

The Young People's Magazine

**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1



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Volume 91

January 2026

Number 1

How Are We to Listen?

One day, Jesus warned those who were listening to him: “Take heed therefore how ye hear” (Luke 8:18). We too are to take care how we listen to the Word of God. From beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, God is speaking through the Bible to all who read it and to all who hear it read.

The Holy Spirit guided all who were involved in writing the various parts of the Bible; the result was that every part of the Bible is free from error; we can rely absolutely on everything it says. See, for instance, what Paul and Peter wrote. First Paul: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16); then Peter: “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21).

In particular, the words of Jesus have full authority over every human being, because He is the Son of God, and this remained so even when He took human nature. We must therefore obey when He commands us to take care how we hear. This command applies, not only when we hear the Bible read, but also when we read it ourselves (even silently) and when we listen to someone preaching from the Word of God.

Remember that Paul speaks in the Bible about ministers as “ambassadors” (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador, for the United Kingdom for instance, represents the government of his own country in some other part of the world. He has no freedom to say what he likes; he must say what his government wants him to say.

So a preacher, as an ambassador for Christ, must say what Christ wants him to say, and the preacher learns what Christ wants him to say by studying the Bible. He must stick to the teaching of the Bible. We must take heed to what Christ says in the Bible.

What will we hear when the Bible is read? Let us note several topics to be found there.

1. God is the creator of everything: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). In particular, God is the creator of the

human race: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (Genesis 1:27). We must take heed to these statements, for they rule out evolution, which controls so much of human thinking today. And, since God made us, we are obliged to obey God in everything He says to us.

2. *We are sinners.* God created Adam and Eve as perfect creatures and placed them in the Garden of Eden. But Satan, an evil angel, came into the Garden and tempted them to do what God had forbidden. They took heed to what Satan told them, but they ignored what God had told them. They fell into sin, with all its consequences – both for this life and for the next.

Let us pay particular attention to these two statements from the Bible: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23); "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). If we take heed to these things, we will confess to God as David did: "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). David was saying that, because of Adam's first sin in the Garden of Eden, he came into the world as a sinner. And so do all of us.

3. *God has given us His law.* He has the authority, as we have seen, to tell us how we should live. He has summed up His law in the Ten Commandments, which apply to what we do, what we say and what we think. The first four of them tell us about our duty to God, and the other six tell us about our duty to other people.

For instance, the Fourth Commandment directs everyone to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy". So that one day in every week – the seventh day under the old testament and the first day under the new testament – must be set apart for spiritual things except for what can be described as works of necessity and mercy. Anything else we do or say or think is sinful. That may seem very hard and rigid. But, like all the other commandments, it is good; it is good for us to keep the Sabbath holy. It is good for us to focus on the needs of our souls on that one day in the week – by making use of the Bible, prayer and public worship. We should ask God to make us profit from such activities and to enjoy them.

We need to take heed to *all* of God's law; otherwise we will not know what we should do and what we should not do. We have no right to think that we may please God by keeping some commandments, although we break others. Nor should we think that we may please God by, for instance, keeping the commandments in an outward way while paying no attention to them in our thinking.

Take the Fifth Commandment, for example, which tells young people to honour their parents. They may think that they have obeyed this command

when they have *done* the outward things that their parents have told them to do, but they do not really honour their parents if they do not *think* respectfully about their parents.

4. *God is merciful.* We should remember first that God is just; so He must punish sin. Yet He shows mercy to sinners. He does good to them although they do not deserve it. Sinners like us do not deserve *anything*; we deserve to be punished for ever in hell. But God has made it possible for sinners to escape that punishment. How is it possible for God to show us mercy, and still be just? How can the just God let us escape His punishment for sin?

It is because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to save sinners, to rescue them from the punishment that they deserve. He took the punishment instead. Surely we should take heed to what we hear about this wonderful salvation. How we should open our ears – do our utmost to listen – to what is said about the way of salvation.

Ministers are to tell those to whom they are preaching: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31) – just as Paul and Silas said these words to the man in charge of the jail in Philippi. These Apostles was speaking as ambassadors for Christ; they spoke with Christ’s authority. And we should feel that authority when we hear the call to believe on Christ; we should take care how we hear these words of mercy.

5. *Heaven and hell.* The Bible tells us about these places, and we must go to one or other of them when we die. Those who begin to live a godly life and who believe on Christ – who trust in Him – will go to heaven when they die and enjoy perfect blessedness and happiness there for ever and ever.

But those who refuse to believe in Christ, and never begin to live in a godly way, will never get to heaven but will have to endure the punishment of their sins in hell for ever. The difference between heaven and hell is obviously enormous. Surely we should listen carefully to what God says to us in the Bible about these places. Surely we should seek Christ, and salvation through Him, at once. We may have very little time to do so. The end of 2025 and the start of a new year should remind us of the passing of time, bringing us nearer and nearer to eternity.

John Newton was once an ungodly seaman. But God was merciful to him; He gave Newton grace to believe in Christ and to live a godly life. He became a minister, latterly in London. When he was old, his memory became very poor, but there were two things, he said, that he never forgot. The first was that he was a great sinner. The second was: “Jesus Christ was a great Saviour”. Let us take heed to these two great truths; let us never forget them; let us keep them before our minds and ask God to bless them to our souls. Let us always take heed to what we hear from the Bible.

James Renwick

6. Constant Hardship and Preaching

F R Daubney

Another section of a paper given at last year's Youth Conference. Last month's article told about Renwick landing in Scotland after sailing back from Holland, where he began to study for the ministry. After reaching Scotland he soon began to preach the gospel in lonely places, where he and his hearers would be safer.

As there was no minister to the remnant since Cargill's death, it is said that, in the first six months of his ministry, Renwick baptized more than 600 children! The winter of 1683-84 was very severe. From mid-September to March, there was a persistent frost with many heavy snowstorms. Renwick and his companions had to travel by night in tough conditions to avoid capture.

He was in great demand as a preacher and was constantly on the move, travelling back and forth across the South of Scotland. He preached to hundreds, sometimes thousands, on bleak moors, always in fear of discovery by the authorities.

Renwick was not short of criticism from those who had chosen compromise; he clearly troubled their consciences. They attacked him for his ordination abroad and said he was an interloper determined to cause trouble. They scorned his abilities and suggested that he copied other men's sermons and gained all his so-called experience from books. This was nonsense, as Alexander Shields, his friend and biographer points out; Renwick was for ever on the move and had no time to make use of books and had fewer books to make use of than others.

As 1684 progressed, the persecution became even more severe, and meetings had to be held at night. Even in the harshest weather, they were held in the open air. Occasionally they managed to meet in a barn, or even in the local church, but such meetings were extremely risky. His hearers began to carry arms for their protection and sometimes armed watchmen were set at a distance to warn of, and repel, the hounding dragoons.

These arms were only for self-defence; Renwick believed that the worship of God was a duty for everyone and should be defended by whatever means necessary. In his book, *A Hind Let Loose*, Alexander Shields argues that the law of nature, the Word of God and the practice of Christians in every age, all justify defensive arms.

In spring 1684, a large meeting was held at the Black Loch, north of Shotts. It began at 8 am and was to continue all day, but word came that a spy had gone to Glasgow to report their gathering. Renwick decided there

was still time for an exposition of the Word and a sermon, before they would have to disperse.

Foot soldiers and dragoons arrived in the late afternoon, but Renwick and his followers had gone, and the search for them was abandoned as darkness fell. One of the worshippers, Colin Allison, said, “Though the soldiers came to the place some hours after the meeting dismissed and ranged the country thereabouts, yet there was not so much as one brought in prisoner with them. . . . Blessed be God for His care.”

The Privy Council were in a rage of indignation that Renwick and a party of men had passed through the countryside and escaped. The Laird of Dundas was in trouble again and the indulgent minister of Cambusnethan, William Vilant, was accused of not reporting that Renwick and his party had passed through his parish. He was imprisoned and forbidden to practise as a minister in Scotland.

There followed a series of narrow escapes for Renwick and his helpers. Some of the providences were so wonderful that Renwick was able to say, “In all these tumults and dangers, the Lord’s goodness was so manifested to His people that He not only hid them under His wings and preserved them, but He also kept their spirits from the least fear, confusion or commotion. . . . He has given us proofs of what He can do for His people in the day of their strait” – when they are hemmed in.

Renwick saw this as evidence, and a pledge, that God would raise up His cause in Scotland. But he was constantly on the run, often without shelter or sleep, and this was taking its toll on Renwick and his health suffered. The fact that he was evading capture and was known to have armed men around him, infuriated the authorities. And the punishments for those they caught grew harsher – large numbers were transported to America, and torture, including the use of thumbscrews, was widely used to force confessions. Many were hanged.

In July 1684 a group of soldiers, who were taking prisoners from Dumfries to Edinburgh, were set upon at Enterkin Pass, in the north of Dumfries-shire, and the prisoners were released. One of the soldiers was killed. During the search that followed, Graham of Claverhouse, with his dragoons, came upon three young men who had met to pray together. They were arrested and taken to Edinburgh and, on the slenderest of evidence, were condemned and sentenced to be executed in the Grassmarket that very day.

One of the three, Samuel McEwan, wrote; “I bless [God’s] holy name that ever He honoured me, a poor country lad, having neither father nor mother alive, to witness for Him. . . . It was my desire, though most unworthy, to die a martyr, and I bless the Lord, who has granted me my desire. Now this is the

most joyful day that ever I saw with my eyes. Welcome, my sweet Saviour; into Thy hands I commit my spirit”.

In a sermon the next day, Renwick said, “I think we never heard of a generation of persecutors whose spirits were more set on edge by hell’s fury than these. They persecute without compassion; they pursue without pity; they have given up not only with Christianity, but with very human reason itself”.

The Great Prison

1. In the Cell of Sin

C H Spurgeon

The first section of the first chapter in Spurgeon’s book, *Words of Warning for Daily Life*. It has been edited; some explanations have been added in square brackets by the Editor.

When preaching in Dover, the mayor of the town lent the ancient town hall for the service. In passing along, I noticed a large number of windows on a lower level that had bars on the outside. These windows belonged to the prison cells, where people were confined for crimes they had committed. It struck me as an unusual combination that we should be preaching the gospel of liberty in the upper room, while there were prisoners underneath. Perhaps, when we sang praises to God, the prisoners heard us, but the free word above did not give them liberty, nor did the voice of song loose their bonds.

What a picture this is of many! We preach liberty to spiritual captives, but how many remain year after year in the bondage of Satan, slaves to sin. Some are mourning on account of unpardoned sin, and others are sad because their hopes have been dashed, for they have looked for comfort where it is never to be found.

The prison cells I noticed fixed themselves in my mind and, in later thinking, they thrust themselves upon me. In my daydream I thought that some angel officer was leading me along the corridors of the great spiritual prison, and was bidding me look into the various cells where the prisoners were confined. I thought he was reminding me again and again, as I looked sorrowful, that “the Lord looseth the prisoners”.

The first cell is called the common prison – the prison of *sin*. All the human race have been prisoners here. And those who this day are perfectly at liberty, once wore its heavy chain, and were kept within its black walls. I stepped into it, and instead of hearing notes of sadness, I heard loud and

repeated bursts of laughter. The mirth was boisterous. Some were cursing and blaspheming; others were shouting as though they had found great riches. I looked into the faces of some of the criminals and saw sparkling gaiety; they looked more like wedding guests than prisoners.

Walking to and fro, I noticed captives who boasted that they were free. When I spoke to them about their prison and urged them to escape, they resented my advice. [Spurgeon means that he was urging them to flee from sin to Christ, but they would not accept that they were slaves to sin.]

They said, We were born free, and were never in bondage to any man. They told me to prove my words; and when I pointed to the irons on their wrists, they laughed at me, and said that these were ornaments which gave forth music as they moved; it was only my dull and sad mind, they said, which made me talk of clanking fetters and jingling chains.

There were men chained hard and fast to foul and evil vices, but they called themselves free-livers [they claimed that they were free to live as they pleased, without being restricted by God's commandments]. There were others whose very thoughts were bound as, with bragging looks, they cried out to me that they were freethinkers [they claimed that they were free to think as they pleased, without being restricted by the Bible].

I had never seen such bond-slaves before, nor any so firmly chained as these. But always as I walked through the whole of this prison, I noted that those whose chains were strongest thought themselves the most free. Those who were in the darkest part of the dungeon thought they had the most light. And those whom I considered to be the most wretched, and the most to be pitied, were the very ones who laughed the most and raved most madly and boisterously in their mirth.

I looked on with sorrow; but I saw a bright spirit touch a prisoner on the shoulder, who then withdrew with the shining one. He went out, and I knew, for I had read: "The Lord looseth the prisoners" – I knew that the prisoner had been loosed from the house of bondage. [He was brought out from being one of Satan's slaves, into the glorious liberty of the children of God, through faith in Christ.] But as he went forth, those who had been his fellow prisoners laughed and pointed with the finger. They called him hypocrite, pretender and all sorts of nasty names, until the prison walls rang and rang again with their mirthful contempt!

I watched and saw the mysterious visitor touch another, and then another and another, and they disappeared. The common conversation of the prison was that they had gone mad; that they had become slaves, or miserable fanatics. But I knew that they had gone to be free for ever, set free from every bond.

What struck me most was that the prisoners who were touched with the finger of delivering love [those who believed in Christ and were converted] were often the worst of them all. I noted one who had blasphemed, but God's hand touched him, and he went weeping out of the gate. I saw another who had often mocked the loudest when he had seen others led away, but he went out as quietly as a lamb.

I watched some whom I thought to be the least depraved of them all, but they were left, and often the blackest sinners of the whole company were first taken. Then I remembered that I had read these words: "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you".

Mother and Daughter Learn Together

A few months after a man began to teach in a Sabbath School, a girl appeared there one morning for the first time. He did not know her. She was about nine years old, and she knew so little that the teachers did not hesitate to put her at once in the youngest class. The man asked for her name and where she lived. Her name was Mary, and she told him that her parents lived in a quiet place quite some distance away. They were very poor, and were almost always out working.

He wanted to visit them, and he soon set off on what turned out to be a difficult trip. He had to follow a lonely path by the seashore. It was bounded on one side by high cliffs, and on the other by the Solway Firth, whose rapid tides completely covered the sands except for a short time each day.

It was a stormy November day, but he succeeded in reaching the cottage, which he found to be a rough and badly-built hovel. Its grey walls matched the dullness all around him. He entered the cottage, and a very stern-looking woman stood in front of him. He began to speak to her, but her heart seemed as cold and hard as the rocks outside. She knew very little about spiritual things and her trust in her own righteousness (which was no righteousness at all in God's sight) was even greater than was common in that religiously dark corner.

When he left her house, he felt sad and downcast. In such a visit there was indeed no pleasure, but he promised himself to persevere in what he felt was his duty. He hoped that his next call might turn out to be more useful than this one seemed to be.

During the winter, the woman's little boy became ill, and it was soon obvious that he could not survive for long. The man often went to see him, and the little fellow listened with interest to all he said, although he seldom

spoke. But his mother appeared to be pleased with the man's visits, and she now always received him pleasantly.

After the boy died, the man went less often to the cottage, and after a short time he went away from the district for some months. He returned home the next summer and was told that the woman was ill. As soon as he could he went to visit her. The weather that day was very different from what it had been on his previous visit. A bright summer sun lit up the whole landscape, and the rising tide was perfectly calm.

He found the woman was better, and now able to sit up in bed, but there was little to be gathered from her manner until he stood up to leave her. He put a little book into her hand and, in a moment, the ice was broken. "I need not thank you," she said, "for the trouble you take, for I now know the Master you serve; He is mine also."

The man was glad to hear her speak like this, but he was also surprised. Just a few months before, no one in the area had appeared more ignorant or had a heart which it was more difficult to reach.

The man asked her about how she had been led to know God, whom to know is life eternal. She told him that, about the time when her boy died, she became deeply anxious about the state of her soul. There was no church near enough to her cottage to make it possible for her to go there. She did not know where to go to seek the instruction for which she now so much longed. The Bible was to her like "a sealed book"; she probably meant that she could not understand it. For a time she remained hopeless, even despairing.

But Christ has said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink". The Saviour did not long leave her to stumble on the dark mountains. She soon realised that her daughter understood more than she did of the subjects that now filled her thoughts. She eagerly made the girl repeat to her all that she heard at the Sabbath-School. Week by week, the mother and daughter learnt together about the teachings of the Bible. Together they looked in the Bible for the proof of each doctrine Mary was taught, and together they committed to memory the verses to be repeated.

At last the mother's interest became so great that she could no longer wait for Mary to return from the Sabbath school. So she crossed the fields to meet Mary and receive the words of instruction while they were still fresh in the girl's mind.

"Gather up the fragments that remain," said Jesus, "that nothing be lost." Here, of the crumbs that fell by the wayside, were gathered baskets full for the provision of this hungry soul. The man left the house with a thankful heart and, as he walked home, he had to praise Christ's power. He could see that, not only could He still the raging of the waves on the sea, but He can

say to the wilder storms that war within the human heart, "Peace, be still". And immediately there is a great calm.

Can the Christian Church Survive?

3. Further Departures from the Truth

Another section of a Youth Conference paper. Last month's section looked at the situation the Church faced in the age following the Apostles. There was widespread persecution, but the Church was preserved. The Church had also to face false doctrine. There was the false teaching of Arius, who claimed that Jesus was created, that He was not the eternal Son of God the Father. God raised up Athanasius as a leader of those who believed the teaching of the Bible: that Jesus *is* indeed the eternal Son of God the Father. God preserved His church from going astray on this important point.

Another heretic of the early Christian centuries was a monk called Pelagius who belonged to Britain and came to Rome about 380. He rejected the scriptural teaching about original sin – that human beings inherit the effects of Adam's first sin: they come into the world guilty and they have a tendency towards sin, but not to holiness. Pelagius taught that human beings are able to do all that God requires, ignoring Jesus' teaching that we "must be born again" (John 3:3) and the teaching of Paul that salvation is "not by works of righteousness which we have done", or may do, "but according to [God's] mercy" (Titus 3:5).

Again God raised up a man to oppose the heretical teachings of Pelagius. This was Augustine, who had lived a thoroughly ungodly life until he was 31, when he was converted. He wrote a large number of books, including his famous *Confessions* – about his past life – but his writings against Pelagius were probably more useful than the others. Indeed not everything that Augustine wrote was according to Scripture.

If people had been left to believe that they could save themselves without God's help, as Pelagius taught, the Church would have been filled with unconverted people. They would not have realised that they needed the saving work of Christ if they were to follow God in this world and be received into heaven at last. But the Lord used Augustine as an instrument to protect the Church from being overwhelmed by the dangerous teachings of Pelagius. Again, God made it possible for His Church to survive.

Augustine became a minister in North Africa, in a place called Hippo, where he died in 430. North Africa had many large Christian congregations at that time and later, but Islamic forces swept across the whole of that vast area, with thousands of Christian churches either destroyed or turned into

mosques. We have to remember that God may leave many areas of the world in darkness for many hundreds and even thousands of years.

Islamic forces moved into Spain in 711 and then into southern France. Eventually, in 1492, the last of these forces were pushed back into North Africa. But, sadly, Islam was replaced by Romanism in Spain and France, and though the Reformation movement made some progress in Spain and greater progress in France, Romanism recovered its control – very quickly in Spain, and after a much longer period in France.

But we must now go back in time to look briefly at the development of Romanism. We read in the Bible about true Christians in Rome. The Church there survived in spite of persecution, but in later centuries, the Church in Rome drifted further and further from the true faith. The men who became Bishop of Rome began to consider themselves more important than other bishops. (Note that originally, in the Bible, the word *bishop* meant exactly the same as *elder*, and an elder could be a teaching elder (that is, a minister), or a ruling elder.)

The Bishop of Rome became known as the Pope, and the popes gathered more and more power to themselves. Many of them were thoroughly wicked, and one of them, Pope John XII, who became Pope in 955, was charged by a Roman Synod “with almost every crime of which depraved human nature is capable”.

When this could be said of someone who was, wrongly, viewed as the human head of the Church, it is clear that the Church itself was in a very serious condition. Most ordinary people believed what their priests told them to believe – whether or not these teachings were according to God’s revelation in Scripture. One of the fundamental problems with the Roman Church was that, in theory, it paid as much attention to its own traditions as it did to Scripture; in practice, it probably departed even further from the Bible. Yet the Bible “is the *only* rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy” God (*Shorter Catechism*, answer 2); in other words, it is the *only* rule for us in spiritual things.

Let us note some of the doctrines that were brought into the Roman Church over the centuries. First, there was the mass. The Bible speaks of the Lord’s Supper, and when believers make use of it, they are to remember Christ’s death by eating bread as a symbol of His body being broken, and drinking wine as a symbol of His blood being poured out. They do so because it was through Christ’s death that believers are saved from their sins.

But Rome has corrupted this ordinance by allowing only the priests to drink the wine and, more seriously, it claims that the priest is able to change the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood and to offer Christ up again

as a sacrifice for sin. These claims are made although the Bible makes plain that "Christ was *once* offered to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9:26). It is a sacrifice that cannot be repeated.

It is blasphemous for anyone to say that they can transform some bread and some wine into the glorious Person of the God-man, Jesus Christ. No human being has that power. It is impossible. It is very sinful for anyone to claim that they can, and pretend to bring about that change.

Then there is the Roman Catholic teaching that not only is there heaven and hell beyond this life, but also purgatory. Rome teaches that some people go there to suffer the punishment still due to them for their sins. But the Bible never mentions purgatory, or even suggests that it exists.

And there is the teaching that infants are born again through baptism. But baptism is only a *symbol* of the cleansing from sin that is brought about for the sake of Christ. It does not change a child's heart.

Another false teaching we will mention is penance, when a priest might tell the person confessing their sin to repeat the Lord's Prayer a number of times or do some works of kindness. But no one receives spiritual blessing by any works that they may do (see Titus 3:5).

Finally, though there are many more false teachings, there is the promotion of Mary the mother of Jesus. She was a godly woman, and so she was conscious of her sin and of her need of a saviour to deliver her from her sin. But Roman Catholics are taught to treat her as a woman born without sin, who in heaven is able to hear prayer offered in this world and who acts as a mediator between us and Christ.

These errors developed over a period of centuries, leaving the Roman organisation very far from what it should have been. But God had not abandoned His Church. At the time of the Reformation, He was to raise up Churches in Western Europe that would be in a better spiritual condition than almost anything that had been seen for hundreds of years.

The Turning Point

Taken with editing from *The Young People's Magazine* for September 1979.

There does not seem to be any harm in two boys sitting and talking together, does there? Yet there sometimes is, for the Bible says we must not "walk", or "stand", or "sit" with bad folks, which means that we must avoid being too close to them. Will was sitting with Sam Jones, and Sam was a wild, willful boy.

I am sorry about that, since he was a young sailor, and people should

fear God who see so much of “the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep”. Sam was trying to coax Will to go to sea. He had told him about the wonderful things on the other side of the world, and a lot that would excite a boy’s interest. The result was that Will wanted to go. Besides, Sam said that his father, who was a captain, would take him; so there would be no bother finding a berth, and the two of them, he claimed, would have fine times together.

“But the trouble is”, said Will, “Mother won’t let me go, and Captain Downe says I’m too young.”

Sam’s reply to that was bad language and an oath. That should have opened Will’s eyes to the danger of having such a companion. Yet it did not, and at every opportunity he went down to the harbour, where he was sure to find Sam, who took him on board some of the vessels, and up into their rigging – trying, he said, to make Will “a salt” (a seaman).

Will often spoke to his mother about his craving for the sea. “You are my all, Will,” she said, “and I cannot part with you yet.”

“I’ve got to go sometime”, he answered roughly.

His mother was a widow and in poor health, and needed all his love and care. Will knew this. He knew that he owed her a son’s tenderest affection, but he did not think much of that while he was longing after the sea.

His mother was keeping him back, he said to himself, and how could he help being cross? So he was not as pleasant as usual; he often answered roughly. Yes, at times he neglected his tasks. His mother was grieved and anxious. “Will is under bad influence,” she thought; and she often prayed over her sewing: “Lord, keep my poor boy from going astray.”

One night as she sat up late with her needle and thread, Will said, “O mother, it is nothing but stitch, stitch, stitch. You will wear yourself out.”

“I do not mind it when Willie is by,” she said, looking up and smiling.

He shut his book, and soon after went to bed. Nor did he kiss her as usual. “If she would let me go to sea, that would make life easier for her, with the pay I’d bring home,” he muttered to himself.

Next morning, a Sabbath morning, the warm sun woke him and shone full on the clean clothes his mother had laid out for him. How fresh and neat they looked! And there too was his mother’s work of the night before, new trousers which she had finished for him to wear at church.

“Mother is good, dear mother,” he exclaimed, and again and again his eyes returned to the clothes. Somehow they brought out his mother’s love and care as never before. In a wonderful way, Will’s heart and conscience were touched. Tears came into his eyes – not proud, angry, willful tears because he could not have his own way – but sweet, penitent tears for ever

having grieved such a love as hers. "I ill never, never cross her by going to sea, or even by mentioning it again," was his resolve that morning. And he kept to it.

Not long afterwards, he went to work in a carpenter's workshop. One day Sam Jones came to the shop to see him. In his usual coarse and foul language he told Will that he had found a berth for him. "You must go. Run away tonight, and we'll be scudding before a nor-wester (a north-westerly wind) by morning."

"No," said Will, "my duty and pleasure for the present are to stay at home with my mother; so there's an end of it."

Sam's further urging was of no use. He saw that there was indeed an end of it, and soon went away. It is not really hard to be rid of bad company. Often one must just want to be without them; they will notice and stay away.

A year later, Will's mother died, and he said he could never thank God enough for speaking to his conscience, that sunny Sabbath morning, and keeping him at home. It was the beginning of better things for him, and the beginning of the best year of his life, when he was happy doing all he could for his dear mother. I hope "better things" for him included faith in Christ.

For Junior Readers

All the Day Long

As you know, the Book of Proverbs in the Bible is full of good advice for everyone. And at the beginning of this new year, it would be good if you began to read it carefully. One of our ministers has recommended that young people should read a portion from Proverbs every day and pray that the Lord would help you to put what you read into practice.

"Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord [that is, with a holy regard to God and His commandments] all the day long" (Proverbs 23:17). Is that not a good motto for you to carry with you all through this year? Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the year long, all 365 days of the year ahead!

William Jay was a well-known minister in England in the 1800s. He suggests five different features of our days that we should try to carry out "in the fear of the Lord".

First, in the *worship* on a day. You should begin and end the day with reading the Bible and prayer yourself. Jesus said, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet [your own room], and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall

reward thee openly”. There should also be family worship each morning and evening. Also you and your family should go to church and hear God’s Word whenever that is possible. These are privileges, and you should value them highly.

Second, in the *work* of the day. The fear of God should make you diligent in your studies or your job. It will also make you to depend on God for His blessing in all that you do.

Third, when you *relax* on the day. The fear of the Lord should make you careful to avoid taking part in anything, or watching anything, which would offend the Lord, wound your conscience, make you think sinful thoughts or make you unfit for spiritual duties.

Fourth, it will make you careful about the *company* you keep. When you have to mix with worldly people, the Bible tells you to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without” – who do not go to church, who pay no attention to the Bible. And you should return to the company of Christians as soon as possible. You should seek out and value the company of godly people as much as possible.

Fifth, in the *difficulties* of the day. There will often be difficulties and disappointments in your life, but the fear of the Lord will help you to see and acknowledge God’s hand in all your trials, whatever form they may take. It will also teach you to pray for “grace to help in time of need” and to help you honour God by how you behave in these situations.

William Jay finishes by reminding us that God sees us *all the day long*. So let us be careful to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long! And all the year long! Will you remember that?

J van Kralingen

For Younger Readers

Nothing to Thank God for?

A little girl did not want to pray before she went to bed. Her mother asked her: “Have you nothing to thank God for?”

“No”, said the girl, “you and Dad give me everything.”

“Not for your pleasant home?” asked her mother.

“It is Dad’s house; he lets me live in it.”

“Where did the wood come from to build it?” asked Mother.

“From trees”, answered the girl, “and they grew in big forests.”

“Who planted the big forests? Who gave rain to water them? Who gave the sun to warm them? Who did not allow the winter to blast

them? Who kept them growing, from little trees to trees big enough to build houses with? Not Dad, not man; it was God."

The girl looked her mother in the eye and then said, "Dad bought nails to make it with."

"What are nails made of?" asked her mother.

"Iron, and men dig it from out of the ground."

"Who put iron in the ground, and kept it there safe till the men needed it?" asked the mother.

"It was God."

"We got this carpet from men," said the girl, drawing her foot across it.

"Where did the men get the wool to make it?" asked Mother.

"From farmers", answered the girl.

"And where did the farmers get it?"

"From sheep's and lambs' backs," said the girl.

"And who gave the lambs clothes good enough for us? Your dress, I see, is made of nothing but lambs' wool. Where did the lambs get such good stuff?"

"God gave it to them, I suppose," said the little girl. "It is you that gives me bread, Mother," she said quickly.

"But," said her mother, "we got the flour from the shop, and the shopkeeper bought it from the miller, and the miller took the wheat from the farmer, and the farmer had it from the ground, and the ground grew it all itself."

"No," cried the girl suddenly, "God grew it. The sun and the rain, the wind and the air are His, and He sent them to the corn field. The earth is His too. And so God is at the bottom of everything; isn't He, mother?"

Yes," said Mother; "God is the source of every good and perfect gift which we enjoy."

The little girl looked serious. She looked as if she was thinking. "Then, Mam," she said at last, "I can't make a prayer long enough to thank God for everything."

"Have you nothing to ask God to forgive you for?" asked Mother.

"Yes," she said quietly, "for not feeling thankful, and trying to put Him out of my thoughts." She never refused to pray after that.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2025-26

Names for Exercise 1

Senior Section: *Barnoldswick:* Bethan Middleton. *Dingwall:* Donald Allan MacColl, *Edinburgh:* Anna Cameron-Macintosh, Beth Dickie. *Inverness:* Murray Dickie, Callum Morrison. *Glasgow:* Violet Marr. *Halkirk:* Grace MacLean.

Intermediate Section: *Aberdeen:* Kenneth Macleod, Cassia Soni. *Barnoldswick:* Susie Middleton. *Beaulieu:* Hudson Maclean, Rebekka Fraser. *Dingwall:* Neil Campbell, Iain MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Alex Cameron-Macintosh, Darcy Esson, Alice Hicklin. *Glasgow:* Evan Marr. *Halkirk:* Angus Hymers-Macintosh, Catriona MacLean. *Inverness:* Cameron Dickie. *London:* Ernest Campbell, Andrew Macleod. *North Tolsta:* Rebecca Morrison. *North Uist:* Katie M Macdonald.

Junior Section: *Dingwall:* Heather Campbell, Mairi MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Julia Cameron-Mackintosh, Anderson Dickie, Joella Esson, Leah Hicklin. *North Harris:* Finlay Jardine. *North Tolsta:* James Morrison. *Portree:* Murdo MacRaid.

Upper Primary Section: *Dingwall:* Charlotte MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Samuel Dickie. *Gairloch:* Penny Mackenzie. *Glasgow:* Joel Marr. *Inverness:* Molly Campbell, Harvey Dickie, Annalise Schouten. *London:* Lydia and William Campbell, Benjamin Macleod. *North Harris:* Margaret Jardine.

Lower Primary Section: *Aberdeen:* Kate Macleod. *Barnoldswick:* Lucas van Essen. *Bonar Bridge:* Maggie Bell. *Dingwall:* Seumas and Chirsty MacColl. *Dornoch:* Hugo and Elspeth Schouten. *Edinburgh:* Edward and Arthur Cameron-MacKintosh, Alasdair Campbell, James Dickie, Theodore and Jessica Esson, Matthew and Rhoda Hicklin, Genevieve and Alexander MacLean. *Gairloch:* Esther MacKenzie. *Glasgow:* Luke Campbell, Susanna and Alec Gillies, Magnus and Archie van Kralingen, Angus Macleod. *Inverness:* Emily, Alfie and Lucy Campbell, Grace Campbell, Rose Dickie, Austin Schouten. *London:* Alexander Campbell, Peter Macleod. *North Harris:* George Jardine. *Portree:* Fraser and Sophia MacDonald.

Overseas Names Exercise 1

Senior Section: *Auckland:* Joseph and Peter Campbell. *Gisborne:* Brooklyn and Shona Hembd. *Münster:* Clara Rösner.

Intermediate Section: *Auckland:* Keith Smith. *Chesley:* Angela Tuinier. *Gisborne:* Preston Hembd. *Sydney:* Ethan Macdonald.

Junior Section: *Alberta:* John Mun. *Auckland:* Marion Campbell. *Fountain Inn:* Tala-Linn Kerr. *Gisborne:* Ashley Hembd. *Jerusalem:* Mordechai Lerner. *Münster:* Conrad Rösner. *Santa Fe:* Luke Smith. *Sydney:* Abigail and Lachlan Macdonald.

Upper Primary Section: *Alberta:* Anna Mun. *Auckland:* David Campbell, Daniel Smith. *Chesley:* Meleah Tuinier. *Fountain Inn:* Katharine Kerr. *Gisborne:* Andrew Hembd. *Santa Fe:* Jesse Smith, Scout Smith. *Sydney:* Jackson Campbell, Hugh Macdonald. *Tarragona:* Valentina Nayach van Essen. *Woodstock:* Jo-Anne Heikoop.

Lower Primary Section: *Alberta:* Hephzi-bah and Isaiah Mun. *Auckland:* Janet Campbell, Sophie Macdonald. *Carterton:* Hudson Verheij. *Chesley:* James and Nathan Kuiper. *Gisborne:* Iain Hembd. *Grafton:* Alexander Winkels, Eliza and Samuel Yong. *Santa Fe:* Winslow Smith, Miriam Smith. *Sydney:* Emma and James Macdonald. *Woodstock:* Emma Heikoop.

Looking Around Us

Trouble and Mental Health

Hundreds of GPs across England have stated that they think mental health problems are being over-diagnosed (442 thought so, out of the 752 GPs who

took part in research by BBC News). Many of them believe that society is too ready to consider normal life-stresses as medical issues. One of these family doctors commented, “As a society we seem to have forgotten that life can be tough – a broken heart or grief is painful and normal, and we have to learn to cope.”

But how should people cope with the ordinary or extraordinary stresses of life? Should they just try to forget what has happened, whether it was serious illness, the death of a close relative or a close friend, or the breakdown of a relationship or something else? Or should they try to drown their sorrows by going deeper and deeper into worldly entertainments? The list of possible difficulties is endless.

And the list of possible solutions is endless. Some might be of some help; others might even make the situation worse. But there is one source of real, lasting help in times of great trouble that I am sure very few GPs today would recommend. That is prayer – prayer to the true God.

David for instance said, “The mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue . . . but *I give myself unto prayer*” (Psalm 109:2,4). When his enemies were telling lies about him, David prayed. He brought his troubles before God, who rules over everything that happens in this world. So should we. God can comfort us in times of trouble, in answer to prayer; and He can take the trouble away or make it easier to bear.

To forget what disturbs us may be impossible; memories of it will come to the surface again and again. To dive into worldly entertainments is wrong, and it is dangerous, especially because God may be speaking to us through the trouble, warning us against trying to live without Him and calling us to prepare for eternity.

If more people knew to take their troubles to God in prayer, fewer would be concerned about their mental health and fewer would feel that their first remedy in a time of trouble should be medicine. Now I am *not* saying that it is wrong to consult a doctor over concerns about one’s mental health. It may be absolutely necessary for you to do so. But even if it is necessary, make sure that you also pray to God about the matter. He says, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee” (Psalm 55:22). Remember too that Jesus says with emphasis: “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33) – bring spiritual things to Him first as what is most important, and then go on to pray about everything else that troubles you.

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