

PERSPECTIVE

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505

THE KINDNESS
OF GOD IN
THE PROTESTANT
REFORMATION



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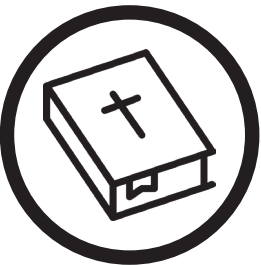
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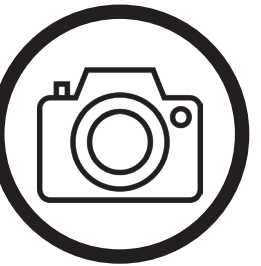
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505: The Kindness of God in the Protestant Reformation

Five hundred and five years ago, on November 31, 1517, Martin Luther initiated a polite, academic conversation with the Roman Catholic Church. His 95 Theses sparked what we now call the Protestant Reformation. In these short declarations, Luther quarreled with the church's definition of repentance and took issue with the notion that purchasing an indulgence could lessen the length of purgatory.

As time went on, Luther took even sharper aim at the teaching of the Church. He sought to recover the gospel itself, which led to the well-known summary of Reformation doctrine—the Five Solas (sola means “alone”):

salvation by grace alone
through faith alone
in Christ alone
according to Scripture alone
to the glory of God alone.

The crucial dispute had to do with the word “alone.” The Church asserted that our works cooperate with God's grace to produce salvation. In other words, for Rome, our good deeds contribute to the *root* of our salvation. For Luther and the Reformers, these actions are simply the *fruit* of our salvation.

In this article, I want to answer five questions:

1. Why all the fuss? I'll explain why the topic of the Reformation is so essential.
2. What happened? I'll walk through what led to the need for a Reformation.
3. What changed? I'll discuss some of the ideas promoted by the Reformation.
4. Who did it? I'll introduce you to the main Reformation characters.
5. What now? I'll share how you can apply what you've learned.

WHY ALL THE FUSS?

Luther started this conversation 505 years ago. So why take the time to dig into the Reformation today?

Let's travel from 1517 to 1962, before Lee Harvey Oswald shot and killed John F. Kennedy. In November 1962, Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II. Catholic theologians from around the world gathered in Rome for three years to present, discuss, revise, and adopt several documents formulating and clarifying Roman Catholic teaching.

(If you are curious, Vatican I occurred in 1869 when the Church affirmed and adopted the doctrine of papal infallibility. According to this teaching, when the Pope speaks about Christian doctrine, his teaching is infallible or without error.)

The theologians at Vatican II addressed many doctrines, including the doctrine of the church. In the following statement, they explain the extent of God's salvation:

The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these, there are the Moslems, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us, adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God Himself far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and every other gift (cf. Acts 17:28–28), and who as Savior wills that all men be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4).

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.ⁱ

In other words, according to Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church offers salvation—in some form or fashion—to all who seek God, whether or not they know or affirm the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But sadly, Vatican II argued that one could find salvation through the prophet Mohammed, idols, or even through one's good deeds.

Stop and think about it for just a moment. When it comes to salvation, this teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is not far from the natural intuition of your average American who would never darken the door of a church, mosque, or synagogue.

We know from Scripture that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of the living God (Matt. 16:18). I take this to mean that until Jesus returns, there will always be gatherings of true Christians professing

faith in the true gospel. I praise God for that! But how does God preserve his true church through the winds of false teaching we find in the documents of Vatican II?

In Acts 27, we read about a Roman centurion Julius who kept the soldiers from killing Paul when their ship ran aground on the island of Malta. God had told Paul he'd stand before Caesar in Rome—Acts 23:11. God promised, and we can trust him. We know Paul would not die on the journey to Rome. But how did God keep his promise? He kept it through the kindness of a centurion named Julius.

Again, in Matthew 16, Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church. Of course, we know there will always be a remnant faithful to the Lord. But how did God keep this promise when most of Christendom considered the Roman Catholic Church to be the only manifestation of the church of the living God? God protected his church through the kind gift of the Protestant Reformation. God did it through the brave actions of men and women who protested against the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church because they realized the institutions of their day—the cathedrals, the monasteries, the seminaries, the churches—had lost the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Were it not for the kindness of God in the Protestant Reformation, our church, Mount Vernon, might not even exist or, even worse, we might be assuring people they are going to heaven based on their actions when, in reality, they may be going to hell.

By 1521, what began at Wittenberg as a polite disputation with religious leaders in the Roman Catholic Church had turned into a contentious debate over the nature of Scripture and the plan of salvation itself. That evening, April 16, Luther entered the city of Worms, a criminal to some and a champion to others. The Church not only rebuked him, religious leaders demanded a book-burning campaign to eliminate any evidence of his teaching.

On the way to his trial in Worms before Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Germany, Luther knew himself to be engaged in a violent, spiritual battle: “Christ lives,” Luther proclaimed, “and we shall enter Worms in spite of all the gates of hell.”ⁱⁱ At Worms, Luther announced unless Scripture changed his mind, his mind would not change. Charles V could not believe a simple monk could be right and the whole church wrong. He declared Luther to be a criminal.

Luther and many others like him are evidence of the kindness of God in preserving his church from the

tempest of false teaching and the wiles of Satan, who is desperate to see God's people destroyed.

But how did we come to the point of needing a Reformation?

WHAT HAPPENED?

When we read the pages of the New Testament, we find imperfect churches striving to hang on to the true gospel and let others know of their dire need for Christ to atone for their sins. But as far back as the first century, Christians struggled to espouse the truth as delivered to them by the apostles. Remember what Paul told the first-century churches in Galatians 1:6, “I am so astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel.”

A similar rebuke came from the lips of the Reformers in the sixteenth century. They rebelled against the Church and its doctrine because they believed the Church had veered from the Bible's teaching. The Reformers sought to recover the truths of Scripture the way you might recover and restore your great-grandmother's vase. The Reformers refused to identify as the creators of a new doctrine. They were happy to be called rebels but didn't want to be called innovators.ⁱⁱⁱ Historian Roland Bainton described the project: “The church to be restored would be that of St. Augustine or even better of Paul and the Gospels. The essential note was the recovery of uncorrupted Christianity.”^{iv}

We go back to Pentecost and Acts 2 to find the birth of the church. Read through those chapters, and you'll see the first persecution Christians faced came from the synagogue and the Sanhedrin. Jewish leaders saw Christianity as a threat to their faith and their power. So, during the early days of Christianity, the great Roman Empire left Christianity alone, viewing it as simply one strange flavor of Judaism.

But as time passed and Christianity spread, persecution came from the ranks of the Roman Empire, particularly from emperors who saw Christianity as a threat to their vast kingdom. In the third and fourth centuries, Emperors Trajan, Pius, Severus, Decius, and Diocletian labored to kill Christianity.

Everything changed when Constantine came to the throne. After he credited the God of the Christians for willing him to victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, he claimed to be a Christian and led the Roman Empire to help Christianity. Eventually (and shockingly!), Christianity would become the official religion of the

Empire. Christians prospered under Constantine and the emperors that followed him in many ways. This favor they received from the crown is what undoubtedly saved the lives of many, many Christians. But it also changed Christianity and sapped much of the healthy spirituality from its veins.

A soldier in war will make sure his sword is very sharp. In times of peace, his skills begin to rust, and his blade grows dull. And, so it was with Christianity. In the absence of persecution and the presence of prosperity, the church will often look and act like the world.

Fast forward to the Middle Ages. Not only were Christians allowed to own land, but the Church came to own land and grew rich from the feudal farming system. At one point, the Church owned more than half the land in France and Germany. Then, when the government needed a bailout, the Church could step up and help. By the eighth century, all this wealth turned the Church into a political powerhouse.

But it wasn't just money that gave the church power. Theology mattered, too.

First, consider the area of church leadership. Over time the Church in the West consolidated power in the hands of what we now call the pope—a word that means papa or father. Today we may naturally or organically allow exceptionally gifted pastors to wield spiritual authority in our lives—we read their books and listen to their podcasts. But the Church concluded that Jesus officially gave authority to Peter and his successors, the popes. So, the Church came to teach that the authority of the apostles now resided in the office of the papacy.

To understand just how important the papacy had become, I need to take you to December 25, 800. On that day, Pope Leo III crowned Frank king Charles emperor of all the Roman peoples. Charles had defended Pope Leo III from corruption charges, and Pope Leo rewarded Charlemagne with the approval of the Christian church, which created what historian Mark Noll called a “strategic alliance” between the Church and State that would last for centuries.” In the 800s, Charlemagne forcibly baptized peoples he conquered and beheaded thousands who refused to convert to Christianity.

This doctrine of papal authority did not serve the Church well. Neither did the Roman Catholic view of the Lord's Supper, which taught that the bread and wine became, in their essence, the body and blood of Christ. This teaching also arose in the ninth century, and over several hundred years, this view of the Lord's Supper gave the Church

extraordinary power. The Church began to teach that the grace of God comes *through* the Lord's Supper. Since only the Church could give the Lord's Supper, you had to go to the Church if you wanted grace.

Imagine, for a moment, a Pope disturbed by the political decisions of a king and decreeing, with the snap of his fingers, that his whole land could not take the Lord's Supper. It's as if the Pope thought he could turn off God's grace at the spicket.

An emperor with a sword could secure prosperity on earth. However, the Church, through the administration of the sacraments, “could convey the peace of heaven.”^{vi} In the Roman Catholic Mass, according to Michael Reeves, “Christ's body would be sacrificed afresh to God. It was through this ‘unbloody’ sacrifice offered day after day, repeating Christ's ‘bloody’ sacrifice on the cross, that God's anger at sin would be appeased. Each day Christ would be reoffered to God as an atoning sacrifice. Thus, the sins of each day were dealt with.”^{vii} Salvation came from the Church the way water comes from a hose.

It's difficult to appreciate how the average Christian viewed the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. They needed the pope as father and the church as mother.

^{viii}

Fast forward to the persecution of Christians in England in the 1700s. Jean Waste, a young, blind Christian, burned at the stake, in part because she refused to affirm that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ. Waste rightly believed this teaching on the Lord's Supper to be a denial of the gospel itself. They executed her because they saw treason against the Church and the State in her refusal.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper were only two of the Church's sacraments. Penance was another. The church could forgive sins committed after baptism through the sacrament of penance. In addition, one could find the forgiveness of sins in the sale of indulgences. Think of an indulgence as a spiritual credit. It stemmed from the idea that Christ and the saints had done more good works than they needed for themselves. Their good deeds filled up a “treasury of merits” that the pope could sell at his will to be “spent” on the forgiveness of others. In dire need of money, the Church sold indulgences to “raise money for the construction of hospitals, bridges, cathedrals, and all manner of public works.”^{ix}

The sad result of this sacramental system is that it separated salvation from the gospel. No individual needed saving faith in the atoning work of Christ; he could find

forgiveness in the Church by receiving the sacraments. But, as we see in Vatican II's conclusions, the Church would eventually argue that one could secure forgiveness outside the sacraments. Once you separate salvation from the gospel of the Word of God, you have no biblical standard to discern who is in or outside the kingdom.

In a nutshell, this is what happened. It's how the Church grew so corrupt that a Reformation became necessary. It brings us to the following question: what changed? In other words, what did the Reformers do that saved Christianity?

WHAT CHANGED?

Long before Martin Luther, faithful Christians smelled something rotten in Rome. They witnessed clear signs that Roman Catholic doctrine was not, in fact, from God. In other words, God paved the way for his Reformation even before the sixteenth century through men like John Wycliffe and Jan Hus.

The Englishman, John Wycliffe, pointed to the authority of the Bible. He wrote against the papacy, sent out preachers, and helped forge a translation of the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into English. Pointing to the authority of Scripture above that of the Church, Wycliffe laid the groundwork for the Reformation. He died in 1384, but shortly after his death, the Council of Constance declared him a heretic.

A Czech named Jan Hus carried Wycliffe's torch. He also criticized the papacy, rebuked the immorality of the clergy, and translated many of Wycliffe's writings. After being jailed and rushed through a mock trial, Hus faced death for heresy and died in 1415. His followers, the Hussites, rebelled against the Roman Catholic Church. They did so by preaching the Word of God.

On the eve of the Protestant Reformation, people needed hope. Besides the corruption of the Church, people faced the kind of suffering and death that would lead anyone to question his faith in God. Historian Timothy George described how all of life had the stench of death. "The corpses of criminals," George writes, "were reportedly taken from the gallows and eaten by the poor in Poland and Silesia."^x Death had always been inevitable, but in the Middle Ages, people often genuinely wondered if they'd live to see tomorrow. It created a spirit of anxiety, spiritual anxiety. People didn't know how to address it. Some turned to self-torture as a way to atone for their sins. And still more turned to the sacraments. Few turned to the gospel.

Then, on November 10, 1483, a man was born who would follow Wycliffe and Hus. He preached about a different, older, and more biblical path. He pointed people to justification by faith alone. If you want to know what *changed* during the Protestant Reformation, the answer is that the Reformers put the doctrine of justification by faith alone center stage. Luther explained how he came to understand what the Apostle Paul meant by "justice of God" or "righteousness" of God in Romans 1:17:

I began to understand that "the justice of God" meant that justice by which the just man lives through God's gift, namely by faith. This is what it means: the justice of God is revealed by the gospel, a passive justice with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: "He who through faith is just shall live." Here I felt I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.^{xii}

Luther preached that the pathway to paradise is not through the Mass offered by priests or through the sale of the indulgences provided by servants of the Church. Instead, paradise is a gift that comes through our weak faith in our strong God, who offers life in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christians rejoiced to learn that the justification offered in the gospel addresses not merely *known* sins and not merely sins committed *before baptism or repentance* but *all* the sins of Christ's people—past, present, and future. No longer did someone have to worry that he overlooked sin in confession. No longer did someone have to live in fear that he wasn't genuinely saved. Instead, a humble man or woman can turn to God in genuine faith and repentance and know that God has truly and forever forgiven him.

Faith is necessary, but it does not accomplish the work. Luther made that clear, too. Faith does not justify; God justifies the sinner *through* faith. Timothy George described Luther's teaching this way, "To have faith is to accept the acceptance that is ours in Jesus Christ. But this is not a self-generated human activity; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit."^{xiii}

Again, what change did the Reformation bring? Simply this: the reformers preached the gospel. The Reformation pointed people back to the Bible and taught them that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, and according to Scripture alone.

The Reformers could recover a biblical doctrine of salvation because they sought to recover the authority of

Scripture. In other words, the Reformation hinged on a return to the Bible.

Salvation by grace alone through faith alone is called the *material cause* of the Reformation (that is, the doctrine that made the Reformation). *Sola Scriptura* means the Bible is our final and ultimate source of authority. We call this the *formal cause* of the Reformation (that is, what essentially led to the Reformation).

Without *sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone—as the foundation of the Reformation, the formal cause, we would not have salvation by *sola gratia* (grace alone) through *sola fide* (faith alone), the material cause.

The Reformation was a return to Scripture as our final authority. The Reformation is built on the Bible. It is from the Bible that the Roman Catholic teaching on the Church and salvation were both criticized. It is the Word of God we need because only the Word has the power to reform the human heart. As Carl Trueman observed, Luther's sermons have a repeated pattern: explain the law and man's inability to obey it, and take us to the gospel held out in Scripture, our only hope.

For Luther, the purpose of preaching was to crush the self-righteous and, having done so, to point them to the promise of God in Christ. That move from law to gospel, from wrath to grace, was the core of the Christian's daily life and was thus to be embodied in, and facilitated by, the preaching of the Word.^{xiii}

WHO DID IT?

I can't do justice to this question, but a few names are in order.

FIRST, THE GERMAN MARTIN LUTHER (1483–1546)

Wycliffe and Hus are important forerunners, but it was Luther's attack on the system of indulgences, the authority of the pope, and his defense of *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura* that made him the leading figure of the Protestant Reformation.

SECOND, THE SWISS ULRICH ZWINGLI (1484–1531)

He worked as a military chaplain and as a priest. His sermons in Matthew brought the Reformation to Zurich. He is known for ridding churches of ornate decorations and even throwing out the organ! He wanted to eliminate anything in the church building or the worship service that might distract Christians from the Word of God. Perhaps he went a bit too far.

THIRD, THE FRENCHMAN JOHN CALVIN (1509–1564)

He earned a law degree in Paris before studying Greek and Hebrew and devoting himself to Reformation theology. In 1536 he published his first edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He was just twenty-five years old! He spent most of his ministry in Geneva, Switzerland, where he pastored and trained theological students.

FOURTH, THE DUTCHMAN MENNO SIMONS (1496–1561)

Simons and his followers, the Mennonites, participated in the Anabaptist movement. They got the name "Anabaptist" because it means one who rebaptizes. All rejected infant baptism. Many died for their teachings, and some Anabaptists held heretical views of Christianity. Simons was not a heretic. Beyond advocating for believers' baptism, he wanted more distance between the Church and the State.

FIFTH, THE ENGLISHMAN WILLIAM TYNDALE (1494–1536)

Standing behind our English Standard Version of the Bible is the work of William Tyndale, who translated from Greek and Hebrew straight into English. Unfortunately, he was rewarded by being arrested, imprisoned, strangled, and burned at the stake in November 1536.

SIXTH, PHILIPP MELANCHTHON (1497–1560)

Another German, he knew Luther well. He is the man behind the Augsburg Confession—a warm summary of Reformation doctrine—which he presented, with Luther's approval, to Charles V in 1530. Melanchthon sought peace and reconciliation more than division.

SEVENTH, THEODORE BEZA OF FRANCE (1519–1605)

The last figure I'll mention is number seven, Theodore Beza of France. He succeeded Calvin as the head of the church in Geneva and lives forever in the shadow of Calvin.

Dig into the lives of these men, and you will find warts. They lived during a time of great transition. They caused much of that transition. Like Julius in Acts 27, they were not perfect. But God, in his kindness, used them to recover the gospel of Jesus Christ that we preach at Mount Vernon today. Historian Robert Godfrey marveled at the way God used these men for our good:

God does raise up uniquely gifted leaders for his church in distinct periods of history. Their role and influence are critical to God's providential governing of his people. The Reformers and preachers of the sixteenth century were the best educated, most godly, and most faithful group of leaders the church has ever seen. In a remarkable

way, they combined commitment, learning, and orthodoxy. We need to continue to learn from them.^{xiv}

WHAT NOW?

The final question I want to ask on this 505th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation: What now?

FIRST, CHERISH AND PROTECT THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.

I'd like to start with your responsibility—if you are a Christian and especially if you are a member of Mount Vernon—to *cherish and protect the gospel of Jesus Christ*. In Matthew 13:44, Jesus told the parable of a man who came upon a treasure hidden in a field. What he saw was so beautiful and valuable that he sold all he could to buy it. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like this. I take that treasure to be the gospel.

Many men I've mentioned and untold other men and women gave their lives to recover the biblical gospel. Huss gave his life. Luther endured trials, hid from emperors, and staked his reputation on the gospel. Calvin didn't want to go to Geneva, but he moved for the sake of gospel ministry. Zwingli died in battle, serving as a chaplain.

When Reformation Day, November 31, rolls around each year, think about their courage. Then, strive to be courageous and remember how much they cherished the gospel.

SECOND, BELIEVE THE WORD OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT.

Don't just pay lip service to the Bible. Instead, read the Bible as if your life depended upon it. The Bible won't tell you how to fix your car or whom to marry. But it will tell you that life is more than a nice car, and it will tell you what kind of man or woman to marry. The Bible is sufficient for Christian faith and practice.

A "norm" is a standard, an ideal. The "norm" in an industry is a best practice in that industry. Theologians refer to Scripture as the *norma normans*—the determining norm, the norm that norms all others! Scripture is the ultimate standard.^{xv} The Reformers waged war against a Church that had grown deaf to the norming power of the Bible. The Reformers lived when the opinion of the Church carried more weight than that of the Bible. Calvin, in his *Institutes*, wrote:

If we think how ready the human mind is to forget God, how quick to follow every kind of error, how determined to create new and false religions, it will be easy to understand how it

was essential to create a store of sound teaching which would be safe from loss by neglect, fading out in falsehood or being tainted by men's proud arrogance. It is clear that God anticipated that the impression of him given in earthly beauty would not be enough and so graciously taught effectually. We must, too, follow this straight path if we sincerely long for true awareness of God. We must look in God's Word, where his character is described accurately and vividly.^{xvi}

THIRD, BUILD YOUR LIFE AROUND FAITHFUL BIBLE PREACHING.

At Mount Vernon, you hear a lot about the church, the importance of the church, and our need for community. I'm grateful to God for our emphasis on the body of Christ. But how are churches formed? What brings us together? It's the preaching of the Word.

In Roman Catholic Churches, even today, the most critical piece of furniture is the table that holds the bread and the wine—it's front and center when they gather. This practice matches their theology because they believe grace comes as we take the Lord's Supper. But in Protestant churches like ours, the pulpit stands front and center. Why is that? Because we believe the Word of God builds his church. As Paul said in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ." Luther pointed his people to the centrality of preaching. He warned people to run away from anything that calls itself a church but doesn't teach the Word of God:

The spiritual authority has another power or function called the teaching of the Word of God and the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Whenever the bishops and their officials proclaim to you the Word of God and preach the Gospel, you must hear them, for in this they are using their authority; but if they do not preach the Word of God, they have lost their power, and their office is gone. Hence be on your guard when parties come with their spiritual claims and human ordinances of indulgences and satisfaction and do not preach the Gospel of Christ in its purity. There is no preaching that reforms except the preaching of the gospel.^{xvii}

FOURTH, NEVER OUTGROW THE GOSPEL.

A few nights ago, I observed a young wife preaching the gospel to her young husband. He was discouraged about his life, his decisions, and his weaknesses. She looked at him with love and told him to take heart because their Savior, in his weakness, went to the cross to purchase

their life. She preached and applied the gospel to her husband's anxiety.

We need more of this in the church. We need more preaching from the pew. But not just any preaching—faithful gospel preaching, which means preaching Christ was judged unrighteous so that we might be considered righteous. Calvin said Jesus had to die the way he died: “If he had been murdered by thieves or slain in an insurrection by a raging mob,” Calvin argued, “there would have been no evidence of satisfaction. But when he was arraigned before the judgement seat as a criminal, accused and pressed by testimony, and condemned by the mouth of the judge to die—we know by these proofs that he took the role of a guilty man and evildoer.”^{xviii} Jesus took that role for us.

It's appropriate that we give Luther the last word. In November of 1520, he wrote a letter to Pope Leo, the most concise and—perhaps—the most beautiful summary of Reformation theology I've seen. Of course, I can't be sure Leo ever read the letter. But the message Luther shared has changed my life, and if you're a Christian, it has changed your life:

The moment you begin to have faith you learn that all things in you are altogether blameworthy, sinful, and damnable, as the Apostle says in Rom. 3 [:23], “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and “None is righteous, no not one; . . . all have turned aside, together they have done wrong” (Rom. 3:10–12). When you have learned this, you will know that you need Christ, who suffered and rose again for you so that, if you believe in him, you may through this faith become a new man in so far as your sins are forgiven and you are justified by the merits of another, namely, of Christ alone.^{xix}

— Aaron Menikoff

ⁱ *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 35.

ⁱⁱ Cited by Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2009), 13.

ⁱⁱⁱ Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 5.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Mark Noll, *Turning Points*, 117.

^{vi} *Reformation*, 11.

^{vii} *Unquenchable Flame*, 18.

^{viii} Ibid., 17.

^{ix} *Reformation*, 13.

^x Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2013), 22.

^{xi} *Theology of the Reformers*, 63.

^{xii} Ibid., 72.

^{xiii} Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2015), 95.

^{xiv} W. Robert Godfrey, *Reformation Sketches* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), xiv.

^{xv} *Theology of the Reformers*, 81–82.

^{xvi} John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, eds. Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), 40.

^{xvii} Martin Luther, “Second Sermon: Preachers, Civil Authorities, and the Knowledge of Christ,” in *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Volume 2.1–2, trans. John Nicholas Lenker and Others (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 38. ^{xv} *Theology of the Reformers*, 81–82.

^{xviii} John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.xvi.5.

^{xix} Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Three Treatises* (Fortress Press, 1943), 281.

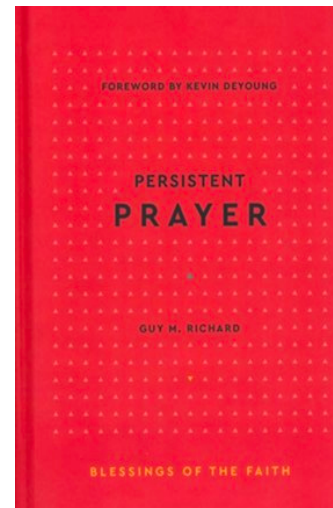
Persistent Prayer

Written by Guy M. Richards

Persistent Prayer by Guy M. Richards is not the most comprehensive book on prayer, but it was encouraging. In the first chapter, based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism's definition of prayer, Richard describes prayer as "pleading" with God. In the second chapter, he enumerates four factors that could impede God's answering of our prayers: "not praying in the name of Jesus, not praying according to God's will, praying selfishly, and praying in the midst of persistent and unrepentant sin" (42). Chapter three explains that prayer is necessary because God commands it (1 Thess 5:17; Col 4:2). He likens prayer to breathing, in that if we are spiritually alive, we will pray! In the final chapter, he says that as we grow in prayer, we will grow in sensitivity to the Lord's prompting to pray, and our prayers will become more kingdom oriented. (Each of the four chapters concludes with reflection questions that could be used as a book study.) The book's final section includes a practical Q&A, which answers common questions like "If God is sovereign, why should I pray?" and more challenging questions like "What about the imprecatory psalms?"

Three things stood out to me. First, Richards uses a helpful metaphor: a thin layer of ice forms over his heart each night, and in the morning before he prays, he needs to chip away at the ice by reading Scripture or meditating on gospel truths. The point is that only with preparation is he ready to commune with the Lord. Richards then reiterates the metaphor later regarding mature Christians learning how to crack the ice and awaken their hearts to do the work of prayer. Second, he says that "our confession and thanksgiving ought to be specific" (36). When we are specific with our confessions, we are more likely to feel the weight of our sins and the relief of our forgiveness in Christ. Lastly, Richard devotes a section to the importance of churches praying corporately and argues that churches are healthier if they spend more time praying. Using Matthew 6, he states that corporate prayer should be a shared experience that knits us together and provides accountability.

— RECOMMENDED BY ALEX CAMP



Excerpts from the Book

1

"Making an argument to the Lord isn't going to twist God's arm, and it isn't going to give him information that he overlooked or was unaware of until you or I offered it to him in prayer. What it does do, however, is force us to think through what we are praying for and why. It forces us to think about why God would answer our prayers in the first place, thus aligning us more with his character and will."

— *The Nature of Prayer*, p. 31

2

"Breathing is indispensable for physical life. We can live only for short periods of time without it. No matter how adept we may be at holding our breath, we all must breathe at some point... We may 'hold our breath' from time to time and experience seasons of prayerlessness, but sooner or later, if we are alive spiritually, we all must pray."

— *Prayer Is Necessary*, p. 63

3

"We open our mouths wide, we pray large prayers (see Ps. 81:10), and we do so with persistence and pleading. If the church could produce a generation of men and women who are characterized by these things, that generation by the power of God could undoubtedly transform the world."

— *Growing in Prayer*, p. 87

The Power of Prayer

Written by Samuel I. Prime

The Power of Prayer is a compilation of first-person accounts and reflections of the prayer revival of 1858 that started in New York City, published by Samuel Prime months later. The prayer meetings began with working professionals in mind, but they soon spread throughout different sectors of society and church denominations. This once-a-week meeting expanded to daily corporate prayer throughout the city and the country.

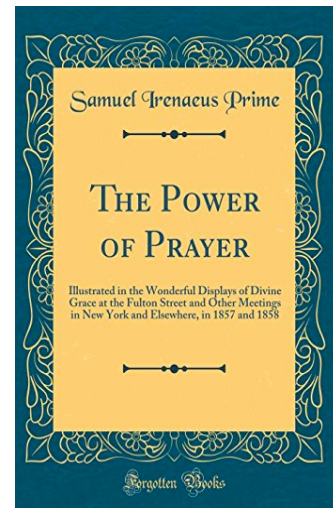
I was excited to open *The Power of Prayer*, having been fascinated with and skeptical of revivals over the years. I hoped to find answers about whether popular revivals tend to be human-centered or directed by God. This book was just what I needed and not what I expected.

Initially, reading was slow going. I brought my expectations into this book. I didn't find a manual for revival, nor did I find a strict history. Where I looked for a logical flow of dates and narrative, I found instead personal testimonies. There was no central protagonist, and I struggled to visualize a typical prayer meeting. Yet, repeatedly, I found a testimony to the value of persistence, the impact of personal testimonies, and the power of prayer. The stories that stood out the most were examples of a prayer request started for an unbelieving family member. People would pray for the person corporately, and often the person would come to saving faith and attend the prayer meeting himself or herself. There was an encouraging account of a person who found his way into the prayer meeting at the end of his rope and without faith in Christ, only to find out that he was the object of a prayer request. He praised God for it!

I was challenged and renewed in my mind as I considered the importance of prayer. More than that, I've been challenged to elevate persistent prayer in my evangelism. God is at the heart of true revival, as 1 Corinthians 3:7 says: "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." The 1858 revival grew organically, church to church, and family to family. God changed lives and gave spiritual growth, evidence of his direction.

I encourage you to read this book if you feel lethargic in your evangelism, if you are a fan of church history or if you need to renew your hope in prayer!

— RECOMMENDED BY ZEK BURKE



Excerpts from the Book

1

"Thousands of the humble people of God, who know the way to the mercy seat, will here find their faith strengthened when they come to pray... they will pray that such great things may be seen and done among them also."

— p. 3

2

"I thought I would let her pray it out, and by keeping her from the prayer meetings, I should break the charm.' So, they kneeled down together, and she prayed such a prayer as took a deep hold of his heart... His heart was softened, subdued, and he came humbly at the feet of Jesus, a converted man."

— p. 92

3

"Often have we had occasion to say to the praise of him who is independent in power, as he is infinite in benevolence, that the revival has been carried on without the use of means that attract observation and challenge the attention of men. But it is the divine economy to work by means and to use the servants of God to promote his purpose of grace."

— p. 202

NOVEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

November 1	Acts 19:1–41	November 17	Proverbs 4:1–27
November 2	Acts 20:1–38	November 18	1 Corinthians 1:18–31
November 3	Acts 21:1–16	November 19	Colossians 1:24–2:5
November 4	Isaiah 6:8–13	November 20	Proverbs 1:8–19
November 5	Acts 21:17–36	November 21	John 11:1–44
November 6	Acts 28:11–31	November 22	John 9:1–12
November 7	Proverbs 1:1–7	November 23	John 9:13–41
November 8	1 Kings 3:1–15	November 24	John 10:1–21
November 9	1 Kings 3:16–28	November 25	Psalms 25:1–10
November 10	Job 28	November 26	John 10:22–40
November 11	Luke 2:41–52	November 27	John 11:1–44
November 12	Luke 11:29–36	November 28	Proverbs 1:20–33
November 13	Proverbs 1:1–7	November 29	Proverbs 5:1–23
November 14	Proverbs 1:8–19	November 30	Proverbs 6:1–19
November 15	Proverbs 3:1–12		
November 16	Proverbs 3:13–35		

*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

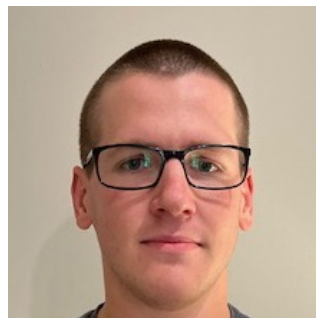
NEW MEMBERS



**Brady
Ballweber**



**Vivian
Ballweber**



Will Crider



Scott Fleming



Will Hulsey



**Lynnette
Hulsey**



**Madeleine
Sokol**



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH