

# Woven Together for a Reason

Many of you will be familiar with Aesop's fables. They are a collection of very short fictional stories, but in each one there is some irony in the plot. The irony provides a powerful teaching base for a much greater truth which is applicable in other parts of life. They are clever pieces of work, because the simple story line is in contrast to the dynamic thoughts that are behind it.

And so it was when this fable came across my desk, (it is not an Aesop's as far as I know) I admired the way the author could use such a simple story to illustrate a teaching point which is good for us all to be reminded of time and again.

*A mouse looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife opening up a package. Wondering what kind of food might be contained in it, he was devastated to discover that it was a mouse trap.*

*The mouse retreated to the farm yard to proclaim the warning to all the other animals. "There is a mousetrap in the house – there is a mouse trap in the house!!"*

VOLUME 13	ISSUE 1	MARCH 2008
Editorial	E Terpstra	1
From the EiC	E Terpstra	3
Answered	R VanderWal	4
On Eagles' Wings	M Terpstra	8
A Bit To Read	T Schouten	10

## **Editorial** (continued)

*The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, "Mr Mouse, I can tell this is of grave concern for you, but it is of no consequence to me. I can not be bothered with it."*

*The mouse turned to the pig and told him, "There is a mousetrap in the house – there is a mouse trap in the house." The pig sympathized with the mouse, but responded, "I am so very sorry Mr Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it but pray. Be assured you are in my prayers."*

*The mouse turned to the cow and said, "There is a mouse trap in the house – there is a mouse trap in the house." The cow replied, "Wow Mr Mouse, I am sorry for you, but it certainly is no skin off my nose."*

*Well, the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected to face the mouse trap alone. That very same night, some time after the farmer and his wife had gone to bed, a sound was heard in the middle of the night, the sound of a mouse trap catching its prey. The farmer's wife rushed to the trap to see what lay in it. In the darkness, caught by the tail, was a venomous snake, which bit the farmer's wife as she tried to grab hold of the mouse trap.*

*The farmer rushed his wife to the hospital, and she returned home some time later with a mild fever. The doctor's advice was to treat the fever with some fresh chicken soup – and so the farmer took his hatchet to the chicken coup for the main ingredient in the soup.*

*As it was, the wife's sickness continued, so friends and neighbors came to sit with her for all hours around the clock. To feed them the farmer butchered the pig. Still the farmer's wife did not get any better and after a few days she died. She was a well known lady, and many people came for her funeral. The farmer had to slaughter the cow to feed all the guests.*

*And from his little hole in the wall, the mouse looked upon it all with great sadness.*

As is typical with fables, the story is very simple, and I guess even a little bit sad. The irony of the story is the mouse survived the death trap which was intended for him, and his friends were killed by a trap which was not intended for them.

The lesson at the end of the fable is, "Our lives are woven together for a reason." It is a good lesson to remember. We have not been placed here in isolation to each other. We are in a community to help and support each other. Remember the commands written in Paul's letters, to love each other, to submit to one another, to pray for one another, to bear one another's burdens.

I like the way the author has chosen the word 'woven' to describe the bond and harmony that there should be amongst us. Woven, (weave) is a word that is commonly associated with fabric and clothing. Think for a moment of a neat cotton garment. It is made up of many small cotton threads that are intricately placed together. By itself cotton is not strong, and it is not so impressive. But when it is woven together and sewn into a garment it becomes strong. It is much stronger as a whole than the individual cottons they were before.

In many ways this is applicable to life as well. A close knit family is stronger together than the individuals that make it up. A church community is stronger together than the individuals that make it up. As a group of youth, you are stronger together than you are by yourself. There are many times when as an individual you face challenges in life. Sometimes these challenges are manageable, other times they are insurmountable and it is impossible to face them on your own. But when our lives are woven together like a fabric, even the insurmountable can be overcome.

The apostle Paul describes something similar in 1 Corinthians 12. The human body is made up of many parts; eyes, ears, legs, arms, hands and feet. As all the individual body parts are necessary for the functioning of the body so also all members are important for the body of Christ – the Church community.

All of the parts work together for the greater good of the body as a whole. As an example, if the eye spots a snake in front of the foot, it communicates with the legs to take the feet out of the way real fast. And if the hand detects a hot surface it communicates with the arm real fast, to remove contact. The individual parts work together for the best outcome of the whole body.

Putting this teaching in the context of the fable as well, Paul says in 12:25, "...that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer together with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it." Imagine for a minute if all the animals had gone to the farmer's house and demanded the removal of the mouse trap. There would be no story to tell, no lesson to learn, but all the farmyard animals would probably still be alive.

We are not all like the mouse in that when we face challenges in life we share them with all and sundry. This is not necessary either; however we should not underestimate the relief of sharing a burden with other people. Neither should it be that the opposite is true in that when a member is struggling there is no one to share the burden with. A member that can draw on the strength of siblings, or friends, or the Church, is much more likely to overcome obstacles than if they would struggle on alone.

In conclusion: your life too is woven into the fabric that makes up the Church of Jesus Christ. Use your life for the greater good of the whole body of Christ. And then when you struggle with challenges in your life, you too can draw on the strength of that same fabric.

**Eric Terpstra**

## FROM THE EIC

*Welcome to another year of Contender, another year where we have opportunity to write and publish Christian reading material.*

*We are thankful for the opportunities that we have in this free country to be able to write as freely as we do. It is not something that ought to be taken for granted. Preparing a magazine such as Contender does take work and effort. First of all there is the work done by the editors in preparing articles for publication, as well as assisting in editing and providing suggestions to anyone else who would like to submit an article for publication. This task may be busy but rewarding never the less.*

*Secondly there is the work of Rosanne Torenoliet, who collates the articles together and puts them into a suitable format for publishing. Finally the magazine is printed by pro ecclesia printers together with the Una Sancta.*

*All in all, there is significant effort by a number of brothers and sisters in producing this magazine. As EIC I take this opportunity to thank everyone who makes time available so that this magazine can be published on a regular basis. To this end*

*too, I mention Jeanette Janssen who resigned from the committee at the end of last year. Thanks for the work you did whilst you were on board. To replace Jeanette, we have appointed Brendan Pitlo who was found willing to take on where Jeanette left off. Thanks for taking on this role.*

*The Contender welcomes articles from young people in all the Free Reformed Churches. For that reason, if you have something in a written format that is spiritually upbuilding for others to read as well, you are welcome to send it to the editor that is in your local church, or otherwise forward it through to the editorial email address on the back of the Contender.*

*In this edition, we have paid attention to the care that we show to brothers and sisters in the church, as well as to the powerful care of our Father in Heaven. Rita has provided some thought provoking material for the iGeneration (and us all) on the way we address God in our prayers. And we have also included an article from a younger person in Canada on his observations of their Bible Study meetings. It is food for thought.*

*Happy reading,*

*Eric EIC*

# ANSWERED

The young adults of today are often called the iGeneration, a term used to describe the generation born primarily in the mid-to-late 1980s who are said to have grown up with the internet, with everything digital, mobile phones, laptops, the popular iPod music device and the "i" before "Generation" suggests selfish qualities of members of this generation.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, the description is accurate. Since sin came into the world, we have always had trouble with selfishness but in recent years, greed has spread like cancer to nearly every conceivable part of our lives. *Four out of 10 Australian iGen's do not believe they will own a house. It doesn't seem to worry them [for they] like to eat out and spend on luxury items for themselves such as holidays, sound equipment, clothes and trinkets.*<sup>2</sup> We are so concerned with our own wellbeing that we have become consumed with ourselves.

Has this also become a representation of our prayers? Are we thinking only of ourselves when we pray? Are we turning to God with selfish requests? We must examine our motives for when we talk to God of our concerns, when we pray for strength, or place before His holy throne a longing for a life partner; it is not *I* or *my* happiness that is to be central to my prayer. We must remember that we have been created in the image of God and have been placed on this earth to live to His honour and glory. In Luke 11 Jesus instructed his disciples about the attitude they were to have in prayer, what the *focus* of their prayers was

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to be. The first petition of the Lord's Prayer is NOT "hallowed be MY name" instead, GOD is to be central to our prayers.

You ask and do not receive; you seek and do not find; you knock and it's not opened to you. Is this because you are asking with yourself in the centre of your prayer? James emphatically forbids us to make requests out of greed: "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures*" (4:3). We must examine our attitude. In order to pray we can't start by thinking that we are a man, a 'somebody' with plenty of self-esteem and influence (which is typical of the iGeneration); instead we are *but* a man, a creature dependent on our Creator and Redeemer.

This, then, is the reason why the world exists, the reason why you exist, and why I exist too: we are here and the world is here, *for the glory of God*, I do not exist for me, you do not exist for your own pleasure, nor the world for its own sake; we are here for the glory of God. As Paul says in 1 Cor 10:

*"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (vs. 31). There is no room for selfishness in our lives. *I* may not be the centre of my

existence; central to my existence must be *God*. It's for Him that I exist in the first place.<sup>3</sup>

What then is a God-centred prayer to look like? How am I, in the actual circumstances of my life, to pray according to the Lord's

<sup>1</sup> <http://forum.ebaumsworld.com/showthread.php?t=89372>  
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22034750-5006016,00.html> Bryan Patterson July 08, 2007 [A-Z of Generation Y](#)

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from a series of articles on prayer by Rev C Bouwman of the Canadian Reformed Church in Yarrow BC Canada. These articles appeared in "*Una Sancta*" during 1996 and 1997: <http://members.iinet.com.au/~jvd/prayer/index.htm>

instruction in the first petition? It is clear that 'I' and 'my desires' cannot be central to my prayer because central to my *life* cannot be 'me' but our focus is to be God, His glory, His praise. That requires denying ourselves, setting the self aside as Jesus did in John 12. As Christians, we live between the first and second comings of Christ. As a result, blessing and waiting characterize our life. Prayer should reflect both sides of this situation. God does not expect us to withhold our honest responses to life and by taking a closer look at the Psalms, you will notice the psalmists express what many of us feel in our various circumstances.

When good occurs, we as believers respond with praise to our Father in heaven but when times of trouble assail us, we express negative feelings. The psalmists too, express their honest reaction to their situations. In Psalm 13 for example, David begins with despair: *"How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide Your face from me?"* and ends with a joyful proclamation of praise to the Lord: *"But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation, I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me."*

Psalm 54 begins by revealing the words of a troubled spirit *"...Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your strength. Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth for strangers have risen up against me."*<sup>4</sup> But the same Psalm ends with praise to God: *"I will praise Your name, O Lord for it is good for He has delivered me out of all trouble"*<sup>5</sup> There are many more examples, Psalm 3, 17, 22 & 69 to name a few, and just as the psalmists express positive and negative feelings in their prayer, we may do the same.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 54: 1,2&3a

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 54: 6b&7a

So we come before God with a humble, heartfelt prayer and ask that His will be done. But how can we do the will of God? We all know that are not able to do the will of God if the God upon whom we are dependent does not supply us with daily needs. No soldier in battle can carry out the commands of his general successfully if that soldier's stomach remains empty and his store of ammunition depleted. To carry out the general's wishes that soldier needs his 'daily bread'. To be able to glorify God in the context of battle, temptation, hatred, strife, God's people are to obey His commands. To live obediently for God, God's people *need strength* from God, need daily bread and drink, need sleep, clothes, a vehicle, etc. But Jesus taught His disciples not to focus their attention on them. What then? If the disciples were not to burn up their energies and their efforts in pursuit of their own needs, what were they to do? Jesus' answer was this: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).<sup>6</sup>

But we are so used to our needs being instantly available to us at the click of a button that prayer and waiting for God's timing becomes difficult. Technology has played an important part in shaping the lives of iGen's: about 75% regularly use the internet, as toddlers they learned to flip TV channels via remote control, played

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computer games in primary school and almost three-quarters of all SMS messages are sent by this generation. Bryan

<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from a series of articles on prayer by Rev C Bouwman. These articles appeared in *"Una Sancta"* during 1996 and 1997:

<http://members.iinet.com.au/~jvd/prayer/index.htm>

## ANSWERED (CONTINUED)

Patterson's (Herald Sun) portrayal of the iGeneration is almost laughable if it wasn't so true: *"with a mobile in one hand, half-caf latte in the other and an iPod-plugged earphones attached to their ears, work is often last on their list of priorities; definitely way behind friends, family and, of course, themselves. They want instant gratification, think email is snail mail and want to be chief executive of the company by 25. And, of course, all in no more than 35 hours a week. If there's a generalisation to be made about young iGeneration people, it's that they don't like waiting because they've grown up in a world of five-minute abs workouts, two-minute noodles and a one-minute manager (and they probably think they're all too slow nowadays)".*<sup>7</sup> We too are part of this

generation and used to receiving instant gratification and instant replies to our requests. But is this attitude affecting our prayer? Does it seem as though God is remote or inactive because its taking longer than expected to receive a reply? Does it



seem as though your prayers go unanswered? Then what? Do you become resentful or impatient with God? Does your expectation die down as time goes by and praying becomes difficult?

God has commanded us to pray and He knows our heart; that we are stubborn and unwilling, hardened and unmoved, impatient and frustrated, but still He has commanded us to call upon Him.<sup>8</sup> Through Isaiah God said to His people, *"I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, seek Me in vain", "For He inclined His ear to me"* (Ps 116) and He has promised us in Ps 94: *"He who*

***"Ask, and it will be given to you;  
Seek, and you will find;  
Knock, and it will be opened to you"***

*planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see?"* The Bible is filled with promises such as these and I mention just one more from Matt 7. After Jesus commanded and promised us that when we ask, it will be given to us, when we seek, we will find, when we knock it will be opened, He continues reasoning: *"what man is there among you, if your son asks for bread will you give him a stone, or if he asks for fish will you give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?"* By the Holy Spirit He enlightens our mind so that we will rightly understand the call of His Word. Our ear, which was closed, will be opened, what is hard He will soften; our will, which is dead He will bring to life; that

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22034750-5006016,00.html> Bryan Patterson July 08, 2007 [A-Z of Generation Y](#)

<sup>8</sup> Call Upon Me/J Westerink/Published by the I.L.P.B. London, Ontario, Canada/1986

which is unwilling to willingness; and that which is stubborn, to obedience<sup>9</sup>.

In light of God's many gifts to us, our prayer must often sound to Him like an ungrateful child whining at the shops; "*Can I have this? and this? what about this? I need it!*" Even after God has blessed us with so much: religious freedom, faithful churches, reformed schools, bible study societies, study clubs, magazines, missions and even sports associations within our communion of saints<sup>10</sup>, we still come back asking for more. However, if we spend time in prayer talking about the blessings God has already given us, we will go a long way toward avoiding self-centred petitioning. Paul encouraged the early church about this: "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*" (Phil 4:6). In prayer, we overcome worry by trusting in God. In thanksgiving, we overcome worry by remembering that our all-wise, all-loving and all-sovereign God has placed this event on our path and He never acts impulsively and His purposes never fail<sup>11</sup>. For prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us and God will give His grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them.<sup>12</sup>

God will surely answer if we ask according to the instructions of the Lord's Prayer<sup>13</sup>. As we seek God's will for us in our specific

circumstances we can be assured of the promises of God's Word. I think again of the words of Christ in Luke 11; the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray so He taught them the Lord's Prayer, and then he added these words: "*ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*" (vs 9). That's across-the-board: whatever you ask will be given. But, it's a promise given in the context of the instruction of the Lord's Prayer.

*"Your Word is a lamp to  
my feet and a light to  
my path"*

That leaves a challenge for all who would pray "Your will be done". And Reverend C Bouwman

(Canadian Reformed Church of Yarrow BC Canada) says that challenge is this: you cannot pray the third petition and at the same time keep your Bibles closed.<sup>14</sup> God's will is not revealed to us by means of a voice in the ear or in the heart, nor is it revealed by means of intuition or gut-feelings. God's will for us today is revealed in His Word. As Paul put it: "*All Scripture is...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*"<sup>15</sup> And David: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*"<sup>16</sup>. Seek then His face in your specific circumstances, pray for understanding and strength to do God's will in His timing, humbly ask Him what He wishes you to do and be assured that He will show you His way. He will answer! That's the promise.

**Rita VanderWal**

(Picture: [tempeubf.org/bible\\_materials.html](http://tempeubf.org/bible_materials.html))

<sup>9</sup> Call Upon Me/J Westerink/Published by the I.L.P.B. London, Ontario, Canada/1986

<sup>10</sup> Contender Volume 12, Issue 7 December 2007 Patient in Adversity & Thankful in Prosperity? Laurence VanderPlas

<sup>11</sup> BST The Bible Speaks Today, The Message of Philippians, Alec Motyer, Inter-Varsity Press 1991 page 211

<sup>12</sup> Lord's Day 45 of the Heidelberg Catechism

<sup>13</sup> Excerpt from a series of articles on prayer by Rev C Bouwman. These articles appeared in "*Una Sancta*" during 1996 and 1997:

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<sup>15</sup> 2 Timothy 13:16f

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 119:105

# “ON EAGLES WINGS”

*“But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)*

This is just one of many beautiful Scripture passages that liken us to eagles. There are even Scripture passages where God likens Himself to an eagle. What is there about these created birds that God the Almighty Creator compares Himself and His children to them? And what do these comparisons tell us about the richness of our relationship with God? To answer these questions it is clear that we must have a look at the nature of the eagle itself as well as study the Scripture passages that speak about eagles.

Col Stringer, author and conservationist, tells a stirring story about an experience he had watching an eagle in a storm. He describes the terrible ferocity of the storm that caused groaning trees to bend and terror-stricken birds to cry in panic as they sought to flee the storm or find shelter. The lightning *“streaked the sky, striking the earth with such devastating power that it caused the house to tremble under the impact.”* In the midst of such devastating power, he witnessed an eagle in the midst of this storm whirling, diving, and riding the air currents using mere twitches of its wing tips to direct its course. *“Here was a creature undaunted and unaffected by the sheer ferocity of the elements. Here was a creature that rather than fight the storm had discovered the secret of harnessing its power... the eagle locked its powerful wings and allowed the wind currents to thrust it aloft.”*<sup>i</sup> He explains how the eagle fearlessly used the very forces that were threatening it, to rise above and soar over the turmoil and confusion of the storm. He then uses this image in relation to the verse above. Rather than seeking to flee or hide from the forces and problems in our lives like the other birds in the storm, we are called to have

wings of eagles. When we trust in God with all our heart, we will be able to soar above our problems, and be borne aloft by the very forces seeking to destroy us.

This image of the eagle in a storm and the comparison to us can give enormous comfort. This is no doubt the intent of Isaiah 40. The Israelites have been taken into exile. They have received the prophesied punishment they richly deserved and have been trampled underfoot by the world powers of Assyria and Babylon. In this hopeless context, Isaiah is able to speak words of comfort, salvation, and restoration. Verse 27 reveals that Israel in exile had begun to believe that God had forgotten them. Yet, God the Almighty Creator is the source of all strength and He promises that those who wait on the LORD shall mount up with eagle’s wings. The eagle is evidently used as the symbol of tireless strength.<sup>ii</sup> When we, like Israel, become weary of troubles and problems that plague us or begin to doubt God’s providence, we can find tremendous comfort in God comparing us to an eagle. Trusting in our Almighty Father, leaning on the source of all strength, we are like that tireless eagle in the storm.

Psalms 103 also makes a comparison to the eagle when it says, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul... who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s”* (vs. 1, 5). I have often wondered what it means for *“our youth to be renewed like the eagle’s”*. Contrary to ancient myths, there is no evidence that an eagle can dive into the sea and magically emerge with every trace of old age swept away.<sup>iii</sup> Other commentators suggest that the promise of renewed youth ‘like eagles’ could refer to the long life span of an eagle compared to other birds. Col Stringer, in his observations and research about eagles gives another suggestion. He

explains how eagles reach a time when their flight is slowed because of problem feathers that whistle in flight and warn prey of the eagles approach or when their talons and beak become blunt. At such times, eagles undergo procedures through which they rejuvenate themselves. They may withdraw to the high country to allow moulting to occur to replace their feathers or simply pluck out their problem feathers and they might re-sharpen their beak and talons by a slow process of honing them against a suitable rock.<sup>iv</sup> After this the eagle is once again able to fly, soar, and hunt like a young eagle and thus its "youth is renewed". In this way, the eagle is able to live up to 80 years compared to the 10-30 year life span of most birds. This comparison of Scripture affirms the promise of Isaiah 31 that God gives us all things we need. This includes His continually renewing strength throughout our life. As with the eagle, this renewing process may require some sharpening in our life and the removal of things that hinder us from serving God as He desires. With God's strength we are renewed like eagles and receive the strength to face, and soar above, what He puts in our paths.



We also find times in Scripture when God compares Himself to an eagle. Moses speaks of God caring for Jacob in his song to the people of Israel; *"as an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings. So the LORD alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him."* (Deut 32:11) This is an image of an eagle teaching its young to fly. There are accounts of how a mother eagle begins teaching her young to fly by hovering over the nest to demonstrate the function of wings. The young eagles begin to copy her and flap about the nest and between branches. When they take the plunge and leave the nest they

often plunge and fall rather than soar. At such times, the mother eagle flies beneath them and carries them on her wings until they can fly or reach safety. God uses this natural imagery to portray His relationship to His people. He carried them through the wilderness by His power and His love. Moreover, we know that our Heavenly Father is unchanging and so this imagery can be used to describe God's covenantal care for us. We are unable to soar alone in this life and God not only gives us His strength to fly but He *carries* us on His wings.

What rich comfort we can find in God's Word. These three beautiful Scripture passages create glorious imagery that illustrates so clearly God's love and care for us. Just as an eagle renews its strength and is able to soar above the storm, so God fills us with His strength when we wait on Him. He enables us to rise above the storms of life. And just as an eagle cares so diligently for its young and carries them on its wings when they are unable to fly, so God carries His children and we may take refuge under His wings. *"He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge"*. (Psalm 91:4)

Picture Ref:

[www.whale-images.com/bald-eagles-hom...](http://www.whale-images.com/bald-eagles-hom...)

**Melinda Terpstra**

<sup>1</sup> Stringer C (1983) *On Eagles Wings*, Col Stringer Ministries Australia, pg 18

<sup>1</sup> Dam, HP (2005) *Isaiah, the Redeemer is Coming outlines on Isaiah 40-66*, Inter-League Publication Board, Ontario.

<sup>1</sup> Stringer C (1983) *On Eagles Wings*, Col Stringer Ministries Australia, pg 123

<sup>1</sup> Stringer C (1983) *On Eagles Wings*, Col Stringer Ministries Australia, pg 126

# A BIT TO READ

## **An Examination of Young peoples Bible Study Club**

*This article was written by one of the youth of our sister churches in Canada about his observations and thoughts of their Youth Clubs (or Young People's Society). It has points that are very applicable to the situation of our youth clubs in Australia. It is reprinted with permission.*

### **A Successful Youth Club**

Every other Sunday evening, young people of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the Fraser Valley gather to their respective church buildings or to someone's home, as the case may be. They meet together in an official capacity, as 'Young People's Society' (YPS), and at 7:30 or 8:00 the majority of the youth are present. Some come for Bible study, some for socializing, and some for both. Most are well-prepared to socialize, but ill-prepared for Bible study – they only discover what they will be studying upon their arrival. Generally, however, the atmosphere is cheerful, the young people get along, and the meeting is a success. Yet we need to pause here for a moment and reconsider this last statement. Was the meeting really a success? Was its purpose accomplished? What actually is the purpose of a YPS meeting on Sunday evening?

### **A Specific Purpose**

YPS is, quite simply, a society of young people. The YPS of Yarrow, for instance, is a society of young people who belong to the church in Yarrow. A 'society', in turn, is "an association of persons for some purpose" as we read in Webster's Dictionary. In other words, a society is a group of people who come together *for a specific purpose*. What, then, is the specific purpose of a YPS? The answer to this question is straightforward: the purpose of YPS is to *strengthen young people*, specifically within the local church that they belong to. In 1 Corinthians 12:27 the apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth, "*you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it*". The believers in Corinth depended on each other just as the parts of one's body depend on each other – "*if the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?*" Obviously, Canadian Reformed churches are no different. Each member of a congregation stands in need of the support of others, and for this reason it is important that we actively seek to be close-knit congregations. It is also for this reason that we have YPS. Young people need to *know* one another, to *teach* and to *learn* from each other, and as a result, to grow in faith together.

### **Two Aspects**

There are two specific ways in which YPS works to achieve this purpose of strengthening the body of Christ. The first is, quite simply, to get the young people of the church to 'hang out' with one another. They are members of one and the same body and need to function as such, including in social activities. YPS serves to get young people together, however that may work itself out in real life (bowling, barbecues, etc.), and requires them to interact with each other. Perhaps we need to encourage more of this kind of activity in our respective YPS. The second way in which YPS works to the strengthening of the church is through spending time together with God's word. This, incidentally, is the purpose of the Sunday evening meetings. The young people aren't simply attending a YPS 'meeting', but a YPS Bible study. It is opened with prayer, a Bible passage is read, and the young people split into groups to study, usually with the aid of outlines or question sheets. There are, then, two aspects of YPS: the social (various activities) and the formal (Bible study). Yet the two are often not properly separated, specifically at Sunday evening YPS Bible studies. What is frequently seen is a mixture more heavily loaded to socializing; often, not a lot of studying gets done. Of course, Bible study plays a significant role in 'getting to know' one another, but this is not the point of Sunday evenings. The point, rather, is to be instructed, and to instruct, using God's word.

### **Why Bible Study?**

Someone might ask, "why have YPS Bible study in the first place? Do young people really need it? They go to church twice a Sunday, after all." Here we do well to examine Psalm 119:9, where we read, "*how can a youth keep his way pure? By living according to your word.*" It is not easy to 'keep one's way pure.' The young people of the church, as do all people, live in a broken world. When they are confronted during the week with the various challenges they must face, how will they know how to react? Psalm 119:9 provides us with the answer, namely, "*by living according to your*

*word.* Bible study is a wonderful opportunity for young people to discuss what it means to live according to God's Word. They face many similar challenges and experiences. It is a beautiful thing that by discussing God's word together, the youth of the church are able to learn more and more how to deal with these challenges. Together they grow closer and stronger in faith, and so become better equipped in their roles as prophets, priests, and kings. Bible study truly serves to *strengthen young people*. Thus it is an important, even the most important, aspect of YPS.

### **Standards**

The realization that YPS meetings on Sunday evenings are for the specific purpose of Bible study has a number of consequences. We think of Jesus' words in Matthew 18:20: *"for where two or three come together in My name, I am there in the midst of with them."* YPS Bible study clearly comes together in Christ's name. The president/leader opens with prayer and asks for God's blessing on the study that is done. Young people need to take this seriously – they are studying God's Word in His name and in His presence. No, this is not a church service, but it is a Bible study and the atmosphere should reflect this. Similarly, we read in 1 Corinthians 14:33 that, *"God is not a God of disorder but of peace"*. If we take a step back and look honestly at what goes on during the course of Sunday evening, we can admit that much 'disorder' is present. People continually talk over one another and there is little respect for the chairman – often just a brief pause will see the meeting descend into a cacophony of voices. The atmosphere is not that of an official Bible study in the presence of a 'God of peace', but rather of an unofficial social gathering, with the purpose of talking as much as possible to various friends, even if they happen to be on the other side of the room. This problem is compounded by the fact that most young people have not spent any time preparing for the evening. It is evident that young people do not take YPS Bible study very seriously.

### **Raising the Bar**

If certain standards are seen to be lacking at YPS Bible study, then how do we go about raising the bar? It is important, first of all, to stress the specific purpose of Sunday evening meetings. Specifying a purpose gives each of

us something definite to reach for, as well as something to direct the attention of others towards. If we have it in our minds that we are gathered together for Bible study, we will be less than happy when very little Bible study occurs. We will also be more inclined to do some preparation before we arrive. Stimulating discussion at Bible study is often difficult, mostly because very few young people have brought anything to the table. Up to the moment that groups are formed and the first question is asked, most of us haven't given the passage at hand a second thought. How do we counter this? We need to put more pressure on each other. We need to encourage each other to put Bible study first, and hold each other accountable to the true purpose of YPS. Most of all, however, we simply have to get down to the work and do it. We are first of all responsible for our own actions, for our own attitude, and for our own preparation. Let's, every one of us, strive to put more effort into YPS Bible study.

### **A Few More Years**

There is one more thing that needs to be said. When discussing higher standards, there is much room for improvement with respect to 'older' young people. It seems that the age of 21 or 22 is when many people cease to be a part of YPS. Perhaps it gets boring, or one starts feeling too old, or the discussion is not at very advanced level.

A person simply doesn't "get anything out of it" anymore. Yet are these really reasons to abandon

YPS? Shouldn't the attitude instead be, "what can I bring to YPS?" Indeed, older young people have a lot to offer: maturity, intelligence, and increased wisdom. They have the ability to set the tone at Bible study. That's just the way it is; the younger look up to the older. If the general attitude of the older youth is one of 'getting out' as fast as possible, this attitude will in turn negatively affect the atmosphere of the entire group. Conversely, when these older young people are present, realizing the responsibilities they have, the tone will almost certainly improve. So, as an 'older' young person, instead of leaving for a different Bible study such as 'College and Careers' or 'Young Couples', why don't you continue to attend YPS Bible study for a few years? Be a leader. YPS could use you and the atmosphere you bring along.

*Bible study truly serves to  
strengthen young people*

**Aim:**

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

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