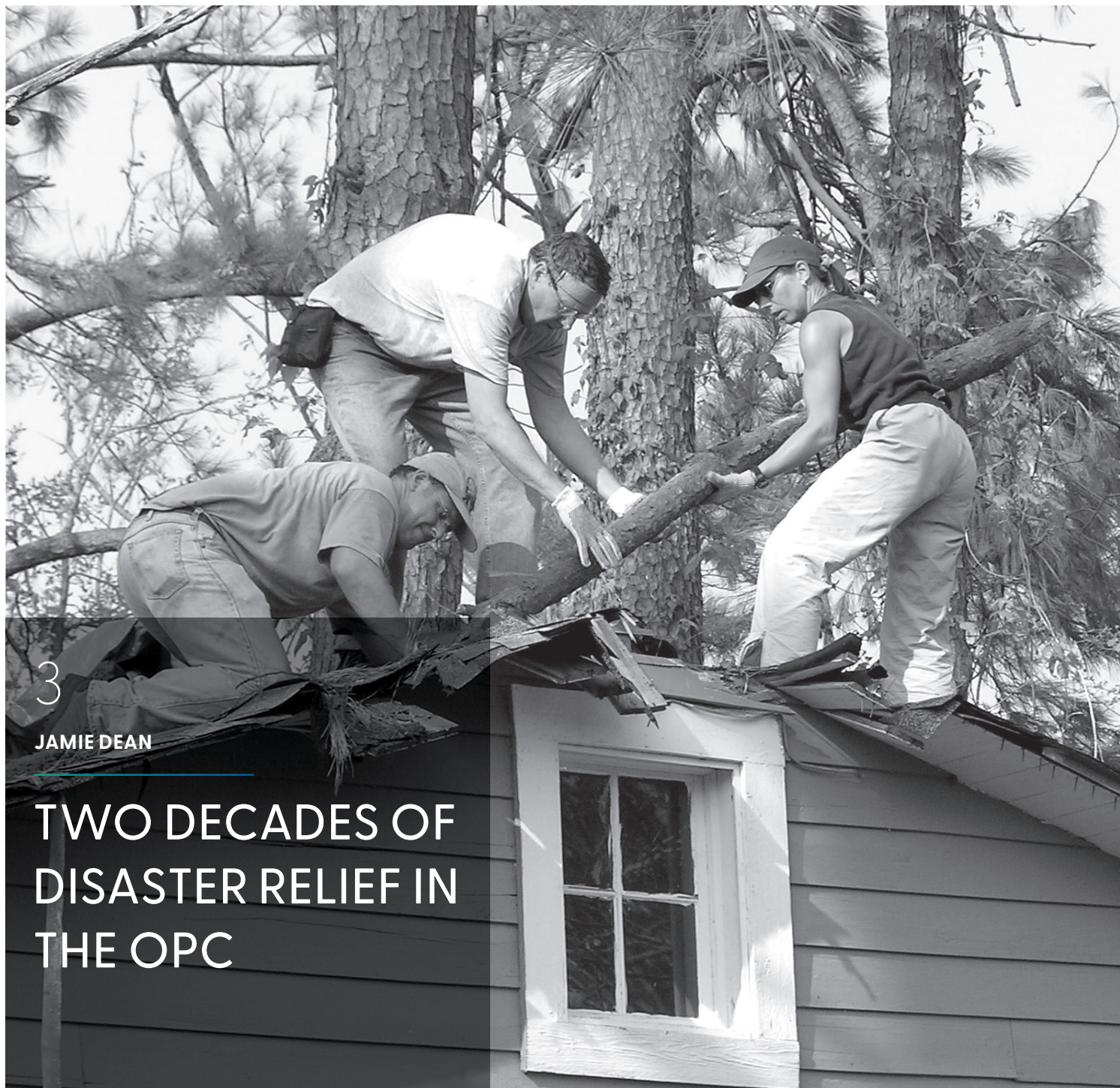


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DECEMBER 2025

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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*Cover image: Relief efforts in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina:
Walter Kidd (left), Rick Cohler, and Charlotte Lang*

Editor: Danny E. Olinger
Managing Editor: Judith M. Dinsmore
Editorial Assistants: Ayrian J. Yasar
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Send inquiries, letters to the editor, and
other correspondence to the editor at
danny.olinger@opc.org. Letters to the
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TWO DECADES OF DISASTER RELIEF IN THE OPC



JAMIE DEAN

In the summer of 2005, the OPC had a heart for helping people after natural disasters, but not a mechanism for organizing relief on a wider scale. What they did have was a man who could start figuring it out.

David Haney served the OPC in many capacities during his decades of service to the denomination. He unexpectedly went to be with the Lord in 2019. But in August of 2005, he was driving south toward the wreckage of one of the most destructive hurricanes in U.S. history.

Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast and set off one of the most massive relief efforts in a century. There were no OP churches in the worst zones of Katrina's wreckage, but a groundswell of OPC members were asking for ways to help those in need. Haney went to check it out. That trip laid the foundation for the next twenty years.

The wheels began turning for a more organized structure, and a few years later another David—David Nakhla—began serving as head of disaster response for the OPC.



OP volunteers Dan and Colleen Boon in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina

Nakhla has seen the denomination learn and grow and develop in encouraging ways since Haney's first trip to the Gulf Coast in 2005—all the way up through Hurricane Helene's torrent through the Southeast last year.

It's been a journey of learning how to plan, how to adapt, and eventually, how to train presbyteries to lead local efforts in the places they know best. It's also been a story of God putting just the right people in just the right place at just the right time—all for the good of his church and the glory of his name.

THE UNEXPECTED CALL

When Nakhla began his OPC role in disaster relief (and also short-term missions) in 2010, things were pretty quiet on the disaster front. Haney's earlier work had convinced denominational leaders of the need to be better prepared for major catastrophes that required an immediate, full-time effort to coordinate, but Nakhla wasn't sure exactly what that might look like as he started the job.

A few months later, he found out—but the call came from over 6,000 miles away. On March 11, 2011, a 9.1-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of northern Japan, triggering a massive tsunami and colossal damage and loss of life. This time OPC workers *were* in the affected regions. So, Nakhla got to work.

The challenges were huge: How do you coordinate a major disaster response for another country an ocean away? One of the answers came through another man in the right place at the right time.

OPC deacon John Voss (Covenant OPC, Orland Park, Illinois) with his many years in the construction industry lent his expertise and began forming a plan. Voss made site visits, drafted plans, and oversaw the shipping of needed materials to the region. OPC teams repaired significant damage to the local church in Sendai. John later joined the Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM).

The mission also acquired a building that had been



used for a dental practice but was destroyed by the tsunami. Short-term OPC teams spent hours mucking out the structure and hauling out X-ray machines, dental chairs, and boxes of teeth molds and dentures.

Other groups renovated the inside, and the building now serves as the Nozomi Center, a hub for community outreach and efforts to share the gospel in a land with few believers. Out of the ruins of disaster, God provided a place to offer the good news of redemption and to proclaim the glory of the God who makes all things new.

WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE RESPOND

Since the Japan earthquake in 2011, there hasn't been another disaster that required major OPC relief efforts for an overseas location, but there have been plenty of other disasters closer to home.

Just a year after the Japan quake, Hurricane Sandy walloped New York and New Jersey. The response was another example of the Lord providing just the right people. Among the teams that helped with relief efforts, OPC member Raun Treible brought his HVAC expertise,

OP volunteers in Naples, Florida, following Hurricane Irma



just as snowflakes started falling on damaged homes. The late-season hurricane had flooded basements and destroyed heating systems, and many people faced long waits for repairs as cold weather arrived. Raun repaired ten systems in ten days with several hundred dollars in parts.

Nakhla says Hurricane Sandy also stands out in his memory because the hurricane hit two presbyteries at one time. And that planted a seed: How could the OPC equip presbyteries to respond quickly to needs in their own backyard?

By 2016, Nakhla started promoting the concept of presbytery diaconal committees owning more of the responsibility for disaster response in their own regions. He underscored the need again at a diaconal summit in June of 2017. Just two months later, three hurricanes hit three presbyteries within three weeks.

Those storms (Harvey, Irma, and Maria) accelerated efforts to organize relief through presbyteries. As local deacons respond to local disasters, they can also inform the wider denomination of specific needs through OPC Disaster Response.

That helps Nakhla's team direct the OPC's registered volunteers to places that need their skills. That's been invaluable in multiple other spots, from Michigan to Florida to Neon, Kentucky.

But these efforts yield more than smoother logistics: They also promote the unity and affection of the church, as more OPC members learn about how to pray for and help their brothers and sisters, near and far.

And it encourages those who might feel particularly far away. After Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico, Nakhla vividly remembers OP church planter Bradney Lopez's response when Nakhla asked what message Lopez had for the broader church.

"Don't forget us," he said.

Assessing damage in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria





OP church planter Johnny Serafini praying with volunteers in North Carolina after Hurricane Helene

THE GOD WHO REMEMBERS

One of the realities of major disasters is that people often do feel forgotten. When everyone has an emergency at the same time, it's easy to wonder if help will ever arrive. And that's especially true for those who have no church home at all.

Last fall, when Hurricane Helene brought catastrophic flooding to the mountains of North Carolina, the members of Landis Presbyterian (OPC) in Marion were spared, but they had a huge heart to help those who weren't.

Once again, God provided just the right people in just the right place. Elder Mike Cloy had spent a significant portion of his military career in disaster preparedness. Another church member was an engineer, another a contractor, and one from Reformation OPC in Gastonia serves as a gifted volunteer coordinator.

Nakhla says he was amazed on the first conference call with Landis members as the small church plant organized their response. They realized they'd need a backhoe for some jobs, and one woman on the call chimed in: "They can use mine!"

"I thought, 'These people are amazing,'" Nakhla said. "We're going to be okay."

And, by God's grace, they've been more than okay. Over the past year, the church has seen dozens of volunteers help build homes for a handful of people in the community who lost everything. Pastor Johnny Serafini makes regular visits to the homeowners, and he uses those opportunities to pray and speak of Christ.

One of the homeowners said he originally thought the church's offer to help was too good to be true. He'd lost his home and his beloved brother in the flooding, and he felt hopeless in the aftermath.

He still grieves his losses, but he's grateful for the kind people from the OPC who came to help. And the church members are grateful for the opportunity to love this member of their community, to offer him a church home—and to point him to the hope of a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Since taking possession of the home, he has begun, with the church's help, a Bible study for friends and neighbors.

Here's to the next twenty years of that kind of ministry, Lord willing. **NH**

The author is an OP member and senior writer for Radical.

David Nakhla (left) with a family affected by Hurricane Florence in North Carolina



THE GIFT OF GIFTS



M. JAY BENNETT

As we enter another Christmas season, we do well to remember that we are under no obligation to keep any time for a holy rest other than what God has commanded in his Word, namely, the weekly Christian Sabbath. Nonetheless, it is always appropriate for us to meditate on the incarnation, including its connection to one of the traditions of the season: gift-giving. Our consumer culture has radically commercialized this tradition—we are under constant pressure to perceive the value of owning *this* product or enjoying *that* service. This Christmas season, as we meditate on the incarnation, let us guard ourselves against the grievous evil of covetousness and remind ourselves of God’s remedy for it.

A GRIEVOUS EVIL

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, calling himself “the Preacher,” observes: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (1:2). He then asks: “What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (v. 3). In other words, “What ultimate purpose may be found in this life, especially when it comes to those things for which we work?” He embarks on

a quest to find purpose by a process of elimination, eventually concluding that it can only be found in something beyond this creation, namely, the one, true, and living God (12:13–14).

Solomon identifies many evils during his quest, but he only identifies one as a “grievous evil.” We see it for the first time in 5:13–14: “There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.” His point is that no matter how much wealth we may accumulate, it can all be lost in an instant, which is why Jesus warns us: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19).

A few verses later, in 5:16, Solomon says, “This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?” Even if we manage to retain wealth in this life, we will still lose it the moment we die. Wealth does not endure to eternal life, which is why Jesus commands us to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20).

Third, in 6:1–2, Solomon says,

There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.

Solomon now reveals the deeper principle. Even if we accumulate and retain all the wealth in the world, if we do not have hearts of faith and gratitude to God for it, we will be unable to enjoy it. Ironically, it will only serve to further aggravate and amplify our sense of discontent as our deepest need remains unmet. Even so Jesus warns us, asking, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

This is the vanity of wealth. Wealth promises good to the one who accumulates it. But since it has no power to set us free from sin and death, and it is not good in itself, it fails to deliver. The grievous evil Solomon identifies in Ecclesiastes is the same evil God exposes in the tenth commandment: “You shall not covet” (Ex. 20:17).

A GLORIOUS REMEDY

The Bible calls Jesus “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16) as a revelation of the glorious truth that, as the eschatological Mediator, he has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18,



A Winter Landscape
by Jan Abrahamsz
Beerstraeten,
1622–1666
(public domain)

cf. Ps. 2). Using this pattern of naming, we might also call him the Gift of gifts. Jesus calls himself a gift when addressing the Samaritan woman, saying, “If you knew the *gift* of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10, emphasis added). Jesus is both the gift of God, namely, the only begotten Son sent from the Father, and the giver of the gift of living water, by which he means the Holy Spirit. Isaiah identifies Jesus similarly, saying, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (9:6). In this verse we see hints of the hypostatic union in prophetic form. A human child will be born on earth as the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), and in the same event the only begotten Son will be given from heaven by the Father. Gabriel tells Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Having been sent from the Father into the world, Jesus is clearly the gift of God. But how is he the Gift of gifts?

THE SUBSTANCE OF THIS GIFT

The value of a gift is, in part, determined by its substance. When a man proposes, he gives his fiancé a diamond ring as a gift. The size and purity of the diamond and the weight of the gold is directly proportional to its value. The larger and purer the diamond and the heavier the gold, the more valuable the ring.

So, what about the substance of the only begotten Son? John begins his gospel, saying, “In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Later, Jesus teaches the crowd the same, saying, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). These and many other texts teach us that the Father and the Son are of one divine substance. They are consubstantial.

This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea. The great burden of that council was to dogmatically pronounce that the Father and the Son are consubstantial. As the creed says, the Son is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [*homoousias*] with the Father.” Thus, in the giving of the Son, the God who “has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself” (Westminster Confession of Faith 2:2), has given us *himself*. This is the most fundamental covenant promise, namely, “They shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Jer. 32:38; cf., Lev. 26:12 and Rev. 21:3). To have God is to have every possible good. This is what Paul means when he says,

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. . . . I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phil. 3:7; 4:12–13)

In this sense, Jesus is the Gift of gifts.

THE FORM OF THIS GIFT

The value of a gift is also a matter of its form. Returning to the marriage proposal analogy, when a man proposes to

a woman, he doesn't typically give her a handful of gold flakes and a diamond in the rough. He gives her gold that has been formed into a ring, sized just right, and studded with a well-faceted diamond that maximizes its brilliance.

We see the value of God's gift of his only begotten Son similarly. Paul writes that the Son,

though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:6–8)

The One who is the very form of God—which for God is no different than his substance!—in the fullness of time took the form of a human, a servant. “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Thus, God bridged the gap between himself and humanity in a new and final way (Gen. 28:12; John 1:51). John puts it this way: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known” (John 1:17–18, author's translation). He is the substance of all God's covenant promises (2 Cor. 1:20) and the fullness of God's self-revelation to man (Col. 1:19). “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb. 1:1–2). So, Paul tells us, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). In this sense as well, Jesus is the Gift of gifts.

THE FUNCTION OF THIS GIFT

The value of a gift is also a matter of its function. Think about the marriage proposal again. If a man just gives a woman a diamond ring, the ring would be a valuable gift. But as part of a marriage proposal, it takes on a whole new significance and value.

The gift of God may have started with the incarnation, but it did not end there. The Father sent his Son to accomplish a mission. Jesus teaches the crowd, saying,

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have

authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. (John 10:14–15, 17–18)

The Father gave his Son that the Son might give himself for his sheep. Jesus laid down his life on the cross as a propitiation for our sins that he might take it up again in his resurrection from the dead and advance us with him into glory. But God does not save us from sin's guilt only to leave us under its power and influence.

Besides forgiving our sins, granting us right standing before himself, and guaranteeing our eventual reception of glorified life—all by faith alone—he also works to sanctify us. So, we confess,

They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. (WCF, 13.1)

One of the several lusts that is progressively weakened and mortified in our sanctification is the grievous evil of covetousness. And one of the saving graces that is progressively quickened and strengthened is the faith by which we recognize that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jam. 1:17). It is by this faith that we are enabled to live in a spirit of genuine love, thanksgiving, and contentment, truly enjoying and wisely managing all of God's other gifts, like temporal wealth. Part of what it means to wisely manage temporal wealth is to be generous with it, using it for the building up of others. Paul writes, “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way” (2 Cor. 9:11).

Jesus is the Gift of gifts not only because he is the greatest possible gift, but because he enables us to enjoy all other gifts in a spirit of thanksgiving, contentment, and generosity. In this season of giving, let us guard ourselves against the grievous evil of covetousness by remembering the remedy God has given in Christ and exclaiming with the Apostle, “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15). **NH**

The author is pastor of Grace OPC in Lynchburg, Virginia.

OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON



ZACHARY C. HERBSTER

When George Bailey shops for a suitcase in *It's a Wonderful Life*, he tells the man at the counter that he wants a “big one” before stretching his arms out wide. We make the same motion when we tell children how much we love them: “I love you *thiiiiis* much!” If we understand that our arms cannot contain our love, how much more must the Father love his Son, Jesus? Their relationship is prominent in Matthew’s infancy narrative and points us to the prophet Hosea to understand the depth of the Father’s love for his Son. We’ll look at Hosea 11:1–9 to get a fuller picture.

MATTHEW QUOTES A PROPHET

In Matthew 2:13–15 we read about Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fleeing to Egypt from Herod the Great. As Matthew points out, this episode fulfills a somewhat obscure Old Testament prophecy: “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos. 11:1). We recognize the parallels between the Old and New Testaments: Jesus’s earthly father wasn’t the first Joseph to shelter his family in Egypt. Jesus wasn’t the first Hebrew baby boy to hide from a murderous king. But Jesus’s story

is not a list of coincidences with the Old Testament. The Holy Scriptures give us one, interconnected story that revolves around one, holy Son. Matthew’s quotation of Hosea 11:1 raises two questions: 1) Who was this son in the Old Testament context? and 2) How does Matthew show us God’s Son, Jesus, as the fulfillment?

AN ABUNDANT LOVE

Hosea 11:1 reads, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Hosea is writing in the 700s BC and reflecting on the Exodus some seven hundred years earlier. In verse 1, God reveals how much he loves his son, Israel. George Bailey’s arms cannot contain this kind of love. God’s love is unqualified, or unconditional. Verse 1 doesn’t say, “When Israel was an obedient child, I loved him.” Verse 1 simply says, “I loved him.” When I was a kid, it didn’t matter how many times I struck out (which was a lot). At the end of the game, my dad put his arm around me and said, “I love you.”

What’s more, God doesn’t just say he loves his son, Israel—he demonstrates his love. Talk is cheap; love is costly. Look how much I love him, God says, “out of Egypt I called my son.” God called Israel out of Egypt in power. He destroyed Pharaoh before Israel’s eyes. It doesn’t matter that Hosea speaks to Israel some seven hundred years after this event. Mention Lexington and Concord to an American. Foundational events have significance. We cannot underestimate the lasting power of the Exodus in the hearts and minds of Israel. The Ten Commandments begin with a preface: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 20:2). This call from Egypt is at the root of God’s relationship with Israel. God is there from his birth. See how in verse 3 he “taught Ephraim [Israel] how to walk; I took them up by their arms” (Hosea 11:3). It’s as if God is showing Israel a home video of his childhood. See the Lord walking behind Israel, holding his little hands above his head as he takes his first steps. Look at this fatherly love!

How wrong it is to characterize God’s electing love as cold or calculated. Read verse 4 and see how he leads Israel and swaddles him in the bands of his love. See how he breaks the yoke of Israel’s oppressors and stoops down to feed him with manna and quail, milk and honey. He gave Israel his holy law to guide him; he gave Moses and Aaron to lead him; he gave Joshua and Deborah, Barak and Gideon, Samson and Samuel to deliver him; he gave David and Solomon to rule him; he gave Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea to prophesy to him; he gave him everything he needed to be the royal son of God. But it wasn’t enough for Israel.

REBELLION

Verse 2 says the “more they were called, the more they went away.” The more the Father talked to Israel, the more Israel rebelled. Dad says, “Go right,” but the son goes left. Dad says, “Don’t go out tonight,” but the son goes out. Israel’s dad said, “Worship me,” but Israel worships Baal. God repeatedly tells Israel to love him and keep his commandments. And repeatedly Israel offered himself to useless idols. Sure, these idols couldn’t love him, but at least they didn’t demand anything from him. Sure, these idols didn’t call him out of Egypt, but at least they let Israel do what he wanted with his time, his body, and his money. If bad times came, he could always call out to his dad in a pinch, and God would heal him. But herein lies the tragedy of verse 5: “They have refused to return to me.” It wasn’t a matter of knowledge, but a matter of will. We may know that God is the Lord, but will we turn to him?

See, Israel’s refusal was no one-off. Israel stubbornly and defiantly refused to return to the Lord. Moses had told Israel that if they refused to obey the Lord in the Promised land, then the Lord will cast them out. They will go to Assyria as captives (verse 5); the sword will devour them (verse 6); though they call out to God, he will not “raise them up at all” (verse 7). There will be no resurrection to the glory days of David and Solomon; they are done. This is what happens in 722 BC. The Father kicks Israel the son out of the house and sends him packing to Assyria.

Maybe you think, “Good! It’s about time! It only took God seven hundred years to punish his son who had disobeyed him.” We want the prodigal son to receive his just deserts. But the Lord says, “Not so fast!” In verse 8 he cries, “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How could I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zebaiim?”—these cities destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah. In verses 8–9 the Lord says in effect: “These peoples I had not loved, but you I have. My heart melts at the thought of teaching you to walk. My compassion swells as I recall taking you up in my arms. How can I destroy my baby boy? I will not execute my burning anger. Exile will come, but my wrath will not endure forever! Though my son deserves a permanent disinheritance, I will show him mercy.”

THE GOOD SON

But how? How can God do this? How can God seemingly let his wayward son off the hook? “I’m God!” he says, “that’s how!” In verse 9 we read: “For I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst.” His mercy exceeds human comprehension. We marvel at God’s perfect justice for sinners, but do our jaws hit the floor at God’s mercy for

sinners? For as the Lord spoke through Hosea to his disobedient son, Israel, he was preparing to send his obedient son, Jesus Christ.

How can God be justified in showing mercy to a disobedient son like Israel? Because he raises up in his place an obedient son like Jesus. The Father says, “When Jesus was a child, I loved him. I saved him from Herod and hid him in Egypt and brought him back home: ‘Out of Egypt I called my Son.’” In this brief citation, Matthew 2:15 shows us so much more than a neat Old Testament connection. Matthew shows us the obedient Son of God who loves his Dad like his Dad loves him.

Jesus was the one Son of God who always obeyed his Father. The more the Father called, the closer Jesus came in prayer, worship, and adoration. You’ve seen tears in the eyes of flawed fathers proud of their flawed sons. How much prouder must God the Father be of Jesus?

Jesus deserved nothing of the curses promised in Hosea 11:5–7: exile, persecution, devouring by enemies. And yet God so loved us, his prodigal sons and daughters, that he exiled his faithful Son to Egypt to be persecuted by Herod, and raised him to be devoured by Roman steel. God can show mercy to Israel in Hosea’s day, and God can show mercy to sinners like you today, for one reason and one reason only—because on another day, he visited his Son in wrath on a cross.

Recall this: In Hosea the Lord said that if Israel rebelled, even “though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all” (v. 7). Wretched thought! Truly, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). But thanks be to God that he shunned the hoarse cry of my Savior and shut him in a tomb for me. Oh, thanks be to my Father that he does hear my cry and that he will raise me up, for he gave up his obedient Son to be raised up for me. Thanks be to God that he called his baby boy out of Egypt to die for my sins outside Jerusalem. Thanks be to God that the arms of the good Son stretch out wide on the cross to proclaim, “I love you this much!” **NH**

The author is pastor of Providence OPC in Mantua, New Jersey.

IMPERIAL CHRISTIANITY

D. G. HART

Imperial Christianity sounds foreign within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and rightly so. Whatever it is (for starters, a Christian faith adopted and promoted by an emperor), it is certainly not part of the experience of conservative American Presbyterians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It evokes at best memories of Constantine, Charlemagne, and maybe Charles V (the Holy Roman Emperor at the time of the Protestant Reformation). Most Americans for that matter do not spend much time thinking about empire. They may have learned about the Roman Empire and the Pax Romana of the first two centuries of the Christian era, but the habits of modern politics—liberalism, democracy, and republicanism—run decidedly counter to imperialism. Some Orthodox Presbyterians may be inclined to hope for a godly president of the United States or governor of a home state. But that longing rarely rises above pious thinking because the OPC lacks the size and access to political leaders to make a Christian government—imperial, republican, or democratic—realistically possible.

THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

Yet, the fingerprints of imperial Christianity are on the doctrinal standards that Orthodox Presbyterians hold dear. The original version of the Westminster Confession of Faith contained affirmations about civil government that sounded remarkably similar to the relationship that Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, had with the Council of Nicaea, whose creed many Christians are commemorating this year. The twenty-third chapter of the 1647 confession includes this description of the Christian ruler:

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the



London: Westminster Abbey, with a Procession of Knights of the Bath, by Canaletto, 1749 (image courtesy Westminster Abbey)

truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administrated, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.

Although Presbyterians in the United States at their first General Assembly (1789) revised the Confession of Faith to remove this description of the civil magistrate, imperial Christianity had been so much a part of British Protestantism that creedal revision could not easily remove it.

Three elements in the Westminster Confession, originally designed for the Church of England and then adopted in 1647 by the Church of Scotland, provide a useful definition of imperial Christianity. The first is that the magistrate has power to preserve the peace, unity, and purity of the church. Constantine worried that the Roman Empire was splitting apart and hoped Christianity would unite his realm. The Nicene Creed did not unite all Christians in the early church. Some remained outside the empire's approved church. Arianism, the error that provoked the bishops to define the Trinity, also spread among groups on the periphery of the Roman Empire in the West, especially among Gothic tribes. But Constantine thought that the Council of Nicaea could unite his empire.

The second and third elements of imperial Christianity in chapter 23 of the confession are the authority of the magistrate to call a synod (second) and to preside over an assembly of church officers (third). Constantine actually followed the confession's description of the magistrate's

power. For starters, he called the Council. Constantine also presided over the bishops called and even though he was new to the Christian faith (if his conversion was genuine), his presence was a definite factor in keeping debate to a minimum among the bishops at the Council of Nicaea. As Eusebius, who wrote a life of Constantine, described the emperor's role at Nicaea, he "gave patient audience to all alike, and received every proposition with steadfast attention, and . . . gradually disposed even the most vehement disputants to a reconciliation."

Thirteen centuries later, the king of England, Charles I (king between 1625 and 1649), did not call the Westminster Assembly, nor did he preside over it. In fact, the English parliament was the governing authority that called pastors to rewrite the Church of England's doctrine and guidelines for worship. Furthermore, when the Assembly convened in 1643, England was going through a revolution in which the king's and parliament's armies fought in a protracted civil war. That conflict was all the more reason to hope that the established church might unify English society. Neither parliament nor Charles attended or presided over the Assembly. Even so, readers of the Confession who know the history of the Council of Nicaea and Constantine's hand in its meeting and statement cannot help but be struck by similarity between what English Protestants taught about the civil magistrate and what happened at Nicaea in 325. Chapter 23 described both what happened at Nicaea in the fourth century and at London thirteen centuries later.

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANS

Seventeenth-century England is not remote history to American Presbyterians the way fourth-century Asia Minor may be. The England that hosted the Westminster Assembly was the same imperial power responsible for establishing colonies in North America where Irish and Scottish Presbyterians settled and built churches. Established in 1634, Maryland was governed by the Roman Catholic Calvert family, but the colony needed settlers and opened its territories to Presbyterians like Francis Makemie, who established churches there in the 1680s and 1690s. Other Presbyterians settled in Pennsylvania, founded in 1681, as part of Charles II's expansion of English presence in the New World. William Penn, the colony's first governor, received the territory from the king, thanks to service his father had rendered to Charles II. English territories in North America, including the maritime colonies that became part of Canada, provided a home to Presbyterians who confessed the doctrines elaborated by the Westminster Assembly. The expansion of Presbyterianism to North

America would not have occurred if not for the Christian imperialism of the English (later British) Empire.

The role of the civil magistrate, whether imperial or parliamentary, raises an awkward question for Protestants who often advocate and affirm that the church is healthier without a meddling government. Instances of the state interference in church affairs are not difficult to find in Scottish church history. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (1733), and the Free Church of Scotland (1843) are two examples of Presbyterians leaving the state church for the sake of ecclesiastical integrity.

Still, if the English Parliament had not called the Westminster Assembly, would Presbyterians have doctrinal standards on the order of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms? Some other assembly of Scottish or English Presbyterians may have decided to meet and generate doctrine, church polity, and guides for worship. If they had, their documents would not likely have attained the stature that comes with the imprimatur of the civil magistrate. The same point applies to Nicaea, even more so. Would the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant churches have the same standard of Trinitarian orthodoxy without a Roman emperor, no matter how shaky his profession, convening a council and then adding his stamp of approval to the bishops' creed? Of course, God gave Scripture to the church without needing a civil magistrate to make it acceptable or authoritative, though the King James Bible does indicate that civil magistrates add stature even to the Word of God. Either way, the spread of Christianity around the world owed greatly, even if not exclusively, to emperors who fought wars against rivals and controlled territories.

BOTH AIDING AND OPPOSING

This author is not sure what the reassuring answer is to the question of, Where would the church be without imperial Christianity? Church history has too many cases of churches suffering from a cozy relationship with powerful rulers. That same history also indicates that Christianity became a global faith because emperor and monarchs sponsored territorial and demographic expansion that made church planting possible in lands far removed from Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus, or Rome. Perhaps the way to resolve the dilemma is to remember that what the apostle Paul called, "the fullness of time," when Christ came to earth and accomplished salvation for his people, was also the early stages of the Roman Empire. This was the same governing authority that supplied relative peace and stability to parts of the middle east, North Africa, and Europe during the first four centuries after Christ's

ascension. Of course, that was the same empire responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Those two sides of the Roman Empire, persecution of Christians and social order for evangelism and church planting, underscore the mixed blessing of imperial Christianity. It both aided and opposed the gospel that pastors, evangelists, and missionaries proclaimed. That is a reason to avoid both celebrating and sneering at imperial Christianity.

The author, an OP elder, is professor of history at Hillsdale College.

TIMOTHY CONFERENCE 2026

The Committee on Christian Education will hold the next OPC Timothy Conference on April 15–18 in Charlotte, North Carolina. Conference participants will hear from Orthodox Presbyterian ministers regarding pastoral ministry and experience a seminary environment by attending classes at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte.

Local sessions are asked to recommend young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one years old who are members of the OPC and exhibit potential giftedness for ordained gospel ministry. Applications for sessions to submit candidates can be found on OPC.org under “Christian Education.” Completed applications should be sent to Danny Olinger (danny.olinger@opc.org). The application deadline is January 30, 2026. All expenses are paid.

Please consider helping us to follow the inspired words of 2 Timothy 2:2, “What you have heard from me . . . entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

SPRING 2026 MTIOPC COURSES

The Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (MTIOPC) is offering three courses in the spring of 2026: Form of Government, OPC History, and Pastoral Theology. The deadline for applying is February 6. The classes start online on February 9 with mandatory in-person intensive training sessions on May 19–21 at First OPC in South Holland, Illinois.

The Form of Government is taught by Rev. Dr. Alan D. Strange, President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. OPC History is taught by OPC Historian, Rev. Dr. Camden M. Bucey. Pastoral Theology is taught by Rev. Dr. A. Craig Troxel, professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California.

OPC ministers, ruling elders, licentiates, and men under care are eligible to apply. All students must pay a \$50 registration fee that is fully refundable upon successful completion of the course. OPC pastors, licentiates, and men under care of a presbytery qualify for a travel scholarship of up to \$450 to help defray the cost of travel to South Holland. An additional \$100 for travel expenses is also available if matched by your local session or presbytery.

To apply, visit www.opc.org/cce/MTI.html. For more information, email MTIOPC coordinator Judy Alexander at alexander.1@opc.org.

2025 Timothy Conference participants



CONGRATULATIONS

The **Shorter Catechism** has been recited by:

- **Joanna Gaebler**, Hillsdale OPC, Hillsdale, Michigan
- **Philip Korkie**, Tyler Presbyterian, Tyler, Texas
- **Emily Winter**, Garst Mill Presbyterian, Roanoke, Virginia

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

DAVID P. NAKHLA

Astonishingly, more than one hundred million people around the world are affected by natural disasters each year. If you're like me, you assume that you and your family will never be counted in that statistic. But disaster can strike anywhere, anytime, and anyone—including you and me.

Imagine you live on the Colorado plains, and a rapidly spreading wildfire tears through your neighborhood, consuming your home and reducing it to ashes. Or perhaps torrential rains bring unexpected flooding to your Midwestern city, pushing several inches of water through your home—even though it sits well outside the usual flood zone. Maybe your east coast neighborhood, having never experienced a severe storm, is suddenly struck by an EF-3 tornado. You emerge from your basement to find open sky where your roof used to be. Or you live in Southern California, and the dreaded “Big One” finally hits—an 8.1-magnitude earthquake—causing devastating damage to your home. You're in shock. You ask yourself, *Has this really happened? What do I do now?*

FIRST STEPS AFTER DISASTER

After thanking the Lord for preserving your life through such a calamity (and perhaps wondering why we even call it a “natural” disaster), your priority must be to ensure the physical safety of your family. Material things can be replaced—human life is irreplaceable. Confirm that everyone is safe and that no one is taking unnecessary risks, unless it's to preserve another's life.

Once your family's safety is secured, your second step is to call your insurance company to inform them of what has happened. Most likely, they will encourage you to file a claim, even if you are unsure if the loss is covered. Pay close attention to any instructions they provide—both what to do and what not to do—as these could affect your claim.

Third, assuming communications are intact, contact your extended family and loved ones to inform them of what's happened and reassure them that you and your family are safe.



Flooding in Midland, Michigan, in 2020

These first three prudent steps apply to just about anyone and may be the only options for those desperate for relief. But thank the Lord, you are not just anyone. You are part of a church—a connected body of believers. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:26, “If one member suffers, all suffer together.” This connection provides you an added layer of support, a safety net many don't have. In the communion of the saints, we are called to “relieve each other in outward things, according to [our] several abilities and necessities” (Westminster Confession of Faith 26:2).

In the OPC, we take this responsibility seriously. Time and again, whenever disaster strikes within our church community, the OPC Disaster Response inbox fills quickly with messages of concern, and generous financial support pours in. These are powerful expressions of love and compassion from our church family in times of distress. The church lives out Galatians 6:2 in bearing one another's burdens.

CALL YOUR CHURCH

Thus, when disaster strikes, as a member of the OPC you go on to the fourth step: Contact your local church deacons (or elders, if there are no deacons). Let them know of

your situation so they can begin assessing the need. Ask whether the Presbytery Diaconal Committee or OPC Disaster Response should be informed and be involved. Don't assume your local deacons will think of this resource!

When it's safe to do so—and before beginning any cleanup or repairs—take detailed photos and videos of the damage. This documentation could prove invaluable when filing insurance claims.

The following steps may be taken by you or by others on your behalf, ideally under the oversight of those who are trained or experienced in disaster response. Consider the following actions in the early days of the aftermath:

1. *Use proper personal protection.* Use masks, goggles, gloves, etc.
2. *Address potential safety hazards.* Turn off gas and electricity if there is any risk.
3. *Prevent further damage.* Use tarps to cover roof openings and minimize water intrusion.
4. *Remove wet material.* If flooding occurred, remove anything that's wet and cut out drywall and insulation typically twelve inches above the waterline.
5. *Decontaminate and dry out.* If flooding involved outside water, proper disinfection is essential before any restoration begins.

If your insurance policy does not cover your losses, you will undoubtedly experience the amazing care of Christ's church as they step in to help you to restore what was lost. It's always amazing to witness this testimony of the love and care of the body of Christ.

PREPARE NOW

If you're reading this and thinking, *Whew—I'm thankful I haven't gone through that*, this may just be a gentle warning,

nudging you to prepare. Here are a few ways you can prepare for disaster.

Review your insurance coverage. Are you adequately insured? Do you understand your policy? Reach out to your insurance agent to review your coverage. Are you in a flood zone? Should you consider flood insurance? What about earthquake insurance? If your home becomes uninhabitable, does your policy include coverage for temporary housing (often called Additional Living Expenses or ALE)?

Document your possessions. It's easy to forget the many things that fill our homes. Fortunately, with today's technology, it's easy to create a video inventory. Using your phone, walk room by room and capture video documentation of your belongings. I recently did this for the first time and was surprised by how many items—tools, books, appliances, heirlooms, and more—would be nearly impossible to recall from memory. This simple act could prove invaluable in filing a future claim.

Develop a family emergency plan. Does your family know what to do if disaster strikes? Do you have a rendezvous point—a way to communicate if cell towers go down? Preparing a plan now can reduce panic and confusion later.

Encourage your church to prepare. Have your local deacons discussed how to care for the congregants in a disaster? Your initiation—and your willingness to help—might spark this important conversation.

I hope you'll use this article as a starting point toward greater readiness—while never forgetting that we serve the Lord of the winds and the waves. Nothing happens outside of his will. Our true safety is found in the shelter of his wings.

The author is coordinator of the OPC's Disaster Response. For more information and resources, visit opcdisasterresponse.org.



*Cleanup after
Hurricane Harvey
in Houston, Texas, in
2017*

HARVEST SEASON IN KARAMOJA

TRAVIS A. EMMETT

As I write, it's harvest time here in Karamoja, a big event for everyone as it determines whether people will face hunger or have what they need for another year. With hearts and minds set on another type of harvest, Pastor Julius and the ministry team at Nakaale Presbyterian Church are developing new outreach initiatives. They help church members harvest their fields and then present the gospel to the church members' friends and family who have also come to help harvest. Then they invite them to church.

Soon, the ministry team hopes to use the church's new garden plot, developed with the help of a local Ugandan agricultural expert, for similar purposes. Not only can church members learn better gardening practices, but they can invite the broader community to gardening workshops where the gospel is also taught.

Throughout church history, Christians have rightly understood that each believer is a laborer in the Lord's harvest (Matt. 9:37–38). The Reformed church understands that the Lord is especially pleased to use the *preaching* of the gospel as the primary means for the conversion and sanctification of souls. As with Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1–4, the church is to be sending those with authority to preach the gospel and with gifts to evangelize to the nations. These men, and others assigned to assist them with their work, are to spread the seeds of the gospel and help build and strengthen the church.

The OPC has a rich history in this endeavor. Think of the critical role foreign missions played in our formation and how the Lord has been pleased to continue to use our church on several mission fields over the last eighty-nine years.

HELP FOR THE PRESENT

Today, in many ways, serving in foreign missions has never been easier, thanks to advances in travel, communication, and modern medicine. Don't get me wrong! I didn't say foreign missions is easy. We're still dealing with painful goodbyes in airports and prolonged separation from loved ones. We still face culture shock and spiritual



Church members and others prep the new garden plot.

resistance. As for sickness, there is no way to speak lightly of how much time it takes away from the work that you want to do. Foreign missions still requires a good dose of what I like to call faith-fueled tenacity. We try to keep going no matter what, and to some we may even look like we are crazy (Mark 3:21). We've been stretched like never before. Yet it still seems like nothing to what missionaries who came before us faced.

One huge challenge for us now, however, is how few of us there are. When someone is sick, or someone goes on furlough, or even when someone just wants to take a little vacation, there isn't anyone to fill in or double up on the workload.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Yet the Lord continues to build his church here and around the world. We are seeing East African believers carry the torch. In Mbale, we continue to see Knox School of Theology (KST) thrive and grow with a primarily African faculty. All Nations Presbyterian Church is maturing, having particularized with its own organizing pastor and ruling elders.

Here in Nakaale, Nakaale Presbyterian Church continues to see new members added as the congregation sees spiritual growth and maturity. Pastor Julius, a Ugandan, continues as the organizing pastor, and officer training is slated to start sometime next year. Lokiru Timothy (Timo),



Timo, clinic chaplain, teaching alongside the health team

a native Karimojong, has graduated from KST and is doing an excellent job as our clinic chaplain, with a heart to see the gospel go forth far beyond just Nakaale. In October, Timo came under care in the Reformation Church of East Africa (RCEA), the same denomination that both All Nations and Nakaale Presbyterian are now a part of. In a few years, Timo will, Lord willing, be ordained in the RCEA.

Our hope and prayer is that in the next five years the Mission will be able to hand everything in Nakaale over to others and start partnering with the RCEA to help plant churches in other parts of Karamoja, places that are still virtually unreached with the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. This vision includes additional Karimojong men who will attend KST, graduate, become pastors, and begin to plant churches in Karamoja. We will also need missionary evangelists to work in Karamoja, moving north of Nakaale to help mentor, disciple, and serve alongside these new pastors that are being raised up.

For now, as we pray for and work towards this future in Karamoja, I have the privilege of serving both the missionaries and the indigenous church in the background. No one day looks the same, but most days I'm continually switching between my maintenance hat, as the facilities

A sorghum field ready for harvest



manager, and ecclesiastical hat, as a presbyter of the Mission. One moment I could be welding something, troubleshooting a solar system, or be knee-deep in muck fixing a sewage line, and the next I'm sitting down with someone to provide spiritual care or counsel. I regularly lead team devotions for our day workers and handle administration tasks for the Mission. I also attend RCEA presbytery meetings, sit on the session at All Nations, and work with Julius and the ministry team here in Nakaale. Next year, Lord willing, we will begin officer training, which I will help with as well. It's been a joy to get to know the men that God has been raising up to be the current and next generation of leaders for his church here in Mbale and Karamoja.

EARNEST PRAYER

The things that we have already seen our Lord do are tangible reminders that our God will fulfill all his promises. We praise him for this, and we hope that we will see an even greater harvest as we pray for more laborers. This laborer-to-harvest ratio isn't a new predicament, as noted in Matthew 9:37–38: "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'" What was our Lord's command? Pray.

On August 17, 2024, the OPC held a day of prayer and fasting for this very purpose, and shortly after, the Lord raised up new missionaries Fred and Kaling Lo and Mike and Jenn Kearney to serve in Mbale, Uganda. Our Lord answered our prayers! What if such prayer wasn't just a one-day event, but the day-to-day heartbeat of our church? A heartbeat that sings, like a hymn of our Karimojong brothers and sisters, "*Yesu acam ayong, Neni daadang ikiyaki iyong ayong*" ("Jesus, I have accepted to go wherever You send me")—oh, that each of us would be daily driven to our knees in fervent and humble prayer! Please pray that the Lord of the harvest would raise up more laborers from the OPC and from the Karimojong. Let us all continue to plead, "Oh Lord, raise *us* up and send *us* out," until the trickle of laborers becomes a flood and the harvest is gathered in.

The author is an OP missionary to Uganda.

SHORT-TERM MISSIONARY

The OP Uganda Mission in Karamoja is seeking a short-term missionary with practical handyman skills and a servant's heart to serve for several months in early 2026 during the Emmetts' medical leave. If interested, please contact Douglas Clawson: douglas.clawson@opc.org.

IN-PERSON CHURCH IN TROY, OHIO

DAVID MYRHEN

I was rather surprised when I googled “Bread of Life Church in Troy, Ohio,” where I serve as church planter, and was given this description:

Embracing the importance of community in a digitally isolated world, Bread Of Life Church emphasizes the value of genuine connections among its members, fostering a sense of belonging as the family of God. The church’s commitment to living out the Christian faith in contemporary times resonates with believers across generations, rooted in the foundational belief in Jesus as the ultimate Savior based solely on his grace.

What was surprising about this review was that the writer had never even visited our church. In fact, the writer wasn’t a person at all. The irony of AI decrying our digitally fragmented society was not lost on me.

NONCURATED CHURCH

A few more clicks around the web can tell you more. Google Maps says that Troy is a thirty-minute drive north of Dayton. Wikipedia explains that Troy is “nestled” along the banks of the Great Miami River and is the seat of Miami County. The city is home to about 30,000 people in a county of about 112,000 people. The US Religion Census claims that over six out of ten people in the county are not religious at all, let alone evangelical. We are the first NAPARC work in the county. The data indicates that there is a great need for churches that exhibit the three marks of the true church.

What I have heard from people here in Troy fills out this picture. Many of them like the idea of Jesus and might



Church members receiving communion, with the author on far left

read the Bible, but have stopped attending church. Some have suffered pretty serious church hurt in their past; it takes a lot to build trust back after betrayal. Others would just prefer online church. While there are certainly many benefits to having great Christian teaching online and freely available to all, a drawback is that we can curate our teachers as we please and maybe even our community. As I consider the breakdown of the significance of the institutional church among the people I talk to, I can’t help but feel that it’s tied to other problems, such as the breakdown of the family and the fracturing of society into echo chambers. To say, “the church ought to be a family,” presumes a healthy view of the family that’s missing for many. The gospel alone can restore the vocabulary that’s been lost by our society.

I’m so thankful for the family that Christ has been bringing together at Bread of Life. Each story is so unique, and yet each soul is there for the same reason: We need Jesus to save us. Over the past year we’ve grown closer as a church through worship and home visits, fellowship meals, and even a church softball team. One thing I wish we had started earlier is our prayer time after service. We break into small groups and pray with and for one another for approximately twenty minutes before Sunday School. I’ve found that time to be a great encouragement

HOME MISSIONS TODAY

Sign up for the biweekly email newsletter from Home Missions, Home Missions Today, by emailing ophomemissions@opc.org

as every member is able to open up, and we can bear one another's burdens and bring them to Jesus.

IN-PERSON OUTREACH

While we have tried to put a good foot forward with our online presence, there is just no substitute for in-person presence, and so we've been putting ourselves out there. The most in-your-face outreach, pun intended, was to rent a booth at the county fair and paint kids' faces while inviting their parents or caretakers to church. A less scary idea was having church members bake cookies and deliver them along with a gospel tract and a handwritten invitation to families that recently moved to the area. It was great seeing our neighbors' faces go from a wary, "Who is this strange person at my door?" to light up when they realized we came bearing gifts. The floodgates haven't opened, but a few brick-and-mortar doors did. We're still praying that it will lead to spiritual doors.

One attempt I've made at opening the door for others is spending some time each week in a coffee shop while I work on sermons or emails. I'll put up a sign saying, "I'm a pastor. Have questions about God? I'll buy you a coffee!" It's a little cheesy, but it's an olive branch.

The other place I frequent is the local hospital where I volunteer as a chaplain. Many times patients will be watching TBN when I come in the room to pray and share Scripture with them, but they usually turn it off when I come to visit. It's pretty rare that a patient prefers a digital pastor in the hospital. It's a good thing to have flesh and blood sitting next to you then, even if I am just a cheap knock-off of the Great Physician. He has ordained me to minister to his sheep with his Word and Spirit.

Please pray that the Lord would establish Bread of Life as a faithful in-person church that preaches Christ and him crucified for sinners. Pray that the Lord would draw



Church cannot be digitally mediated.

people from all sorts of backgrounds to himself, especially the unconverted. Pray that God would use the gospel to recreate such basic notions as "family" for Miami County. As challenges come up—and with church plants, there will always be challenges—pray that the Lord would use them to strengthen our love for Christ and for one another.

The author is church planter of Bread of Life OPC in Troy, Ohio.



Begun in 2024, Bread of Life meets in a community facility.

DEC 2025 PRAYER CALENDAR



The Repps (day 11)



Sangwoo Kim (day 14)

This prayer calendar has two entries per day of those individuals and families supported by the OPC's Worldwide Outreach, so that we can support them also in prayer.

1

Ben & Heather Hopp, Africa & Haiti. Pray for God's work in children's hearts as Heather and Esther teach Sunday School in Mbale, Uganda. / Pray for **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic.

2

Pray that the Lord would raise up good leaders now for next summer's **short-term missions** teams. / Pray for **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania.

3

Mr. and Mrs. M., Asia. Pray for the development of significant Reformed ministry to Chinese speakers in the U.S. / Pray for the stated clerk, **Hank L. Belfield**, as he begins administrative work for the next General Assembly.

4

Pray for Home Missions associate general secretary **Al (Laurie) Tricarico**. / **Mr. and Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray for a recent seminary graduate following up on evangelistic projects while the Foltas visit family in the U.S.

5

AJ & Chelsea Millsaps, Athens, TN. Pray that the Lord would enable Zion OPC to end the year with faithfulness. / Pray for **Greg Reynolds**, editor of *Ordained Servant*.

6

Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray that God may protect his people in Haiti, restrain evil, and bring peace. / Pray for **Danny Olinger**, director of the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC.

7

Heero & Anya Hacquebord, Ukraine. Pray for two young

8

church members sent to military duty, one to the front lines. / Pray for **Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio.

9

Bruce (Sue) Hollister, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest. / Pray for the **Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplaincy and Military Personnel**, the NAPARC accrediting entity.

Affiliated missionaries **Craig & Ree Coulbourne**, Japan. Pray for good reunions as they visit friends and family in the United States. / Pray that the **Ruling Elder Podcast** would edify those who listen.

10

Pray for Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah (Beth) Montgomery**. / Pray for children of pastors imprisoned in **East Africa** to know God's care in the absence of their earthly fathers.

11

Pray that more **Disaster Response** volunteers would be raised up to aid in this important ministry. / **Christian & Hanna Repp**, Doylestown, PA. Pray for continued peace, unity, and wisdom among the leadership and congregation of Park Presbyterian Church.

12

Pray for affiliated missionaries **Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia, to wisely disciple and encourage the staff and girls with whom they work. / Pray for yearlong intern **Brian (Kelsey) Bowen** at Providence OPC in Rockford, IL.

13

Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Ugaof the nda. Pray for Nakaale church members to grow in their ability to study and understand God's Word. / Pray for **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast.

14

David Myhren, Troy, OH. Pray that the Lord would strengthen the faith

of the congregation at Bread of Life Church. / Pray for yearlong intern **Sangwoo Kim** at Theophilus OPC in Anaheim, CA.

15 Pray that the ongoing ministry of *The Reformed Deacon* podcast would edify and inform our deacons in their ministries. / Pray for **Judy Alexander**, administrative coordinator for the Committee on Christian Education.

16 Pray for **Brian (Nicole) Tsui**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California & Nevada. / **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the training and discipleship of future Karimojong church leaders.

17 **Corey & Andrea Paige**, Kyle, TX. Pray for the men nominated for officer training at Hays County OPC. / Pray for yearlong intern **Jeremy (Hannah) Chong** at Covenant OPC in Orland Park, IL.

18 Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for spiritual growth for students sponsored by the Mission during their school holiday. / Pray for yearlong intern **Drew (Monica) Tilley** at Providence OPC in Bradenton, FL.

19 Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for staff Christmas activities organized by the Mission to point participants to Jesus. / **Bradney & Eileen Lopez**, Guayama, Puerto Rico. Pray the Lord would bless the ministry of Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura.



The Walkers (day 20)

20 Pray for **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest. / Pray for yearlong intern **Elisha (Kara) Walker** at Reformation OPC in Grand Rapids, MI.

21 **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for Knox School of Theology students who experience hardship traveling between Uganda and their homes. / Pray for yearlong intern **Jeffrey Shirley** at South Austin Presbyterian, in Austin, TX.

22 Pray for **Eric (Heather) Watkins**, evangelist for Chicago, IL, and Daytona, FL. / **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for Fred's travel and ministry to various churches during the semester break.

23 **Nate & Anna Strom**, Sheboygan, WI. Pray for the Lord's blessing on Breakwater Church's after-school reading center. / Pray for yearlong intern **Michael (Jessica) Xu** at Grace Presbyterian, Columbus, OH.

24 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** and administrative coordinators **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee**. / Pray for *New Horizons* managing editor **Judith Dinsmore**.

25 Pray for faithfulness and joy for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. / Pray for **Jim (Bonnie) Hoekstra**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin & Minnesota.

26 Pray for **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Pray for *New Horizons* editorial assistants **Diane Olinger** and **Ayrian Yasar**.

27 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Uruguay. Pray for the spiritual



The Los (Day 22)

and numerical growth of the church plant in Maldonado. / Pray for financial controller **Melisa McGinnis**.

28 Pray for **Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Pray for **Jim & Lydia Jordan**, Uruguay, as they prepare to move to the field.

29 Pray for Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca**. / Pray for **Rachel Kinney**, video and social media coordinator.

30 Affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik**, Czech Republic. Pray for salvation for a young man who attended English camp and shows spiritual interest. / Pray for OPC.org technical associate **Stephen Pribble**.

31 Pray for the growth of the **Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church** through a recent conference led by Ben and Heather Hopp in Addis Ababa. / Pray for **Chris Byrd**, regional evangelist for New Jersey.



Front: Jin Sil Kim, Elisabeth Young, Calilee Watson, Cherie Franks, Jacqueline Colon, Melanie Scharping, Pam Malkus, Annie Hathaway, Margaret Biggs; back: Laura VanDelden, Trish Martin, Rachel Allison, Janet Barker, Sandy Jones, Meredith Proctor, Grace Jee, Lauren Sloan, and speaker Hayley Satrom

NEWS

PASTORS' WIVES FELLOWSHIP

Margaret Biggs

The Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic Pastors' Wives Fellowship met on September 20 at New Hope OPC in Frederick, Maryland. This was our fourth presbyterial, which continues to be a yearly blessing for us. We welcomed Hayley Satrom, biblical counselor, author, and podcaster, as our speaker. She graciously came, facilitated our meeting, and spoke to us from God's Word on the topic "How God's Presence Restores Our Souls."

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On October 10, **Christ Church Downingtown** in Downingtown, PA, formerly a mission work of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, became a congregation of the OPC.
- On October 17, **Heritage** in Springfield, MO, formally an ARP congregation, became a congregation of the OPC.

MINISTERS

- On June 30, the pastoral relationship between **Robert P. Harting, Jr.**, and Grace Church in Middletown, DE, was dissolved upon his retirement; he served there for forty-three years.
- On June 30, the pastoral relationship between **M. Daniel Fincham** and Covenant in New Bern, NC, was dissolved upon his retirement.

- On September 27, **Peter J. A. Moelker** was dismissed to the Bible Presbyterian Church.
- On September 21, the pastoral relationship between **Harry J. Monroe, Jr.**, and Providence OPC in Bryan-College Station, TX, and was dissolved upon his resignation.
- On October 3, **Jeremiah W. Montgomery**, general secretary of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, was installed as a pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian in Ambler, PA.
- On October 8, the pastoral relationship between **Michael W. Bobick** and Calvary Community in Phillipsburg, NJ, was dissolved.
- On October 10, **Eddie Mercado** was ordained and installed as a pastor of Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.
- On October 10, **Anthony C. Domanik** was installed as pastor of Covenant Church in New Berlin, WI.
- On October 17, the pastoral relationship between **Joshua P. Lyon** and Grace OPC in Carson, CA, was dissolved.
- On October 24, **Mark R. Scaturro** was installed as pastor of Spencer Mills OPC in Gowen, MI.

MILESTONES

- OP elder **Garret A. Hoogerhyde, Sr.**, 95, died on October 19. The longest serving CHMCE, Pensions, and Loan Fund member in the history of the OPC, he also moderated the Forty-Third (1976) General Assembly.



Women from five OP churches at the 25th annual Ladies Retreat at Machen Retreat and Conference Center on October 10–12



Newly particularized Christ Church Downingtown

LETTERS

Editor:

The good obituary for minister Allen Harris (October) overlooked a significant contribution he made to the OPC. When the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension sloughed off its pastoral intern program onto the Committee on Christian Education (CCE) in the '80s, it did so with little instruction—and no funding. The general assembly, however, directly elected a subcommittee of the CCE to pick up—and expand—the intern program. Allen Harris led that subcommittee and persuaded the CCE to hire a part-time Director of Intern Program (affectionately called the DIP) to meet with sessions and encourage them on how to train interns. This behind-the-scenes ministry of Allen was crucial to the development of the OPC's intern program.

Roger W. Schmurr
Cleveland, OH

REVIEWS

Sing in Exultation: A Christmas Devotional Exploring Our Favorite Carols, by Jonathan Landry Cruse. 10Publishing, 2024. Paperback, 112 pages, \$12.99.

Reviewed by OP member Lauren LeMahieu.

In all of life we use God's gift of music to calm our fears, encourage our hearts, express our theology, and praise our awe-inspiring God. As we approach each Christmas season, we are inspired by hymn writers from many generations to sing of the miraculous birth of our Savior. Jonathan Landry Cruse's Christmas devotional entitled *Sing in Exultation* is an excellent tool to encourage your heart as you approach the Christmas season. Cruse is an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and author of numerous hymns including several found in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*.

In twenty-five short chapters, Cruse takes us through one stanza from twenty-

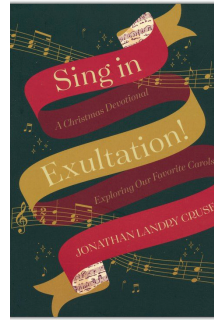
five different familiar carols. Each chapter contains a short devotional explaining the meaning of this stanza, the Scripture passage that inspired the hymn writer, several reflection questions, and a devotional prayer. His reflection questions on the hymn are especially helpful in prompting deeper contemplation of the Christ revealed to us in the Scriptures. For example, there are several questions that compel us to consider the Christ found in the Bible instead of the images of "baby Jesus" so often portrayed in modern culture.

These meditations can be useful for all ages. Adults and teens will enjoy the various short meditations for personal or family devotions. Parents will appreciate using these devotions with their children as they explore the deeper meaning of Christmas and seek to help their children see the true wonder of the Word become flesh. Cruse structures his book by beginning with carols that predict the coming of the Messiah and ends with carols that express the hope of Christ's return. Cruse's meditation on each carol will encourage you as he explores the meaning behind the words that you know so well. You will find that your understanding of carols sung for

a lifetime comes alive as you sing this Christmas season.

In the reflection section at the end of each chapter Cruse gives scriptural references for the reader who wishes to explore the theme of the carol more deeply. The book also includes blank space for personal notes. Cruse includes a QR code for a Spotify playlist of all the hymns that he highlights in the book. This is a helpful feature for anyone who may desire to hear the melody played for them.

While many of the carols that Cruse profiles in this book are centuries old, their timelessness makes them as fresh today as when they were first written, and Cruse helps you to see this more clearly. Cruse



POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Stewardship Advisor: The Committee on Coordination is looking to hire an OPC officer to help educate and encourage OPC members in biblical stewardship. This part-time position will be tasked with expanding our relationship with the Barnabas Foundation, promoting planned giving both digitally and in-person by traveling to presbyteries and local churches, and assisting OPC members and donors with planned gifts. For a copy of the Stewardship Advisor job description, please contact Melisa McGinnis at melisa.mcginis@opc.org.

Pastor: Bethel OPC in Leesburg, Virginia, seeks a pastor to shepherd her congregation and lead the weekly worship of God with praise and thanksgiving. We are a small, close-knit church seeking to glorify God in all we do. Located in a growing area near Washington, D.C., we look forward to meeting the man who will spiritually lead and guide our efforts to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Contact pastoralsearch@bethelpres.com.

Pastor: Church of the Covenant OPC in Hackettstown, New Jersey, is seeking a full-time pastor. We are a mid-sized warm and welcoming community of believers committed to Reformed theology and the gospel of Jesus Christ who are looking for a pastor to faithfully preach and administer sacraments, tenderly and skillfully shepherd the flock, disciple the saints, and develop deep connections. Visit churchofthecovenant.net or email search@cocopc.org for more.

ends his book with a wonderful new carol he penned to tell the Christmas story. It is set to a beautiful melody by Josh Bauder. This book will help you and your family prepare your hearts to praise Jesus this Christmas season.

***What to Say When She's Not Sure She Believes in God Anymore*, by Brianna Reeves and *What to Say When She Feels Like a Failure as a Mom*, by Sara Wallace.** P&R, 2025. Paperback, 40 and 48 pages respectively, \$6.99. Reviewed by OP member Emily VanDixhoorn.

When I see a friend struggling with doubts about her faith or feeling like a failure as a mom, I often hesitate to speak up. Bible knowledge and good intentions alone don't guarantee our words will help. Just look at Job's friends! But should we stay silent? No—we need wisdom about what to say and when. That's exactly what the new P&R Heart Talks series offers.

Two short books—*What to Say When She's Not Sure She Believes in God Anymore* by Brianna Reeves and *What to Say When She Feels Like a Failure as a Mom* by Sara Wallace—offer practical advice on approaching these serious and sensitive issues with compassion and clarity.

Each book starts by helping us understand what a woman might be experiencing. Reeves draws from her own painful doubts about faith, encouraging readers to see doubt more as suffering needing comfort, not sin needing rebuke.

She describes how such doubts can leave a woman feeling disconnected from friends, church, and even herself. Wallace similarly shares how a mom may feel overwhelmed and exhausted—not in need of more tips, but of reminders of who she is in Christ. These opening chapters frame the issues so that we're better prepared to respond with empathy, not quick fixes.

Though short, the books don't offer one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, they guide us in asking thoughtful questions that help us understand what's really going on, whether we're talking to Christians or non-Christians. For example, Reeves suggests asking: "Are you experiencing doubt more as a feeling or as a decision?" or "What aspects of the Christian faith still resonate with you?" She encourages honesty, reminding us that we don't need to be experts. Even saying, "I don't know how to answer that, but let's find out together," can be powerful. Simple things like

sharing laughter or modeling a balanced faith can make a big difference.

Wallace similarly highlights that not all questions are equally helpful. Well-meaning ones like "How often are you reading your Bible?" can come across as judgmental. Instead, she suggests more supportive questions, such as "Would you be interested in coming to Bible study with me? I'd love to sit with you and hold

your baby." The goal is to show care, not criticism.

Both books also provide relevant Scripture to speak into the specific struggle. Reeves includes a section called "Good News for Doubters," applying verses like 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Psalm 13 to show that Jesus welcomes doubters. Wallace highlights gospel truths a struggling mom needs to hear: She is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), deeply known (Ps. 139), and has peace with God forever (Rom. 5:1). These truths equip us to gently, faithfully speak gospel encouragement.

What makes these books especially valuable is that they don't just focus on helping others—they also speak to our own hearts as helpers. They acknowledge the challenges that we face, remind us that we're only part of God's work, and encourage humility and hope as we walk alongside others. Despite their brevity, these books offer a rich, full perspective. The footnotes and appendices point us to further resources as needed.

The two books are also well written, making them a joy to read. Wallace writes, "Whether you are helping a Christian or a non-Christian, it's wise for you to bring a casserole to her before you bring a sermon" (31).

These books are the kind of resources every church, counseling center, and Bible study leader should have on hand. I highly recommend them for anyone seeking to offer meaningful, gospel-centered encouragement to friends in need.

