THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Exercising The Mind || Igniting The Heart || Preparing The Hands

A free quarterly paper for rural pastors.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

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Pastoral and Practical Theology

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THE KRAPF PROJECT

RESOURCES FOR RURAL PASTORS

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WELCOME TO THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Welcome to this issue of The Pastor's Study. The theme of this issue is the book of Ecclesiastes and we begin with the editorial, where we look at God's sovereign control over a fallen world (pages 3–4).

The commentary (pages 6–8), gives an overview of the book of Ecclesiastes, that will serve as a framework to help you dig into the details. The Preacher's Workshop in the centre pages (pages 10-11), will help you preach Christ from this difficult and often ignored book, and tying in with our theme, we do a case study on the life of Abel, linking it to the theme of Ecclesiastes (pages 14–15).

We are thrilled to have an article from Dr. Michael Barrett on how to read poetry (page 5), and another piece from Ligonier Ministries explaining from Ecclesiastes 9:11 that life is ultimately not in our hands (beginning on

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page 20), and some help from Paul on living with a heavenly mindset (page 9). In our practical theology section we have our regular Kenyan writer, pastor Tonny Karwa, with part two of an article on pastoral care for disagreeing members (pages 16–17). Dr. Michael Haykin gives us some insight on Martin Luther's view of Christian marriage (pages 18–19) and an article on the role of women in the church (pages 12–13). On page 17, by the editor's wife, you will find a helpful article for mothers.

These articles will be available also on www.krapfproject.org—our new online resource library. May this Lord bless this issue to his own glory.

Sincerely, Aaron Dunlop

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EDITORIAL: THIS IS MY FATHER'S [CROOKED] WORLD

It was the German Reformer, Martin Luther, who introduced us to the language of "God's Devil." Luther did not mean by this that God and the devil were friends or partners. He was emphasising the fact that even the devil, as God's arch enemy, remains under God's sovereign control.

In a similar manner, in Ecclesiastes, as Solomon developed the theme of the absolute vanity of life under the sun, he weaves throughout it a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God. It is God, he says, who has given us this "unhappy business" of life under the sun (1:13, 3:10; 4:8). All of it, good and bad, is the "work of God" (7:13; 8:17; 11:5), from "the hand of God" (2:24; 9:1 see also 5:18–19; 8:15; Job 2:10). The God who gives, also withholds (6:2) and what he does is an enigma to us (3:11; 9:1; 11:5).

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But where did Solomon get such a solid grasp of the sovereignty of God?

Well, much of the book draws from personal experience. Solomon evidently recognised God by faith in the events and circumstances around him. He was a thinking man (1:13,17; 2:12). But more fundamentally, Solomon's worldview was soundly rooted in

Many fail to see how Solomon finds hope in this weary world. But he has woven hope throughout the book in continual references to God.

Scripture. Three threads of thought run through the book that take us directly back to Genesis 3:17–19 where God explained to Adam what the fallen world would look like. Ecclesiastes, we might say, is Solomon's commentary on Genesis 3:17–19.

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First, the world is crooked The word “crooked” that is used in the first chapter (1:15) and later in the book (7:13) is translated in Psalm 146:9 as “ruined” (ESV) or “turned upside down” (KJV). in Job 19:6, it is translated “overthrown” (KJV). Solomon used the same word to speak of the old man “bowed down” (12:3). Solomon makes the point that God has done this (7:13). The world is “bowed down,” groaning, to use Paul’s word (Romans 8:22), under the hand of

3 God, waiting for the fullness of redemption in the coming of the Lord Jesus (Romans 8:19; 1 Corinthians 1:7).

Second, life is difficult God told Adam that life would consist of ”thorns and thistles,” and “the sweat of your face.” Similarly, Solomon used the word labour/toil over 20 times. Life under the sun is characterised by toil and labour, and ironically it is manifest most clearly among the more prosperous (2:1826).

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There is no escape from the difficulties. Life is an uphill climb, a struggle, weariness of the flesh (12:12). In short, life is an “unhappy business” (1:13, 3:10; 4:8 see also Job 14:1).

Third, death is inevitable God told Adam that his life of difficulty would culminate in the dust (Genesis 3:20), and Solomon highlights this thought through Ecclesiastes (1:4; 9:1–6; 12:7). Even if a person lives many years (11:8), the body, as Solomon so vividly describes, is in a state of decline and decay and death will come as the necessary end (12:1–7).

The theme of vanity is so prominent in Ecclesiastes, that many fail to see how Solomon finds hope in this weary world. But Solomon has woven hope throughout the book in continual references to God, for it is only by tracing everything back to our Creator that can we understand, accept, endure and find hope, as

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Paul tells us also (Romans 8:20).

Solomon's response was the same response as Adam in the garden. It was hope in promise of the living God (Genesis 3:15) that enabled Adam to rename his wife "Eve," (i.e. "the mother of all life" Genesis 3:20).

God has created a sense of eternity in the human soul (3:11), a knowledge that we will go to our "eternal home" (12:5) for the spirit goes back to the Creator, the "God who gave it" (12:7). The best thing, the wisest and safest thing to do-the gospel, if you will—is to "remember" the creator in this crooked world (12:1), to "fear him" (5:7) and to show our faith in God by keeping his commandments (12:13, see also James 2:14–26).

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HOW TO READ BIBLICAL POETRY

Dr. Michael P.V. Barrett

Let's just say up front, we should read the Poetical books with an eye for Christ and the gospel.

The Poetical books can be classified in two broad categories: the Psalms and the Wisdom books. The Psalms constitute an introduction to worship, detailing what it is to serve the Lord. Not all psalms are the same. Some are communal; others are individual. Some are joyful; others are mournful. Some confess sin; others claim righteousness. Any regular reading of the Psalms draws attention to this diversity. Together they make it unmistakably clear that true and biblical religion is found through all of life. Significantly, throughout the entire Psalter we find the contrast between the two ways: the way of the righteous and the way of the ungodly (Psalm 1).

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The Wisdom books include Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. In the context of the Wisdom books, “wisdom” designates the skill or ability to perform the biblical ethic, and they give instructions on how we can develop that skill. The focus of the Wisdom books is on the individual, providing practical instructions dealing with the issues, problems, and perplexities of life.

It is helpful to group the Wisdom books into two categories. Proverbs is didactic (teaching), with all of its aphorisms (proverbs or wise sayings) dealing with virtually every situation of life. The other books are more reflective, concerning some of the perplexities of life that may generate improper thoughts about God and thus hindrances to holiness.

In reading these books it helps to know its central theme and primary purpose. On the authority of the words of Christ (Luke 24:25–

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27), He is the central theme and message of the Old Testament. Therefore, we should read these books through the lens of the gospel and Christ. Seeing Christ and the gospel in the Old Testament is finding the life of the Old Testament; it is what gives life to what otherwise seems to be dry and outdated. Finding Christ is the key that both unlocks and locks in the message of the whole Word of God.

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COMMENTARY: THE MESSAGE OF ECCLESIASTES

The book of Ecclesiastes is focused on a single issue which is stated at the very beginning; “Vanity of vanities … vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (1:2). The focus on this one issue has caused many to struggle, and think that it is a depressing, difficult and repetitive book, and many avoid it.

The purpose of Ecclesiastes is to deconstruct a secularist and materialist worldview, to utterly disillusion us with the world we live in, and to introduce a worldview that is based on the fear of God as Creator. It is remarkable, and contrary to all expectations, that we can enjoy life in a fallen world, but this is only possible when we recognise its place in the purposes of the sovereign Creator. This is what Ecclesiastes shows us.

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This article presents some observations about the Ecclesiastes, using the framework of four questions, to get an overview of the book.

How does the author use the word vanity?

The Hebrew word “hebel”means ‘a breath.’ We might also translate it ‘a light breeze,’ ‘a vapour,’ or ‘a puff of smoke’. Solomon uses this word hebel to describe life under the sun in three respects; what we are, what we do, and how we think.

First, this world is empty; it’s like a puff of smoke (vss. 2–3; James 4:14).

Second, any pursuit of happiness in this world is fruitless; it’s like “chasing the wind” 1:14,17; 2:11,17,22,26; 4:4,6,16; 6:9).

Third, any attempt to understand the world is futile; it’s an enigma (3:11; 7:13; 8:17). When

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we try to understand the mysteries of providence, we are left with more questions (2:15,19,21,23,26).

How does the author develop his theme of Vanity?

Solomon develops the theme of the book in a most remarkable way and forces us to see how vanity is so deeply rooted in life “under the sun.” We cannot escape it. There is nothing at all that is worth holding onto, not a single item, relationship or idea. Even if we could collect the whole world and hold it in our hands, there is no profit in it (Matthew 16:26). The world is a puff of smoke. Notice how Solomon develops this theme.

First, he states the theme at the beginning and end (1:2; 12:8). This is a method that biblical writers often use which scholars call *inclusio*. It is like a set of brackets, or

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bookends, taking in the entire book and setting the theme.

Second, he repeats the theme of vanity throughout the book. Thirtysix times in the book, (in every chapter except chapter ten) the author uses the word “vanity” like a drumbeat setting the pace and establishing the tone of the book. The repetition of the word “vanity” is intended to instruct us, not distract us or frustrate us.

Third, the author emphasises the theme with another writing device called the superlative, “vanity of Vanities,” (1:2, etc.). This is a Hebrew way of speaking which identifies something in the most extreme way. See, “servant of servants” (Genesis 9:25), “Holy of holies” (Exodus 26:33), the “chief over the chief” (Numbers 3:32), “Song of Songs” (Song of Solomon 1:1), and “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16).

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Fourth, the author absolutises the theme with the phrase “all is vanity” (1:14; 2:11,17; 3:1,19; 12:8).

Finally, the author itemises the theme with the frequent use (17 times) of the adverb translated “this too,” or “even this.” No matter what he looks at, or where he looks, he has to say, “even this” is vanity (1:17; 2:1,15,17,21,23,26, etc.).

The Preacher shatters our earthly dreams, bursts our secularist and materialist balloon, pulls the rug of earthly contentment from under us, so that we might look outside of this world for fulfillment and satisfaction.

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How does the author highlight the human experience of vanity?

Solomon's words, "all is vanity" describes the physical world; it is a state of being. There is a tension however between the state of the world and the human experience. Solomon develops this with the phrase "striving after wind" (KJV, "vexation of spirit"), in our English Bibles.

This phrase is a translation of two different words in Hebrew and both of these words are found only in Ecclesiastes. The first word, re-ooth, means "to feed on" or "grasp after" (1:14; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,6; 6:9). The second word from the same root is ra-yone which means desire (1:17; 2:22; 4:16).

There is a similar phrase (with a different Hebrew word) in 5:16 where Solomon speaks of "labouring for the wind." The prophet Hosea uses the same word "feeding on wind"

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(Hosea 12:1). This expression emphasizes the reality that in all our efforts to bring something fruitful or fulfilling out of this world, or of trying to explain the mysteries of life, only aggravates the vanity, and frustrates us; it vexes, or “grieves our spirit.”

Does the author offer any hope?

Ecclesiastes gives no prophecies of Christ, and typology is not obvious and not frequent. With the heavy emphasis on the vanity of “life under the sun,” it seems at first glance that preaching the gospel from this book would be difficult.

The earth-centred worldview is very prominent, but Solomon wants us to see another world-view, one that is grounded in the fear of God (3:14; 8:12; 12:1,13). Rather than presenting the Messiah as the only hope

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of salvation, Solomon takes us back a step to the Creator.

Salvation is God's initiative and God's plan—"God sent his Son" (John 3:16). From this perspective Solomon addresses, not just the nation of Israel through whom the Messiah will come, but all the nations. He shows first, that the Creator is both entirely outside and independent of his creation (5:2) and second, that he is entirely

within and present in his creation, embedded in the consciousness of humanity (3:11). This was the approach also of Paul when he addressed the Areopagus and told them that God was not far from every one of them (Acts 17:27).

Solomon then calls us to "remember" our Creator (i.e. "keep in remembrance" or "think on," 12:1). He is not just our Creator, but is a

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generous provider (3:13) and also a judge (3:17), and we are to fear him (5:1–7).

With a proper view of God and faith in him, the author assures us that it is possible to find pleasure in the midst of all of the mystery (7:27–28; 8:17), frustration and toil of life and the inevitability of death. Like a goad (12:11) the words of the Preacher prick our conscience and bring us face to face with the emptiness of this world. He shatters our earthly dreams, bursts our secularist and materialist balloon, pulls the rug of earthly contentment from under us, so that we might look outside of this world for fulfillment and satisfaction.

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HOW PAUL LIVED ON EARTH AS A CITIZEN OF HEAVEN

The apostle Paul had everything. He was safe socially, as a Roman citizen born in Tarsus. But as a Jew, he was also well connected, on “the inside” of the religious world. He had friends in high places and drew a lot of self-confidence from his position (Philippians 3:4–7).

However, Paul rejected it all and looked beyond earth—to his Creator—for fulfillment. Rather than looking for happiness in this life as Solomon had, Paul lived by faith in the living God, through Christ, and by faith he cleared a path through the thorns of life to eternal glory.

Paul’s life embodied the life of Jesus. Jesus was no longer on earth, he had risen and gone on to glory. But the life of Jesus and his ministry continued on earth through the

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power of the Spirit of God. This is what Jesus said would happen (Acts 1:8), and for Paul it was evident that Christ was living in him and through him (Galatians 2:20). The gospel is not an idea to be nurtured, or a theology to be studied, but a life to be lived—it's he life of Jesus.

According to Philippians 2:12, Paul "worked out" in his life, the life that had been implanted there by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lived in him and through the Holy Spirit he embodied the life of Christ.

The gospel is not an idea to be nurtured, or a theology to be studied, but a life to be lived—it's the life of Jesus.

Paul's life exhibited the citizenship of heaven. In Philippians 1:27 Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to show that their "manner

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of life” was “worthy of the gospel.” This phrase “manner of life” means to behave as a citizen. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony. Although hundreds of miles away from Rome, it was under Roman law, received all of the privileges of Roman citizenship and protected by Rome.

Paul’s point here is clear. Even though you live so far from Rome, you are still to live as Roman citizens. The application is equally clear. Even though we live on earth and not yet in heaven, we are to live as citizens of heaven. Let the gospel shine forth in a heavenly lifestyle.

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EXEGETICAL NOTES

(Notes on the text, words, and grammar)

1:3: "gain" or "profit" appears a total of ten times in the book (1:3; 2:11,13; 3:9; 5:9,16; 7:12; 10:10,11) and nowhere else in the Old Testament.

1:3: "toil" or "labour" is another important and wide-ranging word. It is found over twenty times in the book (1:3; 2:10,11,18,19, 20,21, 22,24; 3:13; 4:4,6,8,9; 5:15,18,19; 6:7; 8:15; 9:9; 10:15), and can denote anything from physical labour (Psalm 127:1), mental anguish (Psalm 25:18), or any sort of human endeavour (2:10ff; 18–23).

1:8: "satisfied" is used again later in connection with riches (4:8), money (5:10), and good things (6:3). Here it is used for the activity of the eyes in general.

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Research into the life of Solomon will show the extent of Solomon's self-indulgence. 2:4–5: "houses … vineyards" … "gardens and parks."

- 1 Kings 9:10–13 years to build his own house, and seven years for the temple; twenty years building in total; see 1 Kings 6:38 and 1 Kings 7:1).

- 1 Kings 7:2; 10:17—the house or armory of the forest of Lebanon

- 1 Kings 9:24—a house for the daughter of Pharaoh.

- 1 Kings 9:15, 24—the fortress on the city walls.

- 1 Kings 9:15 —Hazor and Megiddo and Gezer.

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- Fortified cities in the wilderness—2 Chronicles 8:4–6.

PREACHING NOTES

(Points for explanation and application)

Note the connection between the “eyes” and “heart” in vs. 10, in Solomon’s self-indulgence (2:1–22; 18–23).

The word “weariness” emphasises the fact of continual activity with no satisfaction. It is all activity but is ultimately non-productive and will one day come to an end. It is illustrated by.

• The sun rises and sets (vs. 5),
• The wind comes round and round, like a dog chasing its tail (vs. 6),
• All the rivers run into the sea but the sea is not full (vs. 7).

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In his search for happiness, Solomon learned that while there is pleasure in the world, he learned

• First, it only lasts for a while (vs. 10).
• Second, it is a hollow pleasure (2:1–11) it is not all fulfilling.
• Third, in the end he must leave it all behind (2:18–23).

Solomon was attempting to recreate his own version of Eden. References to Eden are embedded in the text. The same wording is used in this passage as is used in Genesis chapter two and three describing the Garden of Eden …

• “Planted” 2:4,5—Genesis 2:8 God planted a garden
• “Built” 2:4—Genesis 2:22 God “made” a woman.
• “Made” 2:5—Genesis 1 and 2 “God made”

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- “Trees” 2:5—Genesis 2:16 the trees in the garden.

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Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes

Application is an important part of every sermon. The Bible demands a response, and we need to show our hearers how the teaching of the Bible affects us personally. One of the greatest difficulties with preaching from the book of Ecclesiastes is how to find ways to preach Christ.

There are several ways to preach Christ from Ecclesiastes. You could approach it as a series of contrasts between the emptiness of this world with the fullness of Christ. You could also develop the story of Redemption and show how Ecclesiastes is a commentary on Genesis 3:17–19, showing how Genesis three has come to pass, and that in that continuing story, Jesus will come and crush the head of the arch enemy, as God said he would.

You could also look for typology in the book. For example, Solomon was “king in Israel’

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(1:12), pointing forward to the all-satisfying King of kings. The “one Shepherd” also in 12:11 who give us wise words points us to our Saviour, the Chief Shepherd.

But the preacher could also preach Christ from Ecclesiastes by looking for New Testament references.

For example, in 1:3 where Solomon mentions the lack of “gain” or “profit” from this world. This word is unique to Ecclesiastes and appears a total of ten times (1:3; 2:11,13 twice; 3:9; 5:9,16; 7:12; 10:10,11). This word comes from the verb “to remain” or “to be left over,” and the point that the author makes is that with all we can acquire in this world there is nothing left over—no profit.

There are other passages that confirm this (Job 1:21; Psalm 49:17; 1 Timothy 6:7), but the words of Jesus clearly echo what Solomon says here; “What will it profit a man if he gains

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the whole world?" (Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25).

See also Jesus' words, "whose shall all this be?" (Luke 12:20), where he is making several points. First, these things will not be yours, you will take nothing with you of all that you have gathered. Second, these things will belong to someone else. Third, these things are out of your control.

"If one were to sift through the Law and the Prophets, he would not find a single word which would not draw and bring us to him [Christ]." —John Calvin

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The Woman's Role in the life of the Church

Aaron Dunlop

The discussion of the woman's role in the Church often begins with Paul's words to Timothy, "I do not permit a woman to teach …" (1 Timothy 2:12). This should not be the starting point in the discussion, and we should not allow this verse to obscure the broader biblical perspective on the subject. We must remember first that the gospel treats men and women equally; there is no difference (Galatians 3:28). Second, women have qualities and abilities, they have spiritual, practical and theological insight that can be and should be used in the life of the Church (see Acts 18:24-28).

Third, the ministry and influence of women is woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Speaking through the mouth of

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his character Gaius, in the Pilgrim's Progress (Second part), John Bunyan writes.

> *I will now speak on behalf of women, to take away their reproach. For as death and the curse came into the world by a woman [Genesis 3:6], so also did life and health: "God sent forth his son made of a woman" [Galatians 4:4].*

There are many themes, and areas of the biblical story, which emphasise the role of women among the people of God.

Women in the Old Testament

Commenting on Isaiah 40:9, John Newton points out that it was "the custom in Israel for women to publish and celebrate the good news with songs and instruments'' (Works, 4:68-69). Newton highlights Miriam (Exodus 25:20-21), the women welcoming David back from war (1 Samuel 18:6-7), and Deborah (Judges 5:28-29). Newton argues then that all

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the women of Israel should, in the same manner, proclaim to Jerusalem, “Behold your God'' (Isaiah 40:9).

Woman in the lineage of Jesus

In Matthew 1:3-6, there are four women mentioned especially whom Jesus welcomed into his lineage; Tamar, who played the part of a prostitute, Rahab the prostitute, Ruth the Gentile idolator, and Bathsheba the adulteress (Matthew 1:3-6).

Women in the ministry of Jesus

Women had a very special and favoured place in the life and ministry of Jesus, which is illustrative for their continued role in the Church today.

- It was women who first rejoiced over the Saviour’s birth, before men or angels (Luke 1:39-56).
- It was women who followed Jesus, ministered to him and provided for

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him, not men (Luke 8:2-3; Matthew 27:55).

- It was women who anointed his feet with tears, not men (Luke 7:37-38; John 12:3).
- It was women who followed him to the cross, who sat and wept there, and who sat and watched at the tomb (Luke 23:27; Matthew 27:55-56, 61).
- It was women who first brought the announcement of the risen Christ to the disciples (Luke 24:22-23).

Women in the early Church

The Church at Philippi was founded, primarily through the influence of a woman, Lydia (Acts 16). Almost half of his final greeting to the church in Rome was dedicated to women, named individually, and he begins with Phebe (Romans 16:1). Over and over again in his ministry, Paul mentions the help he has received from women in the churches and commends them for their work (Acts 1:12–14;

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9:36–42; 16:13–15; 17:1–4, 10–12; 18:1–2, 18, 24–28; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philippians 4:3; 2 Timothy 1:5; 4:19). After the apostolic age, there are mentions of women among what are called the “Church Fathers.” The most famous among them perhaps is Perpetua, a Christian noblewoman who was martyred at the beginning of the 3rd century.

Conclusion

Women are responsible (i.e. obligated), along with men, for many things within the life of the Church.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-19), for example, or Peter’s exhortation to serve (1 Peter 4:10), were not written for men only. Our obligation to fulfil the “one another” passages of the New Testament were not written to men alone, but to women also.

Women are a precious, valued, and an essential part in the life of the Church–the

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body of Christ. In the creation story, God said, “it is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18).

The same can be said by the Church. The Lord has given to his Church gifts that are suited to men and gifts that are suited to women. As in the family, it is God’s design that these gifts complement each other in the life of the Church, and, like the healthy family needs both parents, the Church needs both men and women.

So, women have served throughout history and can serve the Lord in the Church today (Romans 16:1).

Think of women, like princess Clara Nalumansi, the first member of Buganda’s royal family to convert to Christianity, in 1888, was among the martyrs of the early Ugandan church. Women like Nalumansi can teach both by example and instruction (Acts 18:24-28;

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Titus 2:3; Colossians 3:16), they can provide for the Church, encourage or stir up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:25), spread the gospel (Acts 8:4), pray (Acts 16:13), etc., etc., and they can witness to the grace of God by giving their life's blood for the sake of the gospel.

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THE MEANING OF LIFE: DID ABEL LIVE UP TO HIS NAME?

Genesis four begins with the birth of two sons to Adam and Eve. They named their first son Cain, acknowledging that he was “from the Lord.” They may have believed, as some scholars think, that he was the Messiah whom God had promised back in the garden (Genesis 3:15). At the very least, the name Cain and the explanation given for his name (4:1) shows that our first parents had faith in the promised Saviour.

The second son was named Abel. There is no explanation for why they named him Abel. Could this name indicate their disappointment in life and the emptiness of a fallen world? The Hebrew word hebel means “breath” or “vapor.” It speaks of that which is fleeting or temporary, or that which is empty. In a word, the name Abel means vanity. A very different atmosphere to the joyful hope bound up in

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their first son, and ironically neither of these sons would live up to their names.

The Hebrew word hebel (or Abel) is used here as a proper name. It appears here eight times (Genesis 4:1–10), and nowhere else in the Old Testament as a proper name. However, this word hebel is used throughout the Old Testament in three ways (TWOT, 1:205). First, to describe the false gods, or idols—they

are vanity (e.g. Deuteronomy 32:21). Second, of individuals who waste their lives or the frustration of individuals who feel they have lived their life in vain (Psalm 39:5–6; Isaiah 49:4; Job 7:16). Third, the cluster of references in Ecclesiastes (36 times) where the continual repetition of this world acts like a drumbeat to set the theme of the book.

This brings us back to Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve. If we view Abel's life merely from the perspective of life "under the sun," it

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illustrates all of what the Preacher explains in Ecclesiastes. His physical life was fleeting and empty—without descendants or legacy—his death was senseless, and his faithfulness and devotion to God appears to have been pointless.

However, we can look at Abel's life through another lens and frame the text in a broader perspective—a divine perspective. In his name, "Abel," we expect to find a shallow, fruitless and unfulfilled life, but the opposite is the case.

From the divine perspective we learn first, that the meaning of life is not measured by the length of life, but by faith in God. Abel's was a short life, but his faithfulness to God proved sure and it has echoed through history. His name is among those we refer to as the "heroes of the faith" (Hebrews 11:4).

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Second, that a person's value is not diminished by the injustices inflicted on him, but is proof of a valued life. The world is not worthy of such individuals (Hebrews 11:38), but they are inestimably valued by God and their suffering is a mark of a worthy life (2 Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29).

We learn thirdly, that a fulfilled life is not found in our acceptance with others, but in our acceptance with God. Notice in Genesis 4, that the focus is on the person rather than the offering; "Abel and his offering" (vs. 4). Abel believed God and his offering was accepted because Abel was accepted (Hebrews 11:4).

Cain, who at first held so much promise, lived a hollow life and died a wandering fugitive. He was rootless, without a community and separated from God. Abel, on the other hand, who seems to have been a harbinger of emptiness for his parents, did not live up to his name. Parents sometimes get it wrong!

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Abel, not Cain, was the son with promise, the godly seed, living, although a short life, a full and fruitful one. In his death he gave testimony to his faith in the living God, his acceptance with God and his eternal home.

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CARE FOR DISAGREEING MEMBERS—PT. 2

Tonny Karwa

Part 1 told how the pastor should help disagreeing members by being involved. But the pastor should also be impartial.

Be Impartial

It is possible as a pastor to throw your weight behind either of the disagreeing parties for various reasons at the expense of the other member. For instance, one of them could be more committed to the church or is a better giver than the other. Such varying levels of service in a local church may result in favouritism and bias when handling disagreements. Paul teaches us at least two lessons when in the matter of impartiality.

a) Encourage both individuals to take initiative. Paul directs the exhortation to both the parties when he says, “I entreat Euodia

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and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord." (vs. 2). He is pleading with each of them to take the initiative in resolving the conflict between them regardless of who is right or wrong, or regardless of who is more offended. In conflict resolution, it does not matter which lady sparked the conflict. Now that they are both embroiled in the dispute, both must take initiative and seek reconciliation.

Evidently, Paul knows the struggle that this church is facing—pride (Philippians 2:1–4). Partiality in resolving this dispute would have, therefore, been a recipe for disaster. As a pastor, be wary of favouritism when helping your members to resolve their conflicts. Partiality can easily fuel pride.

b) Encourage both individuals in an equal manner. Paul does not elevate one woman's service to the Lord at the expense of another. He commends their service in an equal manner when he says that they "have

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laboured side by side with me in the gospel" (vs. 3).

Our service to the Lord is not the same since the measure of grace given to each varies (cf. Romans 12:6). But this does not give an occasion to elevate one servant above another. Paul's intention in this letter is to cultivate humility in this church. Therefore, as a pastor of a local church, being involved in conflict resolution between your members affords you an opportunity for their sanctification. That is, the aim is to have two parties conformed to the image of Christ—growth in humility (Philippians 2:5). This is the reason you must grab such an opportunity as the Apostle Paul did.

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MOTHERS DISCIPLING AT HOME

Grace Dunlop

The New Testament gives us wonderful examples of spiritual nurture at home. Think of Moses' mother in the Old Testament or Timothy's in the New. Paul reflects on the encouragement he finds in Timothy's faith, and traces it to the nurturing he received in the home; first in his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5).

Paul makes the point that their faith—the faith of his mother and grandmother — influenced the life and calling of Timothy, and presents us with the truth that the mother in the home is not just a cook and nursemaid, but a teacher and discipler of her children. How then can mothers disciple their children?

First, mothers should model Jesus before their children. Small children love to imitate

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their parents. Teenage children watch and analyse their parents. By reading her Bible openly, then, praying often in private and with the family, singing and worshiping as she goes about her day, and participating in family worship or Bible study, the mother shows her children how to learn from Jesus and walk with him. She does this also by her regular attendance at church and in her response to the challenging ups and downs of life. By this she shows that her trust in God is a reality and not theory.

Second, mothers should teach Jesus to their children. At home, the mother has the opportunity to read the Bible to her children, to read good books to them, and to discuss with them the things taught in Scripture as they relate to the daily mundane chores and trials of life. For this a mother must dig deep into God's word for herself, she needs to be a theologian in her own right.

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This is how you can pass your faith on to your children as they toddle about at your feet all day or sit at your table each evening.

More than anyone, mothers are best placed to have the earliest opportunity and foremost influence in the life of the child–to make God real to her children. How she speaks of the Lord and his Word will shape her children's understanding and will have eternal impact. Children respond to those whom they love and trust most, and will grow to love and trust whom you love and trust the Lord Jesus.

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MARTIN LUTHER AND A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MARRIAGE

Dr. Michael Haykin

One of the most scandalous aspects of the Reformation, according to its opponents, was how the Reformers reinterpreted the spirituality of marriage. The standard line during the long medieval era had been that a robust Christian life could only be found in a state of celibacy. The early medieval author Bede (died, May 735 AD), maintained that the apostolic injunction to “pray always” could not be fulfilled if one was married and engaging in sexually intimate acts.

Not surprisingly the requirement of celibacy for vocational ministry became an unbearable burden for many medieval priests, monks and nuns. Far too many of them were celibate but not chaste. The Reformation solution to this scandal of sexual immorality was to go back to

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the Scriptures and recover a truly biblical view of marriage.

Luther's 1519 sermon on marriage

Even before Martin Luther's 1525 marriage to Katharina von Bora, for instance, he had given serious thought to the meaning of marriage. In a 1519 sermon, he noted that "a woman is created to be a

companionable helpmeet to the man in everything." In other words, for most people, marriage was vital to true godliness. Indeed, Luther went on to note, "the love of a man and woman is (or should be) the greatest and purest of all loves." In fact, Luther asserted, if Adam and Eve had not fallen, this love would have been "the loveliest thing."

As it is, though, the fall has deeply tainted marriage and human thinking about this divine institution, and for many it had become simply a context to give freedom to "the lust

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of the flesh.” Medieval church authorities had used this as a key reason to urge people to embrace celibacy.

Luther, and the Reformers in general, did the opposite. Luther urged men and women to marry, but to recognize the great goal of human sexuality: the procreation of children. As he noted in this sermon, the bearing and raising of children was a much greater work than “all the pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, or Compostella [in Spain]” or the building of churches.

A letter on marriage

Two years later one of Luther’s friends, the humanist Nikolaus Gerbel, who was a lawyer in Strasbourg and who died in 1560, got married and Luther wrote to congratulate him on November 1, 1521. It is not known how the two men had met but it is clear that by this point in time they had a fast friendship. Luther was happy for Gerbel’s marriage, for by it the

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lawyer had escaped from the evils of the medieval perspective on celibacy. In fact, Luther went on,

> *I am daily gaining more insight into the godless lives of the unmarried of both sexes, so that nothing sounds worse to me than the words monk, nun, priest, for I regard a married life of deep poverty as paradise in comparison.*

The medieval church had long supposed that the celibate life of a monk or nun was the nearest thing to the experience of the angels in paradise. Luther did not agree! In fact, the temptations to which the unmarried were exposed revealed the godlessness of the Roman church more than anything else since it dictated celibacy for those called to ministry and ardently promoted it. As Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther's own pastor in Wittenberg, put it, "It is faith, and not virginity, that fills paradise."

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Luther's own marriage Luther himself married in June of 1525. A group of nuns had escaped from a nunnery in the town of Grimma and gotten to Wittenberg, where Luther found himself acting as a marriage broker. By 1525 all of them had found husbands except for one, Katherina von Bora. They were married on June 13, 1525. When asked why he had married an ex-nun, Luther replied that it was to spite the Pope! This playful remark has its roots, of course, in Luther's analysis of medieval monasticism and his determination to retrieve a truly biblical view of marriage.

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NOT IN OUR HANDS

Visit any bookstore and one is almost certain to find a relatively large section devoted to "self-help" literature. From books prescribing ten easy steps to improving one's marriage, to writings that outline steps to guarantee success in business, to works that promise a technique that is certain to land one's best career position, there is no shortage of books written as if prosperity is something that is entirely within our power to achieve. Even the church has its share of popular authors who take such a view, telling us that success is wholly within our grasp if we just do a, b, and c without neglecting x, y, and z.

These authors often turn to Scripture to support the promises they make, outlining the "biblical way to blessing" and other such things. Certainly, there is an appropriate way of doing this, for the Bible promises blessing to those who seek the Lord and keep His

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commandments (Deut. 28:1–14; Matt. 6:33). Yet to set forth formulas that guarantee success in this world if we just follow a few simple steps is to misunderstand the biblical teaching on divine blessing and the sovereignty of God. Though we can be confident that the Lord has good things for those who serve Him, today's passage teaches us that the kinds of blessings we receive and the degree of prosperity we achieve are not ultimately in our hands.

Scripture repeatedly commends wise planning and hard work, both of which can increase our odds of success, humanly speaking, but there is no guarantee that all our designs and efforts will pay off. We remain subject to two powerful forces: "time" and "chance" (Eccl. 9:11). Of course, the Preacher who wrote Ecclesiastes does not view chance as a force operating outside of God's oversight. After all, Ecclesiastes has a strong doctrine of divine providence that understands the Lord as

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having established a set time for every matter under heaven (3:1–8).

Instead, Ecclesiastes 9:11 speaks of things as they appear to the human eye to make an important point. No matter how carefully we plan or how hard we work, the swiftest might lose the race; the stronger army can be defeated; the smartest person does not always earn the most money; the most learned may not receive favor; and the wisest can go hungry (v. 11).
An innumerable array of apparently random circumstances and events can thwart our best intentions.

Our inability to see the future means we cannot anticipate or prevent all of the evil that might conspire against our labors (v. 12). Ultimately, our success is not in our hands but lies in what God has ordained.