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Presbyterian Church

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FAITH FAMILY FORUM II

PASTOR NOTES—WHAT IS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY ?

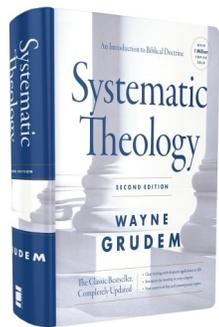


Pastor Karl Thompson

The Bible comes from one mind—the mind of God. Because it comes from one mind, there is a unity to the teachings of Scripture. Systematic theology is the attempt to grow in our ability to understand that system. Louis Berkhof says, “Systematic theology is that branch of theology which seeks to give a systematic presentation of the doctrines of the Christian faith.” Systematic theology looks at the entire Bible to understand what it teaches and seeks to organize those teachings into a coherent system.

When properly done, systematic theology serves the church by helping the church understand what the Bible teaches. But there are necessary limits to systematic theology.

Primarily, it needs to begin and end with Scripture. There is a system of doctrine taught in Scripture, and it is the job of the theologian to understand what the Bible teaches. He does not add to it or take away from it. He understands it. Although the theologian seeks to see the broader form of doctrine that has been delivered, it is also important that he does not add structure to that form by speculating beyond the teaching of Scripture. Instead, the theologian’s task is to show how the teachings of the Bible cohere with each other. The fact is that the theology God gives us *does* cohere together as a system because it all comes from the mind of God.



If you’d like more research on the subject of Systematic Theology, borrow this book from our church library.



Pray for our shut-ins, send a card, call them, or take a minute to visit them. Let them know how much we miss seeing them and that they are still a part of the Body of Christ at Faith OPC.



Joey was asked how he comes up with ideas to write his music and this is just one example. A link to his song can be found at the end. He also has many YouTube videos with his songs.

There was a time, most of my life really, when I lived as though the ledger of grievances, injuries, and injustices were the very things that defined me. My childhood and teenage years left marks that I carried well into adulthood. The world looked the way my wounds taught me to see it, and I didn't know any different. But when the Lord opened my eyes to grace, truly opened them, that entire bookkeeping system exploded. Not slowly, not politely, but all at once. When I finally understood that *my* infinite debt had been cancelled, when the gospel pressed in with real force, I realized that every grievance I thought I had against anyone had been paid.



And not paid by me.
Not paid by the one who offended me.
Paid by Christ.

If the law exposes what I owe, the gospel shows that every cent of that debt has already been absorbed by someone else. Suddenly the “right” to hold onto injuries, slights, and insults simply vanished. If Christ has absorbed *my* infinite offense, who am I to demand payment from another finite sinner? Forgiving a brother isn't an option — it's the natural outcome of realizing the bill was paid before I even picked it up.

I knew this in theory for a long time. But when grace finally broke in, it wasn't theory anymore. It was a kind of detonation. The past stopped being the measure of the present. Old grievances simply... lost weight. They weren't pushed away or repressed; they just no longer had any substance.

And that freedom continues to surprise me.

Just today, before lunch, I had an unexpected reminder of what's really going on inside me. I was at the store, reaching behind someone's cart because they were standing in front of it looking at a shelf. As I reached past, he muttered under his breath, “Manners are always nice.” Immediately a spark of self-righteousness lit up in me: *This guy is a self-righteous jerk; I didn't invade his space just reached past his cart.*

But before the thought had fully settled, something deeper happened — a heart-check I didn't generate. The Holy Spirit exposed the truth: my reaction was the same sin I had just condemned in him. I was irritated at his judgment, while committing the same judgment in my heart. It was Romans 2 happening in real time.

I realized the very resentment I detected in him was rising in me and I hadn't corrected it through self-discipline or moral effort. I didn't think my way out of it. I didn't recite a verse to suppress it. The Spirit simply laid bare what was going on, the same way Christ exposed the accusers in John 8. He stole my wrath by showing me I was no different.

The change is very real, but absolutely not of me.

This is the part that's hardest to explain but most essential: grace is monergistic — the work of God alone.

If the change depended on me, I would weaponize it immediately.
If humility were something I produced, I would turn it into pride.
If forgiveness were my achievement, I would use it as a measure against others.
If righteousness were something I cultivated, I would compare it to my neighbor's.

And I do.

Even as a recipient of grace, I drift right back into that self-righteous cycle. That's why the Spirit must be the One doing the work.

(Continued on page 3)



SONG WRITING --CONTINUED

(Continued from page 2)

Every time He arrests resentment in me...
Every time He confronts my superiority...
Every time He dissolves the scales, I build to weigh myself against another...
Every time He reminds me that I am the sinner, not the judge...

That is not my doing. That is grace doing what grace does. The change is in me, I can feel it, see it, experience it, but the fingerprints on that change do not belong to me. It's like Christ's handling of the woman caught in adultery in John 8.

The law is real.

The guilt is real.

But He applies the law in a way that reveals *everyone else's guilt first*, puncturing self-righteousness, dissolving wrath, and restoring mercy. That's exactly what He does in me. Before I can cast a stone at another sinner, He gently reminds me of the pile of stones I deserved to be under and then He points me forward, forgiven and free. Because that is the heart of the gospel:

God makes us new, and then lets us walk in a change we did not create.

A change that is in us, but not of us.

It's why no matter what happens in this short life under the sun — eighty years at most — nothing can actually jeopardize the outcome secured by Christ. Noah endured six centuries in a world described as “only violence continually.” I can certainly endure a misplaced comment in a grocery store, or any other light momentary affliction in this vapor of a life.

In a thousand years of joy in the presence of Christ,
what could anyone do to me now that would be worth resenting?

I can't fully explain how the change happens.

But I know Who does it.

And I know it didn't come from me.

And I know it's real.

The change is mine — but the glory is His.

Click here



FRUIT YOU DON'T SEE; WHY THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS HIDDEN, AND WHY THAT'S GOOD NEWS

By Joey Uhl

There's a particular kind of fear that settles on Christians who've been taught to constantly evaluate the progress of their sanctification. I've seen it especially in believers who come from performance-heavy backgrounds — the quiet panic that says: "If I don't see the right fruit at the right pace, maybe I'm not a real Christian."

But Scripture paints a very different picture, one full of comfort rather than fear. And it begins with something simple:

The sheep don't know they're doing good works.

In Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats, the goats proudly point to their works:

"Lord, did we not...?"

But the sheep are confused:

"Lord, when did we...?" (Matt 25:37–39).

They aren't tracking, measuring, or analyzing. Their love is not a performance project. It flows unconsciously, the way fruit quietly grows on a tree. That's because the Spirit is the One bending us outward into love for our neighbor — not because we're supposed to meet some sanctification quota, but because He actually makes us love.

Luther puts it simply: "Faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing."¹ It can't help but love. But you rarely see your own love any more than you watch fruit grow hour by hour.

When we look into our own hearts, what we see most clearly is our need. That's not a sign of spiritual immaturity — it's the normal Christian life. Paul confesses this tension in Romans 7:18–25 while simultaneously announcing the unshakable verdict: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom 8:1)

Luther knew this well. His last written note — "We are beggars, this is true"² — echoes Paul, because the more the Spirit works in us, the more honestly we recognize our sin and the more fully we trust in Christ.

Where Law/Gospel Confusion Sneaks In

A lot of fear around sanctification comes from mixing up law and gospel — treating the law as though it were the engine of Christian growth rather than the mirror that reveals our need and the curb that restrains sin.

Scripture is astonishingly clear that the power for sanctification does not come from the law commanding us to do better, but from God Himself:

"It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Philippians 2:13

If God is the One who wills, and God is the One who works, then our sanctification is not a joint project where we contribute our willpower. It is His work in us.

Paul says the same thing again:

"We are His workmanship... created in Christ Jesus for good works,

(Continued on page 5)



(Continued from page 4)

which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
— Ephesians 2:10

This means:

God plans the works,

God prepares the works,

God brings them to us,

and God brings us through them.

So What Do We Do? The Answer: Exactly What Abraham Did

If God is the One who wills, works, and prepares the works... what do we do?

We trust Him.

Same as Abraham.

Paul says Abraham was justified because he believed the promise (Rom 4:20–22). Abraham’s righteousness did not come from helping God keep the promise; it came from resting on the promise itself.

By contrast, when Abraham and Sarai tried to “help God out” by using Hagar, the result was disaster (Gen 16). Not because Abraham didn’t try hard enough — but because he stopped trusting God’s promise and relied on human effort to accomplish what God had already pledged to do.

That’s what happens when we try to make sanctification our project:
we unintentionally repeat the same error as Sarai — trying to assist God in fulfilling His own promise.

But the Scriptures constantly pull us back:

“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”
— Philippians 1:6

“May the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do His will,
working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.”
— Hebrews 13:20–21

This is the beating heart of monergistic sanctification:
God accomplishes what He commands.

Where This Leads Us

So where does that leave the question of fruit?
Right where Scripture always leaves it:
Fruit is for your neighbor to receive,
not for you to measure as evidence.

Your neighbor is the one who sees your good works (Matt 5:16).
You are the one who sees your sin and flees to Christ.

And here is the freedom in all of this:

The part of you that you do see — your weakness and sin — Christ has died for completely.

(Continued on page 6)



The part you don't see — the Spirit's good work — Christ is accomplishing faithfully.

Summary

It's an easy thing to slip into, this belief that if we just work hard enough or discipline ourselves enough, we can make ourselves "godly." That temptation is not new at all; it is the oldest lie in the world. It is Adam's rush back to the tree, reaching for the fruit that came packaged with the promise, "Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God." (Gen 3:5) That promise has never stopped deceiving us. Every time we imagine we can engineer our own sanctification, improve God's plan, or generate holiness through our own willpower, we're simply reenacting the same moment in the garden, grasping for divinity rather than receiving God's gifts. Sanctification is not the restoration of Adam's self-made godliness; it is the Spirit's quiet work conforming us to Christ. Which is why the Christian life looks so much more like trust than technique, more like receiving than achieving, more like Abraham resting on the promise than Adam reaching for what was never his to take.

No fear. Careful, yes, but no fear. Because sanctification is not your burden; it is God's promise, and He keeps His promises.

Footnotes

1. Martin Luther, Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (1522): "Faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing."
2. Luther's final written note (1546): "Wir sind Bettler. Hoc est verum." — "We are beggars. This is true."
3. Formula of Concord, Epitome VI: The new obedience is "not coerced but spontaneous, arising from the new man," and is "the work of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in believers."

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“Singing With the Dead and the Living: Why Learning Classic Hymns Removes Fear”

As I learn more classic hymns and hear how the same theological truths are proclaimed through a hundred different metaphors, images, and allusions, something becomes wonderfully clear: I’m not inventing anything new. I’m not standing alone in a room trying to create my own doctrine or my own path. I’m speaking — and singing — the same faith the Church has always sung.

When we enter the language of the Church’s hymnody, we step into the stream of the saints. We discover that the themes we write about — grace for sinners, the hidden life of sanctification, the freedom given by Christ, the comfort of His promises — are the very themes the Spirit has pulled from the Scriptures into the mouths of God’s people for centuries.

So whether it’s Gerhardt speaking of the cross as a “tree of life,”⁴ or Luther calling Christ our “mighty fortress,”⁵ or Watts seeing the Gospel as a “wondrous cross,”⁶ the Church is saying the same faith, over and over, in a thousand ways.

And when I write — stumbling, learning, praying, checking the Scriptures — I’m not trying to invent a private theology. I’m simply joining the song. The metaphors change, the melodies differ, the voices come and go, but the confession remains the same:

Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ saves sinners. Jesus Christ has done it all.

To stand inside that great cloud of witnesses is to stand where fear cannot rule.

Fear disappears when you realize you are not carrying the truth — the Truth is carrying you, along with the entire Body of Christ from every age.

That’s why writing hymns isn’t a burden or a threat. It’s a gift.

And in that gift, there is no fear.

Additional Footnotes

4. Paul Gerhardt, “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” (translation; original text 1656).

5. Martin Luther, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (1529).

6. Isaac Watts, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (1707).

[Click here for more of Joey’s videos](#)



Elder's



in September



YUM!



HAPPY NEW YEAR

It is popular among evangelical Christians to look down on the serious study of systematic theology. They rightly see how systematic theology often becomes a divisive battleground because of the sin and error of man. It is true that systematic theology has often been used as an ungodly tool in the hands of the proud, yet just because some people use a tool for evil does not mean that the tool itself is bad. In fact, the Bible teaches us that it is important for Christians to dig deep to understand the system of doctrine that God has given to us.

Notice how Romans 6:17 says, "...you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered." The doctrine that God gives us is not a hodgepodge of ideas; it is a system. It has a form, and it is important for us to notice that system.

When we notice the system, it becomes easier to follow 2 Timothy 1:13, which calls us to "Hold fast the pattern of sound words..." The pattern, or system, that we are given helps us think carefully and hold fast to what the Bible teaches. When we hold fast to what the Bible teaches, we have a greater ability to help others understand God's Word more fully, as taught in Titus 1:9: "Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

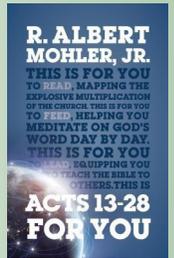
Systematic theology is a good tool that God has given us to carefully understand what the Scriptures teach.



TUESDAY MORNING LADIES BIBLE STUDY

Ladies Bible Study begins on Tuesday, January 6, 2026 at 10am at Faith OPC.

There is no more thrilling part of the Bible than the book of Acts, and no better guide to it than Albert Mohler. This second volume takes in the missions, arrest, and court appearances of Paul; the meeting of the Council of Jerusalem; and the arrival of the church in Philippi, Athens, and Rome. If you want to be fueled for Christian life and mission, you will want to read this book.



We are deeply thankful for the faithful women leading this study: Ann Pimentel, Laura Cent and Debbe Hemmer.

In early December we met at Tami's beautiful home for a teaching moment from Marj. Good conversations, good food and always God present.



MERRY CHRISTMAS 2025

Plan on coming to our **Christmas Eve Worship Service in 2026**. We are so thankful for the many worship opportunities we have here at Faith OPC. We thank our faithful musicians that play every Sunday. We thank everyone who in some little, or big way help around the church; purchasing the poinsettias, decorating the foyer, and organizing all the events. The work does not go unnoticed and we only strive to honor our Lord with His gracious gifts.



Away in a manger



HAPPY NEW YEAR

COVENANTAL BAPTISM

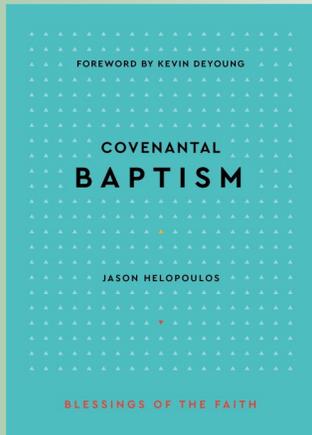
BY JASON HELOPOULOS



October 27, 2025 [Frode](#) rated it 4 stars

Goodreads review by Frode Jensen

This book is not in the church library.



This is a thoughtful discussion of baptism from a covenantal point of view. The author is clear in his writing, and the arguments are laid out in a logical fashion. He begins by establishing what he calls a proper perspective, namely that we are all Christians and believe in baptism, but baptism is not or should not be our fundamental doctrine. It is important, certainly, but our fellowship with other believers should not hinge on this doctrine.

Mr. Helopoulos points out that God mercifully gives us baptism as one of the two sacraments. The two are given to believers as assurance that God keeps His promises, particularly His covenant promises. In the second chapter the author brings out a fourfold testimony to answer what he considers to be the real question regarding baptism: “Are children of Christian parents members of the covenant community and therefore also right recipients of sacrament of baptism?” The four testimonies he identifies are as follows: covenantal continuity, New Testament testimony, theological testimony, and the testimony of the church. Each of these is developed with the most emphasis being on the New Testament testimony.

He has three chapters on how infant baptism is a blessing to the children, to the parents and to the congregation. He explores the imagery of the infant as a type for all believers in the beginning. I quote, “We are each as helpless, in a spiritual sense, as the child is in a physical sense—in fact, even more so. During a baptism, the entire congregation beholds the most precious of pictures that can serve as a reminder that grace precedes all. Grace precedes effort. Grace precedes desire. Grace even precedes faith. ... And when the waters of baptism flow over a child’s head, the congregation is reminded once again that our salvation is all of grace.”

The final section of the book is a series of questions and answers. The questions are those often asked by parents, relatives, or friends when infant baptism is not of their tradition. The answers are relatively short but thoughtful and helpful. I suspect, depending on one’s background, the answers may or may not be convincing. Overall, it’s a short book packed with information and easy to read. I recommend it.



While the book of Proverbs is classed as wisdom literature, it is also poetic. Understanding some of the poetic structure is helpful in getting a better grasp of what a particular proverb is getting across. At the very start of the book of Proverbs we are given the purpose of the book.

Proverbs 1:2 To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding,

So, in order to perceive or to mentally grasp the message of the proverbs, in order to know what the proverbs are saying, we will look at a common structure found in the book, the couplet. A couple of items means two items, so a *couplet* is two lines of poetry. The two lines often have the same grammatical structure and are complete in themselves, meaning the two lines together are independent in their meaning from other lines in the poem. Additionally the lines are usually eight or ten syllables in length. There are four kinds of couplets found in the proverbs. Let's look at them.

The *contrastive couplet* is when the first line contrasts with the second line. The common connecting word between the two lines is *but*. The two lines are sort of like the two sides of the same coin. The conjunction links the two ideas together but keeps them separate. Each line or statement is true in itself, but the contrast brings out the meaning more powerfully.

Proverbs 17:22 A merry heart does good, *like* medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones.
 Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Completive couplets are when the second line or statement completes the first. The first statement is true by itself, and the second line completes the picture or gives us a richer idea. These lines are typically joined by the conjunctions *and* or *so*.

Proverbs 14:13 Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, And the end of mirth *may be* grief.
 Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.

The *corresponding couplet* features two lines expressing the same thought but uses different terms. This type is also common in the Psalms. Another term for this use is *synonymous parallelism*. The first line again is a complete thought, but second line adds depth and dimension to the idea. It is sort of like viewing the same thing from a second perspective. Below you will see the corresponding terms: *fear of the Lord* equates to *knowledge of the Holy One*. To fear God is to know God. In the second set of terms *beginning of wisdom* is related to *understanding*. While not quite the same, they both imply a close relationship with God.

Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.

The last type of couplet is the *comparative couplet*. The two statements invite a comparison that paints a word picture, one that usually resonates with our human experience. Comparative terms that link the two ideas are *better...than*, *as...so*, and *like...so*.

Proverbs 25:24 *It is* better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.
 Proverbs 25:25 *As* cold water to a weary soul, *So is* good news from a far country.

Hebrew poetic style is somewhat different from our day and age, but it is understandable, and knowing the structure of some of the lines should increase understanding. Hopefully this little English lesson has informed you and will be helpful. I am in debt to Charles Swindoll for much of this information.



HUMILITY IN STUDY

By Pastor Thompson

Biblical humility can be defined as “the God-given posture of the heart in which a person recognizes their complete dependence on the Lord, submits willingly to His Word, considers others before themselves, and seeks God’s glory rather than their own.” Although this is absolutely critical in every aspect of life, it is particularly important in our study of systematic theology.

1 Corinthians 4:7 teaches us that everything we know about God has been given to us by God when it says, “And what do you have that you did not receive?” What we have received in that context refers to the Scriptures, which we are to submit to. When Philippians 2:3 says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than himself,” we learn that God is glorified when we place a high value on our brothers and sisters. Proverbs 11:2 teaches that through humility we gain wisdom.



Humility does not say, “There is no truth,” or, “Your opinion is just as valid as my opinion.” Humility does not “go along to get along” when talking about the truth of God. True humility knows that there is truth taught by God and seeks to hold to that truth, but does so in a humble way. The humble way is to depend on God, submit to His Word, learn from others, and seek His glory. “Humility guards us from using theology as a weapon, and instead makes us servants of the truth.”



REMEMBER:

**FEBRUARY 22ND AFTER WORSHIP SERVICE WILL BE
THE ANNUAL CONGREGATION MEETING**



In December we had our annual Jingle, Mingle, Munch event. Everyone thought of a favorite hymn to sing while all the children played and sang to the wonderful melodies.



**HAPPY
NEW YEAR**

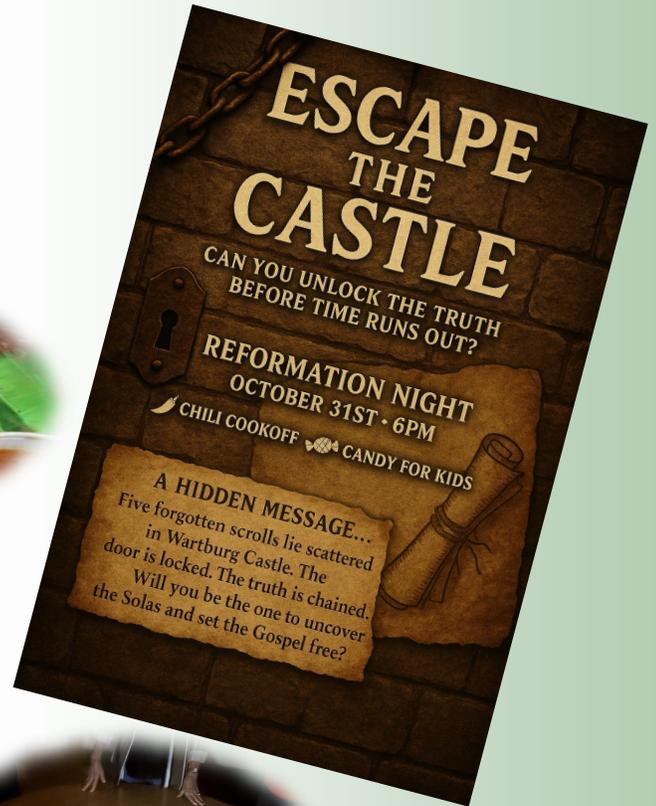
ANNUAL REFORMATION DAY & CHILI COOKOFF

On October 31, 2025 you could smell the chili cooking from the local neighborhood. The contestants were ready for the challenge of who could claim this year's winner of the best chili in the valley? Everyone's taste-buds were anxiously waiting.....



Once the chili cookoff was finished everyone had to search for clues to find the hidden scrolls to uncover the Solas and set the Gospel free.

Such a fun night, plan to attend next year, but brush up on reformation history.



COMING UP

January 10th — 7am Men's Breakfast

January 26th — 6pm Men's Meeting

February 14th—Couples Night (TBD)

February 22nd—Annual Congregational Meeting

10am Monday — Stand for Life

10am Tuesday—Ladies Bible Study (Start Jan 6th)

6pm Wednesday —Family Worship

To view the church calendar— [CLICK HERE](#)



FAITH 2025 BIBLE ACADEMY

The session has decided to do a chronological approach to the Bible reading starting last year. You will be given a chart each week. It will be on the church website, www.faithgp.org, sent via email, and in print on the table in the foyer each Sunday. The reading began in the Old Testament but we paused and read in the New Testament for December 2024 but now back to the Old Testament. The reading will consist of about a chapter per day except for Sundays. Sunday will be a review day; you will not have to read anything but a good review day. The session is asking you not only to read the Bible but also to react to it. The goal is to get you to think a little about what you are reading. You will find space to write on the chart; we are asking you to do two things; see below.

You will be asked to generate a short thought about the reading, probably 15 words or less will fit in the space given. It can be a summary, a reflection, whatever you decide. For instance, let's say you were asked to read Leviticus 25. It is relatively long being 55 verses, and it covers a lot of material: the Sabbath year, the year of the jubilee, and the redemption of property and of the poor and enslaved in that year. You could make a summary statement about content. *It covered the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee.* You could reflect on the chapter's content. *God gave them specific rules for redeeming property and people. The 50 year redemption is a shadow of Christ's ultimate redemption. I don't think the jubilee system would work today.* You might even ask a question? *How would this affect investing in property in year 48?* The point is to get you to think a bit about what you have read.

The second thing you are asked to do is copy a verse you like. You are not asked why you liked it. Just pick a verse you happen to like for whatever reason and copy it down with the reference, v 14 for instance. Sundays are review days. Again, you are asked to write two things. First, look at your chart and make some sort of statement about the reading for the week. Second, pick one of the six verses you had previously copied down. Write this verse in the review section and think about and maybe even jot a note as to why you picked it. At the fourth Sunday evening service of the month, we will talk about your review items, 1st week, 2nd week and so forth. It would be helpful for you to bring your sheets with you to that service. This is an experiment. We think it will take about 15 minutes or so per day to read and fill in the chart. After a time, maybe a couple of months, we will take a bit of time for evaluation of the process. Our desire is to get you involved with your Bible on a daily basis. If you have some other reading plan already in place with which you are comfortable and believe is profitable for you, that's fine; you can continue to follow that in lieu of what we are proposing. We will be continuing through 2025 in finishing the Bible reading.

Date	Chapters	Instruction	Notes
1-Jan	Review		Finish 2022 Reading
2-Jan	Gen 1	(1) Write down one thought (2) Copy 1 verse you like.	
3-Jan	Gen 2	(1) Write down one thought (2) Copy 1 verse you like.	

A lot of care, time, and effort went into the publishing of this newsletter and we would love to hear your comments, recommendations, and thoughts. Drop us a line at:

office.faithopc@gmail.com

Special thank you to the proof readers, Marylou Hansen and Frode Jensen, and the many article writers.

Feel free to write an article anytime, just email to the above link.

