introduced to Christ by Cacilius, a presbyter at Carthage. In honour of this faithful friend, he assumed his name and became known as Thascius Cacilius Cyprianus. Disenchanted with his past life of self-indulgence, he entered church ministry and moved through the ecclesiastical *cursus honorum*—deacon to presbyter to bishop—in three years. Such rapid advancement caused some concern among his clerical colleagues, and they posed this pertinent question: Did a recent convert have the spiritual maturity to hold the honorific position of bishop? This apprehension by his peers plagued Cyprian’s ministry throughout his tenure as bishop.

In A.D. 250, as a newly appointed bishop, Cyprian was faced with two major calamities: a pandemic and persecution. The first to arrive on his doorstep was a harrowing



Bishop Cyprian of Carthage

pandemic that originated in Rome. It has been speculated that this plague came from Egypt—the main supplier of wheat for the Roman capital. Within a short time, 5,000 people were dying daily in the city. The death rate was so high that people were often left in the streets to die. The same was true in Alexandria, Egypt, where sixty per cent of the people either died or fled the capital.

This pandemic has become known as the “Cyprian Plague” as Cyprian was the first person to give an apt description of this horrendous disease in his treatise *On Mortality* (14):

With the bowels in continuous discharge, the strength of the body is gone; the fire that begins deep within burns all the way up to the wounds in the throat; the intestines are shaken with continuous vomiting; the eyes are set on fire by the force of the blood; for some the feet or other extremities are cut off by the infection of diseased putrefaction; as weakness comes from the failures and losses of the body, the ability to walk is enfeebled, the hearing is lost or the eyes are blinded.

Modern epidemiologists think that it was either Ebola or an ancient type of smallpox.

Cyprian and Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, felt compelled for the sake of their Lord to encourage their congregations to assist their communities in those

dire times. Eusebius in his *Church History* relates how the believers in Alexandria, Egypt, reached out to help:

Most of our brethren showed love and loyalty in not sparing themselves while helping one another, tending to the sick with no thought of danger and gladly departing life with them after becoming infected with their disease.... The best of our own brothers lost their lives in this way—some presbyters, deacons and laymen—a form of death based on strong faith and piety that seems in every way equal to martyrdom.

Through these acts of compassion, the estimation of the Christian community grew in the eyes of the non-Christian world. It spoke volumes about the integrity of the Christian gospel. This twenty-year pandemic was no respecter of social status; it claimed the lives of two emperors: Hostilian (251) and Claudius II Gothicus (270). Since cities were highly populated, they were the ideal hotbed for the pandemic to spread. Many fled to the outlying areas—but not the Christians.

Panic-stricken at the magnitude of the pandemic, Emperor Decius was convinced that neglect of the Roman gods meant they were inflicting their vengeance on the Roman populace. To appease the gods, he ordered the temples that had been in disrepair to be refurbished. He then turned his attention to the followers of Christ, convinced that Christians were another reason for this carnage: Christians had offended the gods by their frequent denial of their existence.

Consequently, in A.D. 251, Emperor Decius passed an edict that everyone within the Roman empire had to publicly offer incense to the gods. For their act of obedience, they were given a certificate (*libellus*). Those who refused to offer libations to the gods were put to death.

Decius’ successor, Trebonianus Gallus, went one step further. He ordered a coin to be struck in honour of the god Apollon. On

one side was an image of Trebonianus Gallus, while on the reverse a picture of Apollos and the words, *APOLL SALUTARI*. The strong implication was that Apollos could bring health and healing to a desperate people. The idea that Apollos was the protector against famines and plagues continued throughout the rest of antiquity.

In light of the severity of persecution against the Christians, Cyprian was convinced that the Lord's return was imminent. Similar to many early church fathers, he believed the antichrist would proceed Jesus' appearance and the establishment of his earthly kingdom. For the present, Cyprian urged his fellow Christians at Thibaris that "we all stand ready

**Through these acts of compassion, the estimation of the Christian community grew in the eyes of the non-Christian world.**

for the battle and that we may think of nothing except the glory of eternal life and the crown of the confession of the Lord" (*Cyprian Letters*, 58).

It was only a matter of time before the Roman sword would claim Cyprian's life. When he was brought before Galerius Maximus, the Roman proconsul offered him incense to present to the god Apollos. With resolute faith in Christ, Cyprian refused, and was later beheaded. At that moment, the truth Cyprian had expressed in the final chapter of his *On Mortality* (26) was now a reality:

We should consider, beloved brethren, and we should reflect constantly that we have renounced the world and as strangers and foreigners we sojourn here for a time. Let us embrace the day which assigns each of us to his dwelling, which on our being rescued from here and released from the snares of the world, restores us to paradise and the kingdom. What man, after having been abroad, would not hasten to return to his native land? Who, when hurrying to sail to his family, would not more eagerly long for a favorable wind that he might more quickly embrace his dear ones? **B**

➤ David Herbert, a retired elementary and secondary history teacher, has authored a number of books. He attends Southdale Bible Chapel in London, ON.

## THE WAY WE DISAGREE WITH ONE ANOTHER



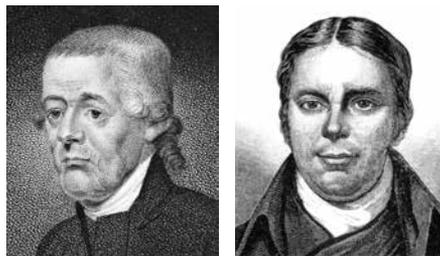
**BY MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN**

»» At the outset of his invasion of Scotland in the summer of 1650, Oliver Cromwell remarked that theological disagreements (and surely he is thinking in part of the differences among the English and Scottish Puritans that had led them to war) are endemic to the life of the church in a world marred by sin. They are a sad reality with which Christians have to contend. Nonetheless, Christians can control the way that they participate in such disputes.

### *Disagreeing over the cross*

Jump forward now to the close of the next century and one such disagreement between Abraham Booth and Andrew Fuller, the two most important English Baptist theologians between 1770 and the late nineteenth century, about the vital matter of the atonement and its extent. Their disagreement became open in the years immediately preceding Booth's death in 1806.

In fact, at one point, Fuller was alarmed to find that Booth was the origin of a rumour (totally without foundation) that Fuller was moving headlong into Arminianism. Fuller remonstrated with Booth about this,



Abraham Booth and Andrew Fuller

and this may have alleviated some of Booth's concerns, but Booth's fears were probably never fully quieted.

Booth had nothing to fear in this regard, as Fuller emphasized. But the way Fuller handled the matter is most instructive. He met with Booth and spoke to him in order to allay his fears. Moreover, he refused to go public about their differences while Booth was still alive.

*"I always revered his character"*

After Booth's death, Fuller did publish two items that dealt with their disagreement.

What is striking about the way he dealt with their differences—concerning one of the profoundest subjects of the Christian Faith—is that he did so with loving respect and reasonableness.

The way he disagreed with Booth was something Fuller regarded as important as *what* they disagreed about. As he put it, two years after Booth died, in a note in *The Evangelical Magazine*: "I always revered his character, though, in some particulars, I thought differently from him."

### *A better way*

What I find particularly distressing about the present day is not that there are differences between Christians about important, albeit secondary or tertiary, issues. Fuller's close friend, John Sutcliff of Olney, once stated regarding differences over worship and eschatology (in the preface to one of Jonathan Edwards's works in which Edwards' post-millennial vision largely figured): "Every Christian has a right to think for himself and ought to have liberty to express his opinion." What is distressing is the way that some Christians are treating those who disagree with them on matters not essential to the faith, casting aspersions on their integrity, calling them shameful names and so causing divisions. It is disgraceful.

Fuller's example speaks a better way. Or, if Fuller will not be heard, hear James and Paul:

With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God's likeness.... My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way (James 3:9–10).

For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans? (1 Corinthians 3:3). **B**

➤ Michael A.G. Haykin is an historian, author, & professor of church history at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He is also on the core faculty of Heritage Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario, where he teaches church history. He is the founding director of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at SBTS. He and his wife Alison attend West Highland Baptist Church, Hamilton, ON.

# CHRIST-CENTRED HYMNOLOGY



**BY DALE NEVELIZER** >> “Worship wars” raged through many churches over the past few decades. Initially, older generations resisted any attempt to replace traditional hymns with contemporary Christian music, but eventually younger generations replaced not only the hymns with contemporary music but congregational singing with worship bands. Missed in much of the controversy was whether there was a way to remain biblical while blending the two together.

When writing to the Colossian Christians, Paul’s desire for them was to know that neither legalism nor mysticism could empower them to live the Christian life, but that Christ is all and all we need. The way we live the Christian life is through the Word of Christ. His Word is not only the foundation for what we teach one another to believe, but it is the authority for our hymnology. Before any music is introduced into the church, two vital questions must be

**Christian music must be God-centred in general, and Christ-centred in particular.**

answered according to the principle Paul outlines in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

First, is the content of the song biblical? Paul may be referring here to three kinds of Old Testament songs or to Old Testament Psalms, New Testament hymns and spontaneous songs

of praise. Either way, the issue is not whether a hymn is traditional or contemporary, because every traditional hymn was contemporary at one time. The issue is whether our hymnology is biblically and theologically sound. Traditional or contemporary, the hymns we sing should be jam-packed with biblical content. Constantly cloaking God with the second personal pronoun in order to make Christianity more palatable leaves us in danger of being ashamed of the gospel, and it leaves our audience with an uncertain message as to whether we are referring to God or their significant other. Christian music must be God-centred in general, and Christ-centred in particular.

Second, is the music itself singable? Much of contemporary Christian music requires a band to perform it while the congregation listens and is entertained. But music in the church should primarily be congregational, which requires the hymns that we sing to be singable. The content of the hymns we sing should inform our minds so that our hearts are stirred as we lift our voices in praise. Our singing should be exuberant because the music that proceeds from our lips should express the inner gratitude and joy that is in our hearts for God.

The issue should not be old versus new. Whether the hymn is traditional or contemporary, there are both good and bad. The music we use in the church should be biblically and theologically sound, and it should be congregationally singable. Instead of worship wars over traditional versus contemporary, let us take the best of both and blend them together with piano and band for the glory of God and the edification of God’s people. **B**



Dale Nevelizer is pastor of Tilbury Regular Baptist Church, Tilbury, ON.

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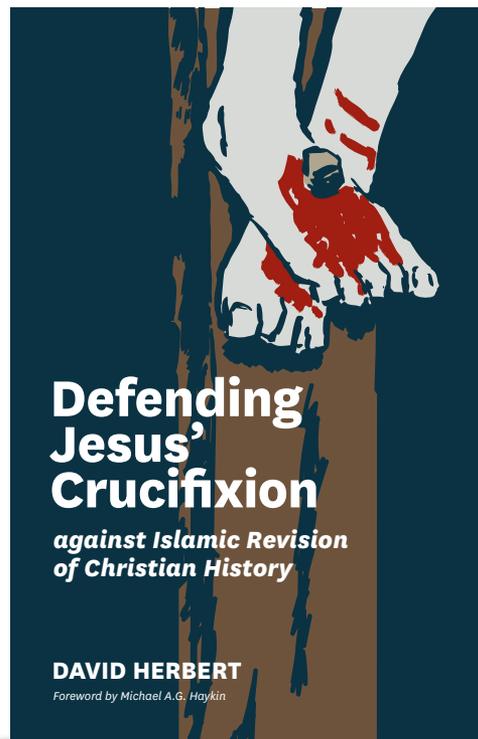
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## David Herbert

David Herbert is a retired elementary and secondary history teacher. He received his B.A. from the University of Western Ontario, M.A. from Wheaton College (USA), M.Div. from Heritage Theological Seminary (Canada) and M.Ed. and Ed.D. from the University of Toronto. Dr. Herbert has written a number of books, including *Charles Darwin's Religious Views* (2009), *The Key to Understanding Origins: The Underlying Assumptions* (2013) and *Becoming God: Transhumanism and the Quest for Cybernetic Immortality* (2014).

**T**he truth of Jesus' crucifixion, one of the most verifiable events in history, has been challenged by Muslims since the creation of Islam and the writing of the Qur'an. Muslims believe there was a crucifixion, but the

majority deny that it was *Jesus* who was the one crucified.

Two prominent Muslim polemicists, 'Abd al-Jabbār from the tenth century and Muhammad 'Ata ur-Rahim from the twentieth century, have attempted to present a historical interpretation from A.D. 33 to 381 to support their denial of Jesus' death on the cross. Since the death of Jesus on the cross is central—and *essential*—to the Bible's gospel message, it is appropriate to consider the evidence for the crucifixion and how this erroneous view came to be commonly accepted by Muslims.

David Herbert tackles this belief by looking at the historical support for the veracity of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, external documentary and archeological evidence and plain historical challenge to the views put forward by al-Jabbār, ur-Rahim and others. In the course of the book, Dr. Herbert also debunks the view that the *Gospel of Barnabas* (frequently used by Muslims to defend their position), was a first-century document. He examines each of three views of what Muslims believe happened to Jesus at the crucifixion and powerfully defends this historical event, central to the Christian faith.

## ***Defending Jesus' Crucifixion against Islamic Revision of Church History***

By David Herbert  
174 pages

ISBN 978-1989174425

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# BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF WRITERS



**BY JEREMY JOHNSTON** >> Writers are often viewed as reclusive and solitary figures, hunching over laptops, Remingtons, or quill and ink pages, crafting literary masterpieces in complete isolation. There is some truth to this stereotype. Writers need to write, and that is best done alone. John

Donne, however, famously wrote that “No man is an island.” Some of the best-known writers had close circles of friends to give and receive critical feedback: Coleridge and Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron, Lee and Capote, Fitzgerald and Hemingway—to name a few. This aligns with the wisdom of the Scriptures, which encourages us to not only learn from feedback but to be open and generous in giving it: “Better is open rebuke than hidden love” and “faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:5–6). This is true in many areas of our lives, but in the world of writing and creativity, receiving honest feedback on our writing is one of the best ways to produce the highest quality work. Through encouragement and honest poking and prodding, writers can help each other become better at their craft. “As iron sharpens iron,” says the writer of Proverbs, “so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

One of the most famous literary friendships where regular, critical feedback was especially fruitful was between C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Lewis wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia* as well as dozens of books, essays, and talks on Christian apologetics. Tolkien wrote the classic children’s novel, *The Hobbit*, and he produced one of the greatest novels of the 20th-century, *The Lord of the Rings*. Many of these now-famous books were read and critiqued while in draft form among a small group of fellow Christian writers who called themselves the Inklings. This group, established by Lewis and Tolkien, met regularly in Oxford, where they listened to each other’s work and offered—as one Inkling described—“profuse and detailed” feedback as well as “frank and friendly” criticism.

**Lewis’s “sheer encouragement” was the catalyst to bringing Middle Earth to the world.**

Both Lewis and Tolkien had a tremendous impact on each other, as well as on many of the other lesser-known Inklings. It isn’t an overstatement to say that without the rebukes, criticisms and feedback of Lewis, Tolkien, and the Inklings, we wouldn’t have heard of hobbits, wizards, or dragons of Middle Earth nor the beavers, wardrobe, or Lion of Narnia. Using the Inklings as a model, here are some tips for creating your own writing group:

## 1. Start small

Lewis and Tolkien began with just the two of them, and eventually, the group grew larger. It’s also key to invite mature believers who are writers (or have an appreciation for the arts) in order to provide the sort of feedback that wordsmiths need. The Inklings were “invitation only” for that very reason.

## 2. Meet regularly

The Inklings met a couple of times a week for over a decade, sometimes for friendly banter but mainly for the serious business of reading and offering criticism. Over those years, various members of the Inklings wrote and published several acclaimed novels, translations, philosophical and historical texts and works of apologetics. The longevity and productivity of the group hinged upon its regularity. Writers often need deadlines, so knowing the next



C.S. Lewis (left) and J.R.R. Tolkien’s longstanding literary group, the Inklings, provided feedback and “frank and friendly” criticism to works in progress.

meeting is just around the corner can motivate writers to put pen to paper. Whenever you meet, make sure it is on a consistent basis.

## 3. Write and share

There may be some apprehension about reading unfinished work, but the point of the meeting is to receive input and make revisions on a work-in-progress. The Inklings read many partially completed drafts, including *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The feedback given during these sessions helped shape and transform these works into much better books.

## 4. Be encouraging but also be honest

Tolkien described the immeasurable debt he owed Lewis for helping him write *The Lord of the Rings*. He wrote that Lewis’s “sheer encouragement” was the catalyst to bringing Middle Earth to the world. He goes on to say that Lewis “was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my ‘stuff’ could be more than a private hobby.” Lewis himself remarks that his impact on Tolkien’s work was often like “nagging,” and on one occasion he bluntly told Tolkien, “You can do better than that. Better, Tolkien, please!”

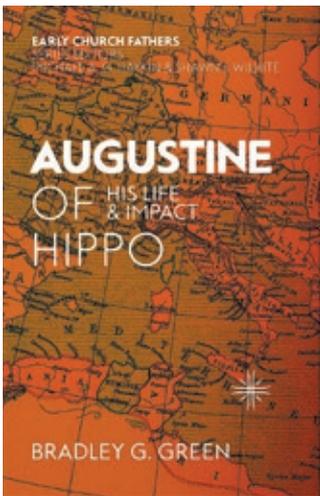
## 5. Writers don’t need to follow all of the suggestions that are given

Tolkien, for example, criticized Lewis’s Narnia books for mixing mythic elements like Father Christmas, Bacchus, and talking animals, as well as mixing Christian and Pagan symbolism. Nevertheless, Lewis persisted in his vision for Narnia. After the books were published, Tolkien called Lewis’s stories “deservedly” popular and he gladly recommended the books to friends and family. All advice is given as suggestions; it’s up to the author to decide what advice to accept and what to leave behind. **B**

For an accessible, and helpful exploration of the creative processes of the Inklings, see Diana Pavlac Glyer’s book *Bandersnatch: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Creative Collaboration of the Inklings* (2016).

➤ Jeremy W. Johnston holds many hats—husband, father, professor, teacher, author and poet. He has also written *Barnabas* magazine’s arts column since the magazine’s founding. He attends Pilgrim Baptist Fellowship, Hamilton, ON.

A QUARTERLY review OF NEW & RECENT books



**AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO**

*His life and impact*

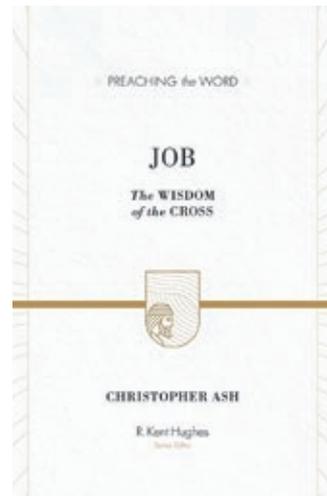
**BY BRADLEY G. GREEN**

Christian Focus (2020); 224 pgs  
ISBN 978-1527105874

Perhaps no one person in the last 2,000 years has had a greater impact on Western civilization than the church father Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430). It would benefit Christians, especially those of a Reformed, Protestant persuasion, to know at least something of his life story and his lasting theological influence on the universal church.

As part of *The Early Church Fathers* series, edited by Michael A.G. Haykin and Shawn J. Wilhite, Bradley Green has written an excellent introduction to this great man. The reader will find Augustine’s life and conversion of great interest. Unusually and naturally gifted, Augustine had no real interest in the Lord. But divine providence—and a mother’s persistent prayers—eventually led to his conversion. Now his great gifts were under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Augustine tackled some of the greatest theological issues of his day and his writings are influential even today. I highly recommend this book and trust it will whet your appetite for Augustine’s *Confessions*, and even encourage some to tackle his great *City of God*. Bon appétit!—DON THEOBALD



**JOB**

*The wisdom of the cross*

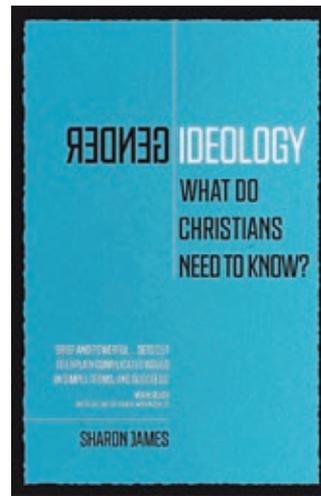
**BY CHRISTOPHER ASH**

Crossway (2014); 496 pgs  
ISBN 978-1433513121

Without a doubt, this is by far the very best book I have ever read on the book of Job. The biblical book of Job is not easy to read, to study or to live out. But pastor Christopher Ash has produced a wonderful tool to help us navigate the maze of speeches by Job, his three friends, Elihu and God himself.

*Job* is well laid out, clearly organized and easy to follow. But foremost, it seeks to be faithful to the text of Job itself. Careful and clear exegesis is found in every chapter. Furthermore, it is faithful to the larger storyline of the entire Bible. Ash contends that the ultimate explanation and resolution to Job can only be found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The person Job is first, a type of the Lord Jesus and second, a pattern for all believers, who will be tested at some point in their lives with unfair suffering and trials.

*Job* has solid exposition and comforting pastoral counsel, but it will take effort, energy and careful thought to benefit from its content. It is jam-packed with nuggets of gospel truth, first to be mined and treasured by the reader and then to be shared with fellow suffering Christians.—DON THEOBALD



**GENDER IDEOLOGY**

*What do Christians need to know?*

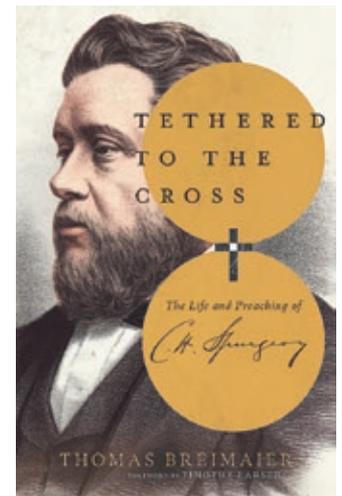
**BY SHARON JAMES**

Christian Focus (2019); 132 pgs  
ISBN 978-1527104815

This is a short and powerful book! Sharon James presents a precise critique of gender ideology, outlining its rise in society, how it has infiltrated and affected so many areas of modern life (especially showing the danger it poses to children and youth and the ways they are targeted by activists) and presents the biblical foundation that rebuts it.

Gender theory advocates for a “gender identity” that is independent of our biological sex. Activists have gained acceptance for this by infiltrating large international bodies and introducing a new vocabulary that attempts to mainstream these ideas (eg. new pronouns). James exposes the falsehoods of this theory: a denial of basic biology, a destruction of male/female, mother/father distinctions, a denial of history, etc.

James’ approach is structured, grounded and insightful, all the while being quite readable for the average person. This book will help you in your families, schools and churches. It will help as you share the gospel with those who are struggling with gender/trans issues and give you strength to hold to biblical truth in a confusing world.—JANICE VAN ECK



**TETHERED TO THE CROSS**

*The life and preaching of C.H. Spurgeon*

**BY THOMAS BREIMAIER**

IVP Academic (2020); 282 pgs  
ISBN 978-0830853304

I was first introduced to C.H. Spurgeon at Ontario Bible College in 1968. Over the last fifty-plus years, I have been greatly blessed and challenged in reading books by and about the “prince of preachers.”

*Tethered To The Cross* is a scholarly work that analyzes the biblical hermeneutics that governed Spurgeon’s theology, preaching and ministry.

Thomas Breimaier skillfully interweaves the key events of Spurgeon’s life with a thorough evaluation of the overriding passions that shaped his public ministry. Beginning with Spurgeon’s conversion on a snowy January day in 1850 until he died at the age of 57 in 1892, two things dominated his interpretation and proclamation of the Word of God: cruci-centrism and conversionism. That is, the cross of Christ was central to all of his ministry and it was proclaimed with the intense desire to see sinners brought into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

This twofold focus is shown to be central in Spurgeon’s published books, in his magazine, *The Sword and Trowel* and in his training of young men in the Pastor’s College. Highly recommended!—DON THEOBALD

# APOLOGETICS AND JOY



**BY OWEN PIKKERT** >> It is banal but accurate to observe that we live in an age of anxiety. It is also banal but accurate to identify various causes of such anxiety, whether economic conditions, political strife, cancel culture or a certain virus. For many, these are sources of stress. But underlying much of today's anxiety is a postmodern worldview that does little to assuage it. How can you be anything but anxious if you deny any providence, if you deny any objective truths by which to live your life and if you see the world as controlled by the forces of oppression? You may not have given these views much thought. You may not have even articulated them. But if you believe them deep down, then they will often exhibit themselves through anxious thoughts, and the need for distraction.

In response to such anxiety, it makes sense for the Christian to emphasize the joy of the faith as a "selling point." Perhaps the most famous example is provided by Blaise Pascal. You might have heard Pascal's name before, perhaps as applied to a unit of pressure, a programming language or even to a triangle. But Pascal was also a great Christian thinker. Yet he did not believe in trying to prove God's existence intellectually. That, he held, would display an ignorance of one's intellectual limitations at best, and intellectual pride at worst. Instead, Pascal thought that one should "wager" on Christianity as follows. Being a Christian undoubtedly has its costs. Still, these costs are outweighed by the benefits of heaven. Anyone who goes to heaven will experience infinite joy, both in duration and in intensity. The costs of being a Christian, however great, are always finite, whereas the benefits of heaven are infinite. So, the sensible thing to do is to become a Christian. In any wager in which the costs are finite and the benefits are infinite, infinity wins every time.

Pascal's wager, which is far more subtle than my brief summary would suggest, has received its fair share of criticism. My aim in this article, however, is not to add further criticism, but to focus on some related joys of being a Christian. Pascal focused on the *future* joy of heaven. I want to focus on the present joy of believing in such a future. That is, I want to identify a couple of ways in which belief in heaven can infuse a Christian with joy right now. If I am right, then such joy provides a further reason for the Christian to remain a Christian, and for the anxious person to become one.

## 1. Joy from the overwhelming goodness of one's existence.

Let us distinguish between your existence and your life. Your *existence* is the total duration of your being, including both your time on earth and your time in the afterlife. Your *life* is simply the duration of your time on earth. Now if you are going to heaven, then over 99 per cent of your existence is one of incomprehensible joy. It is a joy of *absence*: no illness, no death, no fear, no manipulation, no burnout, no stupidity, no eyerolling, no confusion, no anxiety, no insecurity, no trickery and no political division. But it is also a joy of *presence*: great intimacy with a Being perfectly good, beautiful and true, unbreakable love and unity among fellow Christians and unshakeable contentment.

Of course, your life on earth may still have a great deal of

suffering. Your career might stall, your marriage might falter and your children might disappoint. Still, your life can be far more joyful than it otherwise would be, simply because you know that this suffering is comparatively brief, and that you will view it as the distant past for the great majority of your existence. As the apostle Paul reminds Christians, how can your troubles be anything but light and momentary, compared to the eternal glory that far outweighs them all (see 2 Corinthians 4:17)?

## 2. Joy from a profound sense of purpose.

Many people struggle with whether their lives are truly meaningful. If they are naturalists, then they will probably believe that reality is just a large blob of matter in motion, and any meaning will ultimately be a human invention. This often gives rise to further anxiety. After all, inventing a meaning for your life is more difficult than it might seem. You love golf, but you sense an emptiness in a life spent swatting a ball around a field. So instead you consider giving yourself to volunteer work. But that doesn't pay, so maybe the thing to do is to get a steady, respectable job which, though not particularly meaningful, will at least allow for golf on the weekends. But if a lifetime of constant golf is ultimately meaningless, then perhaps a lifetime of weekend golf is meaningless too. And so the mind churns.

The Christian, however, need have no such anxiety. This is because the Christian faces a task of stupendous urgency: to spread the good news of the faith so that others may also have an existence of overwhelming joy. After all, if heaven is real, and if we can play some part, however small, in being used by God to allow other people to eventually experience the joy of heaven, then other goals pale by comparison. Suppose you are a doctor who, just before a long and wonderful retirement, is on temporary assignment in a village struck by a deadly plague. You have a supply of medicine which, if taken, ensures lifelong health and happiness. How absurd it would be to churn with anxiety over whether your brief time in the village is meaningful! Of course, you might still have various concerns, but they will be problems of means, not ends. The end goal is clear: get the medicine out there, even though there will be plenty of obstacles along the way.

At this point it may be objected that, even if all this is true, the anxiety over how best to fulfil such a purpose remains considerable. I may receive much joy from the overwhelming goodness of my existence as well as from a profound sense of purpose, but I just don't know how to evangelize. There is the question of location: Should I stay where I am, or should I go overseas? There is the question of time: Should I study more theology, or should I just jump right in? And there is the question of tactics: Should I share my faith by asking subtle questions, or should I bombard the neighbourhood with gospel tracts? While I do not have universal answers to these questions, it is worth noting that a joyful Christian is usually a much more energetic and attractive spreader of the gospel than a joyless Christian. You might not have all the details of evangelism worked out. You might not even have an overall strategy. But you have the joy of the faith. And that joy is often one of the greatest testimonies. **B**

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# WILLIAM COWPER



**BY RACHEL THIBAULT** >> Since March 2021, our family has studied different Christian testimonies throughout history. Presentations were made to our family each week during our Bible study nights. One of our younger children read to us about the preacher Billy Sunday and his impact on America in the early 1900s. Other children presented biographies on John Newton, John Bunyan, Eric Liddell, Clive Staples Lewis and George Müller. The biography I chose to present was, of course, on a hymnwriter! This hymnwriter, in my humble opinion, wrote the most powerful hymn lyrics we have. (I personally quote this hymn weekly!) Shockingly, many of my children had not heard of this hymnist.

William Cowper (November 26, 1731–April 25, 1800) penned the words to “God Moves in a Mysterious Way,” a hymn that both lifts the Christian through dark days, as well as directs our gaze to a sovereign God. “The bud may have a bitter taste / But sweet will be the flower.” “Behind a frowning providence / He hides a smiling face.” “You fearful saints, fresh courage take / The clouds you so much dread / Are big with mercy and shall break / In blessings on your head.” What encouraging reminders!

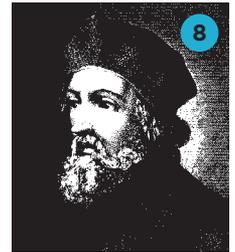
Cowper came from a lineage of poets and from a line of kings (his mother was fourth in the line to the throne during the reign of King Henry III of England). His mother died just before he turned six, and her death had a lasting impact on Cowper for the remainder of his life. He liked school but as he matured to adulthood, he became convinced education should belong in the home. Cowper came to have quite modern thoughts about schooling. Not only should students learn the classics, math and languages, he supported games and learning through play. As he headed to Westminster to complete his law degree, he already had a strong knowledge of Greek, Latin, French and Italian.

In 1767, William Cowper happened to meet John Newton, who was at the time the curate at the Olney Parish Church. Cowper had recently been converted (while a patient in a mental asylum) and was eager to be under the solid preaching of the gospel. Cowper moved to Olney and the two remained friends the remainder of Cowper’s life. Together they completed a hymnal, *Olney Hymns*, which contained 348 hymns (Newton wrote 280 and Cowper 68).

William Cowper suffered throughout his life with depression and often has been called a “modern Job.” One main difference between Cowper and Job is that the latter part of Job’s life was filled with rich blessing. Cowper was once asked how he felt and he answered, “Feel? I feel unutterable despair.” He admitted that he was at times insane, but never bereft of hope. And when he passed into glory in the spring of 1800, he finally experienced the reason for the hope that was in him (1 Peter 3:15). **B**

➤ Rachel Thibault is a wife, mother, homeschool teacher and an ICU nurse (when she can fit that in). She loves playing piano and singing. She joyfully serves in music with the fellowship of believers her family worships with.

## CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY CHALLENGE



## Do you know?

Match the numbered clue to the person below:

- The person who nailed 95 theses to a church door. These theses listed ways that the Roman Church was abusing its power.
- Wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace” and was previously a slave trader.
- A leader in the fight to end slavery and one of the founding members of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).
- Resisted Adolf Hitler’s leadership during WWII. Died on the gallows for defying orders.
- First Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity. Most of this person’s life was lived as a pagan.
- Blind hymnwriter who penned more than 9,000 hymns.
- Helped Jews escape in WWII. Was imprisoned in a labour camp in Germany.
- Was heard singing Psalms while being burned at the stake. Was charged with being a heretic against the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Was the eighteenth of nineteen children. Wrote an average of 10 lines of poetry a day for 50 years. Produce nearly 9,000 hymns.
- Millions of people have been converted by this person’s testimony and preaching.

- \_\_\_ a. Charles Wesley
- \_\_\_ b. Billy Graham
- \_\_\_ c. Martin Luther
- \_\_\_ d. Corrie Ten Boom
- \_\_\_ e. Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- \_\_\_ f. John Newton
- \_\_\_ g. William Wilberforce
- \_\_\_ h. Frances (Fanny) Jane Crosby
- \_\_\_ i. Constantine
- \_\_\_ j. John Hus

Answers (9a; 10b; 1c; 7d; 4e; 2f; 3g; 6h; 5i; 8j)

# CULTURE AND CULTIVATION



BY DANIELLE GIGNAC >>

This is a fitting season to get to the roots of culture. Most often, when we refer to culture, we aren't referring to the original meaning of the word, although the two senses are connected. The Latin *cultura* refers to cultivating or tilling land for crops (agriculture). It wasn't until the nineteenth century that the metaphorical meaning came into more common usage, in which it describes "learning and taste, the intellectual side of civilization," and later on, "collective customs and achievements of a people" (Online Etymology Dictionary). In both meanings, the sense of developing or growing something with intentionality is clear.

This year in particular, we find a strong intersection of practice and metaphor. Gardening has really taken off in our society. Seed suppliers and plant nurseries can hardly keep enough stock to keep up with demand. Community garden plots are popular and many people are trying gardening for the very first time. What's behind this sudden interest and cultural shift toward cultivation?

I think there are a few obvious reasons. People are stuck at home and looking for something to keep themselves occupied. The practice of Victory Gardens has seen resurgence, as a way to create food security in uncertain times. Community gardens are a way to stay connected to others in one's neighbourhood and to learn from them. Vacations are limited so people are spending money on their homes and gardens.

I would also speculate on some less obvious reasons, as well. The Bible tells us that from the creation of human beings, we were made to be gardeners. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden and tasked with caring for it and cultivating it. Cultivating the earth has always been an integral part of human culture. Even though many urban dwellers have not been exposed to agriculture or gardening, the rise in indoor plant and balcony growing clearly shows that the desire to grow and care for plants is strong. While we cannot create life from nothing in the way God does, he does provide us with the capability to cultivate what he has made:



## The garden is a symbol and place of restoration of life.

we start with seeds, and we plant, water and watch them grow into plants. We decide where to plant them, and we create gardens and transform landscapes. While not everyone is skilled in designing gardens, we all appreciate the beauty of entering a space that has been tended with care. We distinguish between barren deserts and oases, and we gravitate toward the latter where there is life and abundance.

After a year of anxiety, stress and uncertainty, it simply makes sense that people turn to gardens as both a practical activity and an act of restoration. We can't change a lot of things going on around us, but we can work with a little patch of earth or some dirt in a pot. We can add beauty to the world. I believe this remains an important aspect of our life on earth. Caring for the environment so as not to destroy it is one thing, and a very important one. But I also think that our direct interaction with the environment and the earth have additional positive benefits. We can make it more beautiful and more productive with our actions. We can cultivate life where there was barrenness. Many studies have shown that the presence of nature or natural forms has a positive impact on our emotions and psychology. Plants are good for our mental and physical health.

I have always found the moment after Jesus' resurrection when Mary Magdalene talks to Jesus before recognizing him to be very poignant. "Thinking he was the gardener..." There is a beautiful parallel between the first Adam who was created in the garden and exiled for disobedience, and the last Adam who was buried and resurrected in a tomb in a garden because of his obedience to the Father. A garden is the place where death and sin first entered the world, and a garden is where life triumphed over sin. Adam and Eve were separated from God when he called their names and they hid. Mary was reunited with Jesus when he called hers and she recognized him. Truly, the garden is a symbol and place of restoration of life. It makes sense that our culture would turn to this image and practice of cultivation during a time of upheaval like we have experienced.

Sadly, we know so well the struggle of living in an environment cursed with sin. Pests and diseases ruin our crops. Droughts leave entire countries without enough food. Yet there is hope. This world, as beautiful as it can be, will likely see greater destruction before the Lord returns and remakes it. In the new heavens and new earth, we will have a restored natural environment and tending it will likely once again be our role. But while we are here, with all the difficulties we have experienced this year, our gardens can remind us to also cultivate the fruits of the Spirit, and to find our hope and joy in the God who created everything and who will one day return to restore it.

Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.  
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to tread on the heights  
(Habakkuk 3:17-19). **B**

Danielle Gignac is an architect living in Guelph, ON. She attends Crestwicke Baptist Church.

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