



Volume 2, Issue 1

# *West Suffolk Epistle*

## *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

*“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”*



January 2015

*Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America*

### *Puritan Prayer*

O Love Beyond Compare, Thou art good when thou givest, when thou takest away, when the sun shines upon me, when night gathers over me. Thou hast loved me before the foundation of the world, and in love didst thou redeem my soul; Thou dost love me still, in spite of my hard heart, ingratitude, distrust. Thy goodness has been with me during another year, leading me through a twisting wilderness, in retreat helping me to advance, when beaten back making sure headway. Thy goodness will be with me in the year ahead; I hoist sail and draw up anchor, With thee as the blessed Pilot of my future as of my past. I bless thee that thou hast veiled my eyes to the waters ahead. If thou hast appointed storms of tribulation, thou wilt be with me in them; If I have to pass through tempests of persecution and temptation, I shall not drown; If I am to die, I shall see thy face the sooner; If a painful end is to be my lot, grant me grace that my faith fail not; If I am to be cast aside from the service I love, I can make no stipulation; Only glorify thyself in me whether in comfort or trial, as a chosen vessel meet always for they use. ~ *The Valley of Vision - Year's End (Page 204)*

### *Never Be Afraid to Entrust an Unknown Future to an All-Knowing God!*

“ I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’ And he replied, ‘Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light, and safer than a known way.’” ~ *The Gate of the Year (Marie Louise Haskins - 1876 - 1957)*

### *In Secret*

According to Jesus, it is what we do in secret that matters most. Jesus is not suggesting that the outward is unimportant—far from it. “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” (James 2:14).

The answer is emphatically no. Still, it is also possible to have outward works but no inner reality. In this instance, religion is a pretense. Six times in the Sermon on the Mount, alluding to three distinct exercises, Jesus employs the term secret:



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## *In Secret - Continued*

- Give “in secret...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:4).
- Pray “in secret...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (v. 6).
- Fast “in secret...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (v. 18).

The Sermon on the Mount is addressing the issue of authenticity. Just how genuine is our relationship with the Lord Jesus? It is altogether possible to practice an outward display of piety—to “talk the talk”—without demonstrating any inner reality of godliness. This is true of every professing Christian, and it is especially true of those engaged in Christian ministry. Authentic Christianity requires an outward and discernible “work of faith” (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). But it also requires genuine godly affections and an inner discipline of the heart.

There is a manner of ministry that is more about self-service than self-sacrifice, self-indulgence than self-discipline, and self-promotion than self-denial. There is also giving that is designed for recognition—plaques on walls intended to be read by generations to come, or press releases informing the world of “generous donations”; prayers in pristine Cranmerlike language of the sixteenth century suggesting depths of personal piety; fasting that is shown via open-necked T-shirts revealing a ribbed torso.

But all these outward demonstrations of piety may be no more than mere hypocrisy. The Greek word translated “hypocrites” (Matthew 6:2, 5) refers to the masks worn by ancient actors as symbols of pretense and show. Thus, give with fanfare; pray with pride; fast with notice. This ministry is inauthentic. It is a sham.

Inauthentic ministry was a charge leveled against Paul. The Corinthians said that there was discrepancy between the way he wrote his letters and the way he was in person: “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account” (2 Corinthians 10:10). It is a serious charge, and in his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul spends almost the entire time defending himself. The critique came from jealousy and therefore bore no legitimacy. But the fact is, the charge can be true—not of Paul, but of us. Leadership calls for genuineness, authenticity and transparency.

True, there’s something of a cliché about the word authentic when applied to Christian ministry (add contemporary, intentional, relevant, and community to that list). If we really need to add the description authentic, we are probably trying too hard and therefore not being authentic at all. Nevertheless, hypocrisy lurks everywhere, not least in Christian ministry, and we ignore it at our peril.

Godliness must be found in the heart if it is to be genuine. The one who prays more in public than in private, or only gives at special events when likely to be thanked for it, or practices spiritual disciplines and lets everyone know just how difficult a spiritual routine he keeps, is more concerned about the outward appearance than a heart-relationship with Jesus.



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## *In Secret - Continued*

Jonathan Edwards observed the pattern of the hypocrite with respect to prayer:

*Perhaps they attend it on Sabbath days, and sometimes on other days. But they have ceased to make it a constant practice daily to retire to worship God alone, and to seek his face in secret places. They sometimes do a little to quiet conscience, and just to keep alive their old hope; because it would be shocking to them, even after all their subtle dealing with their consciences to call themselves converts, and yet totally to live without prayer. Yet the practice of secret prayer they have in a great measure left off.*

There has been a rise in the use of “written prayers” in Presbyterian worship in the last decade. In part, it is a reflection of the desire to elevate worship. Liturgical, written, prepared prayers are certainly preferable to the (otherwise) paucity and emptiness of some extemporary prayers. But written prayers (drawn from The Valley of Vision, for example) may simply mask the emptiness of the heart.

And Thomas Cranmer seemed to understand the danger of wearing a mask of hypocrisy when he included the Collect of Purity in the Book of Common Prayer for the Anglican Church. Cranmer placed it just before the celebration of the Lord’s Supper:

*Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord.*

This is a prayer for all seasons. ~ **Dr. Derek Thomas**

## *Grace for the New Year*

“By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary. I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” (I Corinthians 15:10)

Grace is not only God’s disposition to do good for us when we don’t deserve it. It is an actual power from God that acts and makes good things happen in us and for us.

God’s grace was God’s acting in Paul to make Paul work hard. So when Paul says, “Work out your salvation,” he adds, “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for us his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Grace is power from God to do good things in us and for us.



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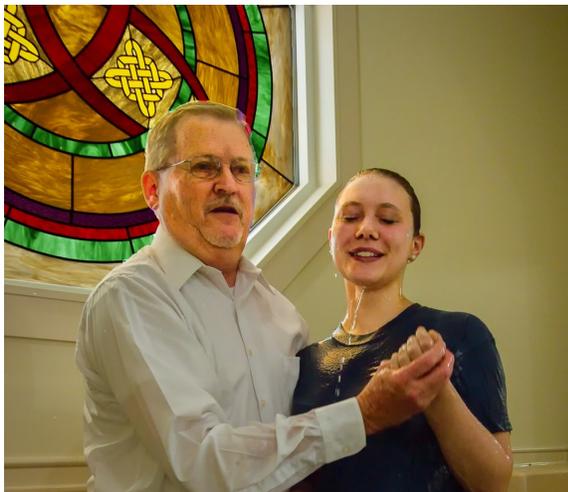
### *Grace for the New Year - Continued*

This grace is past and it is future. It is ever cascading over the infinitesimal waterfall of the present from the inexhaustible river of grace coming to us from the future into the ever-increasing reservoir of grace in the past.

In the next five minutes, you will receive sustaining grace flowing to you from the future, and you will accumulate another five minutes' worth of grace in the reservoir of the past. The proper response to grace you experienced in the past is gratitude, and the proper response to grace promised to you in the future is faith. We are thankful for the past grace of the last year, and we are confident in future grace for the new year. ~ *Dr. John Piper*

### *A Great Day for Celebration*

*January 4, 2015*





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*Newsletter from Pastor Brian and Muriel Russell*



*From our house  
to yours ...*

*Christmas, 2014*

*“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).*

We greet you, our family and friends in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. These greetings come from “the 5th neatest little town in the nation”. Well, that’s what we were voted in February. We’re not sure how this came about, but there you have it! The Fall season has come and gone and we have spent much time over the past few weeks raking up leaves, but it is always beautiful and we love this time of year. We are both so grateful to God for the good health we have enjoyed up to this stage, and for the energy we still have to work around our yard. We have so enjoyed all the fresh produce from our vegetable garden and being able to share it with others. We hope 2014 has been a good year for you too.

Life seems to have continued much the same for us this year, and also for our children. We are thankful that Renelle and Melanie both have good jobs which seem to be very secure. Renelle works industriously for a leading credit card bank in Richmond. Melanie is employed by a large Healthcare organization and is also always busy. Haydn is not so settled, however. When he left San Diego four years ago he was very stressed out as the assistant sales manager of California’s largest Chrysler dealership and was happy to find a job with a small concern only 8 miles from our home, but business is becoming increasingly difficult for small enterprises in our economy, and he realizes the time has come to look for something more permanent, and with better benefits. He is hoping to make a change in the new year. He will turn 50 in March next year, God willing.





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### *Newsletter from Pastor Brian and Muriel Russell*

We are so thankful that after a struggle of more than two and a half years with his eye sight following his bout with shingles, Brian is doing a lot better now. In August he had a small cataract removed from his left eye and his blurred vision has improved. He still suffers a lot from dry eye, but there is no limit to the number of times he can apply lubricating drops each day. As he only has sight in his left eye, there were times when we wondered if he would be able to continue with his writing. Once again, we thank all who prayed so faithfully for his eye. In spite of his sight problems, he was also able to preach and teach numerous times this year, including a weekend Bible Conference, all of which he loved doing, and in June he also conducted a wedding for dear young friends of ours. The groom had come to faith in Christ through an interim pastorate Brian did in Charlottesville, VA. in 2010.



Brian's book on the Second Coming, Christ's Return as King of Kings, finally appeared in bookstores in March. We had been expecting it to be completed before the end of last year, but there were many unexpected delays. His sixth book, Behold My Servant, on the Servant Songs in Isaiah, has now gone through its final editing and is in the line waiting for printing and release. At the moment we are both very involved in his next book (Brian in the writing, and Muriel in the typing), which will probably run into two volumes. It is a devotional verse-by-verse exposition on Revelation. It is now ten years since he retired, and we are both so grateful to the Lord for the opportunity to serve Him still in this and various other ways in our retirement years. In May Brian, along with many of our friends, joined the ranks of the octogenarians. Here is a photo of him with his tiramisu birthday cake (his favorite).

Thank you so much for keeping in touch with us this year. It is wonderful to know that we have been friends for so many years, despite the distance that separates us. We wish you and your loved ones a very happy Christmas as we all once again celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, and ponder the sacrifice He made in leaving heaven's glory to die for our sins on the cross of Calvary. What a blessed hope for those of us who know and love Him! May 2015 be filled with rich blessings on you and your families.

With love from us all,  
*Brian and Muriel*



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## *Choosing Hymns*

The church possesses two books to aid in worship: the Word of God and the hymnal. The Scriptures stand as the perfect and unwavering revelation of God throughout the ages. It is our rule, and the only infallible word on all matters of our faith and practice. The hymnal exists in submission to the authority of Scripture and assists the people of God in singing truth. Its songs are an ever-flowing stream, sung by people responding to God in worship.

Choosing hymns for the local church is a sacred task. Even when the hymnal used is electronic and lacks binding and pages, the practice of Christian singing remains vital. As Colossians 3:16 says,

***“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”***

In this text, Paul teaches the Colossians the importance of singing in the local church. The hymns we sing are not to be chosen clumsily, but with intentionality and with care. Hymns have the ability to teach us, to admonish us, and to provoke our hearts to worship our Savior with thankfulness.

### **CHOOSE HYMNS THAT TEACH**

The hymns of the church ought to be built on, shaped by, and saturated with the Word of God. While the New Testament is silent on many of the specifics of corporate worship, Scripture is clear that the Word of Christ must be central. When the hymns we sing are aligned with the Word of God, our souls are nourished by its truth. Singing is a unique way to “let the word of Christ dwell richly” in us. One reason our songs should be closely tied to the Word of God is their didactic effects. Singing for the Christian is formative and responsive, and therefore must be informed by Scripture. We learn what we sing.

Let us think of singing as a form of exposition that uses poetry to teach the Word of God. When Isaac Watts published *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, his intention was not to sing Scripture line by line, but to create poetic and emotive renditions of Scripture that allow a church to sing the truths of Scripture. Songs are sermons. They don’t work like homiletical exegesis, but they articulate, exegete, and pronounce biblical truths. Our hymns teach and shape the way people view God, man, Christ, and how we are to live in light of the gospel.

One way to ensure our singing is biblical is to comb through our songs to see if we cover the breadth of themes presented throughout the canon of Scripture. Our songs should be held up to the light of God’s Word to ensure we are singing the glories of its truth.



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### *Choosing Hymns - Continued*

#### **CHOOSE HYMNS THAT ADMONISH**

The songs we sing as a church are meant to teach and admonish. When we gather as the church on the Lord's Day, we need to be admonished in various ways. Throughout the week, other things call for our praise, attention, and affection. Singing hymns of God's character reminds us of His greatness. Singing hymns of our sin reminds us of the role of confession. By singing hymns of the atonement, we remind one another of the efficacy of the work of Jesus. Hymns of consecration remind us of the dependence of Christians upon the steadfast grace of God.

We sing to admonish the weak and the weary that their salvation is in God. We sing to admonish the doubting to believe and be renewed. We sing to admonish the suffering that they have a hope that is unwavering.

Our songs ought to exhort and admonish. Our songs ought to encourage and remind. In this practice of song, God's people will be pointed to the Scriptures, reminded of truth, and rooted in the gospel of Christ.

#### **CHOOSE HYMNS THAT PROVOKE THANKFUL HEARTS**

We should choose hymns that provoke thankful hearts. When we sing robust theological truth, our hearts should erupt with praise. The aim of singing hymns is engaging both the head and the heart. The reason we read, study, and meditate on the Scriptures is not primarily so that we might amass knowledge, but so that our knowledge would lead to worship. The chief end of theology is doxology.

In choosing hymns for corporate worship, we should choose songs that make our hearts sing. From the content of the lyrics to the movement of the melody, we want beauty and transcendence to come together and serve the people of God. In our pursuit of theological precision, let us not neglect the pursuit of heartfelt response.

A church's hymns are not a mere preamble to the sermon. Singing is not obligatory filler time to warm up a congregation. Singing is a holy practice. We sing because God has commanded it, and our songs should fill our hearts with thankfulness and delight in our great God. ~ *Matt Boswell - Pastor of Ministries and Worship - Providence Church - Frisco, Texas*



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## *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 Effectual Calling - Chapter 10*

1. In God's appointed and acceptable time, he is pleased to call effectually, by his Word and Spirit, those he has predestined to life. He calls them out of their natural state of sin and death to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. He enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God. He takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. He renews their wills and by his almighty power turns them to good and effectually draws them to Jesus Christ. Yet he does all this in such a way that they come completely freely, since they are made willing by his grace.
2. This effectual call flows from God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in those called. Neither does the call arise from any power or action on their part; they are totally passive in it. They are dead in sins and trespasses until they are made alive and renewed by the Holy Spirit. By this they are enabled to answer this call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it. This response is enabled by a power that is no less than that which raised Christ from the dead.
3. Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how he pleases. The same is true of every elect person who is incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.
4. Those who are not elected will not and cannot truly come to Christ and therefore cannot be saved, because they are not effectually drawn by the Father. They may even be called by the ministry of the Word and may receive some ordinary working of the Spirit without being saved. Much less can any be saved who do not receive the Christian religion, no matter how diligently they live their lives according to the light of nature and the teachings of the religion they profess.

## *What is The Emerging Church?*

The emerging church is an incredibly diverse movement that sprung up out of evangelical Christianity sometime in the 1990's. Since it has had no confession of faith, no formally recognized leaders, no denominational structure, and no official institutions, it is difficult to speak accurately about the emerging church as a whole. That said, here are some traits that characterize many within the emerging church movement. Participants in the emerging church conversation tend to:

- Think that the church must seriously adapt its beliefs and practices if it is to be relevant to our post modern generation.
- Want to raise questions instead of answering them.
- Favor dialogue over preaching.
- Favor stories over systematic theology.
- Pit community against authority and prefer the former.

*(Mark E. Dever/Senior pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.)*



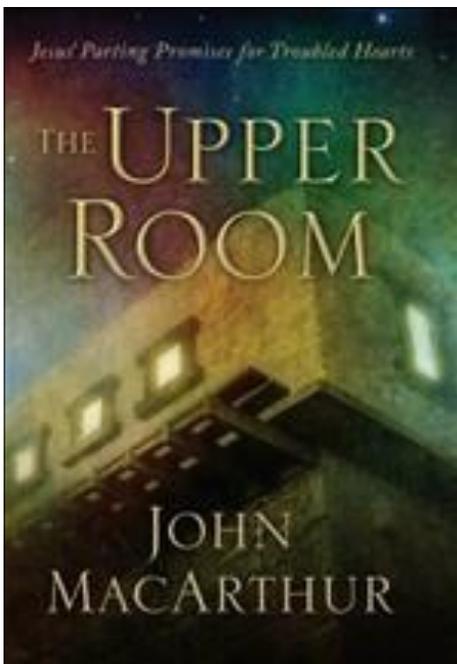
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## *Book Review*

### *The Upper Room: Jesus' Parting Promises for Troubled Hearts*

*Dr. John MacArthur*



In a borrowed or rented banqueting room atop some shop or large family dwelling in Jerusalem, the drama unfolded. The events and teaching recorded in John 13-16, commonly known as the Upper Room Discourse, reveal some of the most poignant and powerful promises for believers in all of Scripture.

Jesus and His disciples were standing on the precipice of the darkest night in the history of the world. The Lord of glory was about to be betrayed and murdered. The disciples would be scattered, and the boldest of them would deny even knowing Him.

The Lord knew full well that He Himself would soon undergo an unimaginable deluge of woe. He would be spit on and mocked by evil men. He would bear the sins of the world. He would be cursed with the wrath of God for others' sins. He would feel as if His Father had utterly abandoned Him. Any other man in that situation would have been in such a state of uncontrollable agitation that He would never have been able to focus His attention on the needs of others—but Jesus was different. He wanted His followers to know the peace of the One who has overcome the world.

During those final hours before Jesus' betrayal, He gave His disciples—and consequently, all believers throughout history—His parting promises, His last will and testament. It is the inheritance of every believer in Christ.

In *The Upper Room*, Pastor John MacArthur takes us back to that night and the glorious hope we have in Christ. This is vintage MacArthur—an exposition of the text that resonates with devotion to the Lord and love for God's people, calling us to know and to love the One who loved us to the end.



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### *Birthday and Anniversary Corner - January 2015*

*Marcy Skora - 1/9*  
*Stephen Hurst - 1/26*

*None to Report*

## *Being Christ to your Neighbor*

The book of Acts records a curious phenomenon: “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... . Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (8:1, 4, NIV).

It is clear that all of the believers, save the apostolic leaders, were scattered. Those who were scattered (the whole church) went about preaching the Word.

Christians must participate in the ministry of the church, and every Christian must endeavor “to be Christ to his neighbor.” To be Christ to your neighbor is not to be your neighbor’s lord and savior. Rather, it is to be Christ’s representative to your neighbor. We are to represent the mercy and ministry of Jesus to all who are around us.

We do not need volunteers driven by guilty manipulation or looking for merits to be redeemed. Christ has taken our guilt and supplied all the merit we need. We need volunteers because in the least of His brothers, Jesus is hungry, Jesus is thirsty, Jesus is homeless, Jesus is sick, and Jesus is imprisoned. We need volunteers who love Jesus in the afflictions of His least brethren. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*

### *Disclaimer*

The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or it’s leadership.



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