

Pres Life

MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF QUEENSLAND



God is Good, but When?

Sharing the life of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland as we glorify God and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our communities, nation and the world.

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Note from the Editor

Dear Readers and Contributors,

Wishing you all a blessed Christmas and Happy New Year. Now that the borders are open I hope that many of you will be able to spend time with family, and friends at this time.

It is with sadness, I share with you the news that I will be finishing up as Editor of Pres Life, and with the Presbyterian Church of Queensland at the end of 2020. I would like to thank you all for your support, feedback and contributions over the years I've been Editor. It has been very much appreciated! At this stage, I do not know who the new Editor will be, but am sure you will be informed at some point in 2021.

I don't know what 2021 will hold for me, but pray it will be something wonderful, and God-honouring. I pray the same for you all.

God bless

Michelle Martin

Editor

Time with God

Read the entire Bible in 2020



Week 43

- Ezekiel 1-3; John 1
- Ezek. 4-6; Psalm 82; John 2
- Ezek. 7-9; John 3
- Ezek. 10-12; Psalm 83; John 4
- Ezek. 13-15; Psalm 136; John 5

Week 44

- Ezek. 16-18; John 6
- Ezek. 19-21; Psalm 84; John 7
- Ezek. 22-24; Psalm 134; John 8
- Ezek. 25-27; Psalm 85; John 9
- Ezek. 28-30; John 10

Week 45

- Ezek. 31-33; John 11
- Ezek. 34-36; Psalm 86; John 12
- Ezek. 37-39; Psalm 87; John 13
- Ezek. 40-42; John 14
- Ezek. 43-45; Psalm 135; John 15

Week 46

- Ezek. 46-48; John 16
- Daniel 1-3; Psalm 88; John 17
- Daniel 4-6; John 18
- Daniel 7-9; Psalm 91; John 19
- Daniel 10-12; John 20

Week 47

- Ezra 1-2; John 21
- Ezra 3-4; Psalm 92; 1 John 1
- Haggai; Zechariah 1; Psalm 138; 1 John 2
- Zech. 2-5; Psalm 93; 1 John 3
- Zech. 6-8; 1 John 4

Week 48

- Zech. 9-11; 1 John 5
- Zech. 12-14; Psalm 94; 2 John
- Ezra 5-6; Psalm 95; 3 John
- Esther 1-3; Psalm 139; Revelation 1
- Esther 4-6; Revelation 2

Week 49

- Esther 7-10; Revelation 3
- Ezra 7-10; Psalm 97; Revelation 4
- Nehemiah 1-3; Revelation 5
- Neh. 4-6; Psalm 98; Revelation 6
- Neh. 7-9; Psalm 140; Revelation 7

Week 50

- Neh. 10--13; Revelation 8
- Malachi; Psalm 2; Revelation 9
- Job 1-3; Psalm 29; Revelation 10
- Job 4-7; Psalm 99; Revelation 11
- Job 8-11; Revelation 12

Week 51

- Job 12-14; Psalm 100; Revelation 13
- Job 15-17; Revelation 14
- Job 18-20; Psalm 141; Revelation 15
- Job 21-23; Psalm 101; Revelation 16
- Job 24-27; Revelation 17

Week 52

- Job 28-30; Revelation 18
- Job 31-33; Psalm 102; Revelation 19
- Job 34-36; Revelation 20
- Job 37-39; Psalm 103; Revelation 21
- Job 40-42; Psalm 150; Revelation 22



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Domestic Abuse and Divorce

by The GiST Team

The recent Queensland State Assembly adopted a paper prepared by the Gospel in Society Today (GiST) Team on the question of whether a biblical case can be made for considering domestic abuse (DA), grounds for divorce. The question arose at the 2019 Assembly, which asked GiST to consider the question, and respond with a paper for the 2020 Assembly.

Consider Paige's story.¹ "I was still a teenager when the abuse started in my relationship. It started with a push against the wall... I wrote it off as 'heated emotions'. Later, that push turned into more pushing, grabbing, manoeuvring, and eventually into punching. Whenever I prepared to leave, he would remind me that Christians are called to forgive, and that I should forgive him and stay together".

Or the story of Belinda: "My husband was abusive from day one. I was shocked on our honeymoon to discover his explosive temper. Once, when I was heavily pregnant, he lost his temper, and knocked me to the ground in our hallway, and kicked me. He was a church minister. When I went to other church leaders for help, I was told I had to forgive, and endure my husband's abuse because I had married him, for better or worse".

The sad truth is, some abusers in marriage use the Christian faith of their spouse to manipulate them to conceal the abuse, and remain in this dangerous situation, using the Bible to justify their position. So, the question, "Is domestic abuse grounds for divorce?", is an important one.

There are three big 'pillars' that undergird the paper adopted by the Assembly.

¹ Stories taken from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-18/shattering-silence-surviving-domestic-violence-in-church/8788902?nw=0>

1. God's design for marriage is good

Christian marriage is meant to point to the love of Christ for his church: "*Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church*" Ephesians 5:25. In his love for his church, Christ shows us that marital love should be self-sacrificing (Eph. 5:25), oriented towards the good of the beloved (Eph. 5:26-27), practically caring for the beloved as it cares for itself (Eph. 5:28-29). This love is also unbreakable (Romans 8:35-39) and is received by the church not in servility or subservience, but in free, willing, and joyful reception (Eph. 5:24,33).

2. Domestic abuse is the opposite of God's design for marriage, and is not permissible under any circumstances

In contrast to Christ's love for his church, a domestic abuser's (so called) 'love', sacrifices the *other* for his/her own purposes, is oriented first and foremost to his/her own desires, not the good of the spouse, and loves and practically cares for him/herself only, to the great cost of the spouse. As such it is an 'anti-picture' of marriage, a repudiation of what Christian marriage is intended to be.

There is therefore no justification under any circumstances for any form of domestic abuse. Church leadership must see it for the evil it is, and treat all cases with utmost seriousness. Perpetrators should be held to account. It should also be noted that the Bible disqualifies abusive or violent men from positions of church leadership (1 Timothy 3:1-4).

Victims must also be quickly protected and supported within churches, while also drawing upon professional help, and obeying police and legal processes (Rom. 13:4). Separation, sometimes even long-term or permanent, may be necessary for the protection of abuse victims, and should

not be delayed. Neither should separation of this kind be considered desertion of a marriage (c.f. 1 Corinthians 7:11). No woman or man should feel obligated to remain in a household, when they or their children are in danger. The primary consideration of ministers, elders and sessions on becoming aware of DA must be the protection of the victim.

3. Divorce, while permissible in certain circumstances, is also the opposite of God's design for marriage

As pointed out earlier Christ's love for his church is unbreakable, and this too is something Christian marriages are meant to reflect. When things become difficult Christ does not walk away from his bride, and neither should Christians walk away from their spouses.

Hence Jesus' words in answer to the Pharisees: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate". Matthew 19:6. The man is to "hold fast to his wife" (Genesis 2:24), and not easily or readily put her away (divorce her). The overwhelming emphasis in Scripture is that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, exclusive union, to be honoured, protected and nurtured according to God's good design.

However, because of our fallen human condition, the Bible recognises that even while we are commanded to uphold marriage, divorce is a real possibility in certain circumstances due to the destructive power of sin.

Jesus speaks about sexual immorality (porneia) as a ground for divorce (Matthew 19, Mark 10), while the apostle Paul discusses divorce further in 1 Corinthians 7, particularly in verse 15, in which he addresses the situation of a Christian deserted by his/her unbelieving spouse. In such cases, Paul says, the Christian "is not bound", which is taken by many, including the framers of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), to mean that divorce in such cases is permissible.

It is worth noting that the WCF, unlike traditional Roman Catholic or even Anglican teaching, assumes that marriages are able to be dissolved for legitimate biblical reasons (as outlined above), and that the innocent parties (only) in such divorces are free to remarry without any qualification or hesitation on the part of the WCF.

But is domestic abuse grounds for divorce?

The legal answer to this question in Australia is, of course, yes. But does *God* consider domestic abuse grounds for divorce?

The paper presented to the Assembly considered in detail the biblical passages and positions put forward by various interpreters, taking into account both current and historical perspectives. We found that in discussing these matters with others, and utilising various arguments that exist in relation to DA and divorce, it is important to recognise that some are considerably better than others. We encourage all who are considering this area, and particularly those who are advising others, to consider Scripture, and the various arguments outlined in the paper carefully and prayerfully. Here though it seems best simply to quote from the conclusion to the paper:

"In relation to DA and divorce... arguments for and against DA as grounds for divorce are complex, and opinions of sincere, Bible-believing, Reformed Christians vary, both historically and today. Having said that, it seems clear to us that in particular circumstances, after having exhausted other avenues, a minister or session who counsels divorce in a case of DA may be considered to be within the bounds of our biblical and confessional standards.

"Further... we affirm that in situations where divorce is counselled by a minister/session in light of DA, and the absence of other genuine alternatives, that the possibility of remarriage for the innocent party should be regarded as a valid option open to them as faithful Christians."

Finally, the conclusion of the paper stressed that "...given the complex and varied nature of particular instances of DA, in pastoral situations significant weight should be given to the role of ministers, elders and sessions as they seek to protect, advise, and assist victims in their specific pastoral circumstances" and that "each situation must be carefully considered on its own merits, according to sound biblical and theological reasoning".

The paper adopted by the Assembly is an attempt to provide ministers and elders with such sound reasoning, as they seek to 'pay careful attention to the flock' under their care (Acts 20:28), especially when one of their flock is being hounded by a wolf.

The GiST paper on DA and divorce will be forwarded to Sessions in the coming months for their use. For others interested in reading it, copies can be obtained from sessions or by contacting GiST directly (gist.org.au/contact). Practical resources for seeking help in DA situations will be released by PCQ in coming months.



God is Good, but When?

Ben Swift, author of the book *Beyond the Fish Sticker* and escapethebox.blog

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We all have memories that stick with us, somehow gluing themselves to our psyches, rearing their heads from time to time. I recall a memory of a pastor who, whenever entering a chapel service full of children would shout, “God is good!” upon which the children replied, “all the time!”

Years later, and with a few more grey whiskers to go with them, I have come to see this seemingly simple catch phrase as one of deep importance. Embedded in this little saying is a wealth of understanding well worth embracing, something to help make sense of things in a world of perceived senselessness.

But before getting too excited, let’s think about what it means to declare God as being good.

God is good because it was a sunny day today, and I needed to wash my car—Hmm...

God is so good. I just received my test results indicating I’m disease free.

The question begs asking. Is God good because things are going well for us, or is God good despite the way life appears to us in the changing seasons of our lives? Surely, the answers we give will be heavily shaped by the worldview we hold, and the lens through which we view both God and ourselves.

Martin Luther in his *Theology of the Cross* argued that God is good despite the circumstances we find ourselves in throughout our lives. God’s goodness does not depend on our feelings, and certainly not on our human wisdom and reasoning. Rather God’s goodness is bound to a theology of faith, in that he is at work in spite of human understanding and observation.

This is why we can say with confidence that God is good all the time.

In fact, Luther went so far as to suggest that the true reality of God is hidden in the sense that it can’t be seen or grasped through human reason, but can only be understood through faith.

The consequence of this way of thinking is to seek our understanding of God in what He revealed to us in a most clear way, in the person and life of Christ; God coming to us as a man. There, as we focus on the reality of God as seen in His Son, we find God’s wisdom and human wisdom forever in contradiction, culminating at the cross.

For it is written, *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”* 1 Corinthians 1:18-19.

Here we see Paul describing the paradoxical way in which God turns the world’s wisdom on its head. Here, in the incarnation of Christ, and at the cross where he achieved salvation for all who come to faith in him, we see God’s wisdom rise high above the wisdom of the world in all its distorted forms.

In Christ, God reveals His power in His weakness. He comes to us in unexpected ways. The Creator of the universe, nestled in an animal’s feeding trough. The all-powerful God obedient to death, cursed and crucified on a Roman cross. Our God knows what it is to suffer, He knows all about humiliation.

When we consider the wisdom of God as revealed in Christ, we find that it’s in our suffering that God works for good. This is where the light of His grace shines through the cracks of our broken lives, encouraging us to rely on His strength, calling us to die to ourselves, so that we may live in Him.

And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20.

It’s also in Christ that God reveals why He is truly good. Here we find a God who comes to us. In the brutality of nature, and the seemingly infinite prosperity of the wicked, it helps us to grasp the truth about God’s goodness. In becoming truly human, Christ entered the muck of humanity and life. God remains good and sovereign despite our perceptions, feelings and situations. His love, grace and forgiveness can be seen in his suffering, bringing hope to those who trust in him.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31.

Simple sayings can certainly hold a wealth of deep truths. Indeed we would all do well to embrace them, remember them, and remind ourselves of them in whatever situation we find ourselves.

God is good. All the time!



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EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE (ETHIOPIA) A gift of \$10 will assist the Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia in the education of children from disadvantaged communities.

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TRAINING for Vijai Tagore (INDIA) A gift of \$25 will assist in training Vijai Tagore, a theological lecturer from India, as he studies for his PhD at Christ College from 2019 onwards.

APWM ABORIGINAL MINISTRY (AUSTRALIA) A gift of \$30 will assist in supporting Rick and Kayleen Manton in training and supporting Aboriginal ministry workers in Australia.

PRISON MINISTRY (MALAWI) A gift of \$30 will purchase much-needed blankets and other living essentials for prisoners in Malawi who live in very difficult conditions.

BIBLE TRANSLATION (TIMOR LESTE) A gift of \$40 will assist in the ongoing translation of the Bible into Tetun, the national language of Timor Leste.

TRAINING FOR REFUGEE PASTORS (ETHIOPIA) A gift of \$50 will assist in providing a short training program for South Sudanese pastors in a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

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Hope of a New Beginning

Alvin and Narelle Chai write from Mount Magnet, Western Australia

“There is *truth*, but God wouldn’t want us to know it, because us humans are so screwed up!”—this was expressed by a local fellow during one of Alvin’s street conversations. Mr R has been living by himself in Mount Magnet since the 1980s. Unemployed and constantly finding himself struggling with alcohol addiction, Mr R conveys one general outlook on life which is held by the majority of the people in our remote town—“We are almost like the forgotten people—isolated—misconceived—left behind”. For Mr R, and perhaps, many others, the giving up of life by resorting to alcohol and substance abuse, sadly demonstrates a dire gospel urgency. God wants His people to know, and discover this *truth*!

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
Ephesians 1:7-10.

By God’s grace, we were able to cross the Victoria\Western Australia border in July to begin the work of Presbyterian Inland Mission (PIM), as well as re-establishing the Mount Magnet Presbyterian Church. We have been warmly received by the community, and have promptly settled into remote living within a short, six-week period. Narelle was even admitted to the local ‘GeoPark’ committee recently, purposed to improve our town’s parks and landscaping! This will provide us with ample opportunity as we seek to build bridges with the Indigenous elders and town residents.

Our first Sunday worship was launched in the first week of August. Ten adults and five children attended. The number of attendees has slightly grown ever since, with occasional visits from travelers and grey nomads. Two people are currently undergoing the church’s first communicant membership course, with two more recently signing up for the next course. The weekly bible study, and monthly prayer meeting are gaining great momentum, also averaging between eight to twelve people each session. In less than two months, God has raised up a small community willing to engage in Christian fellowship. A very encouraging start!

Praise God for a well-attended service during Alvin’s commissioning on 13 September. It was pleasing to witness the strong partnership between our small rural church, and the wider network of the Presbytery of Western Australia (PWA), Australian Presbyterian World Mission (APWM) and PIM. Many experienced a fresh sense of belonging, and hope of a new beginning. Our prayer is that God will continue to raise up faithful disciples who will journey with us in proclaiming the truth about God—the mystery of salvation revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.



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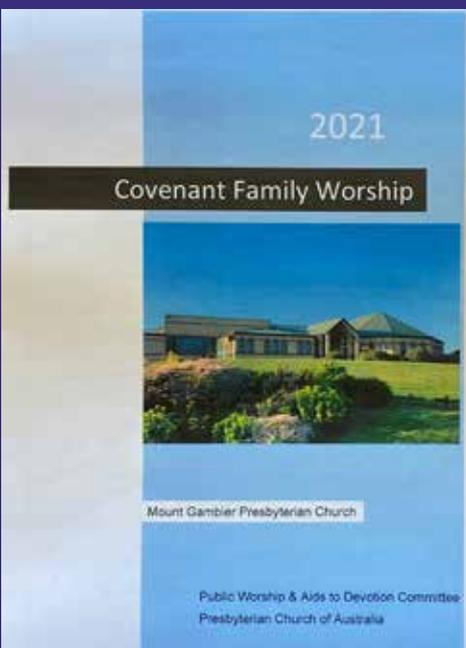


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