As President of Calvin Theological Seminary, I have the joy of participating in a number of ordination and installation services for pastors. These services are like a wedding where a pastor and congregation meet and express commitment to one another before God. The words and vows said during this time will ‘live’ beyond the moment.

During the course of the ordination or installation, the pastor or candidate is asked to stand “in order that all God’s people assembled here may witness that you, in the strength of the Lord, accept the responsibilities of this office.”

The questions are asked and answered and one of those key questions is “Do you believe the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life?”

A positive response to that question is to signify not only acceptance of a perspective on the Old Testament, it is also to identify a pathway for faithful ministry. Faithful ministry means we engage the Old Testament.

As we give witness to Jesus as Lord and Savior, we need to remember that Jesus is more fully understood from and within the broader story of a history of creation, fall, redemption that culminates in and fulfills what is promised by God through Christ. We learn about that broader story with the lens of the Old and New Testament.

Whether it is history or wisdom literature or poetry or prophecy or law or apocalyptic literature, we learn about faith and life from the New and the Old Testament.

This issue of the FORUM is focused on the Old Testament. The Reformed tradition sees that the Old Testament is the Word of God and should frame and function in our faith and life. How should it frame and function in our faith and life? The articles contained in this issue invite you into the conversation.

A key person in this conversation for nearly twenty-five years at Calvin Theological Seminary has been Professor Carl Bosma. Since 1990, Professor Bosma has been a consistent voice on the value of the Old Testament for today.

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Professor Bosma is retiring this summer from full-time teaching ministry at Calvin Seminary, but his witness and teaching will continue in the lives and hearts of those whom he has taught. If you would like to send a more personal word of thanks and appreciation, please do so at cbosma@calvinseminary.edu

Thanks for reading and thank you for your engagement with the Old Testament!
Reading the Bible Backwards: From the Ending to its Beginning and Back Again

Children love to have Curious George or another favorite book read to them time and again, for the old, old story is unfailingly new. Woe to any reader who omits a sentence or perhaps, the child’s favorite word.

Some children never outgrow their love for a favorite novel. You read it time and again because its familiarity never fails to hold while previously unseen twists and forceful phrasing take you to the well-known, but now slightly different ending. Every reading is fresh: you have not seen all there is for the eye to see, nor is this reading moment the same as your last. And when you get to the end of the story, it’s the same but richer.

Even though reading the entire Bible like a novel would be an arduous exercise, I’m going to suggest that when you read the Bible, Old or New Testaments, you do so from the point of view of its ending. I know that’s not the way to read any kind of literature for the first time. But, if you are going to study a book you have read several times, it is a helpful way to understand what it’s all about. Do this for one simple reason: the ending of a story corresponds in some way to its beginning—it brings some resolution to the problem described at the outset. Reading any chapter of a novel, with the end and beginning in mind, gives you the “bookends” to help you keep the storyline straight. No matter where you are in the book, you are where the action is taking you.

The end and the beginning of the Bible

Scripture ends as follows: all nations, tribes and peoples who are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb enter into the presence of God in the New Jerusalem; all the unclean remain outside. This ending described in Revelation 21-22 corresponds to the opening chapters of Genesis where God created all creatures and especially humanity in his presence. Humanity defiled God’s presence in the Garden and God removed them from his presence; humanity now wanders restlessly east of Eden. This is the “problem” described in the beginning. In between this beginning and ending the Bible narrates what God does among his human creatures to bring them back into his presence, and what humanity does in response to God’s acts. That’s the whole story—the plot with twists and turns and, well—you already know the very satisfying ending to the human problem.

Moving from the end to the beginning: the “problem”

The temple imagery at the ending—of the One who is seated on the throne, the Holy City, the cleansed who enter and the unclean who remain outside, the presence of God, the emphasis on wholeness and
purity—helps us see that the opening chapters of Scripture also employ temple imagery.

The beginning tells us God’s creation is like a temple, a sanctuary in which all creatures receive their proper place and vocation in God’s presence. It is the nature of a temple to be clean and undefiled, that obedience to the deity’s instructions characterize life in temple space, that priests maintain the cleanliness of the temple, and that all activities therein are performed according to prescribed instructions. After describing this good beginning in Genesis 1-2, the biblical narrative takes a terrible twist: the priests refuse the divinely given instruction (Gen. 2:15); they prefer a fresh “liturgy.” Such defilement of temple space has only one consequence: God casts the priests from his presence.

But, priestly humanity needs God’s presence like a tree needs water—outside of that presence humanity is dead (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). This is the narrative problem—the conflict which the biblical narrative develops in stunning ways from beginning to end: we learn things about ourselves, we’re the exiled priests, and we learn about God, who like the Aslan of Narnia fame is good but not safe (Ex. 19:12-13; 20:19; Heb. 12:29).

Remarkably the problem is solved rather quickly; the exiled priests arrive in God’s presence like a tree needs water—outside of that presence humanity is dead (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). This is the narrative problem—the conflict which the biblical narrative develops in stunning ways from beginning to end: we learn things about ourselves, we’re the exiled priests, and we learn about God, who like the Aslan of Narnia fame is good but not safe (Ex. 19:12-13; 20:19; Heb. 12:29).

But, if the problem of exile from God’s presence is solved by God’s tabernacling presence in Exodus, why do we have 64 more books to read? The sad answer is that we and our ancestors in the faith are responsible for the many twists in the story, including in the NT.

You might think that people who had wandered outside of God’s presence would earnestly desire his presence. They do, but on their own terms as the Babel story shows. Abraham and Sarah’s descendants are no better than the nations at Babel or Adam and Eve in the Garden. When Moses takes too long to bring the divine instructions, Aaron and Israel build a god to show them the way to the land of promise. God had solved their problem and they were now enjoying God’s presence. They had only to wait for instructions for life in that presence. You might think they would be patient especially after all these years of God’s care on the way to Sinai. You would be wrong.

Sinai presents us with another twist in the story. From this point to the end of the books of the Kings we read the tragic history of Israel fighting off the presence of God for the sake of the “tabernacling” of other gods. It seems that after every good thing God does to keep his people in his presence, they find ways to defile it, especially after they enter the Promised Land. Read through the book of Judges without stopping, weep and decide on the character of God’s people. Or through Kings, and behold the leadership’s folly, such folly that God decided to cast his people out of his presence (2 Kings 23:27; 24:3, 20). And so Israel joins the rest of Adam and Eve’s descendants who are still wandering aimlessly East of Eden, there to lament their bitter end (Ps. 137; Lamentations 1-5). The prophets had warned them, but they did not listen (2 Kings 17:13-14, 23; Isa. 1).

Some return to the land to rebuild the temple, but God’s presence does not fill Ezra and Nehemiah’s temple. The exiles in Egypt, Babylon, and those who have returned can only wait for the problem of exile from God’s presence to be solved again by God.

The good news of Sinai and Solomon’s temple is again proclaimed by Matthew: Mary’s son is Immanuel, God with us; he will be “with you until the end of the age” (Matt. 1:18-24; he will be “with you until the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). John declared Jesus as one who tabernacles with us (1:14). Christ himself spoke of building a new temple (John 2:20). But there are more twists and turns. Christ’s own people...
did not understand he was referring to his body. Like God’s people of old, they defiled the tabernacled Son of God by humbling him into the grave. Paul, when addressing the Corinthians’ sexual immorality, reminds them of that good news—“Don’t you know you are the temple of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6: 18-20) Both Jew and Gentile find ways to defile the good news of God’s presence. For that reason, Paul urges God’s people to “perfect their holiness out of fear and reverence for God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

**Good news in the End**

From the beginning, the Bible is clear—all our building of temples and churches end in ruins. But those ruins are precious to God (1 Peter 2:4-5). The end of Scripture is even clearer—when all opposition to the good news has been destroyed (Rev. 21:3-4), and twists and turns in the plot will no longer be possible, those cleansed in the blood of the Lamb will enter God’s presence, to forever praise him who is the Beginning and the End. The End of Scripture is entirely satisfying, time and again.

Christ in the Old Testament

For various reasons, believers may occasionally be tempted to think that the Old Testament has little or nothing to say to the Christian today. Why bother dealing with all the obscure sacrificial, architectural, geographical, and genealogical details the Old Testament presents to us? It’s hard enough to comprehend and appreciate another culture in our modern world. When we encounter one that’s separated from us by thousands of years, the comprehension problem is only magnified. So, understanding the Old Testament can be difficult. And when we consider that we don’t hear the name “Jesus” until we get to the New Testament, we might conclude that the difficulty of dealing with the Old Testament is not worth our effort. But that would be a big mistake.

The Bible is not just divine revelation—it is certainly that—but more precisely, it is divine redemptive revelation. The Bible is a revelation of God’s gracious, redemptive plan for fallen humanity that culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The entire Old Testament informs, foreshadows, and exemplifies the work of Christ, and the entire New Testament explains that work and its implications for its beneficiaries. We can usually recognize the Christ-focus of the New Testament. It’s the Christ-focus of the Old Testament that often eludes us. But we have the words of Jesus himself encouraging us to recognize that these Scriptures, too, are talking about him.

Once when Jewish leaders were giving Jesus a hard time, he responded by saying: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39). We should note that “the Scriptures” to which Jesus was referring at that time consisted of our Old Testament. So Jesus was challenging the Jewish leaders to recognize that the Old Testament Scriptures were testifying about him. How many of us might be worthy of a similar challenge?

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples returning from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were discussing the confusing crucifixion of the supposed Messiah and his reported resurrection from...
the dead. Jesus then made everything clear to them. Luke tells us, “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27, emphasis added). Once again, it is worth noting that Jesus is explaining how the Old Testament is talking about him.

If Jesus himself considered it worth taking the time to explain how the Old Testament testifies about him, then surely believers should want to explore how this is so. Also, the apostle Paul tells us, “Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). Consider the logic: if the understanding and focus of the Old Testament are found in Christ and believers are being conformed to the image of Christ, then it is logically inescapable that the Old Testament has continuing relevance for every believer. We don’t have the luxury of space here to investigate the implications of this in great detail. For now, however, we can skip through the major sections of the Old Testament to see in broad strokes how they find their ultimate focus in our Lord.

Some Old Testament books describe Israel’s history. These books include, for example, Joshua, 2 Kings, and Ezra. In such books we see God interacting with a specific people in order to demonstrate the salvation he would bring about through Christ. We read that Israel was chosen by God, was delivered from bondage into fellowship with God, received his discipline, and was restored to the place of fellowship with him. If we substitute “the church” for “Israel” in the previous sentence, we recognize the truth of these historical moments for the New Covenant community as well. God has used Israel to act out or demonstrate the contours of his redemptive plan in Jesus Christ. After a brief recounting of the high points in Israel’s history, the apostle Paul concludes, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11, emphasis added). In other words, what happened to Israel in the pages of the Old Testament represents to us, perhaps in ways we are unaccustomed to seeing, what God would be doing redemptively through Jesus Christ. This perspective was not lost on our theological forebears. T.H.L. Parker notes that for John Calvin, “the history of the Jews was not only a preparation for the coming of Christ; it was also a deliberate pre-enactment of him and his work” (Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986 [74–75]). The history of Israel then, awakens us to the larger redemptive history that centers on Jesus Christ.

Some Old Testament books outline Israel’s laws. These books include, for example, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Leviticus. In such books we might suppose we have encountered a formidable roadblock. How could these countless laws, statutes, commandments, ordinances, regulations, and prohibitions have anything to do with Christ? But such a question presumes a purpose for the law it never had. Jesus re-interpreted the law to make its original intent plain. The Law, as Jesus describes it, was not intended to be a fence to keep out life, but rather a fence to keep out death. It was not intended to be an enemy of life, but rather a description of life. The law is actually a gracious provision by the Creator to guide his creatures into the fullest possible human experience in fellowship with him and with one another. Jesus would make this positive goal of the law visible and possible for us. If the law were bad, Jesus would have eliminated it. But he says instead, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

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...
in creation. By doing so, we realize the potential for much greater fulfillment in life than we would have otherwise. What this looks like practically is seen in Christ who “has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Becoming wise then is nothing else and nothing less than becoming like Christ. When we let our thinking and behavior be transformed by Christ’s Spirit, we achieve the wisdom God desires for us because we become like his Son.

Some Old Testament books present us with Israelite poetry. Chief among these books is the book of Psalms. In this kind of literature we encounter believers laying bare their inmost thoughts to God. That’s because the poetic literature emanates from an intimate relationship between the believer and the only One who is there in every trial and every triumph. He is the source of life whether the believer’s life is flickering or flaring. Even the most anguished laments are not expressed into the void, but rather are directed toward the God in relationship with whom, lies the only hope. The poetic literature presumes, nurtures, and celebrates this relationship with God. And who is the one who secures our relationship with God forever? Nothing in all creation, writes the apostle Paul, “is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). It is impossible to talk about relationship with God apart from the one who enables, guarantees, and strengthens that relationship.

Some Old Testament books contain prophecy. These books include, for example, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk. In such books, the judgment and salvation of Christ are foretold “at many times and in various ways” (Hebrews 1:1). A common prophetic theme for example, is “the Day of the Lord”—the day when God will judge those who rebel against him and deliver those who serve him. How much deeper is our understanding of the cross when we recognize the faithful servant receiving the judgment due us rebels? How much more powerful is our understanding of the cup Christ prays the Father would take from him (Luke 22:42) when we recognize it as the cup the prophet Jeremiah describes? That cup, says Jeremiah, is filled with the wine of God’s wrath against every nation on the face of the earth (Jeremiah 25:15–26). How much more clearly do we understand our individual and corporate responsibility to represent God and the new humanity he is bringing about when we see these prophetic tasks carried out by the Son of God and the Son of Man?

There is tremendous depth to explore in each of these areas of the Old Testament and in every book of these areas. Far from being irrelevant, the Old Testament informs and energizes our Christian lives. Rediscovering this portion of the Bible as Scriptures that testify about Jesus will enable us to read them with new perspective and focus. Seeing Christ in the Old Testament, as he himself encourages us to do, will enlarge our understanding of the Gospel, enrich our faith, and enhance our evangelistic witness by keeping us properly focused on God’s grand redemptive plan that centers on his own Son.
One of the earliest heresies in the Christian church swirled around the issue of preaching the Old Testament. In the second century, Marcion, the son of a bishop from Sinope, advocated a ban on preaching from the Old Testament. Marcion claimed that the Christian faith was essentially a religion of love and, by contrast, Old Testament religion was an oppressive system of law. Furthermore, the creator God of the Old Testament was, in his opinion, arbitrary, capricious, vindictive, and mean. He argued that the God of the Old Testament had nothing at all to do with Jesus who came to reveal the true God, a supreme God of love. Marcion fenced off Jesus from the Old Testament. By rejecting the connection between the creator God of the Old Testament and the one whom Jesus called his Father, the heretic Marcion became one of the first to argue against preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

The Christian church, by contrast, has always embraced preaching the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ using Old Testament texts. Over and against Marcion, the church affirmed in no uncertain terms that the God who reveals himself in the Old Testament is the same God who reveals himself in the New Testament as the Father of Jesus. Not only is the God of the Old and New Testaments one and the same, the church taught that the God of the Bible exhibits consistency of character. After creating the world and seeing it fall into sin, God in love consistently acts to save and redeem what he has made. In light of this, the church has always affirmed that the Bible is not a collection of loosely related religious texts but an overarching story of God who created the world, saw it fall into sin, and who then was not content to leave it to suffer in broken, sin-infected degradation. The Bible tells the story of God, who moved to save and redeem his sin Decimated creation, an initiative that eventually culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Consequently, preaching the good news of what God has done and is doing to heal, bless, redeem, and save finds its focus in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Preaching using texts from the Old Testament requires this same focus.

Preaching Christ from the Old Testament not only assumes the consistency of God and his character from testament to testament, but it also assumes the consistency of human nature. People in the Old Testament are not all that different from people in the New Testament. People throughout human history, though created in the image of God, are infected by sin, inclined to turn from God, and to suffer the consequences of turning away.

In light of this inclination, the pastor who uses an Old Testament text is always looking for a couple of important features. First, he or she has an exegetical eye peeled for how sin has affected those within the world of the text. How is sin manifested in this part of the biblical story? The preacher then looks for the ways in which God is acting, has acted, or promises to act to save and redeem those fallen creatures. Since God’s saving action in history culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the sermon will always move to show how God’s saving actions in the text are consistent with and find their clearest expression in the good news of the gospel, the high point of God’s saving plan.

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of which is the cross and resurrection. This anti-Marcion preaching project assumes that the whole Bible is not only revelation, but redemptive revelation, a story intending to introduce us to the God who created and who then moves to save, heal, and bless.

The particular flavor of sin may vary from text to text. There are multiple ways in which human beings choose to turn away from God. God’s human creatures find ways to break all of his commandments. But the tactics that God uses to call back those who have turned away, to heal, to restore, and to bless also come in a variety of flavors.

So, how might this work in particular texts? The preacher might consider along these lines the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. God has called Abraham out of his Canaanite culture and made a covenant with him. God separates Abraham out from the rest of humanity to form in him and his family a bridgehead for saving the whole creation: “In you,” God tells Abraham, “will all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Then after giving a son to elderly Abraham and Sarah, God asks Abraham to sacrifice that son. Such a request would have been thought commonplace in the Canaanite culture Abraham once embraced. The flavor of trouble in this text comes from sacrificing Isaac and provides a ram-sacrifice in place of his firstborn son. This is the same God who institutes an interim system of animal sacrifice which points ahead to the ultimate sacrifice that God would provide for a rebellious and sin-stricken humanity—the self-giving sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. God not only sacrifices himself on the cross, but in the resurrection of Jesus moves to restore humanity to son- and daughter-ship with God.

Take another example: the book of Proverbs provides the preacher with perhaps less obvious opportunities for preaching the good news of the gospel; but her instinct ought to be toward preaching Christ. Proverbs 26:4-5, for instance, offers an interesting Old Testament preaching possibility. Verse 4 advises the reader not to answer a fool according to his folly, “or you yourself will be like them.” The very next verse advises the exact opposite tactic: Answer a fool according to his folly, “or they will be wise in their own eyes.” This text raises the issue of how a person is to decide if a proverb applies in a given situation or not. Proverbs are wisdom sayings—wise and time-tested practical observations about how the God-created world works—but Proverbs 22 points out the limits of wisdom. Knowing the proverb is not enough; one also has to know if the proverb applies in a given situation. Here is the trouble in the text: how is a human being supposed to know how wisdom applies? Where does one receive the wisdom to apply the proverb? Does one answer a fool according to his folly, or not?

Proverbs itself points the reader to God in his or her effort to apply wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 observes that the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” The wise person learns and applies wisdom within a healthy and living relationship with the living God. God gives persons in right(eous) relationship with him the insight to apply wisdom to a given situation. As the highest expression of God with us, Jesus—the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30)—is God’s final and decisive effort to bring foolish sin-estranged people back into relationship with him. On the cross, Jesus opens up for humanity a healthy relationship with God, and through the resurrection power of his Holy Spirit, draws people into a relationship alive with the life-giving guidance of God. Of course, many other examples from the other genres of Old Testament texts could also be cited.

Preaching the Old Testament demands giving voice to the historical-redemptive trouble and grace of the text and then showing how the text leads toward Christ.
Forgiveness—
A Key to Happiness
A Meditation on Psalm 32:1-6

In one of Charles Schultze's Peanuts comic strips, Lucy walks up to Snoopy, pats him on the head, gives him a big hug, and walks away dapperly, saying: "Happiness is a warm puppy." Lucy's heartwarming words triggered an avalanche of happiness greeting cards and posters. Eventually, they even became the title of a book with "Happiness is..." messages.

The biblical equivalent of the "Happiness is..." declaration is the exclamation "Oh the happiness of the one..." This is the way Psalm 32 begins: "Oh the happiness of the one who has had his transgression removed." The fact that this expression occurs 46 times in the OT suggests that people pursued happiness in biblical times just as they do now.

According to the US Declaration of Independence, the pursuit of happiness is one of three inalienable rights. Indeed, the American dream for many is the autonomous pursuit of happiness. Paradoxically, however, this autonomous pursuit of happiness results in sadness and disappointment with life. The refrain in Sheryl Crow's song, If It Makes You Happy (1996), captures this paradox well:

If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad.
If it makes you happy, then why are you so sad?

Over against this ultimately disappointing and unsuccessful autonomous pursuit of happiness, Psalm 32 makes a daring counter-cultural claim that challenges the dominant culture.

Happiness is... forgiveness

Psalm 32 is a song of individual thanksgiving. The purpose of a psalm of thanksgiving is to teach the worshipping community a lesson based on the psalmist's experience of crying out to God and receiving deliverance. The first lesson that the psalmist wants to teach us in Psalm 32 is that, as strange as it may seem to a contemporary audience, the key to happiness is to have our sins forgiven. The second lesson is that to have our sins forgiven, we must acknowledge our sins to God.

To bring the first lesson home, the psalmist begins his poem with two beatitudes (vv. 1–2). Each of these starts with an exclamation that consists of a plural noun in Hebrew: "Oh the happinesses of..." which I understand to mean, "Oh the genuine happiness of." If we want genuine happiness, then we must have our transgressions removed. We must have our sins covered up. If we want to be genuinely happy, we must make sure that the Lord doesn't count our sins against us. We must open up to God with a heart in which there is no deceit because deceit (v. 2) is the heart of sin. In fact, according to 1 John 1:8, the greatest act of self-deception is to deny our sins. In this verse we read, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” And what is worse, we make God out to be a liar.

A basic assumption of Psalm 32 is that sin is all-pervasive—even the righteous struggle with sin. Christians, even baptized Christians, struggle with sin. Therefore, if we want to be genuinely happy, we must not deceive ourselves and deny our sin. We must acknowledge it to God.
The specifics of forgiveness

Four features of the opening double beatitude of Psalm 32 call for special attention. Consider first its contrast with Psalm 1. Psalm 1 begins with the exclamation “Oh the happiness of…” It then goes on to describe something that a happy person does: “Oh the happiness of the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.” It describes the happiness of the law-keeper. Psalm 32, however, begins with a double beatitude that concerns the law-breaker. Such a person, according to Psalm 32:1–2, is on the receiving end of God’s gracious activity. Happy is the person who has his transgression taken away. Happy is the person who has his sin covered. As v.2 shows, the Lord is the implied subject of these passive verbal forms. The Lord is the one who takes away rebellion; the Lord is the one who covers up sin. Genuine happiness therefore is a gracious gift from God.

A second striking feature of Psalm 32:1–2 is its use of three important Hebrew words for sin: 1) pesha’ “rebellion” (v. 1a), which refers to a serious breach of relationship; 2) khata’ah “sin” (v. 1b), which means to miss the mark and denotes a serious breakdown in a personal relationship; and 3) awon “iniquity” (v. 2), which refers to a deliberate perversion or twisting. Together these terms describe the full gamut of sin and provide a powerful insight into its corruptive nature.

A third feature to notice in Psalm 32:1–2 is that each of the three terms for sin discussed above find their counterpart in three Hebrew verbs that denote forgiveness: 1) nasa’ “forgive, carry away” (v. 1a); 2) kasah “cover” (v. 1b); and 3) khashab “credit, assign” (v. 2). Together with the three terms for sin in vv. 1–2, the Hebrew verb nasa’ recalls Leviticus 16:21–22. This passage describes an essential part of the rituals of the Day of Atonement. Once the high priest finished making the atonement, then, according to Lev.16:21, he had to put his hands on the head of the living goat and confess Israel’s iniquity, rebellion and sin. Then, according to Lev.16:22, the goat would carry away (nasa’) all of Israel’s iniquities to an inaccessible land.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:18, this vitally important OT ritual finds its fulfillment in Christ’s atoning sacrifice promised in Isaiah 53:4–5. Like the living goat in Leviticus 16, Christ carries away the burden of our sins.

A fourth significant feature of Psalm 32:1–2 is that even before the psalmist talks about rebellion, sin, and iniquity, he first mentions God’s actions. The verbal forms meaning “carry away,” “cover” and “credit, assign” precede the key terms for sin. This ordering of words emphasizes the fact that the forgiveness of sin is always the result of God’s gracious initiative.

Attaining happiness

But how can we attain the genuine happiness described in the double beatitude of Psalm 32:1–2? The psalmist provides the answer to this important question in vv. 3–5, in which he retells his painful experience to God. These verses constitute the basis for the psalmist’s claim that genuine happiness is to have one’s sins forgiven.

In his powerful testimony, the psalmist first recounts that he had bottled up his sins in grace-denying silence. As a result, he suffered psychosomatic consequences—all day long his bones wasted away (v. 3), his body paying for the guilt of sin. He recognizes in this the heavy hand of the Lord pressing down on him (v. 4).

Then, in a sharp dramatic turn (v. 5), the psalmist reports that he only broke through his pain by acknowledging his sin, by not covering up his iniquity, and by resolving to confess his rebellion to God. Grace-denying silence about sin is like cholesterol and high blood pressure—both are silent killers. They creep up on us before we know it. The same is true with the awful burden of guilt unacknowledged to God.

Only open confession can liberate us from the deadly consequences of sin. Remarkably, in v. 5 we encounter once more the same three terms for sin that we saw in vv. 1–2. Significantly, together with the verb “carry away,” these terms for sin also occur in Exodus 34:6–7, which speaks of a merciful God. We read in those verses that God is so merciful that he carries away iniquity, rebellion,
and sin (Exod. 34:7). According to the psalmist, that is exactly what God did for him. As soon as he broke his grace-denying silence and confessed his sin, God graciously liberated him from the burden of sin.

Therefore, based on his dramatic experience of God’s forgiveness, in v.6 the psalmist implicitly urges everyone to pray to the Lord and confess their sins. If we really want to be happy, we must follow the psalmist’s example—we too, must come clean and acknowledge our sin to God. When we do, like the psalmist, we will also have our sins forgiven.

### Sin and our culture

We live in a culture in which the word “sin” has become uncomfortable to us. Even in the liturgies of many Protestant churches there is no longer any room for confession of sin and forgiveness. In corporate worship many Protestants prefer only to praise the Lord.

To be sure, Psalm 32:11 does invite us to “rejoice in the Lord and be glad.” However, according to the psalmist, there is only one way to move from the awful pain of unconfessed sin to exuberant joy, and that is to confess our sins. As the repetition of the declarations (“I acknowledged … I did not hide … I said … I will confess to the Lord”) in v.5 shows, we must openly confess our sins to the only One who can remove the immobilizing burden of unacknowledged sin.

Sin has been compared to garbage. If we do not take out our garbage regularly, it eventually starts to reek. To avoid this, we must take out the garbage on a regular basis. Similarly, we should also dump our spiritual garbage regularly in corporate worship through confession of sin. Only by acknowledging our sin will we receive God’s forgiveness. When we allow God to take away our garbage, then we will experience God’s liberating forgiveness and the genuine happiness that follows.

### The Old Testament as a Resource for Christian Discipleship

Many years ago, while participating in a walking group, I met a young woman whom I’ll call Heather. She soon became a regular conversation partner and friend. As our relationship developed, Heather began asking me about Christianity and matters of faith. In time, I gave her a New Testament and invited her to read the gospel of John. When I followed up with her a week later, she told me that though she found it helpful, the gospel of John did not deal with her primary questions and concerns about God. It turned out that as a child, Heather had known tremendous loss and suffering, leaving her rather jaded about God. “The problem,” she confessed, “is that if God is good and God is powerful, how could God have allowed others to hurt me so?” I was stunned. Now what? What could I say that she hadn’t already heard to convince her that God loved her, that God did care, that God hated her suffering and died to put an end to such evil.

I decided to try again. This time, I gave her the Bible (Old and New Testaments) and suggested she read the story of Job. Not a week had passed by when she announced that she had finished all forty two chapters. “Now I understand,” she said. “What is to stop me from becoming a Christian?” To this day, I’m a little fuzzy about what

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Forgiveness—A Key to Happiness

by Amanda W. Benckhuysen
Associate Professor of Old Testament
Heather understood. However, what I do know is that as she read this rather obscure Old Testament book, the Spirit stirred in her heart convicting her of God’s goodness and love and arousing in her faith in Jesus Christ. Not long afterward, Heather was baptized into the body of Christ.

Heather taught me something valuable through this experience—that the Old Testament can be a rich resource for Christian discipleship and formation and yes, even for evangelism. Now I recognize that this may sound strange, that the Old Testament has something to teach us about being disciples of Jesus. Even so, it seems that Paul and the other New Testament writers believed the Old Testament could function this way. “All Scripture is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,” we read in 2 Tim. 3:16. And indeed, if the Old Testament bears witness to the same God as the one who is revealed in Jesus Christ, then we as Christians can learn much from the Old Testament about what it means to be followers of Jesus and citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Consider, for instance, the Old Testament laws. These laws have much to teach us about how to live as God’s joyful people. The various teachings about the Sabbath are a good example. While the practice of Sabbath, ceasing from our labor one day a week, has fallen on hard times in the broader culture, the Old Testament presents Sabbath-keeping as an important spiritual discipline for God’s people. In Exod. 20:8–11, for instance, we read, “Remember the Sabbath day … for in six days the Lord made heaven and the earth … but rested the seventh day.” By associating the Sabbath with creation, Exod. 20:8–11 grounds the practice of Sabbath-keeping not only in the natural rhythms of work and rest that God established at creation but in the confession that God is the creator. It is he, not we, who sustains and upholds the world in his loving care. Sabbath-keeping reminds us of this and invites us to practice our creatureliness by entrusting the world, our world, one day a week, to God.

A second Sabbath text, Deut. 5:12–15, associates Sabbath not with God as creator but with God’s act of deliverance in the Exodus. According to this text, the Sabbath was to be a celebration of Israel’s redemption. In other words, it was a celebration of what Israel had been delivered from, namely slavery, and what they have been delivered for, that is, freedom—the freedom to stop working, the freedom to rest, and most importantly, the freedom to worship God. While this text is rich with lessons for the Christian life, one area of consideration is our relationship to work and the place it holds in our lives. With the advent of new technologies, work has become ubiquitous, increasingly pressing in on our lives, claiming more time and energy. Practicing Sabbath can be a way of reminding ourselves and declaring to a watching world that we are more than our work, more than what we produce. Our proper end is not labor. Instead, we were created and have been redeemed for the purpose of loving God and enjoying him forever.

If the law teaches us how God would have us live, that is, what we should be, the prophets show us what we are. As interpreters of their times, the prophets named and exposed the corrupting and dehumanizing values of the dominant culture. Of particular concern to the 8th c. B.C.E. prophets was the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few and the accompanying greed and self-interest that gave rise to structural inequalities and systemic injustices. Isaiah declared, “The Lord enters in judgment with the elders and princes of his people: ‘It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?’ says the Lord God of hosts” (Isa. 3:13–15). For the prophets, this relentless pursuit of prosperity and selfish ambition at the expense of justice, and on the backs of the poor, was inconsistent with claims to love God and be God’s people. Loving God was not, after all, to be a private affair relegated to the spiritual realm, but was to find expression in physical and tangible ways, in the practice of justice, the love of kindness, and walking humbly with God (Mic. 6:8). What the prophets invite us to consider as Christians today, then, is how our love for God finds public expression, particularly in the face of dominant ideologies and values of our own time that are remarkably similar to those of Judah in the 8th c. B.C.E. What does it mean to follow Jesus, for instance, in a nation where the
gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen, where economic and educational disadvantage persists, particularly in communities of color, and where the number of those living in extreme poverty, without the basic necessities of life, is growing?

Lastly, we turn to the psalms. The most striking aspect of the Book of Psalms is the wide range of emotions that are expressed in these prayers. Some psalms capture the joy of our life with God. “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere,” the psalmist declares (Ps. 84:10). Other psalms, psalms of lament, reflect the darker side of life. These psalms may surprise us by their raw and uncensored expressions of anger, torment, and grief (see, for instance, Psalm 13). The inclusion of these psalms in Scripture, however, assures us that the full range of human emotions and troubles—our fears, our doubts, our anger, our questions, our temptations, our failures, our loneliness, our shame, our grief—properly belong before God to be addressed in the context of faith. In this respect, the psalms of lament encourage in us an honesty and authenticity in our relationship with God. Furthermore, far from being an act of impiety, these psalms, which cry out to God and petition God to act in times of crisis, acknowledge the fundamental truth of our faith, that God is our Redeemer. Salvation belongs to the Lord!

Thus, even as they give us language and permission to voice our distress, our anger, our despair before God when the brokenness of the world presses in upon us, they also move us through our grief and direct our gaze toward the Lord who, the psalmists testify, hears our cries and is mighty to save.

In the end, what strikes me most about the Old Testament is that this ancient text, written so long ago, has such a keen grasp of the human condition and of our need for a savior. Perhaps this is what Heather heard in the narrative of Job, an honest assessment of her life and the challenging word that she too needed saving. And perhaps this is the great gift of the narratives and poetry of the Old Testament for us today, their ability to name the wilderness of our current lives and remind us that God is here, redeeming, renewing, transforming our wilderness through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit, and holding out the promise that one day, we will have life and have it abundantly.
Teaching the Language of the Old Testament

When I was a young boy growing up in my hometown, I would regularly pedal my bicycle the two miles or so to the bridge that crossed the bay and then spend the day fishing off the catwalk. Imagine my surprise when I returned to my hometown some years later to discover that Tampa had become a sprawling urban center with multi-lane highways and modern buildings making my old bike route unrecognizable. Anyone would be taking their life in their hands if they decided to make their wobbly way on a bicycle along those roads now while carrying a fishing pole, tackle box, and a stringer full of fish! Tampa is not what it used to be. But then again, neither is Hebrew instruction at Calvin Seminary.

Some people who studied biblical Hebrew at Calvin Seminary in the past may be carrying around a perception of the experience as outdated as my perception of Tampa proved to be. There have been many and substantial changes over the almost two decades I have been teaching the subject. Those changes in how biblical Hebrew is taught have kept pace with changes in computer technology, distance learning capabilities, and a general shift in emphasis in all areas of education from “what” to “so what.”

The changes have been as dramatic as the change from the old bait shack by the bay to the upscale restaurant that now stands in its place. When I arrived at Calvin Seminary in 1995, biblical Hebrew was taught in three quarters, after a “Hebrew boot camp” that took place during three weeks at the end of the summer break. That boot camp was a hard slog and a big inconvenience for international students who had to cut their summers short to start an intensive program before the regular academic year. Then, after wading through a grammar book for two and a half quarters, students finally came to the exegetical payoff in the last half of the last quarter—a long time to wait for the “so what.” That arrangement was, if you will, the old bait shack. But the new program that now stands in its place looks nothing like it.

When computers began to be more common tools than curiosities (Yes, there was such a day!), we began incorporating their use into Hebrew instruction as well. Computer generated vocabulary flash cards and parsing practice guides were big deals when they first appeared. And we made use of them. Next came audio files. Students could now hear Hebrew words pronounced as well as displayed, thus engaging another sense in their learning. Bible software programs became available that presented the text of the entire Hebrew Bible, and even provided search capabilities! And biblical Hebrew instruction at Calvin Seminary continued to change and adapt. There have been at least ten complete revisions of the course in the last twenty years. That’s right, ten! And I’m not talking about little tweaks here and there. I’m talking about different textbooks, experimenting with an entirely online course, restructuring to include an introduction to biblical language software, adapting to three different course management systems, etc. The biblical Hebrew course has certainly not suffered from a lack of attention. It has seen more adjustments than a chiropractor’s office.
So what does biblical Hebrew language instruction at Calvin Seminary look like now? It is a great time to be asking the question because we are just completing yet another major renovation. Beginning next fall, there will be two biblical Hebrew courses, both extending over two semesters. One of the courses will be for students taking the course at a distance. In fact, this course was already launched this year and the first cohort of students is just now completing it. The other course will be for our in-residence students. Though delivered in different ways, both courses have the same basic format. There will still be some of the “what” that is necessary for learning a language: common vocabulary words, basic grammar and syntax. But there is now a marked shift to an emphasis on the “so what.” Consider just a tiny example. A computer program might tell the student that the Hebrew verb has a Waw Consecutive attached to it. That’s the “what” and does precious little to enhance our understanding. Learning, however, that a Waw Consecutive signals the fact that the action of this verb logically or chronologically follows the previous action is the “so what” and is very exegetically significant. We can then appreciate, for example, that we shouldn’t understand the Hebrew assertions that “the Lord was with Joseph” and “Joseph was successful” as two unrelated, positive aspects of Joseph’s life. Rather, we should understand the second statement as logically following the first, and read them together as: “The Lord was with Joseph and as a consequence Joseph was successful.” The Lord’s presence is powerfully generative!

So how in practical terms have we facilitated this change in focus toward the “so what” by the way the Hebrew course is constructed? Instead of placing the exegetical section at the end of the two-semester course, we have now distributed the exegetical insights throughout the course. Now, as soon as students learn a specific feature of the language, they can see the reason why it is necessary to know that feature by seeing its exegetical payoff in an actual biblical passage. Each lesson of the grammar includes a brief video and animated PowerPoint presentation (in addition to the riveting classroom presentations for our in-residence students). There are also Guided Exercises, which are directed exercises in actual biblical texts that lead students to see how what they learned will help them go deeper in their understanding of the Word. Weekly Labs help them to put together everything they have learned each week. And supplemental tools abound. There are one-page summaries of “need-to-know” language features, audio vocabulary, mnemonic devices, FAQs, and, of course, an engaging professor. For several years, we have been encouraging students in their use of Hebrew language tools by means of instruction in Logos Bible software. However, due to the high cost of Logos, and the fact that many students enter the seminary with either a different Bible software program or no software program at all, we (with the great help of our Educational Technologist, Nathan Bierma) have developed an in-house online biblical language tool that will serve their needs. Every effort is being made to make learning biblical Hebrew as rewarding as possible, and to use the available technological resources to do so. Anyone who is interested in exploring for themselves what the seminary is doing in this area can now do so relatively inexpensively by means of a Hebrew resource we’ve made available online at: http://study.calvinseminary.edu. This resource has many of the same features of the for-credit course and takes an individual all the way from no knowledge of Hebrew to an ability to read prose Hebrew texts.

Some may nevertheless still wonder why we bother to teach biblical Hebrew at all when Bible software programs make so many details readily available. But, as we have already briefly observed, computers can be very helpful in telling us the “what,” but not the “so what.” We are training ministers of the Word of God, who are responsible for tending to the precious souls of human beings. We ministers have to be terribly sure that we get things right or we can do major, widespread, and lasting damage. Enthusiasm and energy are not enough. I had those when I helped my father weed the garden, but because I couldn’t tell a young weed from a young flower, I’m
afraid many blossoms never saw the light of day. Paul wrote to Timothy, a young church leader he mentored: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). We strive to do our best to learn both the “what” and the “so what” of this Word we proclaim because we believe the God we serve and the people we pastor are worth our best.

Clearly, both the content and the method of teaching biblical Hebrew at Calvin Seminary have changed greatly over the years. These changes have placed Calvin Seminary at the forefront of innovation in the wise use of technology to enhance language learning. And there is no doubt that Hebrew instruction will continue to evolve as other capabilities become available. Calvin Seminary has been and remains committed to providing our students with all the tools they need to be effectively engaged in building God’s house. The language of the Old Testament is one of those tools.

For more help in recognizing Christ in the Old Testament, consider this recent book (Zondervan, 2012) by Michael Williams, Professor of Old Testament at Calvin Seminary. The following excerpts describe in his words what the book is all about.

The simple truth that all of the Scriptures—Old Testament and New Testament—testify about Jesus seems to be often overlooked. For modern readers, the picture of Christ in the Old Testament can be obscured by veritable whiteout conditions of chronological, sacrificial, architectural, geographical, and genealogical details, so that all that can be made out after spending some time in the snowstorm is a mound of white where the car used to be. To an admittedly lesser degree, the problem exists for the New Testament as well. Names of apostles and disciples, travelogues, letters to forgotten churches in obscure locales regarding confusing theological issues—all of this can seem like so many differently shaped jigsaw pieces without a picture on the box to help us to put it all together. This book is intended to help believers make out the picture on the box. And it is a picture of Jesus.

To accomplish this purpose in a book that one doesn’t need a wheelbarrow to carry around, the chapters are brief and similarly structured. In each one, I present the overarching theme of each biblical book along with a discussion of how that theme ultimately finds its focus in Jesus Christ. I then explore how this focus in Christ is subsequently elaborated upon in the New Testament. Finally, I consider what that fulfillment in Christ must necessarily entail for believers, who are being conformed to his likeness, along with ways to effectively communicate those entailments to others effectively. By means of these considerations I hope to help brothers and sisters in the faith grow in their awareness of how all of Scripture finds its focus in Jesus Christ, and so help them to root their Christian life, theological discussions, and evangelical witness in the one who is our life (Colossians 3:4).
President Jul Medenblik wants every Calvin Seminary professor to finish well, so he has initiated the “Last Lecture” series for retiring members of the Seminary faculty. Lest anyone wonder about the title, he quickly reminds us that “last” does not mean “final.” Instead, it represents the last official, Seminary-hosted opportunity for a professor to address an audience comprised of students present and past; faculty, staff, and emeriti; and the professor’s family and friends as well as friends of the Seminary.

Dr. Ronald J. Nydam, professor of Pastoral Care presented his Last Lecture on April 17 and Rev. Carl J. Bosma, Associate Professor of Old Testament presented his on April 30. We are pleased to offer a video recording of both, found on the Seminary’s website (www.calvinseminary.edu).

Finishing well also means that we at the Seminary, along with the broader church community, take grateful note of these remarkable lives of service in God’s every growing kingdom. May these tributes help us remember and rejoice in work done well.

Rev. Carl J. Bosma, Associate Professor of Old Testament

After nearly a quarter-century in the classroom at Calvin Theological Seminary, Carl J. Bosma is setting aside his daily teaching duties as an associate professor of Old Testament studies. But he anticipates remaining vigorously engaged in the life of the church—and the theological formation of Calvin Seminary students—through his ongoing leadership at the seminary’s Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal, a fitting capstone to his career as a seed-sower and cultivator in God’s glorious garden.

“We’re in a kairos season right now, where the worshiping community must begin to think of itself as a multiplying community,” said Bosma. “Churches are losing members and closing their doors -- and we are losing the Christian Reformed Church community in West Michigan at the age of 12, and was educated at Calvin College and Calvin Seminary before becoming more thoroughly “Americanized” while serving in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War.

Yet, his acclimation to American culture and mores during the upheaval of the 1960s prompted him to pursue graduate work at the Free University in Amsterdam back in his homeland. It also encouraged him to spend more than 13 years in Brazil as a church planter. He also taught during that time at the Seminario Presbiteriano do Sul in Campinas, Brazil, a helpful preparation for his move to the Calvin Seminary faculty in the summer of 1990.

“The church I served in Brazil had no money, yet by God’s grace that little church planted three new churches,” he recalled. “One of my dreams is that Calvin Seminary will become more and more mission-focused, so that it’s known not just as a good academic seminary, but also produces pastors who plant churches and renew churches.”

Bosma believes that church-related agencies and institutions often spend too much time in introspection and organizational revamping.

“Look how many times we have restructured, and still we are not good at changing,” he said. “The church has become too corporate and too American. Americans think that if they have it nicely organized on a piece of paper, it’s going to work. It would be
far better if our pastors spend at least one hour a week with a non-Christian, really getting to know that person and the barriers that they experience with the church. But our pastors are too busy restructuring instead of renewing and changing.”

The churches that are vital and growing, Bosma noted, have both a heart for evangelism and a head for cultural relevance. “We have to learn how to exegete the culture—to go to the shopping malls, the book stores, the music shops, and discover the best-selling books and the beats that people are listening to,” he said. “We need to get into the trenches. I’d like Calvin Seminary to be known as a place to go for dynamic church leadership, to discover models for church renewal, in addition to finding deep and broad theological resources.”

Throughout his tenure at the seminary, Bosma has taught the Hebrew Bible with the view of opening his students’ “minds and hearts to the love of the Old Testament.” It has been, he acknowledged, a challenging and often-unappreciated assignment.

Even though he has seen marked changes in the Christian Reformed Church since his arrival in America more than a half-century ago, Bosma remains hopeful about the future, and excited about his continuing directorship at the seminary’s Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal.

“The role of the denomination and the allegiance to denominations is shifting and that’s for the good,” he said. “The unfinished task is that local churches need to be focused more on mission—and not to cede that to institutional agencies. It’s the business of the church to plant churches. Agencies are not churches. Agencies plant churches inefficiently.”

Bosma said it is time for the CRC to embrace “radical change. We can’t go about business as usual. Christianity is North America is in a minority position. We have to ask ourselves, How do you share the gospel with post-modern people? And we have to be prepared to be uncomfortable with finding the answers. We need to fulfill our mission and we need to do it with passion.”

—Bruce Buursma

Dr. Ronald J. Nydam, Professor of Pastoral Care

In his ministry, and throughout his 16 years of teaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, Ronald J. Nydam has been a mentor and model for confronting and managing the messiest parts of life. As a professor of pastoral care and pastoral counseling, he’s advocated for unflinching honesty, good grief, and mustering the courage to do the slogging, difficult work of reconciliation with ourselves, with others and above all with God.

“I’ve come to love the magic of the classroom—this delight that I have when I interact with students to help them see something they didn’t see before,” said Nydam, who will retire this summer from full-time teaching and move back to Denver where he earlier served as a pastor.

“I deeply enjoy giving my students insight into the nature of human behavior, to help them better understand why people sin when they sin, and how the Holy Spirit can use us to minister in a health-giving, gracious way,” Nydam continued. “So, how exactly does that happen? It’s the ministry of presence. I take great delight in seeing students resist it, and then learn it.”

Nydam, who spent a decade in pastoral ministry before establishing a pastoral counseling practice in Denver for another 14 years, has brought a compassionate and thoughtful perspective on pastoral care to the Calvin Seminary community.

“The face of pastoral care has changed significantly,” he observed. “A century ago, the primary task of pastoral care was to help people with their sin. Today, the
primary task is simply presence. We enter the Samaritan’s ditch to bear the load together.”

Yet, Nydam shares liberally (with confidentiality intact) from his own rich portfolio of real-life experiences with parishioners who struggle with loss and despair.

“One of the first things our students face when they begin ministry is the challenge of dealing with broken marriages,” he said. “So in the pastoral disciplines class I give them ways to think about marriage and divorce. How do you position yourself with the sanctity of marriage and the reality of divorce? How do you restore relationships? Some people have disorders of character. I push my students to know why people are doing what they are doing.”

Nydam’s retirement from full-time teaching comes in the context of his own health challenges that have impacted his immune system and placed limitations on some of his activities. But he intends to continue lecturing Calvin Seminary students next fall from his Denver area home via web-enabled technology.

“I’ll be teaching online from the Rockies, but I’ll miss smelling the breath and hearing the heartbeat of the students,” he said. “I love this place. I will grieve deeply when I leave it. The seminary is becoming what I always hoped it would be—not so much a critic of the church, but a servant of the church. Even in our high academic standards, we are serving well when we make full use of our learning in service to the church.”

Nydam is a native of Whitinsville, Massachusetts, and holds an undergraduate degree from Calvin College, and a Master of Divinity degree from Calvin Theological Seminary. He earned his D.Min. degree from Chicago Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from the University of Denver and Iliff School of Theology. But much of what he’s learned has come through simply sharing in the cares and sufferings of parishioners and clients.

“The more healthy leadership we can offer the church, the greater our impact will be. Pastors who are effective as representatives of the Christ who enters the sufferings of others will make the difference.”

Nydam is unreservedly enthusiastic about the quality and commitment of the students who enroll at Calvin Seminary. “Most students in seminary are going to sort out their faith, but at Calvin they are here to sort out their calling,” he said. “We do a pastoral identity retreat every year and we get to spend time with students to talk about...
their call and motivation for ministry. They do that in the context of this broad and thoughtful theological education.”

His own more specialized mission within pastoral care and counseling falls into the area of adoption and related matters of relinquishment, abandonment and identity. He has written a book about the subject, entitled *Adoptees Come of Age: Living Within Two Families.*

Nydam has traveled to Ukraine, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan and Korea to visit orphanages to deepen his understanding of a fundamental question that sparks his research interest: What happens to babies when they lose their parents?

“I'm very interested in issues of attachment,” he said. “In the classroom, I talk often about the struggles people have in attaching to God and trusting God. I like to keep in front of the class how a close connection to God increases the capacity to be a real human being. What does it mean to have healthy relationships and be the body of Christ?”

Nydam departs from the seminary at a time of transition in theological education and a groaning anxiety about denomination survival.

“The seminary is keeping a close eye on what is going on in the church and the effort to revitalize dying congregations,” he said. “We're seeing church plants as a way to reinvent ourselves. Churches are growing when they provide a place where people truly feel cared for and at home, a place where they belong.”

—Bruce Buursma

### 2014 Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients

The Calvin Seminary Board of Trustees this year named two recipients for the 2014 Distinguished Alumni Award. The award is given annually to recipients who have brought unusual credit to their alma mater by their distinction in Christian ministry. For 2014, the recipients are Rev. Donald H. Postema and Rev. Dr. Roger S. Greenway.

### Rev. Donald H. Postema

Donald Henry Postema has devoted his life and ministry to proclaiming the counter-cultural claims of Christ’s gospel and the lively implications of the upside-down Kingdom to a community of often-skeptical and searching academicians surrounding the Campus Chapel at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

His leadership at the Campus Chapel, from 1963 to 1997, coincided with an era of sweeping unrest and change in higher education in the U.S. His ministry within the context of a university campus involved him in many intellectual, moral and social concerns. It prodded him to develop a relevant theology, an innovative liturgical style and a Reformed spirituality to nurture his congregation.

Rev. Postema continued to enjoy being involved with young people during a formative stage of their personal, academic and spiritual development throughout his 34 years on campus. He is especially thrilled to know that so many former members of the Campus Chapel are today carrying on their professions and ministries that first took root at U of M and Campus Chapel.

To minister effectively within the university, Rev. Postema worked closely and collegially with those from many religious traditions. He engaged in numerous ecumenical and interfaith dialogues and events with leaders from the world’s religions. For nearly a quarter century, Rev. Postema was involved in the Snowmass InterSpiritual Dialogue founded by Fr. Thomas Keating. He attended the Parliament of the World’s Religions—first in Chicago in 1990, and a second in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1996.

During a seven-month sabbatical, he and his wife, Elaine, traveled throughout the western United States and visited various Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, and Buddhist retreat centers, monasteries, ashrams and seminars, where they experienced the insights and practices of the various spiritual traditions.

He scarcely could have envisioned the path ahead when he was growing up on Chicago’s far south side and attending worship and
Called to Serve

catechism classes at Fourth Roseland Christian Reformed Church. But at the age of 15, he came home from Sunday School on Sunday morning and informed his parents that he was going to be a minister.

Rev. Postema enrolled at Calvin College in 1952 and entered Calvin Theological Seminary in 1956. His years in seminary were rather productive as he and Elaine (Vander Ploeg) were married and began their family with the birth of their two sons. Their two daughters came later, during post-graduate studies abroad and in the early years of Rev. Postema’s ministry in Ann Arbor.

His time at Calvin Seminary also broadened and deepened his biblical and theological understanding, as well as his commitment to Jesus Christ and to ministry in His name. Rev. Postema went on to study at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, supported by a Fulbright and a CRC Diamond Jubilee scholarship, ending up with a ‘Doctorundus’ degree in pastoral psychology. This experience also gave him a deep appreciation of the Dutch cultural and theological heritage.

Rev. Postema further explored that cultural heritage during a sabbatical for study and contemplation at Yale Divinity School with Dutch Catholic priest Henri J. M. Nouwen. Out of that year came a book on spirituality and prayer (Space for God: Study and Practice of Spirituality and Prayer) that sent his life and ministry on a new and surprising trajectory. Since then, he has been invited to lead retreats and conferences all over the U.S. and many other countries, and also to teach at various seminaries in the area of spirituality, prayer, and ministry. In 1996, Rev. Postema received a certificate as a spiritual director and continues to carry on that ministry.

His interest in travel and other cultures has taken him to Paris, France, in 2005 where he served as a pastoral assistant at The American Church for six months. He has also been an on-board Protestant Minister on numerous Holland America Line cruises.

From the divine nudge he experienced as a teenager, Rev. Postema notes it has been quite a journey—personally, geographically, religiously, spiritually, socially and politically—accompanied by the Spirit of Jesus along the way. Despite the unimaginable and unpredictable course that one might follow in ministry and life, Rev. Postema is delighted to testify that all the way through God remains with us … no matter what!

Advice for graduating seminarians:

What a privilege you have to live by and to proclaim the heart of a biblical, Reformed theology—the grace of God that accepts us before achieving anything! A vital message for our competitive, identity-by-achievement, hassled society and congregations. Your life and ministry can be formed by gratitude for such grace. Grace also leads you to compassionate concern for the needy, the broken, the outcast. I encourage you to develop an inclusive attitude that promotes justice, peace, and hope. Preach it!

Love your people, care for your people, encourage your people on their spiritual journeys, but don’t be so busy with people that you have no time for God. For your ministry to have depth, maintain intimacy with God, stay close to Jesus, breathe the Holy Breath by developing a spiritual practice: study of and meditation on Scripture, solitude, prayer, worship, Sabbath and retreat time to keep your soul alive. Also play, fun, exercise, entertainment, time with family and friends to keep your body and spirit alive—self-care is not selfish.

In short, I encourage a ministry and spirituality of grace, gratitude, compassion sustained by a contemplative life and practice. To God be the glory!
God’s wide and wondrous world has been Roger Selles Greenway’s passion and parish from the moment he graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1958.

His formal ministry began on the far side of the globe with an appointment from Christian Reformed World Missions to serve as missionary-pastor of the Nugegoda Reformed Church, located in Colombo on the island of Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka). By 1963, the family moved to Mexico City, where Rev. Greenway taught at the Juan Calvino Seminary and later founded the Instituto Mexicano Bíblico, a Bible institute that focused on training urban pastors and church planters. The students from the institute, along with their professors, planted many new churches by canvassing neighborhoods and organizing home-based Bible studies.

After completing a Ph.D. degree in 1972, Rev. Dr. Greenway brought his multicultural experiences to bear on the denomination, serving as Latin America Secretary for Christian Reformed World Missions. In 1978, he accepted the call to pastor the Burton Heights Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

In 1982 after a move to Philadelphia, Rev. Dr. Greenway taught Missions on the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, where he founded the Urban Mission Journal and helped expand an interest in mission outreach to great metropolitan areas around the world. By 1986, Rev. Dr. Greenway was attracted back to Grand Rapids, where he became Executive Director of Christian Reformed World Ministries.

After leading World Ministries for four years, Rev. Dr. Greenway put an energetic exclamation point on his ministry by joining the faculty at Calvin Theological Seminary, teaching World Missiology from 1990 until his retirement in 2001. During his time at Calvin Seminary, he served the community in many ways, including a time as Dean of Students.

He has continued to serve the church and the cause of missions through his writing and speaking. In 2003, for example, he was appointed as Missionary-in-Residence at the Overseas Ministries Study Center and as a Research Fellow at Yale Divinity School, both in New Haven, Connecticut.

Rev. Dr. Greenway is the author of a dozen books, some of which have been translated in multiple languages. His field of specialization for decades has been urban evangelization and the growth of the church among city dwellers. His books include: Go and Make Disciples: An Introduction to Christian Missions, The Pastor-Evangelist, Cities: Missions’ New Frontier (with Timothy Monsma), Discipling the City: A Comprehensive Approach to Urban Mission, An Urban Strategy for Latin America, Let the Whole World Know: Resources for Preaching on Missions (with Richard DeRidder) and his most recent—Fish: The Call of the Master Fisherman.

Himself the son of a Christian Reformed clergyman, Rev. Dr. Greenway’s missionary service with his wife, Edna, has sown seeds for the next generation. The Greenways’ children all have offered their lives to the proclamation of the gospel and the cause of missions. From the Christian Schools in the Dominican Republic, to Young Life in Nicaragua, to the Esther School with GEMS in Zambia, and to pastoral ministry in North America, the Greenway family is deeply and wholeheartedly involved in building the Kingdom. They give thanks for the schools that educated them, churches that nourished, supported and prayed for them and opportunities to see Christ’s Kingdom growing around the world.

This legacy of faith continues to bear fruit in the hearts and lives of many whom Rev. Dr. Greenway mentored and in those who read the books he has written.

Advice for graduating seminarians:

Remember that all of the seminary coursework and all the time you have spent studying and listening in the classroom will someday prove useful as you follow the Lord’s calling in your lives. Study the Word of God diligently. Above all, preach Christ!
Over the past year Calvin Seminary has been developing the Scripture Study App, a Web resource for studying the text of Scripture. The app can display a passage in English and Greek or Hebrew, and you can click on a word to get a definition and other passages that use that word. You can also open companion resources to get background on a biblical book and search commentaries. The app is freely available on the Web at http://study.calvinseminary.edu (use the QR code below). Submit your feedback and feature ideas at app@calvinseminary.edu.

Nathan Bierma introduces the new Scripture Study App at Calvin Seminary.