

2021 Pastor's Reading List

1. **PREPARATIONS FOR SUFFERINGS: or the Best Work in the Worst times:**

Wherein the Necessity, Excellency and Means of Our Readiness for Sufferings are Evinc'd and Prescribed; Our Call to Suffering Cleared and the Great Unreadiness of Many Professors Bewailed, by John Flavel (1628-1691).

In his own words he tells us why such a treatise is important, *"Humiliation for our own sins and the due preparation to take up our own cross and follow Christ in a suffering path is the only mark and aim of this tract. The expectation of and preparation for suffering abates much of the dread and terror by accustoming our thoughts beforehand to it, that we may find it not so grievous, shocking, and intolerable when it comes. Reader, the cup of suffering is a very bitter cup, and it is but needful that we provide something to sweeten it so that we may be able to receive it with thanksgiving. What those sweetening ingredients are, and how to prepare them, you will have some direction and help in the following discourse. It is a blessed and excellent thing for the people of God to be prepared and ready for the hardest services and worst of suffering to which the Lord may call them. Beloved, suffering is one of the choicest discoveries of your love to your master Christ—yea, it is such a testimony of love to Him as angels are not capable of. They show their love by their readiness to do His will in the execution of which they fly as with wings (Ezekiel 1:24) but you only have the happiness of testifying your love for Him by your readiness to suffer for Him. Is not this excellent? The shoe of preparation to follow Him through thorns and briers, and over rocks and mountains of difficulties and troubles, loves Him indeed."* His works, especially this one needs to be read in this day and age as a reminder that first, we are not the only ones who suffer, two, our suffering is nothing compared to the actual suffering of those who are being persecuted, oppressed and killed for their faith, third, we should learn to give thanks in all circumstances, especially suffering because it one of the ways that God uses to keep us focused on Him and growing in the faith as individuals and as a church. And fourth, it is a sign of God's grace as we work through the suffering in this life. *"Hence in like manner hath the soul as great an advantage for sufferings; for this new creature (grace) having such a natural tendency to God, will enable the soul in which it is, to break its way to God through all the interposing obstacles and discouragements. What are persecutions, what are reproaches, what are the fears and frowns of enemies, but so many blocks thrown into the soul's way to keep it from God and duty? And indeed where this principle of grace is wanting, they prove inaccessible mountains. Graceless hearts are stalled, and quite discouraged by them: but now this tendency of the soul to God enables the Christian to break his way through all. This is grace, and this is your advantage by it in the most difficult part of your work. It will carry you through all; make the hardest work easy and pleasant, 2 Cor. 12:10. And if great sufferings or temptations interpose betwixt you and your God, it will break through all, and enable you to withstand all; as it did Paul in the text, who forced his way not only through the fury of enemies, but also through the entreaties and*

tears of friends.” This is not a long treatise (150 or so pages) but it is chock full of biblical insight to aid the Christian in the sufferings of this life.

2. ATTACK PLAN ALPHA (BLOOD ON THE STARS BOOK 16), by Jay Allen.

Here we go again...the attack is coming...the biggest in years...or was that a few years ago? It might get tedious but it isn't. Allen's writing of each of the battles are so moving that you can hardly put it down...even when you think you know the outcome. These are like the movie that you watch over and over again even though you know the outcome... because the writing is so good one part of you knows the end but another part is just not sure how it will end ...even after the 12th time viewing the movie. Now the Highborn are invading but they have a few battle plans all dipped in deception. But this is yet another twist that makes you keep reading just to find out how this works out. This conflict is going to be waged on two fronts at two legendary fortresses'... Grimaldi and Striker. They must hold. Will they... is always the big question. Then there is the deception going on the floor of the Senate as they entertain a representative from the Union who has been carrying around in her a device that controls her every movement..."the Collar" though hers is a little different...it is undetectable. What do the Highborn have planned for her and the Senate in Troyus City? And then there is Jake Stockton, "Raptor"...yeah you thought he died ...well he has wished for 5 years that he had as he has been wearing a Collar as well and destroying the Confederation wings. What is his story...will he ever make it back home...can he make it all the way back even if he does return? Is this yet another Highborn deception? Many regulars do not come back from the battles or excursions they have gone on to find the mystery weapon that ran off the Highborn before. But as normal so much suffering leads to new hope...another reason to read these...because the "good guys" come out on top. But how much longer will they be considered "good guys with the latest information that Andi found on a faraway world? How far will Barron be willing to go to beat the Highborn? Onto to **DESCENT INTO DARKNESS Book 17.**

3. DESCENT INTO DARKNESS (BLOOD ON THE STARS Book 17), by Jay Allen

(2018). Whoops...Tyler Barron and his wife are on opposite sides of a dilemma that could take the Confederation down a road of losing themselves ...their character...their dignity...the things that separate them from the Highborn and even the Hegemony... both of which would do whatever it takes to retain their culture and its way of life which in effect subjugates all peoples who are "lesser" than themselves in their opinions. Or are they really divided or are all parties struggling with the ethics of what they want to do...or even if this strage Imperial virus will do what some hope it is capable of doing? Will they follow Barron or will they turn and follow Andi? Inquiring minds want to know. Again the story line is compelling even after this being the 17th book in the series...the penultimate book the author says...but we will see. One of the best space battles yet ensues with literally millions of spacers battling it out...again facing the possible doom of their civilization...seemingly, it IS the last stand of all free humans and Hegemony...so what will it be...freedom or slavery...or worse- The Collar? If I

have one complaint...and it is one that I have made with the author... that is that the editing/proof reading is absolutely atrocious... almost non-existent to the point that it can be and is distracting. If someone did proof read they ought to be let go to be sure because the mistakes were juvenile in nature. As has been said this is perhaps the worst book in the series and I think this is the main reason. You get past it by having read the other 16 and knowing immediately what word, phrase, person or people group ought to be there but isn't. But what is a gem in this book is how the author writes the struggles of Tyler Barron...the hero...but also the one who bears the burden of the literally thousands of spacers that have died in 20 years under his command. I know it's a novel...but think about that a minute...almost 20 years of non-stop war with somebody and the last 2 wars have been with enemies far superior in technology, at least, so yeah PTSD, battle fatigue...the morality of decisions yet to be made, the weight of a whole culture, I think the author writes this extremely well. This is the kind of hero...the kind of man that we would hope would be in charge of a vast military...someone who in fact struggles with his decisions to send men and women to their death for the ultimate good or even to use a weapon of such potential (think A-bomb in WWII) and all the ramifications that could have come down the road. I am looking forward to the next and maybe concluding book in this series **EMPIRE REBORN.**

4. **THE FREEDOM OF SELF-FORGETFULNESS: THE PATH TO TRUE**

CHRISTIAN JOY, by Timothy Keller (2012 and reprinted every year since to 2019). This booklet is an excellent tool for anyone who worries about what others think...(can you say?) but also for any of us who worry about conflict more than we should. Rev. Dr. Keller develops this "little" teaching around **I Cor. 3:21- 4:7**. Pride and boasting are the root problem in this text...these 2 are the reason we can't get along in life...the reason there is little to no peace to be had in the world. He points out an interesting fact on the way to making his points. *"Up until the 20th Century, traditional cultures (and is still true of most cultures in the world. Is this a basic difference between 1st and 3rd world cultures?)...and what it was always held that too high a view of yourself was the root cause of all the evil in the world. There actually was answers to these questions: What is the reason for crime and violence in the world? Why are people abused? Why are people cruel? Why do people do the bad things they do? Traditionally the answer was hubria- the Greek word meaning pride or too high a view of yourself. Traditionally, that was the reason given for why people misbehave...But our belief today...and this thinking is embedded in every part of culture...is that people misbehave for lack of self-esteem and because they have too low a view of themselves. For example, husbands beat their wives and people become criminals because they have too low a view of themselves..."* So why not make judgments less for crime since it isn't their fault. But instead of supporting our modern view, Paul instead speaks the truth in 3 ways (1) Paul shows us the natural condition of the human ego- prideful and boastful; (2) Paul shows us the transformed self which Paul discovered and which is brought about through the gospel; (3) Paul shows us how to understand that transformed sense of self. His

overriding point is that they are to stop thinking about self...we are to stop thinking of every experience as it somehow relates to us, hence the freedom of self-forgetfulness. This book can help those who are searching for true meaning in their lives...those whom the Lord is changing and they are trying to figure things out and this book will help the life long Christian remember that is not about me...it is about God ...and it is about others...but this booklet can help the spirit led find our way back to that point.

5. **THE RIGHTEOUS MAN'S REFUGE**, by John Flavel (first printed 1682, reprinted and digitalized by Monergism 2020). He develops this series of messages around one text, ***"Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be over-past."***- ISA. 26:20. As a very easily followed pastor he wants us to know why he believes this teaching is important, *"That the days are evil, is a truth preached to us by the convincing voice of sense; and that they are like to be worse, few can doubt that look into the moral causes of evil times, the impudent height of sin, or into the prophecies relating to these latter days; for whom the sharpest sufferings are appointed to make way for the sweetest mercies. A faithful watchman of our own hath given us fresh and late warning in these words of truth: Hath God said nothing? doth faith see nothing of a flood coming upon us? Is there such a deluge of sin among us, and doth not that prophesy to us a deluge of wrath? Lift up your eyes, Christians, stand, and look through the land, eastward and westward, northward and southward, and tell me what you see? Behold, a flood cometh: a flood of sin is already broken forth upon us, the fountains of the great deeps are broken up, and the windows of hell are opened, &c. In such an evil day as this is, happy is the soul that hath made God its refuge, even the most high God its habitation. I have endeavored once more the assistance of poor Christians in these two small treatises, one of fear, the other of preparation for the worst of times; which, it may be, is the last help I shall this way be able to afford them. It is therefore my earnest request to all that fear the Lord, and tremble at his word, to redeem their time with double diligence, because the days are evil; to clear up their interest in Christ and the promises, lest the darkness of their spiritual estate, meeting with such a night of outward darkness, overwhelm them with terrors insupportable. Some help is offered in this treatise to direct the gracious soul to its rest in God: May the blessings of his Spirit accompany them, and bless them to the soul of him that readeth; it will be a matter of joy beyond all earthly joys to the heart of, Thy Friend and servant in Christ, John Flavel."* This book really gets to the heart of why we have such a hard time trusting the LORD and in typical Puritan fashion he gives us so many Scripture proofs to make his point that the reader is left wondering why we have a hard time trusting in the LORD. Rev. Flavel recognizes the heart of his people, he recognizes the temptations and he recognizes the distractions and so he knows not only that this is a problem with them ...it WILL be a problem down the road so we must be fully engaged with the battle within and without and he gives us wonderful assurances through Scriptures, if only we would listen and act accordingly.

6. **THE BIRTH OF CHRIST**, by Charles H. Spurgeon. He takes as his text Isaiah 7:14-15 and develops such a sermon around the birth of Christ that I have never read before. He talks about the birth of Christ, the food of Christ (this was particularly helpful in expositing this hard text and then he speaks of the name of Christ . (3 point sermon...good stuff! ☺) This sermon was delivered December 24, 1854 at the New Park City Chapel. As I said this text has given commentators “fits” for years...some prophecies are like that, especially if you get too caught up in the immediate context. By virtue of it being prophecy it immediately must be understood in the greater context in order to be able to grasp its meaning and application...which , of course, the prince of Preachers does. I am planning on reading this sermon some holiday...maybe this one, if I remember. Some sermons just need to be heard again and this is one of them.
7. **MARINES (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES BOOK 1)**, by Jay Allen (2012). This was one of his first book series if not his first and this book tells of the beginning of a Marine grunt, Erik Cain, who is destined to greater things once he is taken off of death row and made into a lean, mean fighting marine. He says in a first person narrative, *“The Marine Corps saved me. I was born Erik Daniel Cain in 2232 AD in Lenox Hill-Fargus hospital. My father, John Cain, was a project manager for Metadyne Systems Corporation, and we lived in a company-owned apartment block in the Midtown Protected Zone of Manhattan. My family wasn’t rich, but we weren’t poor either, and we lived better than most people in twenty-third century America.”* But then his world changes for the worst and within a few years he is on death row and just before they flip the switch he ehars these words, *“Erik do you want to die or do you want to be a Marine?”* The rest as they say is history. This book develops Eric’s character and the character of others Elias Holms, Sarah Linden extremely well to the point that you are drawn more and more to them. Erik has found a home in the Marine Corp but after a few campaigns under his belt his old inquisitive nature begins to raise his head and he begins to search for more meaning, *“So why do we fight? We all thought we had the answer to that from the first time we blasted out of a ship and put our lives in the hands of the men and women strapped in beside us. We fight for each other. That’s definitely part of the answer, but it isn’t the whole thing. Certainly, having decided to fight, we do so for our comrades in arms, those who share the mud, blood, and hardship with us. If my brother and sisters are going in, I’m going in. No ifs, ands, or buts. But that’s a private’s answer. Yes, I’m going if my comrades go, but why do any of us do it? It didn’t take me long to realize the truth: we fight for the colonists. Because they are brave and daring and deserve to be protected. Because they are the future. Because the societies they create, small and struggling though they may be, are far superior to the mishandled disaster back on Earth, and they are the one thing that gives us hope for a future, for a better system... for one truly worth fighting for.”* And it is, of course, this realization that will run throughout the book giving purpose to all that he does.

8. **THE COST OF VICTORY (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES BOOK 2)**, by Jay Allen (2013). The biggest war of the Western Alliance is raging as we enter into this book and we are hit with the people of integrity and the ones with not so much integrity...who are out for domination over the Alliance and every one of the other 8 Confederations of planets. This 3rd Frontier war is being fought across lightyears of human occupied space. After the earth virtually destroyed itself and they discovered gate travel people began to leave and settle through out the galaxy and beyond...because that was where you could make your fortune and not have to be under the tyrannical regimes of the earth even those who put on an air of democratic Republic like the Alliance. All of the first book was about the marines and much of this one is as well...but now we must meet the Navy and they have their heroes as well, especially one Admiral Augustus Garret. Like General Holms with the marines, Garret leads the Alliance fleet from one victory to the next and is revered by all spacers everywhere , even his enemies...that is enemies in the other nation groups. But the Western Alliance is seeking to to rear its head of dominance not just over the other nation groups and this is where the story line begins to get dicey because they also want absolute control of all off world resources which will ultimately get to the core purpose of the marines like Erik, and General Holms. What will the Western Alliance do with men such as these? What is their ultimate plan? Will it succeed?
9. **A LITTLE REBELLION (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES BOOK 3)**, by Jay Allen (2013). The war is over. The western Alliance and its allies have won the war. People are celebrating all over human controlled space and getting back to the lives they led when there wasn't a threat of invasion. But, as always, peace in this life is really just an illusion and it is not long before the powers that be want more from them...their liberty. But with so many Marines that have retired on these colonies and so many of them either having left earth decades before and other who have been born on these worlds...this group of people are not like the people on Earth who live by government hand out and are "happy" to get anything. These "colonists" are like their "forefathers who settled America" having broken off from the tyranny of a King. Unlike the Earth now, democratic Republics have grown in the Western Alliance colonies after the government that had once existed on earth, so they are governed well but this freedom will come at a cost...a cost they are willing to pay deeply for...just like the early colonials...for their liberty. So what will the colonist do? How far will they go to retain control over their liberty? What will our main characters do, now Brigadier General Erik Cain, full General Elias Holms, Admiral Garret, Admiral Compton...what will they do? Is their duty to the Western Alliance or to the colonists that they fought so hard to make sure they could have the life they worked so hard to develop? As Thomas Jefferson said, *"I hold that, a little rebellion, now and then, is good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical."* Hence the storm begins! Will the storm end in this book? Who will win? The writing and story line is a continual page turned for someone who likes this genre.

10. **WORDS OF PEACE AND WELCOME**, by Horatius Bonar (1860, 2020 iBooks edition from Monergism.com). This was one delightful read. I have never found a devotional guide from before the 20th Century. With short, 1–2 page bursts of biblical reflections, **Words of Peace and Welcome** is an absolute treasure of spiritual insights—perfect for dipping into day after day for holy inspiration...and that include in the 21st Century. These devotionals were perhaps some of the most sound theologically that I have ever read with perhaps a nod toward the devotional works of Paul David Tripp. These 62 individual devotions cover everything from the assurance of salvation, the work of the Spirit peace through our justification in Christ, going home to be with the Lord, and finally to the end when Christ returns with the new heavens and the new earth. He says in an opening paragraph concerning our confidence in God; ***“My times are in Thy hand.”—Ps. 31:15. THESE are Christ's words, for the psalm is one of His utterances when bearing our sins. He is speaking as the "sent" one, the dependent, trusting Son of man. We too can take up these words. We look up and remember Jehovah. What He is, even apart from what He is to us, is our joy. He is Jehovah; He is the disposer of times and events, the sovereign arranger of everything relating to us. We are creatures, sinners, worms; yet He is so condescendingly mindful of us that He orders our whole life and lot. He in whose hand our times are is the God of love.*** These devotionals seem to cover all the questions that a Christian could ask then some and ought to be read and re-read by the church at all ages.

11. **THE FIRST IMPERIUM (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES BOOK 4)**, by Jay Allen (2013). This finds all our heroes having just finishing off the War between the corrupt Western Alliance and its colonies who had rebelled against the heavy hand it had tried to use to make them like the people of Earth and it backfired big time. The Marines saved the day...again...upsetting the plans of the maniacal Gavin Starks, head of Alliance Intelligence, to take over the whole Western Alliance. But even with the war won on Alliance Intelligence on the run there still are other plans in play. Like what will Alex Linden do when she meets her sister? What is Plan “C” that Starks is cooking up? But with these things in play there is yet another threat that will not just threaten the colonies but the whole human race. From the midst of some ruins on a deserted planet a message has gone out to a race unknown and long dormant...long like thousands of years long. They have come answering the call the “invaders”, as they see the humans, inadvertently set off in their study of the ruins. The First Imperium and their robot legions will be an unsurmountable challenge for the Alliance Marines so they will have to call on the other Superpowers for help...powers that mostly have been enemies up to this point. Will this work out? Who has to die this time before they learn how to fight these almost unstoppable robots bent on the destruction of all humans? Can they be beaten? And what is wrong with Erik? Interesting no matter how advanced a culture gets there are just some things they can't fix; ***“His head was really pounding now despite the two analgesics he'd taken before the meeting. How, he wondered, can they regrow lost limbs and organs but still not come up with a decent headache remedy?”***

12. THE GOSPEL: HOW THE CHURCH PORTRAYS THE BEAUTY OF CHRIST, by Ray Ortlund (9Marks Building Healthy Churches, 2014).

I have read this before but it has been many years ago so re-reading it came with more insight to be sure. He reminds us of how we as a community...a local body of the Body of Christ need to be versed in and living out the gospel...that is what will attract others to the Gospel...not us but the way we live our lives in the gospel of Christ. But we also need to remember that we are constantly in a battle. J.I. Packer in the introduction says to the Church, *"Satan, in his wicked way, is a shrewd strategist. C. S. Lewis reminded us of this in The Screwtape Letters and the apostle Paul clearly never forgot it (e.g. **2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14**). Sherlock Holmes spoke of Professor Moriarty as the "Napoleon of crime," and we do well to think of Satan as the "Napoleon of sin." Satan stays active, cunningly aiming to spoil God's work and to thwart his plans to do good for his people and bring praise to his name. It is what God has ordained to happen. So the church must ever be at war with Satan, since Satan is always at war with it—with us who believe."* The Church especially the local church often forgets these 2 things...and so the leadership needs to constantly be evaluating whether or not the church is living up to its purpose to glory God in all that it does...what he calls a gospel culture. Over and over again he reminds us that gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. It is this gospel doctrine that will mold and shape a church into one that will glorify God and it is this kind of a church that will draw in people to Christ as God's instrument in salvation. Or this gospel doctrine that leads to a gospel culture will cause people to reject and flee from the church...that was one of the examples of Christ...either people loved Him and were drawn to Him or they rejected and sought to control His message or worse kill the messenger and His disciples. This is our legacy...but the gospel must go forth and that will only happen naturally when there is a gospel culture alive and well within the church. This is a great short read full of reminder for leadership and for everyone as we consider our role in this gospel culture and what is required of us to live out the gospel doctrine.

13. THE LINE MUST HOLD (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES BOOK 5), by Jay Allen (2013). *"Only the dead have seen the end of war."* - Plato The Grand pact is gearing up for the largest ground attack in the history of mankind on 3 planets Sandoval, Garrison and Samvar...the Line that couldn't be crossed by the First Imperium. The Regent has one plan...the destruction of all mankind. General Erik Cain has yet another and so does Admiral Garrett both of which means mankind is not wiped out...but the First Imperium is? They are 2 men obsessed with victory in the same way the regent is obsessed with ridding the universe of the scourge called humanity. Who will win this war of wits and weapons? The First Imperium has far superior weapons...anti-matter weapons...something that the Grand pacts best scientists have yet to figure out in a way that is safe and useable. But these same scientists have figured out some other things...new weapons that are almost equal to the Imperium's so they are making progress. Will it be

enough for the Pact...for Cain and His generals on all three worlds to be able to hold the Line? How much is he and his comrades willing to give for this victory? Also, there seems to be a dark force that is being raised up back on earth by the nemesis Gavin Stark. What will that mean to the safety of the Grand pact? It is good enough reading to move me into the next book, **TO HELL'S HEART.**

- 14. OF THE NATURE OF TRUE CONVERSION; The Only Thing that Makes Men Truly Happy and Perfectly Blessed in the World to Come**, by John Flavel (digitalized in 2020 by Monergism). This is an interesting work. Obviously an evangelistic work at the time. It appears that he wrote a number of small pamphlets on true conversion and this is a compilation of the all in one source. This is an excellent little booklet in itself not so much as an evangelism tool at this point but in considering discipleship for those especially that may think that somehow they may have had something to do with their own conversion...which of course they do not either by personal choice or by baptism but only by God Himself through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. *"WHATEVER the difficulties and hazards are, that attend this change by conversion unto God, the change itself is absolutely and indispensably necessary to every man's salvation. The door of salvation can never be opened, without the key of regeneration. Christ assures civil and formal Nicodemus, 'That except he be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,' John 3:3. Think not conversion to be the attainment of some singular and extraordinary Christians, for it is the very point upon which every man's eternal happiness or misery depends. There is one law for all the world; they must be changed or damned: No restitutions or reformatations, no common gifts or abilities, no religious duties or services, can save any man from hell, without a change by thorough conversion, Rom. 8:8. 'They that are in the flesh, cannot please God.'"* At the end of the book he begins by asking the unregenerate in my words: "How is what you are doing working for you?"...let me tell you about what God has in store for all who are His. Not necessarily a book for evangelism strategies but definitely one for on-going discipleship since so many are asking throughout their life...am I truly saved...how can I know?

- 15. TO HELL'S HEART (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES BOOK 6)**, by Jay Allen (2013). This book is about the grand pact taking the fight to the First Imperium. Obviously, they survived at the Line of 3 planets that was the line they were not going to let the First Imperium cross...they survived in victory. The author either taking from Melville, *"...to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee."*... or from the Wrath of Khan when Khan quotes Melville's line from Moby Dick, is seeking to in the title to convey the urgency and the stress and the trauma of taking the fight to the enemy not knowing what will be the upshot of their actions. I say this about the Wrath of Khan because the author in these early books refer to many images from Star Trek even places like Wolf 359, Tau

Ceti star system and other illusions along the way which for a Trekker like myself keep me alert to these illusions as I read through now the sixth book in this 9 book series. So they do take the fight into the star systems controlled by the First Imperium and after ravaging an Imperium planet they find something that could stem the tide of the war. But again, what will it cost them? And then there is that “force being raised up on earth by Gavin Stark that they are fully unaware of, how will that affect the world scene if they win and go back home. Is it home any more or just a prelude to yet another unwinnable battle this time from within? On to **THE SHADOW LEGIONS**, book #7.

- 16. THE SHADOW LEGIONS (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES BOOK 7)**, by Jay Allen (2014). The war with the First Imperium is over. How you might say? By closing up a wormhole in space preventing them from coming through with their massive fleet. But at what cost? Now what’s left of the Grand fleet is headed home totally unaware of a new threat. A threat that has been brewing for some time. A threat from within rather than from without this time. In fact, a threat so big that even before the Fleet get close to normal space they are getting calls of numerous colony worlds be taken over. Now not only is the Fleet decimated but also the ground troops. The marines are at a fraction of what they had been and while they won the war it did come at a great expense...as usual. But this new threat is not understood. Where did it come from? Is one of the other Superpower nations involved? How could anyone have been able to hide an army such as this one? And then the marines begin to engage them and they are wondering where did they get all of these power suits...and Marine equipment...and even more concerning Marine training in half the time of a regular marines training? And it’s not like regular training... all of them seem to fight like veterans though there does seem to be a bit of a lack of passion and cohesiveness...more like the robots they had just fought in the First Imperium except...these are humans...or are they? It does seem to keep you on the edge of your seat even if the actions of all parties are like...I’ve read this before...but you want to keep watching to get to the end...even if you already know the basic outcome. It is like watching a good movie more than once...you always see it through to the end. Now on to **EVEN LEGENDS DIE (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES 8)**.

- 17. STRENGTH FOR THE WEARY**, by Derek Thomas (2018). Derek does in these pages what he always does...speak to the heart of the matter with the Gospel of God. He takes his readers to the final chapters of Isaiah, pointing out the remarkable promises of God for His covenant people. He doesn’t pull any punches, he tells us that ...life is hard...and it is meant to be. If life was not hard we would become completely complacent and useless. But all too often it seems that we get knocked down and just as we are getting up we get hit again and it can be so discouraging unless we are depending upon the truths of God’s Word rather than our own despair being tempted to believe that God is not there and that he really doesn’t care. Well, he walks us

through multiple passages that tell us otherwise. Ones that tell us why the affliction is necessary and ones that tell us in whom we can trust during those times when God is stretching us preparing us for this life so we can be a blessing to others and/or preparing us for the heavens. These final chapters bring with them so much comfort and peace as they are the same ones He gave His people millennium ago for the same purposes. This people were making their way through trials and sorrows of which we can't even relate and these came at just the right time. They are there for us as well. In a day and an age like now we need encouragement and the only place to get encouragement we can trust is in the scriptures for God's Word never fails us...ever. Practically this book is an easy read...but not simplistic...it is easy to read and follow his thoughts so that his readers can spend more time considering what he has to say but more importantly what God's word has to say. For it is strength for the weary and the weary don't have much strength too work too hard at understanding God's promises. It is almost a book that was written to get us back into the Scriptures of these final chapters of Isaiah...I would have wished for more.

- 18. EVEN LEGENDS DIE (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES 8)**, Jay Allen (2014). Gavin Stark has set his plan in motion to rule the known universe with his Shadow Soldiers and with his plan to have the world's power annihilate themselves enabling him to swoop in and save what is left...rather, enslaving what is left to rebuild his empire in his own image. He is becoming less and less stable...taking out everyone and anyone who does anything for him because he doesn't like loose ends. He is on a vendetta to kill Erik Cain since none of his operatives have been able to do it. Even Sarah's sister is sent by Stark to kill Erik, her sister's lover, but she fails...or does she? **EVEN LEGENDS DIE** is a cliff hanger all the way through because you are waiting to see... "who's next" among the main characters to die. Will Stark get caught or will the world and the known universe fall into his control? The Navy and the Marines are working hard on one world and then another to keep that from happening but they are running out of time, manpower and equipment. Will a miracle occur in time? Will they be able to liberate Columbia, Armstrong and Arcadia in their quest to destroy Stark's diabolical plans to rule? Will Stark finish what he set out to do in having General Cain killed or will another take his place? Someone is going to die hence the title..**EVEN LEGENDS DIE**...sometimes making them larger than life ...something Stark does not anticipate as we bring this series to a close with **THE FALL (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES 9)**.

- 19. THE FALL (CRIMSON WORLD SERIES 9)**, by Jay Allen (2014). Eric is on the war path...literally. With the death of his mentor, leader and father figure Elias Holms by Stark's hand he now has left the Corps in a search for personal vengeance. Vengeance or death is the motto of Erik and a small band of veterans start out across known space hoping that Stark will make a mistake so that they might find and do away with this madman once and for

all. Starks plan see the Earth in the worst nuclear turmoil since the Unification Wars which almost destroyed the earth the first time over a hundred years before...but this time total annihilation may just occur. Stark has what's left of his clone soldiers waiting to take over when that occurs. Stark isn't happy with what he has already so he takes of the whole MARTIAN Confederation... killing millions which places them on his tail even in a stealth ship. He runs back to his asteroid bases to set in motion the last part of his plan. Will Erik and the marines get their just desserts and kill Stark...or will the Martian Navy do it instead? Will the world and all the colony worlds submit and be ruled by Gavin Stark? Will there ever be peace? Will Erik and Sarah be able to live with their memories or is death a better conclusion? This is the epic conclusion to a series that has taken us across the galaxy and beyond to preserve the human race and the code of the Corps. Excellent series...with excellent character development. I didn't want to say goodbye to these characters whether through death or just the conclusion of the series. I am beginning the series **Crimson Worlds Refugees** to keep up with those who were stranded in Imperium space when they blew up a space gate to keep the Imperium from their final assault. I only have 3 basic critiques: (1) Editing could have been better...not as bad as other works but still pretty obvious lack of editing; (2) Too many "F" words for me...I'm a prude maybe but I don't like women using the word and there were just too many by the Marines even for my liking. Wasn't as bad as the movie Platoon but became tedious for me;(3) Too much sexual innuendo for my liking ...little to none in subsequent series....maybe with this being his first work he felt he needed to.

- 20. THE TALES OF BEEDLE THE BARD: A HARRY POTTER HOGAWARTS LIBRARY BOOK**, by J.K. Rowling (1st published in 15TH Century...2008). The book itself gives a good explanation of itself, "**THE TALES OF BEEDLE THE BARD** is a collection of stories written for young wizards and witches. They have been popular bedtime reading for centuries, with the result that the Hopping Pot and the Fountain of Fair Fortune are as familiar to many of the students at Hogwarts as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty are to Muggle (non-magical) children. Beedle's stories resemble our fairy tales in many respects; for instance, virtue is usually rewarded, and wickedness punished. However, there is one very obvious difference. In Muggle fairy tales, magic tends to lie at the root of the hero's or heroine's troubles—the wicked witch has poisoned the apple, or put the princess into a hundred-years' sleep, or turned the prince into a hideous beast. In *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, on the other hand, we meet heroes and heroines who can perform magic themselves, and yet find it just as hard to solve their problems as we do." These are the tales that I have been wanting to read some of which were referenced to in the Harry Potter books and movies. Some are just children's tales with life lessons in them but some like the *The Warlock's Hairy Heart* are downright gruesome in its ending. While it still teaches life lessons it of course was one that many in the wizarding world held back from reading to their children until they were much older. And like so many things in life we see complainers about content that

gives Muggles too much of accepted status for some of the “pure-blood” families which Professor Dumbledore states, in his notes on each story, that there really aren’t any pure-bloods anymore and those who claim that status are perhaps some of the most mixed in the wizarding world, like the Malfoy’s and even Tom Riddle better known as ...Lord Voldemort. One of the best parts of this short read is the commentary of Albus Dumbledore at the end of each story. A good read for all those who are devote fans. “Free to borrow” right now if you are a Kindle Unlimited subscriber.

21. HOGWARTS: AN INCOMPLETE AND UNRELIABLE GUIDE

(POTTERMORE PRESENTS BOOK 3, by J.K. Rowling (2016). As the title says this is book number 3 of the information we ALL need to better understand the wizarding world of Harry Potter. The others in the trilogy are **SHORT STORIES FROM HOGWARTS: OF HEROISM, HARDSHIP, AND DANGEROUS HOBBIES,** and **SHORT STORIES FROM HOGWARTS: OF POWER, POLITICS AND A PESKY POLTERGEIST.** (Review on these in my 2020 Pastor’s reading list.) I couldn’t read the third installment until now because it wasn’t “free to read” on Kindle Unlimited before. **Hogwarts: An Incomplete and Unreliable Guide** takes the reader on a journey to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. You’ll venture into the Hogwarts grounds, become better acquainted with its more permanent residents, learn more about lessons and discover secrets of the castle . . . all at the turn of a page. This tackles great information, like how the Hogwarts Express and how Kings Cross Station was used. The train seems to have come into being after many attempts for a few centuries to get students to school safely. *“Where exactly the Hogwarts Express came from has never been conclusively proven, although it is a fact that there are secret records at the Ministry of Magic detailing a mass operation involving one hundred and sixty-seven Memory Charms and the largest ever mass Concealment Charm performed in Britain. The morning after these alleged crimes, a gleaming scarlet steam engine and carriages astounded the villagers of Hogsmeade (who had also not realised they had a railway station), while several bemused Muggle railway workers down in Crewe spent the rest of the year grappling with the uncomfortable feeling that they had mislaid something important.”* This is just one area of interest this little book tackles there is also the Sorting Hat, the Marauder’s map, the Mirror of Erised, and the Chamber of Secrets to name a few. Again a good read for the real fan.

22. INTO THE DARKNESS (Crimson World Refugee Series Book 1), by Jay

Allen (2015). Some of our favorite secondary characters from the Crimson Worlds original series are here, like Admiral Greta Hurley, Admiral Terrance Compton, Admiral Erica West and Captain/Commodore Max Harmon along with various others highlighted as they still are struggling to defeat the First Imperium. The last time we saw these characters the whole fleet was in X-2 fighting the First Imperium. Adm. Compton’s half of the fleet were too far from the warp gate to get back into X-1 so Adm. Augustus Garrett made the call to

take his half of the fleet back into the gate and blow it up to keep the First Imperium from getting into human space and destroying all humankind. This decision, the only one that could be made, left Compton's fleet in X-2 to fight or run if they could. Well, this book highlights the first year of life in First Imperium space and the fleet's battles one after another during that time because they are constantly under surveillance and being pursued by First Imperium fleets. They keep fighting, winning and then moving farther and farther into First Imperium space to keep from leading the robot destroyers back to earth. Along the way during moments of rest and refueling they are able to search out information about the Imperium on many of the lost and dead planets where life ...abundant life had existed before the robots turned and destroyed everyone. They are finding many things. Their scientists are making headway in understanding the Imperium. They even took control of a long dead Colossus to win yet another battle against the crazy and deadly robots. The book ends with a time of rest and remembrance as they have been in this space now for a year and they are hundreds of light years from where they started so they take a moment to remember the fallen. This series may be even better than the last one...so on to the next book **SHADOWS OF THE GODS.** (Most all of his book average between 300 pages each.)

- 23. PROVERBS**, by Ray Ortland, Jr. (2012). This book is an extremely encouraging to read, especially if you like the Proverbs. I will definitely need to read this one again sooner rather than later. I suspect it is like a good movie...it gets better each time it is read. His insights in the Hebrew help to re-affirm my understanding and appreciation for this section of God's Word. Along with that he gives some excellent contemporary application for the Church as well. God's Word, especially the Proverbs highlights true wisdom...not the stuff that poses as wisdom in our day to day in the media and academia. Whether he is talking about love, friendship, sex, marriage money or power (just to name a few of the things he covers in this book) he seeks to provide for his readers with a biblical world and life view that revolves around God's wisdom alone. He shows just how shallow the conventional/ worldly wisdom is that we all too often listen to when God's wisdom, having existed from before time began, has proven itself reliable for like in its depth and simplicity when understood properly. This book is written in such a way (the only thing that could improve this would have been study questions) that it could easily be used to teach through a very large part of Proverbs. The book covers the first 9 chapters closely and then the author picks topics from the rest of the book after that. This is a read..."old" now that everyone who wishes to understand true wisdom needs to read.

- 24. SHADOWS OF THE GODS (Crimson World Refugee Series Book 2)**, by Jay Allen (2016). Wow, there is so much happening to the spacers, Marines and researchers in this one. It literally is a never ending page turner to be sure. They have traveled deep into Imperium space running away from the maniacal robots killers but now they must stop for supplies, which mean they

must find a suitable planet. They find the absolutely “perfect” planet for growing crops. It is so much like Earth...almost too much like Earth which gets the scientist going with theories. While the crops are growing Adm. Compton takes the fleet off to another system as not to draw attention to the crew left on the planet. But the Regent is aware and has been aware of them and he has plotted the demise of every one of the humans. But there is now another robot that is in charge of this sector involves...the Command Unit which is far older than the Regent and still thinks highly of the “Old One” the humans that built them over 500,000 years before. The Command Unit is a thinking unit and it has question which need answering before he can fully carry out the Regents commands. The answers that it finds may change the whole outcome of the coming epic battle to end all battles. Also, while on the planet, Dr. Hieronymus Cutter stumbles upon a sentient robot in a city on the planet where the farming is going on. The robot is all that is left of the true Imperium and it wants the Regent to cease functioning, so the possibilities of success for the spacers, the Marines, and researchers that are left may have just gotten better. Now on to book #3- **REVENGE OF THE ANCIENTS.**

- 25. REVENGE OF THE ANCIENTS (Crimson World Refugee Series Book 3),** by Jay Allen (2015). The action is continuous in this one even after they exist “small” fleet split up so that one half can lead away the Regents forces while the other half goes in search for Shangri La, the battles continue and the deaths of even some of our favorite characters continue to pile up. The language gets a bit carried away from time to time which is not something I like but overall the character development and even their deaths ...except maybe deaths of main characters from the first series as well...are timely and written well. The editing is still a problem but not so as to stop me from reading up to this point. Admiral Compton’s fleet keeps pulling victory out of defeat in their on-going pursuit of the hidden planet, dubbed Shangri La. With that being said who doesn’t like a good guy always wins story? Do they find this mysterious planet? Are they able to use the planet as the entity had told Dr. Cutter he would be able to or has it been too many years even with all its advanced technologies if they do find it? Will the Regent ever be defeated and who all will still have to die to make this happen? Will the budding romances continue to grow or will they be drowned in sorrow since death stalks this group of humans seeking a safe place in this unsafe space. The answers are in this book and more which has prompted me to want to continue on to the **WINDS OF VENGEANCE.**

- 26. WITH ALL MY HEART: ORIENTING YOUR MIND, DESIRES AND WILL TOWARD CHRIST,** by A. Craig Troxel (Crossway, 2020) This book was a “delight” in that this contemporary book was like reading the Puritans like Richard Sibbes, Jeremiah Burroughs or Thomas Watson. Between the ease of reading and understanding of what the author was writing the amount of Scripture written out and referred to was what enables the reader to take complete assurance in the truthfulness of his message on the heart. “When

the Bible says that a person "lacks heart," it may refer to his or her lack of compassion or courage, but just as often it also refers to a person's lack of understanding or good sense (Prov. 7:7; 9:4, 16; 10:13; 11:12; 12:11; 15:21; 24:30). It is a rule of thumb in the book of Proverbs that when you encounter the phrase "lacks sense" (ESV), "has no sense" (NIV), "void of understanding" or "wanteth understanding" (KJV), or "lacks understanding" or "lacks sense" (NASB), it is a translation of the literal phrase "lacks heart" (see Prov. 9:16; 12:11; 15:21; 17:18; cf. Eccles. 10:3). For example, Proverbs 6:32 says, "He who commits adultery lacks sense [lit., 'heart']." The adulterer is not thinking things through. Neither is the one who belittles his neighbor (Prov. 11:12), rejoices in folly (Prov. 15:21), or acts as a sluggard (Prov. 24:30; cf. 9:4; 10:13). Where the context is clear, English translations will often render "heart" with words like "understanding," "consider," "sense," or, most often, "mind," as seen in the following verses, among others: See what I mean as far as Scripture usages? His chapters on the gatekeepers of our heart...the eyes and the ears are well worth the price of the book alone. In the introduction he says this about the heart, *"Os Guinness contends that the biblical understanding of the heart and our modern understanding of the heart are almost opposite. Today, heart is understood to refer to a person's emotions. Biblically, the heart refers to the whole person, including our capacity to think. Many modern readers probably have the (false) impression that a believer is determined more by feeling than by reason."* He reminds us that the Scripture presents the heart not just as a unity but also as a trinity of spiritual functions: the mind, the desires, and the will. *He says, to put it another way, the heart includes what we know (our knowledge, thoughts, intentions, ideas, meditation, memory, imagination), what we love (what we want, seek, feel, yearn for), and what we choose (whether we will resist or submit, whether we will be weak or strong, whether we will say yes or no). No other word combines the complex interplay of intellect, sensibility, and will. This threefold scheme of the heart (mind, desires, will) that provides the structure to this book is by no means original. It is the lifeblood of Puritan theology.* Richard Sibbes is known for his sermons on the heart. Jeremiah Burroughs is known for his works on the contentment of the heart. They all sought to cover the heart as the author describes so that we would not fall to the common worldly and simplistic understanding of the heart. This is such a great little book (220 plus pages). There is so much to say but I think this sort of sums it up, *"God says, 'You will seek me and find me' only 'when you seek me with all your heart' (Jer. 29:13; cf. Deut. 4:29; 2 Chron. 15:15; Ps. 119:10). You are called not merely to love God but to love Him 'with all your heart' (Matt. 22:37). The human heart strives with astonishing tenacity, whether in pursuit of an object of sin or in its repentance over sin (2 Cor. 7:11). This explains John Calvin's motto, 'I give to you my heart, promptly and sincerely.'"* This book ought to be read and re-read by many!

27. THE SAINT'S DUTY IN TIMES OF EXTREMITY, by Jeremiah Burroughs (1645 preached/printed 1651). This sermon was given during the English Civil

Wars (1642-1651). After the Battle of Naseby (June 1645), the Royalist cause was lost, and Parliamentary forces commenced an assault on the South West. Restormel Castle was evacuated by the Royalists as they retreated to the West. That was just before Burroughs gave his series of sermons, labelled by others as **The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment**. This sermon was included in the 1651 edition of that work. This is a prolonged exposition of **Exodus 14:13- “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.”** In this sermon he gives his hearers and readers later much to ponder concerning the existence of “extremities”... struggles/hardships...in this life. He considers why and how God uses these in the life of the believer so that we can understand God’s never ending care for us that we might live in the peace of God...the contentment to which his later book would make much of. As he begins this sermon he says, “Says Moses, Fear not, but stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. Stand still; the Hebrew word is “yatsab” — it signifies to settle and compose, to be in a settled condition. It is a reflect word upon ourselves; so the learned know what it is to work upon ourselves, to form; it signifies so. It is the same as if he said, Work upon your own hearts, to get your hearts to stand still; work upon your hearts to do that; work arguments upon your spirits, and never stop working until you have wrought your hearts into such a frame that you may stand still, and be quiet. At first, even the dearest servants of God will find their hearts shake in time of hazards and extremities. But once they come to work upon their spirits, to bring arguments to lay to their hearts, they get some advantage there, so that their hearts grow quiet quickly.” This “stillness” or “quietness” is crucial in the life of the believer for without it we will not submit to Him as we ought. If we do not stop and have time to reflect we will never see and understand our sinfulness and pride...we will never be able to see and experience the things that God would have us experience, since we are choosing our own path...we do not take the time to learn from adversity or His law and hence we reject Him and His law...either outwardly or inwardly. We will have no peace with this constant rush and lack of peace. Of course, without time to reflect and learn we will not take the time to “stand firm” for God either before a watching and needy world. His sermon just like the book, **The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment** are very timely for the Christian today. It is amazing how loudly and clearly the Puritan preacher spoke through the ages.

- 28. WINDS OF VENGEANCE (Crimson World Refugee Series Book 4)**, by Jay Allen (2016). People are crazy in every place and in every time...even in sci-fi- fantasy which reflects the human heart so well at least in these books. The depravity of men and women continues even after we have find prosperity and societal stability until we /they get too comfortable. Well, 30 years have gone by since Earth 2 has been colonized after the Regents demise. Thirty years of growth and prosperity on the backs of the information left behind by the Ancients. Since the population was less than 20,000 when they originally

landed they began to seek out ways to expand the population...they of course, did this the natural way but they also branched off into cloning and they develop a whole set of clones to help in society many of which ended up in the new Marine Corps headed up by Connor Frazier a close friend and soldier who fought under Erik Cain back before the barrier was blown and these folks were stranded in Imperium Space. And then to further understand the Ancient technology, 116 individuals were created by Hieronymus Cutter and Ana Zhukov with the use of Ancient DNA and human DNA...they are called Mules in this society because they cannot naturally reproduce on their own. Well, as you can imagine after 30 plus years of relative ease and 20 plus years of nothing from the Regents, battle bots society does what society does best...when it gets comfortable it gets enabled and it wants more....more of what others have. Well, there is unrest brewing just before another election. Max Harmon has been elected President of Earth 2 continuously for 30 years but it seems his popularity has waned and he is getting tired himself. But wait, they haven't heard back from one of their deep space patrols...and then when they do there is obviously something out there. So they send a task force to investigate all along there is a standoff brewing with the Mules over the right to "reproduce" themselves in the laboratory. Possible Civil war at home and possible problems on what they now call the Rim...the far reaches of then traveled space...what is to be done? Well, it is confirmed the Imperium is back but who is at the head of this new group that is set on avenging The Regent? Where are they getting their new weaponry? How are they being led? So the fights at home are suspended and they rally together to deal with this new threat...that's the good news. The bad news...??? They are at war again with a smarter and more powerful adversary bent on their destruction...a robot entity seeking vengeance...who knew? Now that IS bad news. So on to **STORM OF VENGEANCE.**

29. STORM OF VENGEANCE (Crimson World Refugee Series Book 5), by Jay Allen (2018). The 2nd Regent ...whose name is Vengeance...at least that is what it is calling itself as it seeks vengeance for the demise of the original regent...is setting the stage for the "perfect storm" where he will get his vengeance against these enemies...this virus called the human race. It has developed a plan that it believes to be perfect and it will wreak such disaster to utterly destroy or at least demoralize the humans so that its forces can swoop in and annihilate the rest of mankind that is infecting the universe. I wonder, is it smarter than the last regent who thought it had devised the perfect plan as well...? Anyway, the battles in space are not the only things going on. While the spacers are gone seeking the world that makes all the antimatter for the Imperium, back on earth unrest is beginning again. Max has been the president now for 42 years with the last 12 serving as a virtual dictator after the attack of the First Imperium. *"But in the forty-two years since*

*the fleet had arrived at Earth Two, there hadn't been a sign of anything else out in this dark and distant corner of the galaxy, save the apparently resurgent First Imperium. Graham had listened as a child to his parent's stories of the days of the Fleet, of the desperate battles of their desperate flight, but he'd never imagined then that he would end up battling the same enemy... or some new version of it. At least not until twelve years before, when that shadow descended once again on the crews of the Fleet, and on their descendants. The original Regent had been destroyed, more than forty years ago, by the hand of no one less than the current president—and effective dictator—of Earth Two, Max Harmon. Debate had raged over the past twelve years, various explanations put forward to explain the resurgent hostilities with forces of the First Imperium, an enemy that had, for some merciful years at least, seemed vanquished.” But now there is also a “terrorist cell” terrorizing the citizens of Earth 2 so Harmon while being stressed out about the longevity of the humans on Earth 2 because of the threat of the First Imperium now is stress by some of the people of Earth 2 itself that have no concern for human life. He knows what must be done when these terrorists are captured but will he be able to severely judge them when that time comes? Will the spacers succeed in blowing up the antimatter planet? Will Erika West return victorious or will Vengeance’s perfect storm win out for the absolute rule of the universe? Does Vengeance have another plan if this one fails? ...Which is absurd...but there must always be a backup plan just like there was a backup Regent. Well, I am off to the last book in the series **CRUSADE OF VENGEANCE** to find out what will happen next.*

- 30. JOSIAH'S REFORMATION: AN EXPOSITION OF II Chronicles 34:22-28**, by Richard Sibbes (first published 1637, republished in paperback 2011). *“Sibbes never wastes the student's time,”* wrote Spurgeon, *“he scatters pearls and diamonds with both hands.”* I would add that he scatters all of these treasures out in the open...for as I have said before, to me, he is the easiest Puritan preacher to understand and follow even with the archaic language (archaic to us) that he uses. This book was originally a four-part sermon series on 2 Chronicles 34:22-28, especially verses 26-28- *“But to the king of Judah(Josiah), who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD. Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place and its inhabitants.’”* The sermons are titled *The Tender Heart, The Art of Self-humbling, The Art of Mourning, and The Saints Refreshing*. Each of these get to the “heart” of the matter...which was always Sibbes point. To exposit the Scripture so that his hearers and his readers hearts would be moved from where they are now to where they

should be. He says point blank, *“Sin is the bane of all comfort. That which we love more than our souls undoes us. It embitters every comfort, and makes that we cannot perform duties with spiritual life. Our very prayers are abominable to God so long as we live in known sin. What makes the hour of death and the Day of Judgment terrible but this?”* The “good” doctor seeks reformation of heart, mind and soul and hence Reformation of God’s Church, His people, and he does it in the simplest of fashion...pray, humble yourself before God, live in His forgiveness and rejoice in being renewed. Here towards the end of the book in the midst of many uplifting pieces is yet another gem, *“Here we learn again that it is the sight of misery which works the deepest impression. It is not the hearing of a thing, but the sight of it, which affecteth most deeply; as in the sacrament, the seeing of the bread broken, and the wine poured out, works a deep impression; and because God knew Josiah’s heart would break at the sight of the misery, therefore he tells him, ‘Thine eyes shall not see the evil that I will bring upon this place.’ The sight is a most working sense, to make the deepest impression upon the soul. What shall be our great joy and happiness in heaven, but that we shall see God for evermore.”* This book like so many other great reads from Sibbes and others of his day can be downloaded for free from Monergism.com.

- 31. CRUSADE OF VENGEANCE (Crimson World Refugee Series Book 6)**, by Jay Allen (2021). This one was a real page turner to be sure. Given that I have read so many of his other books the outcome was never in doubt but it was literally up to the last couple of chapters before you knew for sure. Once again there is trouble brewing for Max Harmon the dictator/president who has been in power for over 60 years now...trouble between the Mules the genetically enhanced beings created from the original DNA of the First Imperium people. They want to rule...Max knows they will...but how will all the others pure humans and clones/Tanks take to that rule? All along they are searching for the Regent 2.0 while the Regent/Vengeance is doing the same and of course, they find one another virtually at the same time. Who will win? The battle for Earth-2 was epic with the son of a former hero coming forth just in time to become a new hero. Earth-2 is virtually destroyed at least around the city center where most of the population is centered but most of the people survive. The fleets of both sides are all but destroyed during the battle which could go either way up until the end. For all the smarts of the advanced AI Regent/Vengeance there are only so many variables that can be calculated (“millions, even billions”) and even those don’t work with such an unpredictable creature as humans. Over analyzing often ends in disaster for the one doing the over analyzing. All through the series it just can’t figure how his predecessor was destroyed. It plagues “him” right up until the end...his end. Just a couple of observations: the editing seems to get worse when you get to the last books of a series with this author. Thankfully the characters are so drummed into you that you almost read their names where the lack of editing has left a name or a place that should be there. The relationships while not descriptive obviously condone homosexuality and living together

outside of wedlock...but then this is a secular author. Also, a major cliff-hanger from the previous book was never addressed in this book. All in all very enjoyable read...though I am left with many unanswered questions that none of his other series book seem to deal with.

32. **THE BRUISED REED**, BY Richard Sibbes (1630, digitized 2010). This is a re-read as I have been going through some of my favorite Sibbes books this year so far. In his book **The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax**, the Puritan preacher Richard Sibbes provides a tenderhearted, Christ-exalting exposition and application of **Isaiah 42:1-3**-***“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed He will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench; He will faithfully bring forth justice.”*** Sibbes follows Matthew’s interpretation of this text, seeing it to be fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:18-20). His exposition breaks down into three basic parts: (1) Christ will not break the bruised reed; (2) Christ will not quench the smoking flax; (3) Christ will not do either of these things until he has sent forth judgment into victory. Since its initial publication, **The Bruised Reed** has been a source of encouragement to dejected sinners and struggling saints alike. To help his readers/listeners (since these were sermons made into a “book”) he writes to those that are still struggling with the truthfulness of all that he says, *“God often works by contraries: when he means to give victory, he will allow us to be foiled at first; when he means to comfort, he will terrify first; when he means to justify, he will condemn us first; when he means to make us glorious, he will abase us first. A Christian conquers, even when he is conquered. When he is conquered by some sins, he gets victory over others more dangerous, such as spiritual pride and security.”* This little booklet which only comprises the slightest of the vastness of his printing has caused me to want to read more again. From its beginning his words comfort and assure his readers in ways that seem foreign when talking and writing about doctrinal issues. A couplet was written about Sibbes after his death that captures this well: *“Of that good man let this high praise be given: Heaven was in him before he was in heaven.”* To encourage his hearers and readers he says often, *“There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.”* Would that we would think about that. (Now there is a Modern English version out there that would make this understandable preacher even more enjoyable.)
33. **LUKE: PART 1: A STUDY OF LUKE 1-8 (At His Feet Book 5)**, by Hope A. Blanton, Christine B. Gordon (2019). This is a re-read as the Women of Virtue was studying through this book so that if I was asked anything I would be up to date with them. I said this before and still believe it...in fact, it is still good only after a year later after reading it the first time. *This is a one of a kind Bible study in my opinion because these 2 women combine real scholarship with probing questions that lead to challenge and change. On top of that each*

lesson can be done in less than 30 minutes preparation. With each lesson the reader is given the “big idea” as well as the contextual insight needed to not only understand the Word of God but also to incorporate it into your life. Of course, this is written for women. I say that, not in any condescending way but because it is so efficient and rewarding all at the same time. Where does this study take the reader? Listen in their own words. “We have traced the life of Jesus from his birth in a dirty cave. Born to a powerless, teenage mother, foretold by a miracle child born to two elderly people, and raised in a poor family, Jesus lived a difficult life in our broken world. From the very beginning, he had chosen to deal with the suffering of humanity by entering into it. He endured the testing of Satan in the wilderness and the rejection of the religious leaders. He called a band of unlikely disciples and began a preaching tour complete with demonstrations of God’s power. He withdrew to pray when he could have rallied for insurrection. He taught love for enemies when he alone had the right to condemn. He saw and had compassion on those who were hurting, released people from the tortures of Satan, and called an unclean woman ‘daughter.’ Who was this man? Who is this man? He is the Son of the Most High God, the anointed one who was to come, the Messiah, the king of the upside-down kingdom. And to those who put their trust in him, he still says, “Your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”’ I wish there were more of these...oh wait... there are, this is book 5 in the series after all! And as I have often said...the husbands of these women ought to read this book with their wives.

34. STRANGELY BRIGHT: CAN YOU LOVE God AND ENJOY THIS

WORLD?, by Joe Rigney (2020). He, like his mentor John Piper sets the stage for the Christian that all things that come from the Father are good gifts and as long as they lead us back to the Father then they are good gifts. John Piper talked about Christian Hedonism and that very term made many in the conservative church uneasy, as I am sure that many will be uneasy with this work as well...but it does set a few things into perspective. *“When Paul refers to the things on the earth, does he mean things like baseball, bacon cheeseburgers, game nights with the family, Shakespeare, working out, Star Wars, home repairs, and church picnics on sunny spring days? Is Paul telling us that we shouldn’t seek those things at all or set our mind upon them in any sense? This is where careful reading of the passage can help. Look at the next verses. ‘Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming’ (Col. 3:5–6). Now, the word for “earthly” in Colossians 3:5 and the word for the “things that are on earth” in Colossians 3:2 is the same word. So in the immediate context, earthly things doesn’t mean “created things” but instead means something like “sinful things”—sinful behaviors, desires, and activities. It is these things that we are to reject in favor of the heavenly things, the things above.”* So in this book he speaks of the tension that we Christians have between God’s sovereignty and our ability to enjoy things on earth. He offers this helpful breakdown so that we can

know that all things come from God to His children and they are good so: *“So joys in the things of earth become joys in God when they are: 1. received and recognized as pictures of spiritual reality and on-ramps to spiritual virtue; 2. shared with others as a way of loving them; 3. wielded as a weapon in the fight of faith; and 4. enjoyed (or grieved) as a way of anticipating the joys of the new heaven and the new earth. And that’s just a sample. There are countless variations and combinations of earthly joys, custom-made for each one of us, all designed as invitations from God to know and delight in him. Each joy individually, and all earthly joys together, are calling us to go further up and higher in to the life of the God of all pleasure.”* But he offers yet one piece of advice that brings this book home for us seeking to find the balance, *“Begin where you are. Whatever earthly things are present to you now, start with them. Whether it’s warm sunshine or a cool spring rain. Whether it’s eating enchiladas or sipping lemonade. Whether it’s planning a project for work or having a conversation with your spouse. Whether it’s working in the yard or wrestling with your kids. Whatever good and perfect gifts are coming down to you now from the Father of lights, begin with them. Receive them with gratitude. Savor them with gladness. Study them with delight. Share them with others. And refuse to stop with the gifts. Follow them back to the giver. See them as declarations of his glory. Know them as images of divine things. And then turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely bright, in the light of his glory and grace.”* This book is like the Cliff’s notes of his much larger academic book he wrote a few years back now entitled **THE THINGS OF EARTH: TREASURING GOD BY ENJOYING HIS GIFTS.**

- 35. GEHENNA DAWN (PORTAL WAR SERIES BOOK 1)**, by Jay Allen (2013). Jake Taylor was a lost soul among thousands of other lost souls consigned to Erastus, a planet just through the portal (think Stargate SG-1, but a bit more constrictive since they can’t fly through their gate/portal) that was so hot and unforgiving that they took to calling it Gehenna...the pit of hell. They were all here with one mission in mind for the rest of their lives...to kill the Tegeri and their cyborg Machine warriors to keep earth safe. It becomes clear after a few years that going home is not an option and hope becomes farther and farther away for those who are “unlucky” enough to actually survive. They had all been told that the Tegeri invaded New Earth, yet another planet at the end of a portal, and massacred every man, woman and child. They were all sent there from earth by UN Central, an institution that basically reorganized the Earth into one ethnic group after a major conflict had occurred on Earth. But it seems they may have needed a reason for this new government to exist so with the Tegeri “invasion” everyone was willing to give up more freedom for what they were told was for their own safety. Now Jake Taylor had a gift...actually a couple of them. One was his ability to anticipate the enemy and strategize the best way to get the job done with the least amount of casualties. His other gift...he was good at staying alive on a planet where the average rookie only lasts their first battle... he stayed on planet year after

year being elevated in rank because of these 2 gifts. By the end of the first book we see that he has survived on planet for 14 years with his 4 other friends and they had become quite a force to reckon with. Along the way some interesting things occur to change the way Jake thinks...and his friends for that matter. First, the “lifers” that actually survive are cybernetically-enhanced so that they could fight the war on a somewhat level playing field against the cyborgs called “The Machines” by the UNGov forces...making them an almost unstoppable force. But along the way after countless battles Jake discovers something that changes him even more than the soul wrenching cybernetic warrior that he has become. This something is so traumatic that it causes him to begin to think about the things his father had told him about the “new” UN Central and the lies that politicians tell. So he is left with determining who the real enemy is. His main concern is that he does the right thing for his men and not turn into a cyborg with no emotion himself. Will he succeed in choosing wisely? Will he become the man he was always meant to become? Will Jake find peace? More to follow in the next in the series **THE TEN THOUSAND**.

36. **ON KEEPING THE HEART**, by John Flavel (1630-1691) (This book/treatise was first published in 1670...it has been republished and reformatted many times and lastly in 2018 in this electronic format to offer as a free download by Monergism and lastly published again independently into a Modern English version edited by James Roth in 2020.) This book was a treatise originally entitled **A Saint Indeed or The Great Work of a Christian in Keeping the Heart in the Several Conditions of Life**, based on **Proverbs 4:23**, which exhorts us to ***“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs/issues of life”***. And Flavel carefully and exhaustively unfolds all that is involved in ***“keeping the heart with vigilance”***, and how that should be the “great business” of every Christian. The keeping of the heart, Flavel would have us to understand, involves the ***“diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means and duties to preserve the soul from sin and maintain its sweet and free communion with God”***. A fact that is continually supported in Scriptures and by all men of God through the ages. In fact he also states, ***“The stability of our souls in the hour of TEMPTATION depends upon the care we exercise in keeping our hearts. The careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation. Satan's principal batteries are raised against the heart; if he wins that—he wins all, for the heart commands the whole man. Alas! How easy a conquest is a neglected heart! It is not more difficult to surprise such a heart, than for an enemy to enter that city whose gates are open and unguarded. It is the watchful heart which discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength.”*** In his almost exhaustive work he sets out six reasons why Christians should make this the great business of their lives: 1) the glory of God, 2) the sincerity of our profession, 3) the beauty of our conversation (conduct of life), 4) the improvement of our graces, 5) the comfort of our souls, and 6) the stability of our souls in the hour of temptation. Among other applications of the doctrine,

he discusses 12 special “seasons” in the Christian’s life, which call for special diligence in keeping our hearts. This book is as comprehensive as you would think from such a “good” Presbyterian scholar as this who also had a stout pastor’s heart and yet, it is not a long book, as his actual writing only covers 200 plus or minus pages. With a pastor’s heart he exhorts us throughout this work to keep our heart and here is one of his example prayers for us to pray: *“O for a better heart! O for a heart to love God more; to hate sin more; to walk more evenly with God. Lord! Do not deny me such a heart; whatever you deny me! Give me a heart to fear you, to love and delight in you!” It is observed of an eminent saint, that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin; and when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit until he had obtained some relish of that mercy.*” This is the 2nd or 3rd time I have read this book but this being a modern language version it was easier to understand because you didn’t have to work so hard to figure out the grammar and words. This should be a must read on the reading list of every Christian. The struggles of the Church have always been the same whether in Israel, England or America we struggling with Keeping our Hearts!

37. **THE PASTOR IN PRAYER** by C. H. Spurgeon (republish by Banner of Truth in 2014, digitalized by Monergism Books 2021). This is yet another book that I will read and re-read through the years. Previously I have only read snippets of Spurgeon’s prayers but now I have read in context the whole of his prayers, that is, at least, 28 of his opening prayers at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London where he preached for 38 years. He, of course, is known as the “Prince of Preachers” because he could use the common language to speak convincingly across age and social strata. But it was his prayers that many write about. People like D.L. Moody did not find his style of preaching all that alluring and persuasive but his prayers were a different story. He said, *“Such was his access to God that he seemed to be able to bring down power from heaven.”* Many have said that this the heart of his influence and gospel success...his prayers. Here is an example ...a piece of a much longer prayer... for those who have never read his prayers before, *“BLESSED God, our heart doth praise Thee, our inmost soul exults in Thy name, for the Lord is good, and His mercy endureth forever. Thy people praise Thee, O God, for all that Thou hast been unto them, and we can each one set forth Thy worthy praise by reason of our personal experience of Thy goodness. Thou hast dealt well with Thy servants, O Lord, according unto Thy word. We bless Thee for teaching us from our youth; for some of us have known Thee, even from our childhood, and Thy word was precious to us even in our earlier days, when, like young Samuel, we were spoken to of the Lord. Now Thou hast borne and carried us these years in the wilderness with unchanging love and goodness, and there be some in Thy presence this morning who know that even to hoar hairs Thou art He—Thou hast made and Thou dost carry; Thou dost not forsake the work of Thine own hands. “Thy mercy endureth forever,” and let Thy praise endure forever also.”*

Interchanged with these 28 verses are poems of the time that he would use in service as well. Besides the grandeur of his prayers that really to make you feel that you are in the very presence of God still after all these years...there is the constant references for safety and wisdom focused on the Queen...Queen Victoria. The first time I read that I had to stop and remember where he was at...Lol! Each prayer is filled with confession/repentance...with the needs of others physically and spiritually...as well as the constant and solemn request by God for the souls of the lost to be brought into the kingdom. Of all the things that convicted me...this one hit me the hardest.

38. **THE WHITE CHIEF OF CACHE CREEK**, by Faith M. Martin, Charles R. McBurney (2020) This is a wonderful but larger book (600plus pages) on the call of Rev. Work Carithers, his wife Ella and their little daughter Mary to do the Lord's work on the Comanche-Kiowa-Apache reservation (at the time) in the Oklahoma territories in and around 1889. This was one of the great works of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America (The Covenanters) that existed and served the Indians and the white settlers up until 1970 when it was finally closed along with the church that still existed at the time. This is a wonderful nuts and bolts true account of the founding, the struggles of mission work but also the deep love of the Carithers for the Indians that they served faithfully for almost 50 years. The author states, *"The story of his (rev. Carithers) work among the Indians of Oklahoma reads like a fiction, but is a record of ingathering to the kingdom that one cannot read without tearful rejoicing. In the history of the [Reformed Presbyterian Church] in America, the work of the Indian Mission will fill a large and unique place, and the center and soul of it will always be the greathearted missionary who, with his wife and little one, followed the Spirit into the wilderness, and braving death and conquering despair, built a city of God out of those whom the white man had for a century guarded with sword and gun as hopelessly savage.... The Synod honored itself in honoring one so worthy and competent to preside over the great work of the church."* To see God work among the Indians was a story worth reading for me as the author stayed true to the mission and the people with most of her book being from the actual letters sent from the mission as a record to God's faithfulness in lean and in plenty in sickness and in health...God prevailed. Praise the Lord!
39. **THE TEN THOUSAND (PORTAL WAR SERIES BOOK 2)**, by Jay Allen (2014). Jake Taylor, now General over the 10,000 cybernetically enhanced veterans from Erastus, has grown his ranks as he has convinced many of the UNGov troops sent to Erastus to annihilate their ranks that they have been fighting the wrong battle all these years. When they see the truth many seek to lay down their arms and join him and they do. So now that Jake and his Army of Erastus, now the Army of Liberation, must go to earth to eradicate an infection of corruption that has spread to all of earth's ruling class enslaving the regular people for all too long. But to get to earth they must jump through many portals and land on other worlds governed by UNGov troops, other men,

like the men of Erastus, that had been consigned for life to a planet fighting an enemy that only seeks to defend itself...an enemy by the way that could have won the war years ago...but was hoping to find a partner to save the human race which they have in Jake Taylor. His job is to convince them to join his crusade or kill them so they do not have problems later. Jake bears a great burden concerning the number of deaths and what is coming he has to carry on his shoulders...his own men from Erastus, who with every engagement dwindle in number...the consigned men of other worlds who are only following orders and the propaganda that they have heard all their lives...and the Machines who were only sent as a defense against the evil of the UN Central government. But there is more at stake than the freedom of humanity, greater consequences to their fight than even Taylor can imagine. For there is another alien race, one shrouded in legend and myth, known to the Tegeri only as the Darkness. Long ago the Darkness made war on the Ancients, the mighty beings that built the interstellar Portals. The Ancients are remembered in Tegeri lore as wise and powerful...almost as gods. But they fell ages past, destroyed utterly by the Darkness. Now that great evil is returning, and this time it will destroy not only mankind and the Tegeri, but all the fledgling races the Ancients planted, hundreds of young sentient species, only now grasping for civilization. The Ancients long ago foretold that an alliance of men and Tegeri would stand and defeat the Darkness and save the galaxy from destruction. But if this prophecy is to come to pass, Taylor and his men must destroy Earth's totalitarian government and bring the dark truth to mankind, that there is another war to fight, one vaster and more terrible than any in human history or legend. Well, they are finally just a couple of jumps from Earth when UNgov begins to actually fight back with their own cybernetically enhanced and brain modified soldiers. It is on a planet named Juno that the battle to stop the AOL occurs, one which even Jake is uncertain they can win. Will their new friends, the Tegeri help? Can they help? Can they have success here or will their push to earth be stalled? Again yet another action packed book by Jay Allen so now I look forward to **HOMEFRONT.**

40. **HOMEFRONT (PORTAL WAR SERIES BOOK 3)**, by Jay Allen (2016).
Again, another riveting read from Jay Allen. This last book in this trilogy has Jake Taylor's Army of Liberation making it to earth and being engaged by hundreds of thousands of troops... a virtual 30 to 1 scenario when it came to man power. The invasion of Earth has begun and the odds are overwhelmingly in favor of UNgov. Thankfully the Tegeri have re-supplied his army with the needed supplies for a protracted campaign which will be won or lost in just a few days. All along there is a Resistance movement that has grown worldwide in the last 40 years that is plaguing the UNgov as it tries to prepare for Taylor's arrival and the last battle. Since Taylor seems to be Secretary-General Samovitch's main concern the Resistance fighters are able to hurt UNgov resources, especially in what used to be the U.S. It seems in each of these books a beloved brother from Erastus must die...who is it this

time: Frantic, Bear, MacArthur or Taylor himself? Does Taylor get to fulfill his mission to kill Samovitch and the take down the rest of UNGov? Help seems to come from an unlikely source... will Taylor take it...will he survive? And in the end, if Taylor survives what kind of government will take the place of the UNGov dictatorship and will the people who have become so dependent be able to make a go of it with freedom as their battle cry? This last installment actually sets up yet another chapter in the future for the humans and the Tegeri. The Darkness, and ancient foe of the Tegeri, is on the move. How long does earth have before they are thrust back into yet another battle?

41. AN EXPLICATION OF THE FIRST PART OF THE ASSEMBLY'S

SHORTER CATECHISM, by Thomas Boston (somewhere around 1700, digitalized by Monergism 2019). Since the book of Hebrews and I Timothy both influenced him in how we are to maintain the catechizing of our children and as a pastor he knew that parents don't always get the teaching they need; Puritan pastors like him, as well as the likes of Thomas Vincent and John Flavel set out through the years to give us question and answer "helps" so that parents would have the type of knowledge they needed to train their children effectively. This version only covers through Q&A # 38- What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection? *At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the Day of Judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.* His expert analysis of this document is extremely beneficial in the teaching of the catechism. The Westminster Divines knew that it was necessary to train families in the truth of the Scriptures so they wrote both the Shorter and Larger Catechism for the good of the family. This volume by Boston found its way into many parents' hands so that they would learn and be able to teach the catechism in a way that would help them in their establishing a firm foundation in their believing covenant children as the Bible commands. There are many commentaries and sources explaining and seeking to train scholars in the intricacies of the catechism but thanks be to God that Boston and others sought to be pastors with their congregations' success in mind to the glory of God. This is written in a very easy reading format...the catechism question and answer and then other questions and answers attached to this catechism to aid the parent or the older reader in understanding how to implement the teaching into daily life.

42. THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT RACIAL TENSIONS, by Kevin De Young (E-published by Heritage Bible Church, 2021) yet another extremely worthwhile book by the wonderfully gifted pastor. I love how he comes up with questions that I don't even think about after all the years that I have been dealing with sin and victory in Christ. He pushes us to think passed where we are at the moment. He challenges our well established norms... even the norms of the best of us... whoever and wherever they are. This issue like every other sin needs to be dealt with through the eyes of God's Word not the

cultural mores of the world around us if we wish to ever come to anything near understanding and unity, if you are a Christian, in this. I did hesitate a couple of times...recognizing this is a relatively short essay/booklet on a huge subject. He said this in the *introduction* "... *(the Bible) will not tell us the reasons for the continuing racial disparities.*" I think it does. Now if he means that the Bible does not speak to what particulars in the 21st century lead to racial disparity then we can agree...maybe, but the fact is (and he shows this in the rest of the article) it does tell us the why of racial disparities...and that showing favor or partiality has been around for a long time and that God has always condemned it as a behavior in His image bearers. Our particular garden variety is just a product of millennium of pride, self-centeredness, self-preservation, arrogance and a lack of humility...the one thing that is to be evident in the believer through the ages. A couple of others things that are extremely helpful in this booklet is his breakdown in Acts 10-26 when considering the whole topic of how and on whom to place blame. (The Bible does answer most of the questions that we have today.) Also, he gives 15 great principles that the Church should consider to properly be the Church in the world today. He could have ended with this quote but there is yet 4 or 5 pages to go but this is where I will end this review, *"Whatever you think and fear in the present moment, believe that God hears and sees and knows (Ex. 2:24–25). Believe that he can bring beauty from ashes. Believe that Christ is still on the throne. And as we revel in that confidence, let us move toward others to learn from them, listen to them, and love them as we would want to be loved."*

43. **A GOSPEL PRIMER FOR CHRISTIANS**, by Milton Vincent (Copyright © 2008). This book was born out of one man's search for God's grace. After working hard to keep God's favor the Spirit finally got a hold of him in the Spring of 2001 and moved him to understand that he already had God's grace as a believer because of Christ's work on the cross not because of anything he did or could ever do thus freeing him up to experience the blessings that he had been working so hard to experience. He says, *"I started reading: 'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we exult. . .'* As I continued through the chapter, my soul was stirred by the inspired exultations of a man who rejoiced in, rather than worried about, his justified status before God. This justification brought him into a gracious standing with God that was accomplished and always maintained by Jesus Christ. The more I read, the more I began to see something I had not seen before. As a justified one, I am under God's gracious favor at all times because of what Jesus did! Being justified in Christ doesn't mean that God no longer sees or cares about my sin. He does see, and He is grieved by my sin. But His gracious favor upon me remains utterly unchanged by my sin, and no wrath is awakened in Him against me—because Christ already bore it all! In fact, God favors me so much when I sin that He sends chastisement into my

life. He does so because He is for me, and He loves me, and He disciplines me for my ultimate good.” But he knew that this is something that he would need to be remind of frequently so he put together a method to remind himself which, at first, he shared with others and then those others told him to print this up for the good of the church. He says, “This book is offered as a handy guide to help Christians experience the gospel more fully by preaching it to themselves each day. It is also offered as a correction to a costly mistake made by Christians who view the gospel as something that has fully served out its purpose the moment they believed in Jesus for salvation. Not knowing what to do with the gospel once they are saved, they lay it aside soon after conversion so they can move on to “bigger and better” things (even Scriptural things). Of course, they don’t think this is what they are doing at the time, yet after many years of floundering in defeat they can look back and see that this is exactly what they have done. God did not give us His gospel just so we could embrace it and be converted. Actually, He offers it to us every day as a gift that keeps on giving to us everything we need for life and godliness... Finally, it should be noted that the purpose of this book is admittedly narrow, given the larger context of Christian practice. Actually, there are numerous “habits of grace” that are essential to the full experience of God’s grace in the life of the believer. Some of them are as follows: Bible meditation (Acts 20: 32; Colossians 3: 16), faith (Hebrews 4: 2), prayer (Hebrews 4: 16), fellowship with the saints (Ephesians 4: 29), humility (James 4: 6), generosity (2 Corinthians 9: 8-14), obedience (Titus 2: 11-12), forgiveness (Ephesians 4: 32), worship (Ephesians 1: 6), and evangelism (2 Corinthians 5: 18-20). My purpose here is merely to spotlight the first of these practices and to provide a specific method by which you can meditate on the gospel in a meaningful way. While preaching the gospel to yourself will powerfully enrich your life in every area, the other habits listed above should also be practiced in order for your experience of the gospel to be truly complete.” So, at the beginning of the book he gives us 31 reasons to remind the reader of the blessings of the gospel in our lives that we need to remember and then he shares more fully his reason for writing, as I said above, in the last part of the book. An excellent book that will always be up close to the top of my reading list.

- 44. THE LIFE OF GOD IN THE SOUL OF MAN (in Modern English)**, by, Henry Scougal (1650-1678, Updated English by Paul Lamb Copyright © 2016). The writer of the preface to this book, Gilbert Burnet a contemporary pastor of Henry Scougal said this, *“It was written by a godly and highly educated fellow Englishman. He wrote it for the private use of a highly-respected friend of his without any intentions of having it published. But when others saw it, they were struck by both the excellent intentions it contained and the exceptionally clear and pleasant style. And they observed its unforced and unadulterated systematic way of presentation, and short to the point delivery. They desired that more people could benefit from reading it. Because I know the author, they asked me to decide if it should be published. My decision came quickly after reading it. Especially because I know firsthand that the author has*

written only of things he strongly believes and knows intimately. It is a transcript of the divine impressions upon his heart. Therefore, I hope that its sincere and unforced genuineness will both greatly delight and deeply enrich the reader." This was originally written to explain simply the major tenets of Christianity. Rev. Scougal said that is was written to address something that all Christians struggle with in this life... *"MY DEAR FRIEND: Because you are my dear friend, you are sure to get all of my efforts to address your curiosity about true godliness."* However, it became a classic Puritan text and one the most read treatises for the comfort of God's saints. Henry Scougal wrote this around 1670; seven years later as he was dying from tuberculosis he allowed this to be published. This was his only work published and it was done so post humorously. He was a simple pastor by all accounts with a passion for the lives of God's people. He writes as the premise for this book, *"Christianity is not about external duties to perform, nor is it an emotion or feeling one has. True religion is the union of the soul with God, a partaker of the divine nature, or in the Apostle's words, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'"* God used this simple volume to bring George Whitfield to a saving knowledge of Himself and, the rest, as they say ... "is history." I have now read this a couple times...first, in the "original" harder English and now in this more Modern version. I would commend the "original reading" at least for a first read because I believe that there are places that Paul Lamb (not necessarily a Reformed believer) takes some license translating and rewording sections that are heavy on God's election so that they are not so weighty or not there at all. Otherwise, it is a good modern version.

- 45. THE FOUNTAIN OPENED: THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS REVEALED,** by Richard Sibbes (originally written around 1630, digitalized by Monergism 2020). This was perhaps the hardest book I have ever read by Sibbes who is generally one of the easiest to read and comprehend of the Puritan pastors of his day. The reason that this one was harder was not the inability to comprehend the material, which was just as thorough as all his other works, but because of its structure. A line of thought would go on for pages as well as many of the sentences. Much like Paul he would also pick up a new point in the midst of an existing one...talk it through...and then returns to the original thought without any lead back in. One of the things he does well in all his works that is true here as well is his ease of concluding a thought for his readers to leave a subject line well. This whole book is a "thorough exposition of this one text, I Timothy 3:16- ***"Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: 'He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.'"***" To this he sums up what he is trying to do in this treatise, *"THERE are two things that God values more than all the world besides—the church and the truth. The church, that is the 'pillar and ground of truth,' as it is in the former verse. The truth of religion, that is the seed of the church. Now the blessed apostle St Paul being to furnish his scholar Timothy to the ministerial office, he doth it from two grounds especially: from the*

dignity of the church, which he was to instruct and converse in; and from the excellency of the mysteries of the gospel, that excellent soul-saving truth."

Having begun with a succinct summary of where he is going as he breakdown and exposit each section of this text he then ends with a summary of where he has been, *"Therefore let us first begin with Christ's abasement, and then we shall have comfortable thoughts of his exaltation. These points are very useful, being the main grounds of religion; having an influence into our lives and conversation above all others. Other points have their life and vigour and quickening from these grand mysteries, which are the food of the soul.*

Therefore let us oft feed our thoughts with these things, of Christ's abasement and glory, considering him in both as a public person, 'the second Adam,' and our surety; and then see ourselves in him, and labour to have virtue from him, fitting us in body and soul for such a condition. The very serious meditation of these things, will put a glory upon our souls; and the believing of them will transform us 'from glory to glory,' 2 Cor. 3:18." This as he states throughout is the mystery of true godliness revealed.

46. MERCS (Crimson World Successors Series- Book 1), by Jay Allen (2015).

Alright, alright, alright! I was concerned that the author had not written an account of what happened to those left behind after THE FALL, the 9th book of the Crimson World Series with Eric Cain and Augustus Garrett and the cast of those left behind after the space gate was destroyed to keep out the main invasion of the First Imperium. But here it is...well, not exactly...but close enough. This trilogy starts off with Darius Jax Cain...yeah that is right the son of the famous General Eric Cain from the last series. There is someone seeking to disrupt his lucrative business as the most efficient and most feared of all the mercenary companies in Occupied Space. After the Fall when the Earth was basically decimated the colonies that were spread out from the earth had to make it on their own and as they grew their economies they did not have the where with all to protect themselves so after a second struggle with a rogue First Imperium group there apparently wasn't any need or ability to field a fighting force strong enough to defeat enemies so the mercenary companies arose fighting for the best money. Darius Cain's Black Eagles were the best at what they did. But now someone with resources is cutting his feet out from under him and he doesn't know who. Worse than that even is that other worlds are being hit hard and it is made to look like it is his eagles so he is angry and desirous to get to the bottom of this conspiracy. Enter Roderick Vance for Martian Intelligence and Augustus Garrett, retired and Gen. Gilson, retired to seek to discover how all of these different events are related and who is behind them. Oh, Eric hasn't spoken to his twin brother in over 10 years and they meet up again as well and it is anything but pleasant...but an "alliance" must be formed to figure out what is going on 33 years after The Fall. Now interspersed among "the story" is the back story of Eric and Sarah getting married settling down on Atlantia, having the twin boys and then Eric's call to duty again for the 2nd First Imperium War where he is lost. These are written as well as all the rest...the end of the world...or in this

case Occupied Space...the human race... is at stake again. You would think this basic story line would get tiring...but it doesn't! So, who is behind all of this? When we will discover the actual architects of this mess...or have we already? Moving on to the 2nd in the trilogy **THE PRISONER OF ELDERON**.

47. **THE PRISONER OF ELDERON (Crimson World Successors Series-Book 2)**, by Jay Allen (2015). Is Erik Cain alive after all these years? Sarah and Darius think so and they are prepared to move heaven and earth against an unknown adversary to find out even with the full knowledge that they are probably walking into a trap. The Triumvirate, the new power in the neighborhood, is seeking to fulfill the original plan of Gavin Stark so long dead but ever living in a set of 3 exact clones. This power has been silently building ever since the Fall of all the Superpowers in a war that Gavin Stark engineered so that he could rule whatever was left and these 3 see it as their goal to finish Stark's work of domination. Of course, Darius Cain and the Black Eagles are still unaware of who they are fighting and how big of an organization they are dealing with. All they know is that this "smells" like the Shadow Legions 2.0 and the Imperium combined. How long will it take to connect the dots as to the connection to a long dead Stark? What else does the Triumvirate have up its sleeve to solidify its takeover of Occupied Space? Is Erik Cain still alive and can they rescue him if he is...or will Darius simply obliterate the world that had been holding his dad if given the chance? Along the way, we are reintroduced to an assortment of characters we know very well from the rest of the series...Cate Gilson at Armstrong with what is left of the Marines and Augustus Garrett retired, but no less settled on Terra Nova. Are they destined to be involved in one last conflict to save humanity? The author basically tells the same story over and over again but he does it so well that you are drawn in wondering if maybe this time humanity will lose. This book, the longest in the series, goes a long way to answering all of these questions and more. I am moving on to the last book in the series, **THE BLACK FLAG**.

48. **KILLING SIN HABITS:CONQUERING SIN WITH RADIACAL FAITH**, by Stuart Scott with Zondra Scott (2014). This book came up on Kindle Unlimited along with a few others of his books so I thought what the heck...let's take a look. He is a Baptist scholar with ties to the Master's College with John MacArthur as one of his mentor and it shows. The author seeks to be grace—full in his approach but just like Macarthur often reverts back to a methodology based grace, if you will...do these things the way they have worked for me ...kind of thing. Now don't get me wrong, his book is filled with Scripture and that is one of the things that I wish to commend in that he is clear on where the power comes from and how God through the Scriptures is what enables those with on-going sin habits to over-come in the sense of the sinful habits becoming less and less intrusive in our lives...but a cursory reading would leave people wondering if complete sanctification could not be reached in this life as long as you followed the approved steps. He downplays

the 12 Step method while at the same time commending yet another methodology. I could see this book being helpful for the counselor more than the counselee. In the right hands adapting it to fit each believer struggling or even used as the 2 read this book together ...it could be helpful as long as the leader in this discussion understands that one method does not fit all. He seeks to tie his argument to John Owens' masterful work **The Mortification of Sin** but as with so many others who have tried, he falls short in that John Owens' work is THE preeminent text on this subject. My wish is that someone would take the time to bring Owen's work into modern language with modified grammar maintaining the original thrust of the author. If that is out there I would read that for greater clarity.

49. **WORDS OF WARNING FOR DAILY LIFE**, by Charles Haddon Spurgeon (digitalized by Monergism, 2021, originally published in 1895). This little book (150 or so pages) covers 15 short topics on practical advice for the Christian from pride, to the Coming of Christ, the elevation of self, warnings to sinners and the halting between two opinions ...the way Christians struggle with the truth. Concerning pride, he had much to say throughout the book, *"In politics, in everything, in fact, that concerns temporal affairs, personal interest usually leads the van. Men will always be looking out for themselves, and personal and home interests will generally engross the major part of their thoughts. But in religion it is otherwise. In religion men love far rather to believe abstract doctrines, and to talk of general truths, than the searching inquiries which examine their own personal interest in it. You will hear many men admire the preacher who deals in generalities, but when he comes to press home searching questions, by-and-by they are offended. If we stand and declare general facts, such as the universal sinfulness of mankind, or the need of a Saviour, they will give an assent to our doctrine, and possibly they may retire greatly delighted with the discourse, because it has not affected them; but how often will our audience gnash their teeth, and go away in a rage, because, like the Pharisees with Jesus, they perceive, concerning a faithful minister, that he spoke of them."* Also, throughout the book in the midst of his many practical thoughts we find him reaching out to the sinner with logic but also, as was his usual position, with the truth of Scripture with the undying hope that God would draw them to Himself. He is powerful in his evangelism to a people with as little understanding of the gospel as the church and the world do today. He says in his chapter on Coming to Christ, *"Your want of power lies mainly in the obstinacy of nature. Suppose a liar says that it is not in his power to speak the truth, that he has been a liar so long that he cannot leave it off; is that an excuse for him? Suppose a man who has long indulged in lust should tell you that he finds his lusts have so girt about him like a great iron net that he cannot get rid of them, would you take that as an excuse? Truly it is none at all. If a drunkard has become so foully a drunkard, that he finds it impossible to pass a public-house without stepping in, do you therefore excuse him? No, because his inability to reform lies in his nature, which he has no desire to restrain or conquer. The thing that is done, and the*

thing that causes the thing that is done, being both from the root of sin, are two evils which cannot excuse each other. What though the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots? It is because you have learned to do evil that you cannot now learn to do well; and instead therefore, of letting you sit down to excuse yourselves, let me put a thunderbolt beneath the seat of your sloth, that you may be startled by it and aroused. Remember this, that to sit is to be damned to all eternity.” There is so much commendable in this little book but then it is Spurgeon after all.

50. CALVIN ON PRAYER: FROM THE INSTITUTES OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION, words by John Calvin edited by Chapel Library 2015. This book is part of a 3-part series on **the Institutes of the Christian Religion**. This was lifted out of **Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion**, Book 3, Chapters VII-VIII, so that individuals could read and consider the individual subjects with more clarity. We are too easily distracted these days so the Chapel Library decided to begin breaking out different sections of **The Institutes**, modifying the language and “reprinting” (e-form mostly) them so that this generation can be exposed to such historical and doctrinal materials. As with all things, it is better to read **the Institutes** within the context of the whole but this is helpful in that this may get these sections into hands that otherwise wouldn’t pick up the whole book to read. It was good once again to read Calvin’s teaching on this. For anyone who hasn’t read the **Institutes** this would be a great introductory text ...short and sweet...to pick up and read. I first came across it a couple of years ago but never got around to reading it until now. These come from the **Institutes** and are Calvin’s general guidelines for a vital prayer life for the Christian. Proving that even after all these years that the Institutes are still relevant for today. This short volume shows us the different kinds of prayers that he wished to highlight and concludes with a wonderful exposition on the Lord’s Prayer that everyone ought to read. It does choose to leave out all that Calvin says about the unbiblical kind of prayers offered up by the Roman Catholic Church...but that is fine since the point of this text is to direct the reader to a great guide on prayer and to bring to their attention the usefulness of **Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion** for today.

51. THE BLACK FLAG (Crimson World Successors Series- Book 3), by Jay Allen (2017). This was an excellent wrap up to a truly wonderful series of books that included the Crimson world, and the Crimson World Refugees series. I will truly miss all of these characters from Erik Cain to Augustus Garrett, to Sarah Cain to Roderick Vance and even Gavin Stark...one of the best bad guys that I have read about. The newer additions like Darius and Elias Cain, Erik Teller, Admiral Compton and Max Harmon along with a whole slew of supporting characters will be missed as well. Even though the outcome for Occupied Space was never in doubt (the good guys win...the Triumvirate is defeated) the author’s engaging style of writing kept me moving forward to get to the end of each book just to see how it would actually

end. This series is even better than the Blood on the Stars Series which was the series that got me started on this author. (I am still waiting the final installment of that series...book 18. I so appreciate the way he treats with such dignity the military in his books and how he paints the picture of a politician so well as well. His conclusions seem to run toward a benevolent but strong dictator like Jarrod Tyler as far as his politics are concerned because in his opinion mankind simply cannot be trusted with any type of ruling government since man is so prone to selfishness and pride when it comes to choosing self over everyone else. His view of mankind may seem cynical to some, but given the fallenness of man if Christ was never or hardly ever part of the picture ...this is true almost every time in world history. Man's inhumanity towards man always raises its ugly head. His conclusion is that a strong benevolent can tame men...but of course, that view falls short, because what happens when that man like a Roderick Vance, a Max Harmon or a Jarrod Tyler falls...the same fallen traits of men are destined to repeat themselves...because that is all fallen man has. Excellent sci-fi military series to be sure.

52. INVASION OF TINIAN:1944 BATTLE FOR TINIAN IN THE MARIANA ISLANDS, by Daniel Wrinn (2021).

When I began this small book I felt like it was simply a recounting of daily commander logs with a few personal encounters thrown in there. Not personal encounters as if he was there ...he was not...but encounters with letters and other correspondence he seems to have researched well. These books, and he has many, on WWII Pacific encounters-especially by the Marines-are good reads. They don't expect much from the reader and they provide insight and record from that time that, especially for the novice, could be very helpful...like this *"Tinian's place in history was cemented by the flight of the Enola Gay dropping a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945. A few days later, another nuclear bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. The following day, the Empire of Japan surrendered. When news of the official surrender reached the division on Saipan, one Marine recalled that he looked at Tinian's clean and rocky coast of the coral boulders where they'd gone ashore. He thought of the forbidding coast of Japan—the coast that could have awaited them in the fall. He said, "Tinian was a pretty good investment, I guess."* And the occasional editing problem will be overlooked because most people today picking these books up do not have an extensive enough background knowledge to check his facts and/or spelling. Having said that, these are good little books for the history buff as well, since they give insight into people we may never have heard from, from these battles and that is always a highlight for me. But he should probably have someone do a better editing job for the reader needs to know the difference between an aircraft carrier and a cruiser and then there are certain general's names that get confused as well. I don't question his desire for accuracy as some other reviewers, I would simply caution him to be careful and edit better. All in all, I have downloaded a couple more of his books and look forward to reading those as well.

53. THE SEVEN UTTERANCES OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS, by John Flavel (1660's digitalized 2020). This is John Flavel's works on each of Jesus final "Words". "Father, forgive them..." to "Today you will be with me in paradise."...to "Woman, behold your son..." to "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"...to "I thirst..." to "It is finished..." to "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He does a masterful job with each to encourage the Christian in how these truths bolster our faith. But he also, takes this time to point out the flip side concerning the un-regenerate and what they have to look forward to since they do not receive the blessings of the believer in these sayings. John Flavel is a pastor's pastor when it comes to expositing the Word of God for clarity and understanding. He says when addressing the first Word "Father, forgive them...", *"The rule by which they are to walk, is, 'If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay it, says the Lord,' Rom. 12:18, 19. It is not religion, but lusts that make the world so unquiet, James 4:1, 2. Not godliness, but wickedness, that makes men bite and devour one another. One of the first effects of the gospel, is to Civilize those places where it comes, and settle order and peace among men. How great a mistake and evil then is it to cry out, when atheism and irreligion have broken the civil peace; this is the fruit of religion! This is the effect of the gospel! Happy would it be if (the Christian) religion did more obtain in all nations. It is the greatest friend in the world to their tranquility and prosperity."* And when addressing the last "word"- "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He says, *"Nothing but God can please it in this world, and nothing but God can give it content when it goes hence." It is not the amenity of the place, where the gracious soul is going, but the bosom of the blessed God, who dwells there, that it so vehemently pants after; not the Father's house, but the Father's arms and bosom: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit: Whom have I in heaven but you? And on earth there is none that I desire in comparison of you..,' Psalm. 73:24,25."*

54. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: WHAT THEY MEAN, WHY THEY MATTER, AND WHY WE SHOULD OBEY THEM, by Kevin De Young (2018). I had to pick this up again to re-read it while I was answering the Shorter Catechism questions on the 10 Commandments. It is that good...even the second time around...better even! It is not that there is much or anything new here but Kevin's style is very engaging and being reminded of old truths is not a bad thing even in this day and age. He looks at these Commandments with the "fresh" eye of a father of young children, a relatively "young" pastor, and an obviously zealous scholar and biblical linguist...and it works. So, while the basic content is "old" the presentation is new and fresh. I had a hard time putting this book down. This is a great pastoral book because he walks his reader through to understanding the commandments place in the lives of the people then and us today. He says at the beginning, *"The church has historically put the Ten Commandments at the center of its teaching ministry, especially for children*

and new believers. For centuries, catechetical instruction was based on three things: the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. In other words, when people asked, "How do we do discipleship? How do we teach our kids about the Bible? What do new Christians need to know about Christianity?" their answers always included an emphasis on the Ten Commandments. In the Heidelberg Catechism, for example, eleven of the fifty-two Lord's Days focus on the Ten Commandments. The same is true in forty-two of the 107 questions in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, in more than half of the Lutheran Large Catechism, and in 120 out of 750 pages of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Across various traditions, there has been a historic emphasis on the Ten Commandments." And he ends with this, "We still need the Ten Words handed down at Sinai. Have they been changed in some respects by the coming of Christ? For sure—transformed but not trashed. We can no longer keep the Ten Commandments rightly unless we keep them in Christ, through Christ, and with a view to the all-surpassing greatness of Christ. As new creations in Christ, the law is not only our duty but also our delight. If we want to love Christ as he deserves and as he desires, we will keep his commandments (John 14: 15). And that means as we keep in step with the Spirit (not to mention, keep in step with most of church history), we would do well to remember the Ten Commandments, which are foundational for all the others." This is a very timely book for Christians to read today.

55. GENTLE AND LOWLY: THE HEART OF CHRIST FOR SINNER AND SUFFERERS, by Dane C. Orlund (2020). This is a book for the moment. So

many of us in the church could be classified as whiners...so many of us are so needy and then there is a feeling among many that Jesus is so disappointed with us because, quite frankly, when we hang out with people who act like us we are easily offended and disappointed...so He must be as well. He says, "Perhaps it isn't sins so much as sufferings that cause some of us to question the perseverance of the heart of Christ. As pain piles up, as numbness takes over, as the months go by, at some point the conclusion seems obvious: we have been cast out. Surely this is not what life would feel like for one who has been buried in the heart of a gentle and lowly Savior? But Jesus does not say that those with pain-free lives are never cast out. He says those who come to him are never cast out. It is not what life brings to us but to whom we belong that determines Christ's heart of love for us. So with Christ. We cling to him, to be sure. But our grip is that of a two-year-old amid the stormy waves of life. His sure grasp never falters. **Psalms 63:8** expresses the double-sided truth: **'My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.'**" This book is based on Matthew 11:29 but this is not the only text he will be using to show us Christ's heart though as He says, "My dad pointed out to me something that Charles Spurgeon pointed out to him. In the four Gospel accounts given to us in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—eighty-nine chapters of biblical text—there's only one place where Jesus tells us about his own heart. But in only one place—perhaps the most wonderful words ever uttered

by human lips—do we hear Jesus himself open up to us his very heart: **‘Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ (Matt. 11: 28–30)** In the one place in the Bible where the Son of God pulls back the veil and lets us peer way down into the core of who he is, we are not told that he is ‘austere and demanding in heart.’ We are not told that he is ‘exalted and dignified in heart.’ We are not even told that he is ‘joyful and generous in heart.’ Letting Jesus set the terms, his surprising claim is that he is ‘gentle and lowly in heart.’” He makes the case of how Christ wants us to experience His rest and to do so we must know His heart. “Here is the promise of the gospel and the message of the whole Bible: In Jesus Christ, we are given a friend who will always enjoy rather than refuse our presence. This is a companion whose embrace of us does not strengthen or weaken depending on how clean or unclean, how attractive or revolting, how faithful or fickle, we presently are. The friendliness of his heart for us subjectively is as fixed and stable as is the declaration of his justification of us objectively.” So the author helps us to know this reality by referring to multiple other Bible verses to help us “know” Christ better so that we don’t question our relationship and we see His heart...why He does what He does and at the same time a glimpse into the depth of everlasting love for us...His bride. This book as one re3viewer said is anchored in the Scriptures, while drawing on the wealth of knowledge offered up to us by the puritans in a book that is medicine for our soul. Two of the many Puritan books that he will be referring to are two on my favorites **KEEPING THE HEART: How to Maintain your Love for God**, by John Flavel and **THE HEART OF CHRIST**, by Thomas Goodwin. This is yet another that will go on my regular re-reading list.

56. **STILL A PFC: A COMBAT MAINE IN WORLD WAR II: The Pacific Theater (1942-1945): Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Guam, & Iwo Jima** by Eugene H. Peterson (printed 2000 and then re-printed and updated 2018). The title says almost all that needs to be said. It is not as graphic as say, E.B. Sledge’s **THE OLD BREED** but it is a first hand account of many of the hottest battles in the Pacific during WW II. He begins by giving his adversary a moment of praise, “My adversary--The Japanese Soldier. Initially we were all swept up in the hate generated by the “sneak” attack on Pearl Harbor. In confronting the Japanese soldier, I found it difficult to hate this man. He was courageous and crafty. He served his Emperor and nation to his death. It is hard to detest a man willing to die for his cause. The Japanese soldier’s willingness to die was at once courageous and also could be carried to a fault. The soldiers often times preferred death to fighting.” But later he would talk about how their tenacity got them obliterated more often than captured. “Over all this grey and fear was the stench of death. Humans and animals killed by the shot and shell of combat decompose very rapidly and hang a cloud of rotting flesh over the entire warring arena. We had this stench on Bougainville and Guam, but it isn’t something you can get used to. The near and far sounds of war keep you ever

alert, yes on edge. The lack of sleep dulls one's senses, but you remain alert for any extraordinary sound or movement. Days are an eon of time, nights are an eternity. The endless lines of wounded being moved back for evacuation reminds you of the danger ever present." But not all things were so graphic and harsh. He recounts several stories of the "fun" that was had in a war zone as well as the unexpected. *"Robert Applebaum who carried the loathing of the Corps to new levels of repugnance. Bob charged into our tent on Guam in a very irate condition. He stood in the middle of our tent and proclaimed, "I hate the Marine Corps. I hate the Officers. I hate the Colonel. I hate the Sergeants and I hate you, because you are a member of the Marine Corps." We all understood Bob's position statement on the Marine Corps because he had expressed it before at the least provocation and on many occasions. Perhaps, you can understand my surprise when I learned recently that he had retired from the Marines after 30 years active duty. He fought the battles of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Seem they just don't build hate like they used to."* Personally, the author remained a PFC at the end of the war. He was given the chance to stay in and even go to officer training but decided to get back home and get to work rebuilding...but the reality is...he died with this understanding... "Once a marine, Always a Marine." A really good read.

- 57. A FORTY-THREE YEAR PASTORATE IN A COUNTRY CHURCH** by C.W. (Cornelius Washington) Grafton, (first published in 1916, and now again in 2017 by Log College Press). The Rev. Dr. Grafton was born in 1846 and actually pastored the Union Church Presbyterian Church in Jefferson County, MS, for 61 years from 1873 to 1934. This book is about the first 43 years. He was a covenant child. A Civil War veteran a graduate of the University of Mississippi, obviously a Presbyterian minister as well as the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1916 when he gave an address with a similar title and then shortly after that wrote this booklet with even more details. He was somewhat of an enigma even then that is why a rural pastor was elevated to the Moderator of his denomination. This booklet provides a firsthand account of life in rural Mississippi from around the turn of the twentieth century. Visiting a family 20 miles away was a full day's ride in good weather but he made sure to connect with all of the members of his church giving the elders and example that was hard to duplicate. He was also known for his ministry to those around the church that didn't necessarily go to Union Church with funerals and weddings. He had been there so long that his reputation was renowned. Aside from his duties of preaching and visiting he also taught school labored in presbytery and wrote copiously an article entitled Dr. Grafton's Message for a monthly periodical of the time called *The Mississippi Visitor*. He also wrote a 600 page history of Presbyterianism in Mississippi that many use today in discovering our history in this denomination. The book covers how he was able to actually come up with sermons for over 40 years in the same place having never

preached the same sermon twice for his congregation. It discusses music in the church and the work of the pastor and how it changed over time. He even gives insight into how the pastor was paid and supported back then and how he always made it clear that it is not about the money sometimes it is about the suffering of not having enough so that he was reminded about how to depend on the Lord for his family and his needs. And he also speaks of the losses and joys of ministry from the very personal to the very public all along espousing the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. His joy in serving comes through in every page ...a joy that seems to have infected countless other men who entered the ministry as well through his tenure at the church over 61 years.

58. THE GERMANS IN NORMANDY by Richard Hargreaves (2006) Very detailed account, graphically recorded, of the events leading to the demise of the Third Reich. An exceptional accounting of life in the German military... everything from submarines to tanks to infantry. But also, how they saw the “invaders”, how they sought to repulse them and how they ended up running for their lives or dying where they stood by the sheer because of the of the fury and fire and overwhelming influx of the Allies with a determined thrust to destroy the Third Reich and all it stood for! We see this monumental event...D-Day at Normandy...through the eyes of the German soldier rather than how we normally view it ...through the eyes of the victors. Just like with many of the firsthand accounts that we have from living people and the journals and letters of the dead we have the same here. This is a very personal accounting of life basically on the run. When the Germans were not able to stop the allied assault on France the war was effectively over and the sad thing was even though many fought bravely they knew they were fighting a losing war. When you see what the ordinary German soldier had to contend with you realize just what D-Day was all about. Crushing the Nazi war machine was never going to be easy but the suffering on both sides is well documented. *“The German soldier in the west would fight on after Normandy. The Western Front anchored again in September 1944, along the West Wall and through Belgium and Holland. The advancing Allies had exhausted their long lines of supplies; the Wehrmacht’s, in turn, shortened dramatically. But just six weeks earlier, the Western Front had been a mere seventy miles long. Now it stretched from the North Sea to the border with Switzerland. Even the lowliest German soldier could see the plight of the Reich was perilous.”* This book documents graphically just how much fire power the allies unleashed on the basically unsuspecting German soldier. This is a title that could easily be put alongside other WWII classics. My only critique is that it may be too long in because of rehashing the same event through so many different eyes.

59. THE HEART OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN TOWARDS SINNERS ON EARTH, by Thomas Goodwin (Copyright 1651 and then at Monergism 2017). Given the tone concerning Christ love for His own and the continuous nature of Rev. Goodwin, this soon became his best known work. He wrote this treatise basically to convince the Church that now that Christ has ascended He is still

with us in Spirit and in truth. One of my favorite lines is this, *"Though Christ is now in glory, do not let that discourage you, for he has the heart of a husband towards you, being betrothed to you forever in faithfulness and in loving-kindness. ...Take this as one incentive to obedience: that if he retained the same heart of mercy towards you which he had here on earth, then to answer his love, endeavor to have the same heart towards him on earth which you hope to have in heaven."* Before reading this in 2018 and then again I have now been reminded again of the depths of Christ's love. I particularly enjoyed the author's description of how Christ loves us even more as He sees us fail in the flesh, recalling our beauty when first promised to Him by the Father as His Bride and later when reunited in Paradise. Because we are His members, when we sin in this life, He is not angry with us but rather hurts for and pities us in our affliction of sin. He says, *"Now, therefore, to conclude this head: Never fear that Christ's great advancement in heaven should in any way alter his disposition, for this his very advancement engages him the more."* He continues to remind his readers that Jesus is the same **"today, yesterday and tomorrow"**, because we and the world continue to confound the truth of Christ's work especially now that He has ascended. Between John's Gospel and Hebrews he continues to reveal to us all that is necessary for us to have the assurance that we need in this life as to Christ's on-going involvement in the lives of His children...from forgiving our daily sins to enabling us to persevere through hardship to the enjoyment of the victories that He chooses to give us in this life that we might all the more delight in Him. Goodwin begins with the beautiful assurances given by Christ to His disciples, taking as an example of that love Christ's washing of the disciples' feet (John 13). However, the heart of his argument lies in his exposition of Hebrews 4:15, in which Goodwin shows that in all his glorious holiness in heaven, Christ is always loving towards His people. He makes it clear that Christ's heart beats more strongly than ever with tender love for them given where He is and the duty He now fulfills in heaven. And in particular, two things stir his compassion: our afflictions and—almost unbelievably—our sins. Using his vast knowledge of Scripture and his great understanding of the doctrines of grace he misses no opportunity to let us know how blessed and loved we are as God's child. (170plus pages in paperback and 150 plus pages in eBook).

- 60. THROUGH THE VALLEY: How Psalm 23 Gives Us Hope in Suffering**, by Rob Wootton (Covenant Seminary Graduate and pastor of Rocky Mountain Community Church, (PCA) in Billings, MT., published 2021by White Blackbird Books). My love for the Psalms is well known by all who know me. But this book took this most beloved and well known of the Psalms to another level for me as the author applies it directly to the sufferings in his life through the years and how God used it and is using it in his sanctification unto glory. He wrote this book to show forth the hope that God has given him through some of the toughest moments in life with the hope that others will find that same hope from God and His Word. This book is definitely for and all of God's children who are, have been or will go through their Valleys of the Shadow of Death.

This then, deals with our daily struggles as well as those that may plague us all our life. I have known for years now that this Psalm is really about how we live our life rather than a Psalm only for funerals, but in this short book he takes this to a new level that helps us see God's promises and then with the sight, live in those promises no matter what we are going through. In this work he keeps taking us back to Christ showing how the Good Shepherd is our only hope. He introduces us to our Shepherd again so that we can know and experience Him for ourselves and those we may be helping through a dark night of the soul. He helps us to understand that this life in this fallen world is hard...it is meant to be but the rewards are great in Christ...whether in this life or the next. He challenges to enter into our "valley" regularly so that we can find our Shepherd, since He is always there wherever we are...and I for one see this as a daily endeavor and am thankful to have been reminded.

61. BLOODY BEACHES: Marine Raiders in World War II (WWII Military History Series), by Daniel Wrinn (2021). The author is new to me but he has been writing these vignettes of war for some time and is now putting them into book form. He is a navy veteran, which aids in his understanding of naval protocol and love for history is seen in his impeccable detail. This is the second of his works that I have read. This one was especially helpful for how it succinctly captures the beginning of the Marine Raiders as the first Special Forces group. The book highlights Edson's Raiders and Carlson's Raiders who are familiar to military history buffs but we also see into the daily workings of these units from equipment to training unlike I have read before. It was a long road to actual Special Forces Units like we have today but these were the foundational units even though they spent most of their time supporting conventional military campaigns. But they were "the elite of the elite" which would be a characteristic that would mark the Special Forces going forward. If one is wanting a quick but accurate fairly detailed look at these units this is the book to read. These books, and he has many, from WWI to WWII Pacific encounters especially by the Marines are good reads. They don't expect much from the reader but they provide insight and record from that time that, especially for the novice, could be very helpful. But for the old at military history buff his stories of otherwise unknown soldiers that make up the core of units...their acts of bravery as well as acts of shenanigans... make these reads very engaging and hard to put down. The problems of editing that I encountered in the first one I read was not in this book or, if they were, the read was so enjoyable as to not make them noticeable. Definitely does the Marine Corps proud!

62. GENESIS (First Colony #1) by Ken Lozito (2017). An excellent read! This book is engaging, entertaining and swift moving while also being funny. *"The disguises were preconfigured for operations that brought them among civilians, and they used forms that put the casual onlooker off guard. Not many people would look twice at a pregnant woman or an elderly couple. Connor checked Kasey, whose outward appearance resembled a morbidly obese*

man. Maintaining the hologram was taxing on their combat suit computers and couldn't be sustained for more than a few hours." Connor Gates has just completed a mission against an old enemy that has gone sideways in a major way. He meets with an old friend, admiral Wilkerson, to debrief and is told that he and his team would be tried and locked up for this failed mission but while he is talking he passes out and is awoken ...sometime later he thinks and everything has changed...everything. The Admiral placed him and what was left of his team on a transport called the Ark ... an interstellar ship the likes of which he has never seen before with people he has never met before. He is woke up and finds himself 200 years in the future on with people who had been sent off to colonize a new earth and he is having to live with the fact that everyone he ever knew is gone...dead and buried. And if that is not enough him, he and his compatriots discover that Earth...the Old Earth...was seemingly destroyed because their destination had been changed in flight and there is now the possibility of an alien force headed their way. Oh, did I mention that Connor...Colonel Connor Gates is military and that is all he has known and from the very beginning of touching down in this new environment he is a fish out of water...one of a kind...left to figure out how to defend a world from an unknown enemy that will arrive at some time...if they will let him. The only thing they know for sure is... they are coming! (At least, many are convinced...but as time goes on fewer still believe) As I said an extremely entertaining read and I am already reading the next book in the series, **NEMESIS.**

- 63. 12 FAITHFUL WOMEN: Portraits in Steadfast Endurance**, edited by Melissa Kruger and Kristen Wetherell (2020 The Gospel Coalition). This book highlights 12 Christian women at different times in history and how they remained steadfast in the trials that God put them through. There are some women many would be familiar with and others not so much, like Helen Roseveare born in the 1920 and grew up to become a doctor and served on the mission field in the Congo. She remained steadfast in training nurses to helped relieve the suffering in the area along with sharing the gospel. She also endured the Congo wars of the early 1960's where she was captured by the rebels and abused severely at the hands of her captors. But after her release and returning to England she once again came back to Africa to start again, which she did. *"In her writing, Helen is honest about her own sin. Time after time in her books, she admits her own struggles with pride. Her honesty challenges her readers by suggesting that what we often label "hurt" may be pride in disguise. She writes: When you feel hurt, stop and pray . . . '[H]urt' means that the self is very much alive, and striving to get back on the throne of my life. If Jesus really indwells me, I ought not to be hurt. I may well be grieved at the behavior of others, or by certain events, but not hurt. Hurt is a symptom of self. If I let the Lord have His rightful place on the throne of my life, He will handle that which causes the hurt."* Then there is the stories of Esther Ahn Kim, Sarah Edwards, Elisabeth Elliot, Corrie ten Boon, Philis Wheatley, Susannah Spurgeon, Wen Wei Chieh, Catherine de Bourbon de Navarre,

Lilias Trotter, Hannah More and Joni Eareckson Tada. Each of these women had to endure or in the case of Joni are still enduring pain and struggle to be able to privileged to proclaim the Gospel. Each of these women need to be known by us and each of these women have something to teach us. At the end of each chapter is a set of questions and Scripture that will cause the reader to learn specific things from the lives of these women and the Word of God that we need in our lives daily as we endure in this fallen world for God's glory.

64. **OPERATION DETACHMENT: 1945 Battle of Iwo Jima**, by Daniel Wrinn (2021). This little book is faithful to the men who served on the land, the sea and in the air in recounting the actions of those bloody days on Iwo Jima. From actual letter and verbal accounts from the vets themselves, our author paints a picture for us of the horrendous experiences that so many suffered in this-the bloodiest of battles-and how these Marines, along with all the support of the Navy, Army, Coast Guard and Army-Air Corps were able, finally, to subdue perhaps the hardest and most unpredictable of the Japanese garrisons in the Pacific Island campaign as they made their way to Japan. *"It was a miracle the casualties hadn't been twice as high. Did Gen. Kuribayashi wait too long to use his big guns? The first night in Iwo Jima was an eerie affair. Mists of sulfur spiraled from the earth. Marines who were used to the tropics now shivered in the cold, waiting for Kuribayashi's samurai warriors to come screaming down the hills. Marines learned this Japanese commander was different. There would be no wasteful banzai attack tonight. Instead, small teams of infiltrators, 'Prowling Wolves,' would probe the Marine lines and gather intelligence. A barge full of the elite Japanese Special Landing Forces tried a counter landing on the western beaches—they died to a man under the alert guns of the 28th Marines and supporting LVT crews."* This island was the first US battle on Japanese "soil" as this was one of the islands that were claimed as Japanese land...so its fall would be a tremendous blow to the backbone of the Japanese Imperial forces. The air field on this island would become a safe haven for wounded B-29's coming back from bombing raids over Japan but also a closer jumping off spot for the continual action in the Pacific as we moved closer and closer to the total pacification of the Japanese Empire. The story is seen through a microscope since there was so much going on than that which can be captured in a small book, but the author captures enough to keep the reader...history buff or novice...glued to their seat.
65. **NEMESIS (First Colony #2)**, by Ken Lozito (2017). Well it has been 7 years since we last saw Connor Gates and the colonists and in that time Connor is now General Gates in charge in charge of the Colonial Defense Force (CDF) who have been charge with preparing this world for the eventual...possible...arrival of the plague or aliens that destroyed earth. They have made pretty good progress in their defenses...building space cruiser/ battleships. Along with a large Space Station for forward protection and guns along the way. But-and there is always one of those when people are involved-

a struggle has begun between people in how much of the colonies resources actually need to be given to the CDF when most aren't sure any longer that there is a threat coming their way. The new leader of New Earth is least concerned of an attack even to the point of trying to take things into his own hands concerning getting some of the louder advocates for preparation dealt with in a quiet, out of the way...way. This plot comes to a head just as ...you guessed it ...the much feared force ...at least feared by most of the leadership of the CDF invades. And an epic battle ensues with so many twists and turns that sometimes it is almost too hard to keep up...just the way I like my plot turns. Now at the end of it all have they beaten this enemy or is there more to come? Will they be able to rebuild or will the powers that be rest in their laurels of "victory"? Will Connor ever marry Lenora? But the ultimate question...Will the colony survive... even after this? Turning to the next book **LEGACY (First Colony book #3)** to try and find out.

66. **DEEPER HEAVEN: A Reader's Guide to C.S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy**, by Christiana Hale (2020). This is perhaps as much as a theological treatise as it is a guide to the Ransom Trilogies. (I never saw them as a Space Trilogy because it didn't really follow the definition that we are aware of today in space themed books and shows like Star Trek and Star Wars. And as Lewis said many times his books are not about space in the sense that we think of it but rather the heavens as the Bible and cosmology specifically Medieval cosmology.) The reader is won over to the fact that this is more than an academic exercise in seeking the mind of C.S. Lewis in one of his best works. (I know the Narnia series is most people's favorite but this one is mine!) In the first 2 books it was not hard to follow the biblical allusions and downright direct illustrations but as Lewis's readers get into the third book this is where many people lose the thrust of his redemptive message. We know it is there ...or I should say...I know it is there but there is so much going on with myths and allusions to medieval cosmology that if the reader is not up to speed on those then you can get lost...or at least I did. I had so many unanswered questions after reading the 3rd book (**That Hideous Strength**) in the series that I became dissatisfied with the trilogy as a whole. But after reading this book you see Lewis's deep faith and the interwoven strong biblical world and life view that he was known for in his later years. And the author of this "guide" also has a strong biblical world and life view so they mesh well together to give the reader far more than they could have expected...at least for me... from a contemporary writer on the subject. At the time that I read these books I marveled at how this trilogy was so contemporary in its application for today. I have many excerpts I could choose from but maybe this is the best: *"Ironically, those who hold to the materialist worldview are often some of the biggest supporters of charitable humanitarian projects. The N.I.C.E. claims to care about humanity, about the environment, about providing jobs for workers, all while working against the way God created the world. But the truth is that, while men can deny the reality of the universe, curse the God of all creation, shake their fists at Him in rebellion, and grasp at the power to "create*

*themselves” or form a new humanity, they cannot escape His world. They are still men, and men cannot actually function as pure matter or pure spirit. Belbury embodies this pendulum swing from materialistic reductionism to a sort of twisted spiritualism, both of which are driven at root by the desire to “be as gods.” Education is primarily concerned with shaping people. It is about creating a certain kind of man or woman. We cannot relay raw facts without shaping the worldview of the student, without having an effect on the kind of person that they are and that they will become. Lewis saw this clearly, and this is why he objects so strongly to the materialistic, evolutionary education springing up in post-war England. He saw the kind of man it was seeking to create—a man like Mark Studdock, a man without a chest. But he also demonstrates that this sort of education cannot ultimately succeed, because although they try to erase His image, they cannot escape His world.” And then she quotes Lewis himself, “And all the time—such is the tragi-comedy of our situation—we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible. You can hardly open a periodical without coming across the statement that what our civilization needs is more ‘drive,’ or dynamism, or self-sacrifice, or ‘creativity.’ In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.” (Lewis, **The Abolition of Man**)” For anyone wanting to get the fullness of Lewis in the Ransom Trilogy this book is essential.*

67. **LEGACY (First Colony book #3)**, by Ken Lozito (2017). The Vemus are back from a hidden area of space and they are loaded for bear. It has only been 7 months since the colony defeated what they know now was just the first wave attack. But now everyone is on-board with the changes that need to be made so the colony has been able to do so much preparation under General Gates...but will it be enough? All the people have been evacuated to undisclosed locations around the planet with hopes “when” not “if” the Vemus breakthrough that they can still hold on. The Vemus are a type of Borg creation...not mechanical but all part of one collective mind source... so can the colonists find this collective controlling mind source and shut it down...destroy this flesh desiring and devouring species created in some laboratory somewhere on Earth before it devours all humanity? Will men actually work together when their back is up against the wall to save humanity and defeat an enemy that is driven to assimilate all human life? This is the mankind’s ultimate enemy to this point. It will take everything they have to win this battle for the ages. It will either be man’s finest hour or its demise.
68. **OPERATION ICEBERG: 1945 Victory on Okinawa (WWII Pacific Military History Series)**, by Daniel Wrinn (2021). In this book our author borrowed heavily from E.B. Sledge from **THE OLD BREED**...but then what better resource is there concerning actual reports of the type of fighting and the carnage seen and experienced there. “Tensions were high in landing force

transports. The 60mm mortar section of Company K, 3/ 5 Marines learned that the casualty rates on Love-Day were estimated to reach 85%. According to Private First Class Eugene Sledge: *'this is not conducive to a good night's sleep.'* A Japanese soldier observing the massive armada bearing down on Okinawa wrote in his diary: *'it's like a frog meeting a snake and waiting for the snake to eat him.'* Or another quote from later in the book, *"Rain and mud plagued the advancing Allied forces. In Eugene Sledge's book, he described this battlefield as a '...five-mile sea of mud.'* PFC Sledge wrote: *'The mud in camp on Pavuvu was a nuisance. But the mud on that Okinawan battlefield was misery beyond description.'*" Again, he gives a great abbreviated account of the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific theater and of the final campaign of WWII. There are many things to be learned from this little book that may get lost in bigger volumes like, *"Many Marines who survived Okinawa went on to top positions of leadership that influenced the Marine Corps for the next two decades. Two Marine Corps commandants emerged from this hellish ordeal: General Lemuel Shepherd of the 6th Marine Division and Colonel Leonard Chapman, CO of the 4/ 11 Marines. Oliver Smith and Vernon McGee were promoted to the rank of four-star general. At least seventeen others achieved the rank of lieutenant general—including George Axtell, Alan Shapley, Ed Snedeker, and Victor Krulak. Corporal James Day recovered from his wounds and returned to Okinawa forty years later as a Major General in command of all Marine Corps bases on the island."* Again, I will say, the story is seen through a microscope since there was so much more going on than that which can be captured in a small book but the author captures enough to keep the reader...history buff or novice...glued to their seat. There are at least 12 of these books that are out right now with apparently more to follow.

- 69. EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE**, by John Colquhoun , (from Monergism Books, Copyright © 2011). A sobering book to be sure. He covers so much ground covering the vileness of sin and the justifications we give to keep from actually, fully and truthfully repent of such sins even after we are saved. And just like the rest of the men of his day he holds nothing back in saying if our repentance does not emulate what he describes as true or evangelical repentance then we just simply aren't saved and we should at that moment of realizations...dropped to a prostrate position and beg God to truly forgive us for we now realize and recognize the vileness and odiousness of our sin. It is a convicting work to be sure. He says we ought to exhibit such an example as this, *"Accordingly, the humble penitent is represented as smiting on his thigh (Jer 31:19), as if he thereby declared that he would willingly take vengeance on the legs that carried him forward in the ways of sin; and that he would be filled with holy resentment against himself for the innumerable injuries which, by his unaccountable crimes, he did to the honour of his God and Saviour. When he repents of his wickedness, he says, 'What have I done?' (Jer 8:6). What an ungrateful, what a vile, what a loathsome, what a wretched sinner, have I been!"* And these are just a couple of examples, *"No man truly abhors his sins but he who loathes and abhors himself as a sinner. An impenitent*

sinner usually loves that in himself which he appears to loathe in others, but the true penitent loathes sin in himself even more than he does in others.” He does with inexhaustible accuracy trace the saving grace of repentance unto life to the work of the Holy Spirit, revealing to his readers how it flows out of God’s mercy and grace as we come by faith to recognize with a true spiritual eye sight the depth of our sin. He says, *“Now, while the exercise of true repentance flows from supreme love to God, the exercise of this love proceeds, under the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, from the forgiveness of sins in justification. Justifying and saving faith is the mean of true repentance, and this repentance is not the mean, but the end of that faith.”* As I said and I hope these few verses illustrate... his writing can be quite arresting-requiring you, as you read-to stop, ponder and perhaps confess your sinfulness of the moment to God. To understand true repentance this book is an absolute necessity.

- 70. CHRIST ALL IN ALL: THE RIGHT TEMPER OF A THEOLOGIAN**, by William Swan Plumer (addresses given in 1854 and 1868 but reprinted by Log College Press 2017). Swan was in the 19th and early 20th centuries one of the most prolific writers in the Presbyterian Church. He was well known for his Christ-centered and experiential piety that impacted many church members and elders alike. Plumer’s life was full and useful. He was devoted to Jesus his Savior and King to his last days. On his deathbed, upon being asked, *“Do you suffer much, Doctor?”* he replied, *“Not nearly as much as my Savior did.”* When a visitor exclaimed, *“I am sorry to see you suffer so, Doctor!”* he responded, *“One who loves me better than you do put me here.”* When the word “submit” was used with regard to his death, he said, *“Perhaps acquiesce is a better word for the Christian to use. We may submit, because we are obligated to – but the Christian cheerfully, joyfully yields all to his Lord’s will.”* This book was put together to show his desire for God’s people not to languish in this life but to flourish. They are both inaugural addresses to 2 seminaries that he was preparing to take over the helm of. So on one hand, these addresses are for those preparing for a life in the ministry but on the other especially the first one, entitled “Christ All in All”, he clearly has the whole church in mind as he generally...and I use that term loosely...for this man and the times...while he gets more specific in the second address, **THE RIGHT TEMPER OF A THEOLOGIAN**. He wrote these to address what the right and true focus seminary education ought to have, but they also apply to life among the church and leading the church. He said, *“The great central truth of the religion of sinners relates to the person, character, work, sufferings and offices of Jesus Christ. As a man is sound or corrupt here, so is he elsewhere. Both now and in the last day, the great question in determining character is the same — what think ye of Christ? In the wars of opinion the greatest contests ever known have been on the question, whether Christ is the sole and sufficient cause of salvation. Strange that any, who have God’s word, should be at a loss on such a matter. The language of Scripture is clear, ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.’ This is the sum of*

inspired teachings on the subject. This doctrine is quite beyond the suggestion of reason. The gospel is not the progeny of human wisdom" From this work and others that I have read by him he takes a no-nonsense approach to the person of Christ...it would be interesting to see what he thinks of his beloved mainline Presbyterian Church today. As I said in the **THE RIGHT TEMPER OF A THEOLOGIAN**, he gets more specific and a whole lot more helpful for those of us who like it spelled out for us more practically. Much like Richard Baxter in **The Reformed Pastor** (almost using his particulars as his own...which shows the power and influence such a book had almost 200 years later) he speaks to these subjects quite eloquently and seriously; the power of prejudice against the truth, humility which he calls modesty, independence of thought and freedom of inquiry- fashioned after the Bereans, profound reverence for all that is sacred starting with the word of God, a sincere and constant love of the truth, patience that produces discernment, diligence in all pursuits of the truth and civility, a lively faith- a putting into practice well even the depth of knowledge being learned, a just moderation in judgments...not too far to the left or the right, prayerful...that is developing a spirit and a delight in prayer, and an evangelical temper...a mind set on Christ, for Christ and from Christ for the believers in which they will serve. He also loved to quote McCheyne, so I will end this with one quote concerning the Bible and prayer. McCheyne says: *"Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you are reading the first Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel and pray, 'O Lord, give me the blessedness of the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. Let me not stand in the way of sinners. Let me not sit in the seat of the scornful.' This is the best way of learning the meaning of the Bible, and of learning to pray."* This review is too long but this book was so good!

71. **THE RACE OF FAITH**, by R.C. Sproul (2016). The Church has always had Creeds and Confessions to express what we believe with perhaps the earliest creed simply being "Jesus is Lord." R.C. says, *"One of the earliest Christian creeds is found in the Bible. It was very simple. It was the affirmation 'Jesus is Lord.' It is possible to speak these words without understanding them. You can repeat this statement without understanding what the concept 'Lord' means, what the verb 'is' indicates, and what the name 'Jesus' refers to. But if you speak the words without understanding them, you are not actually affirming what the words mean; you are not making a true profession of faith. So, to believe the gospel, to have faith in Jesus, you must first have at least some degree of understanding of the message of the gospel in your mind."* So, the year before he died Ligonier put together this little book to help believers understand their "race of faith" since the Bible often refers to our Christian life as a race. But in order to run the race we must understand the basics. The Christian life is based on faith in Jesus Christ, which means we must believe to be called Christians. Christians have met together and formulated statements of faith...creeds...that describes exactly what beliefs are necessary for everyone to understand what it means to be a Christian. So this book looks at the earliest of these creeds the Apostle's creed which actually summarizes the

teaching of the Apostles from the New Testament. This book attempts to help the reader understand the Apostles' Creed. Point by point, it examines the creed and lay out its meaning. The goal is to give the reader a clear and succinct understanding of the basics of Christian belief and what it means to run the race of life according to faith in Christ and according to the teachings of the Bible. This Creed was used by the church for centuries as a tool for any who wanted to join a local congregation they must recite it, affirm it and live according to this belief. It is the Gospel put in a familiar and easy tool to help us know why we run the race as well. Small book but full of content.

72. TO A THOUSAND GENERATIONS: INFANT BAPTISM-COVENANT

MERCY TO THE CHILDREN OF GOD, by Douglas Wilson (1996). In my "humble" opinion one of the best books on this subject written by an author that I do not normally recommend for too many to read because of his almost legalistic approach to patriarchy. Having said that this little book (130 plus or minus pages digitally) is the most comprehensive and balanced discussions on the subject. He begins by helping us understand circumcision, *"It would be hard for Paul to make his point any more clearly. Abraham was declared righteous in the eyes of God through his faith. Abraham then received the sign of that righteousness, circumcision. Thus, we see that when Abraham was declared righteous by God, his heart was circumcised. Years later, he was physically circumcised as a sign. Paul says that Abraham received the sign of circumcision, which was also a seal of the righteousness he had by faith. This was a seal, not of Abraham's faith, but of the righteousness which he had by faith. Abraham's righteousness was not his own personal faith; his righteousness was Christ, whom he appropriated by faith. Thus, the seal of circumcision was not a seal given as a personal testimony. The seal was God's seal of the promised and coming Christ, in whom Abraham believed. The meaning of Abraham's circumcision was not, 'Abraham got saved.' Rather, it was, 'Salvation will come to the world!' It is true that Abraham was personally saved, and that he was saved by faith. But he was saved because he believed in the objective promise—that is, in the coming Christ. This is really quite important, because our tendency is to think that the seal is of something entirely subjective (personal faith) rather than objective (the saving Christ). Therefore, we think nothing can be sealed unless we have ascertained with our own eyes that it may be sealed. This means, we think, that we should not circumcise or baptize anyone until we can guarantee that they have professed faith and evidenced the true fruit of it. We baptize by sight, and not by faith."* But then moves on to what goes on in baptism, *"It is important to reiterate that water baptism is not a picture of the believer's own personal death, burial and resurrection. It is a sign of the believer's union with and in the death, burial, and resurrection of Another. An essential part of the argument in Romans 6 deals with the union of the believer with Christ. Paul mentions this same point in connection with baptism in Galatians 3: 26–27: 'For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.' This true baptism may be called a*

baptism of union. The union is with Christ, and the effects of it are eternal. How is this baptism accomplished? In 1 Corinthians 12:13 it gives an answer: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." In this verse, Paul says that we are baptized into a body. Contextually, that body is the body of Christ. The Person who does the baptizing is the Holy Spirit. Just as an elder baptizes into water, so the Holy Spirit baptizes into Christ. And water baptism points to that baptism into Christ. The baptism of union with Christ is performed by the Spirit of God." With these two in mind he talks about infant baptism but at the same time talks about what the believing Jewish community would have done at this time until circumcision was finally phased out by the church. A great book on a few of the subjects that seem to plague the church the most.

- 73. THE REFORMED PASTOR, by Richard Baxter 1656**, updated and abridged by Tim Cooper (2021 by Crossway Books). Of all the books on the pastorate this one in its original form was the most informative, declarative and pastoral of all, though extremely long and tedious to get through. This was one of the first books I ever read on the pastorate and what was expected of pastors in 17th century England which scared the "you know what" out of me but it didn't scare me enough to not to want to continue. I always saw myself as a "parish pastor type" and after reading this the time and sacrifice that is required to love your people well was extremely evident. *"The main theme of The Reformed Pastor is the Christian minister's need for a personal pastoral ministry. In Baxter's England there were lonely people, sick people, and complicated families. There were Christians facing sin and suffering who lacked the assurance that they should have had. And there were churchgoers with a strong sense of assurance that they should not have had. Some of these people could be reached through powerful preaching. But not all of them. Thus, Baxter emphasized personal pastoral care for its own sake: a divinely appointed means, practiced by the apostle Paul himself (Acts 20:20), to bless the people God has placed in a minister's life. Not to give it all away, but Baxter's recipe for personal care includes praying, teaching, risking awkward questions, and insisting on hard conversations. Baxter is most famous for his commitment to visitation. Visitation is a dying art in our day, but it need not die out altogether. Raising the topic of visiting families or individuals in a modern church is likely."* When Richard Baxter published **The Reformed Pastor** in 1656, he had no idea that he had produced a classic text, one that would still be in print nearly four centuries later. The book was his exposition of Acts 20:28: *"Take heed unto yourselves and all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood."* His enduring work sets forth a vision of what pastoral ministry should be in all its rounded fullness. It summons pastors to tenacious, intentional, and sacrificial soul care of every individual under their oversight. The call is demanding and provoking, inspiring and affirming. If there is any one book that every pastor should read, this is it. But at the time of my first

reading of this classic text, I didn't know that he had not married yet which would have explained why he had so much time and how he was willing to "burn the candle to the end". He starts out hard hitting and doesn't throttle back until the end, *"Effective leadership begins with candid self-assessment: I think it is no time now to neglect our duty and befriend our sins, and so provoke the Lord against us. Instead, it is fitting for us to fall down at the feet of our offended Lord and to justify him in his judgments, and freely and penitently to confess our transgressions, and to resolve upon a speedy and thorough reformation before wrath breaks out upon us, which will leave us no remedy."* (This quote is from the beginning). And then there is this from the end: *"Well, brethren, I have given you my advice, and I now leave you to the practice. Though the proud may receive it with scorn and the selfish and slothful with some distaste and indignation, I do not doubt that God will use it to awaken many of his servants to do their duty and to promote the work of a right reformation. His great blessing will accompany the present undertaking for the saving of many a soul, for the peace of you who undertake and perform it, and for the purity and the unity of his churches. Amen."* It would have been good for him to write another treatise on the pastorate after he was married and much later in life, especially for us older guys who feel age creeping in to the point that we aren't as active in the congregation as we were once. Tim Cooper does a masterful job of updating the language and abridging this classic work without taking away its punch, as is evident from the quote above, that comes when any pastor/elder reads this, because we all realize how limited we are in living up to this standard. There have been other attempts at updating other Puritan works and the liberties that have been taken have taken away from the author's original intent...not this one. He is a student of Baxter and His times and he is faithful in his abridgment. Oh and we go from over 300 tedious pages down to 130 plus or minus easily read pages with reflective questions at the end of each chapter. Good stuff.

- 74. COMING HOME: Essays on the New Heaven and New Earth**, by D. A. Carson and Jeff Robinson Sr. contributors and editors (2017 by the Gospel Coalition, Crossway Books). This book is helpful for those who do not share an accurate image of the home that has been prepared for us in the future. This book is for those of us who have a hard time keeping the image of that hope before our eyes long enough for it to make a difference in how we approach and live in the world today. This book is for those of us who struggle to trust God's steadfast love, His provision and His promises. Eight writers in this book have contributed essays to aid in our vision of the future...of God's promise of a New Heavens and a New Earth... because with a correct vision of the future our present will be impacted positively for Christ. D.A. Carson, Timothy Keller, Voddie Baucham Jr., Mark Devers, John Piper, Augustus Nicodemus Lopes, Ligon Duncan, Philip Ryken are the men that contributed these extremely helpful essays. From the preface we read, *"It is impossible to think richly and faithfully about eschatology without thinking richly and faithfully about Jesus Christ; it is impossible to focus on him without reflecting on eschatology. The*

eight chapters of this book expound select passages from the Old and New Testaments that deal with these themes. They are the written forms of eight plenary addresses of the 2015 National Conference of the Gospel Coalition. Our hope is that circulating them in this form will help many more people revel in the richness of God's Word—not only of these discrete passages but also of some of the ways these passages unfold the developing lines of Scripture and call our minds and imaginations home to the new heaven and the new earth. The final plenary session of the conference, preserved as an appendix in this book, preserves the probing and sometimes moving panel discussion titled "Biblical Foundations for Seeing God's Justice in a Sinful World." And in the end, we face the call of God for more than mere justice—the call of God to respond with the grace of the gospel." This appendix was a great addition, for it exposed the thinking of so many different believing brothers...but it was John Piper in the end that actually summed up the biblical injunction... "The gospel unleashes in the world a commitment not to live for justice, but to live for more than justice. Justice is minimalist. A life devoted to treating people as they deserve is not a Christian life. God, in the gospel, treated us better than we deserve. That's not justice—we don't get justice in the gospel. God got justice in the gospel. We don't get justice in the gospel, we get grace. And he unleashes on the world a people in churches, and spilling over out of churches, who treat each other way beyond justice. You shouldn't walk through the day or through your life thinking, 'How can I be just?' You should walk through the world thinking, 'How can I be gracious? How can I be loving? How can I be kind? How can I love my enemy? How can I go the extra mile? How can I, when I am sued, give him my cloak as well?' The gospel unleashes something way beyond justice, so Christians shouldn't be known mainly as the justice people. That's minimalistic; you start there and go beyond. So Christ will be known in the culture when we treat people better than they deserve, not as they deserve." As I said A good little book (250 plus or minus pages) to keep our head on straight about our future home and how that should impact our today!

- 75. LESSONS FROM THE UPPER ROOM: The Heart of the Savior**, by Sinclair Ferguson (2021 by Ligonier Ministries). As I have said before, this is one of the few authors in my generation where I can say...whatever he writes is worthy of our reading. His style is very engaging as one contemplates what he is talking about. In this book, he transports us to the Upper Room where Jesus is meeting with His disciples for the last Passover and lets us see and experience almost everything that is going on in that room before they leave to go out to the Mount of olives the night before Jesus' death. So, this little book (240 pages or so depending upon formatting) is an exposition of John chapters 13-17. While wonderful to read, we must remember that he is teaching us as well, "*John's gospel has a clear and relatively simple shape. It begins with a prologue (1:1–18)—a passage we often read at Christmastime. It ends with an epilogue (21:1–25)—the passage in which Jesus restores Simon Peter to his Apostolic ministry. In between, the gospel is divided into two parts or books. Part 1 (1: 19–12:50) is sometimes called the Book of Signs. The words and works of Jesus together point to His identity as the Messiah and Savior. So, for example, He claims to be "the Light of the World." Those who follow Him will not walk in darkness*

(8:12). He then illustrates this by giving sight to a man who was born blind (Ch. 9). There are seven signs recorded in chapters 1 to 12. Part 2 (13: 1–20: 31) is the Book of the Passion or, as it is sometimes called, the Book of Glory. As it opens, we have been transported, without explanation, to a room above a house in Jerusalem. It is Thursday afternoon of Passover Week, and a meal is already underway. As far as we know, only thirteen men are in the room—Jesus and His chosen Apostles. Now the glory that Jesus has hidden from a world that has rejected Him will increasingly be revealed to the disciples who trusted and loved Him. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) show us “His body”—they tell the story from the outside, as it were. But the nearer John’s gospel gets to its climax the more we learn about what was “going on inside” our Lord. This is preeminently true in chapters 13 through 17. Here we are invited to listen in as Jesus patiently instructs His closest friends as they sit around Him during a Passover meal. It would have lasted several hours—truly memorable hours with the Master!” There is so much in here revealing to his reader the heart of the Lord even in his discussion of the texts on the Holy Spirit we see the Lord’s heart in not leaving us as orphans. He does yet another masterful job bringing the Bible to life for us so that we come away say...I have been with the Lord!

76. **SANCTUARY (First Colony Book 4)**, by Ken Lozito (2018). The Vemus are gone-or so they believe-so the New Earth colony is settling into a rebuild phase since so much of the society was destroyed by the Vemus who were bent on the total destruction of the human race. Gen. Gates is now private citizen Gates and he is living at the sanctuary with Lenora. The sanctuary had started out as an abandoned city turned research facility seeking information on the aliens that had once lived there, but during the Vemus invasion, it literally became a “sanctuary” for many of New Earth’s residents. Since the threat has been neutralized while many left and went back to rebuild their lives in the capital cities some stayed making the Sanctuary a new city as much as a research facilities. Well of course, their research has led to some interesting discoveries that go awry awakening a force so powerful indigenous to the planet that they, of course, threaten to destroy the people left. Everyone’s lives depend upon some of their smartest teenagers in the research teams finding what is causing this force to head their direction destroying everything in its path. In the meantime, there is a growing unrest among the CDF (Colonial Defense Force) that Gates has uncovered that could undo all that this team of researchers is trying to do to prevent this ultimate catastrophe. So, will New earth survive this latest enemy of indigenous species because of their ignorance of the planet as they rebuild? Will the CDF be the undoing of all that is civilized on this planet to date? All of this and more are answered in this great story that keeps you reading these 350 plus page works like you are eating candy. You just can’t put them down. I am looking forward to the next one, **DISCOVERY.**

77. **PURITAN GEMS: or, Wise and Holy sayings of the Rev. Thomas Watson, A.M.,** by Thomas Watson (1620-1686) (Formatted in book form independently in 2019. Digitalized by Monergism about the same time). It is thought that these were put together by Rev. Watson for the good of God’s people just after he was expelled from his pulpit when Charles II was restored to power. He even says at the beginning of the book, *“It has been thought this miniature Cabinet of jewels would be an appropriate companion for the journey — the voyage — in the walk — in leisure moments, or on the couch of weakness, when some sentence might be found adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the reader, and be conducive to instruction and edification. ‘The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like*

firmly embedded nails — given by one Shepherd.” (Ecclesiastes 12:11). His works have been a blessing to many throughout the ages. I would put this volume (if I had the actual book rather than the digital version) alongside of **The Valley of Vision** for its wisdom and comfort and encouragement and study the 2 together. But this volume is actually even one better in that this book of quotes and antecedents is developed topically, covering a wide variety of subjects from sin to repentance, to prayer...44 in all. On sin he reminds us, *“It is worse to love sin than to commit it. The love of sin . . . hardens the heart, keeps the devil in possession, and freezes the soul in impenitency.”* On contentment he remarks, *“A contented Christian does not choose his own cross — but is willing to take that which God chooses, and is content with the kind and the duration of the cross. He will wait for God's providence to remove it — but never force the door to escape from it.”* On the conscience he says, *“Conscience is God's deputy in the soul, his viceroy. The wicked do all they can to dethrone conscience and put it aside. Conscience is God's echo, and the sinner strives to silence its voice. Conscience is like a looking-glass: if it is soiled with thick dust, you cannot discover anything in it clearly; wipe away that dust, and how clearly seen is the least imperfection in the countenance! The time is coming, when God will wipe away the dust from a man's conscience, and he will see every one of his sins clearly represented!”* Stuffed in these 140 plus or minus pages is such a wealth of his thought...a wealth of Puritan thought from that time. It would be a great volume to have in print or in digital form for when you are struggling with a clear way to word something or simply for encouragement and comfort.

78. DISCOVERY (First Colony Book 5), by Ken Lozito (2018). The author himself tells us why he chooses to write, *“I’ve been reading both genres (sci-fi and fantasy) for a long time. Books were my way to escape everyday life from when I was a teenager to my current ripe old(?) age. What started out as a love of stories has turned into a full-blown passion for writing them. My ultimate goal for writing stories is to provide fun escapism for readers. I write stories that I would like to read and I hope you enjoy them as well.”* He definitely accomplishes his goal with this series. These stories have been really fun to read...so fun in fact that I am able to read through a 300 plus page book in less than a week with all my other readings and work that I must accomplish. In this volume, they “discover” the past aliens from a long ago dead culture. The colonists call them the NEIIS (New Earth Indigenous Intelligent Species...not very imaginative, but then we are talking about a bunch of researchers and scientists) which is simply a designation not a true name. But in finding them it seems that now they now they are not alone but also that everything that they thought they were figuring out about them was wrong...obviously, placing their whole colony in jeopardy. If not for the work and courage of Connor Gates and his team of researchers all may be lost. What were the NEIIS doing when they all seemingly disappeared? Why do they continue to find enhancement on many of the predator species of New Earth? The more they learn the more the need to re-learn. Is that the way of things on this planet? Now on to **EMERGENCE** book 6 of 12.

79. JOYFULLY SPREADING THE WORD: Sharing the Good News of Jesus, by Kathleen Nielson and Gloria Furman (contributors and editors), 2018 by The Gospel Coalition Published by Crossway. This is an interesting book from which there were a few things to be gained. It is mostly baptistic in its approach to evangelism and baptism and not as well done nor as informative as say, **12 FAITHFUL WOMEN: Portraits in Steadfast Endurance**. But having said that, there were those occasional gems, like, *“In our efforts to share the gospel, we should take counsel from flight*

attendants. We are in an emergency situation: all around us, people are gasping for spiritual breath. But in order to best assist them, we must have our own supply firmly affixed. Nearly one hundred years before the advent of commercial air travel, Scottish pastor Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote similar counsel to a brother in Christ: 'Take heed to thyself. Your own soul is your first and greatest care. You know a sound body alone can work with power, much more a healthy soul.' And nearly two thousand years before M'Cheyne, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy with these words: **'Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers' (1 Tim. 4:16).** If you want to labor effectively for Christ, secure your own soul's oxygen mask first." This particular chapter stressed the importance of our having a handle on our own faith then we will be freer to share it with those in need. In another chapter, they emphasized the "ease" of starting a conversation by starting with the simple word "hello" which then leads to sharing your life with another. Actually, one of the best chapters was written by Rosaria Butterfield talking about how to reach the LGBTQ community. Some of the best insights many of which could be gleaned from her other books but especially **THE GOSPEL COMES WITH A HOUSE KEY**. And lastly, the emphasis on hospitality and community is brought home in the last chapter with these words, "The gospel turns traitors into ambassadors and guests into cohosts. Invite your friends and neighbors in—go out and run to meet them. When you step out of bed in the morning, when you walk through a parking lot at work, when you wander the aisles of a store, remember you are an ambassador—a 'cohost' of sorts. Christian hospitality cannot be contained within the walls of your individual home; 'This is our Father's world—oh, let us ne'er forget!' And what does a cohost do? She introduces his guests to him. 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' (John 4:29). One by one, individuals are raised to new life in Christ when the Spirit causes them to be born again and they embrace the gospel. What a privilege we have to be sent as his ambassadors to our lost brothers and sisters!" This was just an okay read...so I wouldn't necessarily recommend it.

80. **ONE HELL OF A WAR: PATTON'S 317TH INFANTRY REGIMENT IN WWII**, by Major Dean James Dominique and US Army Retired Colonel James Hayes (2014). The best way to sum up this book is probably with the authors own words, "I felt that it was my job to help piece together how the leadership decisions made at the highest levels affected the men of the 317th. I left it up to the late Colonel Hayes to tell his story of how those decisions affected both him and the unit he loved. I have done my best to show how the strategic decisions affected the soldiers of the 317th. I have also tried my best to make sure the events and timelines match, which I am sure I have not. But most importantly, I have tried to make sure that the story of the 317th is told." Throughout this book, we hear from retired Col. James Hayes in his own words as he was there for the whole time from the US through Austria and then during the occupation. Much like the heralded **BAND OF BROTHERS**, we get to be personal with many of these men who fought for our country at the head of Gen. Patton's advance to Germany. The author realized after reading the Colonel's memoirs that in many instances, there was no way to truncate his stories; therefore, as one reads this book, one will find many extended quotes. He says further, "Colonel Hayes's literary eloquence when describing many of these events had to be told in his own words." Col. Hayes finished his memoir with these words, "In the final analysis, I exposed myself to the same dangers as my men. Sometimes I exposed myself to greater dangers. That I had not been killed amazed me and made no real sense except to accept the fact that my time had not come. Finally, I had lived up to my own

expectations for courage and decision making. I had lived through the horrible crucible of combat and I knew myself. I had walked through the valley of death on a daily basis for almost ten months and knew that death was an inescapable end to life. I agreed with Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: 'Towards die many times before their deaths; The valiant taste of death but once.'" This was an excellent read about an infantry regiment that was only known to the few who fought with her and those even fewer who survived to tell some of their stories. I am glad to have read this account. I pray because of this book that they will not be forgotten.

81. **EMERGENCE (First Colony Book 6)**, by Ken Lozito (2018). Well, they have found out that they are NOT alone on this planet that in fact the NEIIS (New Earth Indigenous Intelligent Species) are there still even if they are mostly in stasis. But at this point they are not the biggest threat. There are many within New earth that are taking matters in their own hands concerning this discovery and one group in particular that is taking this a militant stage...even listening in on people without their knowledge. Well, without most people's knowledge. Noah discovers that this is going on and has set about seeking to discover who is behind this with his friends Connor Gates, the mayor of the Sanctuary. This particular faction is doing things with the NEIIS that they bring out of stasis that would not be consider ethical and when Noah finds out that a close friend is involved he is stunned and even more desirous to unearth the larger organization. But tragedy strikes in a few ways before that can occur. Gates and a research team are transported to another "universe" on planet...another time and they make contact with a formidable foe before they are able to escape with most of their team. A similar event takes place in space and Sean Quinn is cut off from New Earth without knowing, at first, what is causing all of this? Meanwhile life goes on in New Earth with everyone unaware of what happened to these two parties or even where Noah and Dash are. The suspense comes to an unexpected conclusion which makes moving on to the next book in the series, **VIGILANCE**, a necessity to see what happens to the colonists now with this new threat looming on the horizon.
82. **VIGILANCE (First Colony Book 7)**, by Ken Lozito (2019). Connor does something that he had said he would never do...he re-joined the CDF...with Lenora's blessing no less. The Krake is the reason. A new threat...of course...you knew that had to be a new threat...has the opportunity to wipe out the whole colony..."shocker"! The NEIIS or Ovarrow have been a willing pawn in Krake manipulation leading them to go into stasis not knowing if they would come out alive. Of course, a near extinction event occurred as well in the form of a fast advancing Ice Age that jump started the whole stasis issue for the. As they begin to understand the Krake they begin using the Krake's space-gate (think Stargate SG-1 with a bit of a twist) technology to seek to discover the Krake home world. Upon opening up a gate they receive a CDF distress call. Six months prior they had left people behind (all presumed dead at the time) in a first experience through a gate. They must go and get them because you don't leave a man behind. This new threat...the Krake...leaves the colonial government with some decisions to make...do nothing or go all in. Sean and the Trident Battle Group is still "lost" ...on mission according to Sean and Noah remains in a coma. Things are progressing and as they do more questions surface which makes this series so great. So now on to #8 **FRACTURE**.

83. **FRACTURE (First Colony Book 8)**, by Ken Lozito (2019). This book opens with Sean and the Battle group in an alternate universe seeking to discover more information about the Krake...though they are experiencing multiple levels of struggle from morale issues to weapons depletion because of the multiple battles they have had to fight and run from. The title says it all...there is a major fracture in the battle group as morale leads to the possibility of mutiny. There is fracture within the colonial government that almost gets Connor canned. And on top of that there is a fracture in the growing alliance with the Ovarrow that they are bringing out of stasis. And then they find another group of Ovarrow who have been out of stasis for over 40 years preparing to fight the Krake themselves. Even husband and wife are fractured as Noah finally wakes up from his coma and he and his wife are at odds... Fractures abound and then there is the hope of a new day and unity! All of these fractures lead to a crisis in each that keeps the reader moving forward in the book with the fastest pace they can muster. The writing of these books deals with the dilemma of coming to a foreign and hostile world and seeking to develop a human colony with the "best" of humanity...but the sins of the fathers always accompany mankind...and it seems to be a character trait in all created beings...alien or human. I like the way he pushes these limits of human depravity and human resourcefulness and barely hedging on religion. At one point in these first 7 books Noah had asked Connor to pray for him if anything ever happened to him. It did and Connor prayed for his friend because that is what friends do and even though there is not any reference to the God we know, there is still the assumption of Someone who created all that there is and somehow, they are all tied together...and they are not meant to fracture...but because of human or alien nature as it seems...it does. These books never cease to amaze and cause me, at least, to keep going. Once more unto the breach with #9-**HARBRINGER**.
84. **HARBRINGER (First Colony Book 9)**, by Ken Lozito (2019). It has become apparent now...the Krake are hunting the humans. These aliens have manipulated and destroyed whole worlds in their pursuit of dominance and power. As we come into this book Connor is having a hard time with bringing together an alliance with the "peoples" that most ought to be aligned...Krake enemies...Ovarrow and Colonists. Both sides know they must find a way to fight the Krake but will they be unified in their attempts or stand-alone...certain to lose. Meanwhile, Sean is still in an alternate universe running down leads ...or thinking he is...all along devising a plan to return home. Oriana is devising a way to get them home and at the same time a new way to deal with the Krake weaponry which they have been able to do little to stop as of late. As Sean rebuilds morale, all things that could happen do and we are left again on a wild ride through a wonderfully written book. There are many signs that foreshadow (hence the name of the book) the return of the Krake from the Ovarrow's insistence to the fact that they know they are looking for the universe from which the humans came from. The depth of character that the author develops throughout these books is just another reason why these books are so compelling and enjoyable. They seem to read so fast not because they are short (average 320 plus or minus pages) but because the action and interaction is so well written. On to #10- **INSURGENT**.
85. **INSURGENT (First Colony Book 10)**, by Ken Lozito (2020). This book tells us about all the off-world...off-universe teams and action that is going on to discover the Krake home world. A long the way we meet a "drone" that is Krake and is not willing to sit back and wait for the humans to come to them...even not following the overseer's orders. "Drones" always follow orders but this one is off the ranch simply because the overseers don't see the threat of the humans. So now we have the Krake overseers,

Krake drones and Krake soldiers (who exhibit an enhanced intelligence over their “cousins” the Ovarrow...or are the cousins?), multiple factions of Ovarrow, the CDF ground and space forces, and the colonists all involved in this on-going struggle. The humans can’t do all the work that needs to be done in trying to find the Krake home world, so Connor and his off world teams have begun making alliances with off-world Ovarrow which has enhanced the relationship with many of the Ovarrow back on New Earth. In the midst of all of this chaos, a new group of Ovarrow, discovered last time, who said they wanted to be friends, begins marching their huge army across the continent in a show of force toward the existing city of the Ovarrow that the CDF have been bringing out of stasis. Will this newest threat destroy the relationships already built or will it enhance them? Will the colonial government compromise its positions because this new group is obviously stronger than the old group? Choosing allies does not come without cost, as Connor knows too well. I have been waiting for someone to ask the question of why there are so many Ovarrow in every universe...but no humans and no Krake...and finally someone does, but is it the right someone...and is there an answer? Another well written book which requires me to move on to the next to hopefully discover some more good stuff. So, on I go to #11 (in a 12-book series) **INVASION.**

86. IN THEIR OWN WORDS, The Testimonies of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and John Bunyan, by Dr. David B. Calhoun (2018). Dr. Calhoun was a former professor at Covenant Theological Seminary who has gone home to be with the Lord this year. Dr. Calhoun was a wonderful teacher and a wonderful mentor and friend to so many and he will be missed. His heart was in training missionaries but God lead Him to train pastors in Church History and other areas of the ministry training. He was a teacher at heart, so this book contains so much to learn about men we have known and “idolized” as a few of the “heroes” of the faith. This book does something well that others try and fail at...taking a lot of information and compressing it into the pertinent. In each of these “great” men, he tells us their testimony of faith and calling “in their own words”. Dr. Calhoun has done what he always did in class and took the best from all the rest and taught it succinctly. This book is broken down into approximately 50 pages for each man and tells their story with not a lot of commentary from Dr. Calhoun. He has scoured the vast amounts of material and compressed all that he had found through the years into these pages and it is a gem for any Christian to pick up and read of God’s marvelous calling on the lives of these men from birth till death. Within these pages there are so many wonderful, profound and funny quotes that could only be found if one had the time and inclination to read all the works of these men...who, I for one...who likes to read...do not have that kind of time. A great book! Thank you, Dr. Calhoun...I only wish I had read it while he was alive so that I could tell him how much I appreciate this book.

87. KILLING CRAZY HORSE: The Merciless Indian Wars in America, by Bill O’Reilly and Martin Dugard (2020). This appears to be the 9th book in this series that has captured my attention and the attention of thousands of history buffs ever since the first book, **KILLING LINCOLN**, came out. Each of these books is written with an eye open to the truth when it comes to history. There is no clouding over the faults of any of the “players” within the book. This is a particularly cruel period in our day and age...a period of darkness in our history as a civilized nation that also has at its core human slavery. When you show partiality towards one group over all others you always begin to devalue people as a whole. This book shows this from the point of view of the Indians of the Americas toward one another and how the expansion of a

nation excluded caring for the lives or livelihood of yet another people seen as inferior to the rest of culture. This book begins in 1811 with the time just before the Battle of Tippecanoe because the Shawnee had been making alliances with other tribes to hurt the settlers coming into their area. This was the first battle that would openly fester on-going battles for the next 7 or 8 decades before the American Indian succumbs to the power and pressure of a growing nation. This book catalogues and examines many of the major events in these struggles culminating with Custer's Last Stand at the Little Bighorn. We see the seediness of men...on both sides. We see the valor and bravery and a desire to preserve a nation from both sides. There is much here that that average person does not know, like how so many famous names in our history got those names from these conflicts...on both sides. Many people might be shocked with the candor of how the authors show the ruthlessness of the US government in their eventual takeover of the Indian lands but also the intrigue and ruthlessness seen among the Indian peoples among themselves. Another thing that makes this book so good is the historical footnotes that are at the bottom of the page. They are almost worth the purchase price of the books themselves. This is a fast paced look at American history that all people would benefit from if we are going to have a better picture of some of the on-going problems today in our culture. We as "a people" are sinful, thinking mostly of what all will benefit ourselves...this book shows very well that culture does not change the basic fallen nature of mankind...though I not sure that was the authors intent. Maybe...it was!

88. **THE GREAT GAIN OF GODLINESS**, by Thomas Watson (1682, digitally by Monergism. **THE GREAT GAIN OF GODLINESS** is Watson's exposition of **Malachi 3:16-18**. In it, he aims *"to encourage solid piety and confute the atheists of the world, who imagine there is no gain in godliness."* There is much to commend this book to believer's. One of the biggest sections deal with the fear of the Lord. He states in one place what could be an overarching statement for this and the rest of the exposition, *"Those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord hearkened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. 'They will be mine,' says the Lord Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my jewels. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.'" (Malachi 3:16-18) The first of the good effects of the saints-piety-is that God REGARDED it. "The Lord hearkened and heard." These blessed ones in the text were speaking and thinking of God—and he did not turn away his ear from them, as if he had not minded them. But he hearkened and heard; which expression denotes both diligence and delight."* The exposition of this alone is worth the purchase or download of this book for all to read. This book is exceedingly practical as well, as we see in this quote, *"If God records our services—then let us record his mercies. Let us have our book of remembrance. A Christian should keep two books always beside him; one to write his sins in—that he may be humble; the other to write his mercies in—that he may be thankful. David had his book of remembrance: "David appointed some of the Levites to be ministers before the ark of the Lord, to give thanks and praise to Him." (1 Chron. 16:4). We should keep a book to*

record God's mercies—though I think it will be hard to get a book big enough to hold them! At such and such a time we were in straitened circumstances—and God supplied us; at another time under sadness of spirit—and God dropped in the oil of gladness; at another near death—and God miraculously restored us. If God is mindful of what we do for him—shall not we be mindful of what he does for us! God's mercies, like jewels, are too good to be lost! Get a book of remembrance!” I love this quote as well... “They shall be mine.” I take the sense of it to be, ‘They shall be mine in covenant. As in, ‘I entered into a covenant with you—and you became mine!’ (Ezek. 16:8; Isa 43:1). This is no small blessing—to be in covenant with God. Therefore, when God told Abraham that he would enter into covenant with him, Abraham fell on his face (Gen. 17:3), as being amazed that the great God should bestow such a signal favor upon him. God never entered into covenant with the angels when they fell—but he proclaims himself God in covenant with believers, ‘They shall be mine.’ This covenant enriched with free grace, is a better covenant than that which was made with Adam in innocence.” If you get the opportunity to download it or to purchase this book...do so. It will encourage and strengthen you in your faith as Watson hoped that it would.

89. INVASION, First Colony Book 11, by Ken Lozito (2020). Wow...what a way to end a series. It was a wild ride from beginning to end. They have been studying the Ovarrow for years while helping them to re-build their society and along the way they have learned vital information that will ultimately be helpful in the coming battle. Connor Gates and the colonists have been gearing up for this fight. At least, in this case, they actually know something about the enemy, the Krake. Oh, to be sure...there are still lots of unknown...but they have a profile and they have the space-gates and they are acquiring more information from their allies in other universes. One of those Ovarrow allies call for Connor to come into his universe because they have “found something” of interest. It piques Connors curiosity and even though Lenora is not exactly on board because she is pregnant with their 2nd child he goes off with the promise that it will only be for a couple of days. Well, as with all special teams’ ops those couple of days spread into a life or death situation where there is loss of life especially the loss of someone close to Connor. But even with that weighing on him, Connor and his crew are racing to find the Krake home world before the Krake invade New Earth, which seems to be what the Krake are doing while Connor is gone. The Krake have found New Earth. Time is up! But does new earth prevail? Do the Ovarrow live on? Do the alliances pay off? Big question... Does Connor find the Krake home world in time to stop complete annihilations of all humans and Ovarrow alike? Even bigger question? Will there be more books in this series? I sort of gave that one away in the last review...or did I?

90. IMPULSE, First Colony Book 12, by Ken Lozito (2021). While this is book #12 it really seems to be a new book in the continuing series where while hanging with the old regulars we meet some new people and a new race of Ovarrow...the Bhatdin. Not sure of much about them with the exception that they have something to do with how all the others...Ovarrow and Krake came to be and possibly came to be enemies. This book shows us how the colony and the Ovarrow have fared after the Krake War. There are still many interdimensional teams going out into other universe looking for signs of the Krake (think Stargate SG-1) since Connor and the old dogs still believe

they may still be around... And we didn't hear anything from the "drone" we encountered in the last couple of books. So as the author says in the end of the book this is a new beginning. The main premise of the book that the reader doesn't get to until the second half of the book (he spends the first half telling us of the recovery and the work being done to keep the culture ready for the next time.) is the strain placed on friends by children and politics and prejudice. Connor and Diaz have been friends for a long time and their friendship will be put to the test over prejudice and politics all while Diaz is dealing with his own dilemma at home with a "wayward" son who has been kidnapped from an internship in the Mekaal capital city while helping the Ovarrow with fertility issues. All ends well as you would expect...but there is sufficient action, drama and humor to keep you reading through to the end even if you have already figured out the outcome. These have been and are extremely well written with a great balance of intrigue and humor. I hope He does keep writing. Now I am off to go find other stuff that he has written with the hope that more of this series will come out.

91. **REDISCOVER CHURCH: Why the Body of Christ is Essential**, by Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman (2021 from Crossway and 9Marks). There is much to be commended in this book...if you are a Baptist and enjoy Baptist polity. Having said that, there is not much to bring anyone back into the fold that has wandered far and away either by boredom, immaturity or pandemic. I speak of their polity concerning how they approach the office of the elder and the sacraments for they are unashamedly not in lock step with the Reformed understanding of these. Like with the elder, there is no spiritual oversight because in a congregational system they are not leaders but advisors at best. When they speak of churches doing discipline...which they highly endorse as a mark of the church...they add an extra step (or maybe an extension of the last step) before excommunication to include the members of the church in this process because the elders can't and don't speak for the church on such matters in their polity. The sacraments are expressly important for the purpose of fellowship and union with one another...there is little to no emphasis on the true purpose of church...which is not fellowship...but the worship of our triune God in the way He has prescribed. They say in the introduction, *"You have many reasons not to rediscover church and one reason why you must: because through these people you don't much like, God wants to show his love to you. It's the only kind of love that can draw us out of ourselves and into a fellowship that transcends the forces tearing apart our sick world. It's the only essential way for us to find healing together. Beyond all that, your church is where Christ says he's present in a unique way. We would even dare to say that your church and ours is where heaven touches down on earth—where our prayers begin to be answered: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'"* While this is true, it is secondary to the fact that we must be in Church because God has commanded it of all His people. Their emphasis on why we are to come together gets high marks and here is a lengthy tidbit on this, *"Maybe you've never wondered why Jesus chose the word 'church.' The Jews of Jesus's day gathered in synagogues, but Jesus didn't use the word 'synagogue.' He used the word 'church.' Why? We can answer this by looking backward and forward in the storyline of the Bible. Looking backward, we learn that it was prophesied that Jesus would assemble a people who had been scattered by exile (see Joel 2:16). Looking forward, we understand that Jesus wanted these assemblies—these churches—to anticipate the final assembly where God will dwell with his people once more: 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them' (Rev. 21:3; also 7:9ff.). Our assembled local churches represent God's presence with*

man—where heaven comes to earth. This doesn't happen on the internet or in our heads. It happens 'when you come together as a church,' to borrow a phrase from Paul, a phrase that suggests there's a sense in which a church is not a church until it comes together (1 Cor. 11:18). Sometimes people like to say that 'a church is a people, not a place.' It's slightly more accurate to say that a church is a people assembled in a place. Regularly assembling or gathering makes a church a church. This doesn't mean a church stops being a church when the people aren't gathered, any more than a soccer 'team' stops being a team when the members are not playing. The point is, regularly gathering together is necessary for a church to be a church, just like a team has to gather to play in order to be a team. Jesus organized Christianity this way. He means to center our Christianity around regularly gathering together. What goes missing when your "church" experience is nothing more than a weekly livestream? For starters, you think less about your fellow members. They don't come to mind. You don't bump into them and have the quick conversations that lead to longer conversations over dinner. Beyond that, you remove yourself from the path of encouragement, accountability, and love. Praise God that we can "download" biblical truths virtually. But let's praise God that the Christian life is more than just an information transfer. When church is only online, we can't feel, experience, and witness those truths becoming enfleshed in the family of God, which both fortifies our faith and creates cords of love between brothers and sisters. Virtual church is an oxymoron." I did say there were things to commend in this book...but as a pastor of a Presbyterian Church I cannot recommend this book to just anyone. It is a good and easy read but from my Reformed/biblical perspective there is too much that leads to too many other questions unless you are mature enough to not ask them.

92. **ACHERON RISING (a prequel of the Federation Chronicles)**, by Ken Lozito (2019). I will be starting this new series by Ken Lozito which I believe there may be 3 books in the series itself at this point. This particular book is a short "novella" I think they are called to introduce the greater series the Federation Chronicles. The multiple personalities introduced in this book piqued my attention right away...from an almost washed up space naval Lt. Commander Elias Browning to a young scientist, Miles Harding, on the verge of a major breakthrough that every government good and bad wants to get their hands on, who gets set up and tricked into making a deal to take care of his family and a mortally ill brother. The author seems to have a clear understanding of computer and technology concepts. There is from his imagination (experience?) a good blend of advance scientific knowledge and space military and intelligence struggles with moral codes. The bottom line is this is a very good action science fiction military thriller prequel that I couldn't put down. There is sorrow...there is triumph and there is always space battles...all in this short 70 plus page book that will whet your appetite for more. I have some questions about the processes depicted, but it sounds awesome.
93. **PERSISTENT PRAYER (Blessings of Faith series of books)**, by Guy M. Richard (2021). This book is part of a teaching series of 3 books so far...one on covenant baptism and another on preaching. This book follows in the historical line of "primers" that educators and scholars used to prepare giving the "highlights" of subjects...almost like a catechism so that they would pique the interest of the reader to do their own more extensive study. This book highlights the many reasons why prayer ought to be an important part of our everyday life...as important as breathing he will say. This book is a real gem and blessing and could be used devotionally and I study groups. This book helps us to understand the need to pray and why it ought to be a

chief desire not to be taken for granted. While we are commanded by God to pray it still ought to be a desire of ours to keep talking with the one who loves us best. When speaking to the concept of being persistent in prayer he says, *“Jesus says that we ought to ‘ask,’ ‘seek,’ and ‘knock’ when we pray (Luke 11:9–10), and he doesn’t mean that we are to do each of these things only once. He uses the present-tense imperative each time, which, in Greek, shows ongoing action. This means that Jesus is telling us not to ask, seek, and knock once but to do so continually. He is saying, ‘Ask and keep on asking,’ ‘Seek and keep on seeking,’ and ‘Knock and keep on knocking.’ He wants us to persist in praying. Like Jacob, we are to hold on and not let go until and unless the Lord blesses us (see Gen. 32: 26). We are to ‘give [God] no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth’ (Isa. 62: 7).”* But having sufficiently tackled that subject he moves on to the nature and the necessity of prayer and how we can grow in prayer. He highlights how prayer intersect with our salvation to make his point, *“But as important as it is for us to remember that God commands us to pray—and, thus, that prayerlessness is disobedience—it must also be acknowledged that this doesn’t get to the heart of the reason that prayer is “absolutely needful to salvation.” We find that reason in the comparison J.C. Ryle makes between prayer and breathing: ‘Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world, is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again, is praying.’ Breathing is indispensable for physical life. We can live only for short periods without it. No matter how adept we may be at holding our breath, we all must breathe at some point. And prayer, according to Ryle, operates the same way. 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. To look at it another way, praying is just as necessary for the Christian as growing oranges is for the orange tree. Every healthy orange tree will necessarily produce oranges. It may not produce as many oranges as it did in previous seasons or as many as other nearby trees produce. But it will produce oranges. If it doesn’t, then there is something wrong with the tree.”* A helpful tool with this book on prayer is the reflection questions at the end of every chapter. And then at the end of this book there is a helpful question and answer section made up of questions that many people have asked through the years...which is almost worth the price of the book. An excellent read very theologically sound but also delightful and thoughtful as well.

94. **THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MR. SPOCK: The Life of a Federation Legend**, by Una McCormack (2021). This was an interesting read to be sure...possibly better than the **Autobiography of James T. Kirk** by David Goodman. The reason it may be better is because there is so much written and “known” about Kirk but Mr. Spock’s history has gone through a recent “modification” with the introduction of a sister, Michael Burnham, which up to now had been presumed lost but here and now he reveals the truth that he had been bound to cover up concerning her and her ship the U.S.S. Discovery. He gives us all the details that were previously unknown concerning Michael’s coming into his family and how that change effected his childhood into early adulthood. The interesting twist to this book...his Vulcan *t’san a’lat*...(more than a memoir, of course, as Bones might say) is to whom he writes making him his literary executor. The inheritor of Spock’s immense library of works, some of which came from his father, has a storied career in Starfleet until recent events caused him to be pushed out and all of his great achievements put in jeopardy because the powers that be are covering up another issue. He dedicates this way, *“But I also give this book to you, Jean-Luc, because I hope you might benefit*

personally from what I have written. The twists and turns of history have, I think, dealt you some hard blows in recent years, ones that are not just reward for the man that you are, and the work that you have done. If anything in this book resonates with you, then by this alone the writing will have been justified. If this book shows you a path forward, then I will have done more than I dared hope. Two years ago, after your resignation, you invited me to visit you in La Barre. It is, and will be, one of the great regrets of my life that I never had the chance to take you up on this kind offer. As the great friends of my early life moved on or passed away, the opportunity to cultivate new friendships has been a most treasured aspect of this, my later life. To you, then, Jean-Luc Picard, my friend, I give the book of my wisdom, such as it is, and I leave it to your own considerable reserves of wisdom to judge its value, and to decide what to do with whatever value it contains. I do not believe that I shall be here to see what you decide. I am setting out on another mission, one last voyage, in a long life filled with many strange and wonderful journeys. I hope that when you learn of my intentions, you will understand.” As you can see, Spock, in his last years, has made peace with himself by the help of his friends especially with the help of the one to whom he leaves this work. He has seen the Kitomer Accords signed to bring peace between the Federation and the Klingon Empire by his hard work and his work among the Romulans come to a halt leaving him to conclude failure even as he leaves to try and remedy the problem with Romulus’ sun to save their people from certain destruction. In this personal history he speaks of his mother, Sarek, Sybok, the Enterprise, of Captain Pike, of Dr. McCoy, of Saavik and of the treachery of Valaris along with others giving us more insight and details into these people than we would have otherwise known since this is the first time he has shared much of his “feelings”. A book of great insight and a wealth of Star Trek knowledge. Spock concludes in his own words, *“It is customary to conclude a t’san a’lat with a statement of what has been learned during a life. I find this difficult to summarize. The main lesson of my life was to abandon the habits of thought acquired as a child which set up in my mind irreconcilable differences between the various parts of my nature. Always, or so it seemed to me at the time, two parts of me were at odds: logic against emotion; Vulcan against human; meditation against action; death against life. Looking back now I see that whenever I have experienced resolution in my life, some kind of certainty, it has been through an acceptance of variety, hybridity, and diversity... The great struggles of my life came when some part of me was forced into opposition with another; the great triumphs and friendships of my life came in threes—Jim, Bones, myself—and at all points in not only accepting, but delighting, in multiplicity, in myself and in others.”* My one negative would be that die hard TOS fans will most likely not like it because it is tied so much to the new Trek series’ of USS Discovery and Picard. However, it does open the door to help a possible new show that would highlight the 10 years between when Michael leaves and James T. Kirk takes over the Enterprise NCC 1701. So over all I think it is a win-win since Star Trek continues even with the cultural nods that it is beginning to give that may sooner rather than later cause me to stop watching.

95. **THE SHORTER CATECHISM EXPLAINED FROM SCRIPTURE**, by Thomas Vincent, Copyright © 2021 by Monergism books. The original title of this work was **An Explanation of the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism** published in 1675. He had a shortened career as Puritan non-conformist preacher and scholar as he was put in jail for his non-conformity and died 2 years after his incarceration in 1678 at the age of 44. He is known as much for his biographical account of the Great Plague of London in 1665 wherein 7 members of his own family perished entitled, **God’s Terrible Voice**

in the City and Fire. However, back to this book, I myself prefer the first title because while there are many scriptural proofs offered there is more explanation. This work was endorsed by many of his day, even one John Owen, along with many other non-conformist pastors of the day. This work is a bit more academic and is yet a helpful tool to help parents understand the catechism that they might teach it effectively to the children. This tool was put together also for when the clergy would visit so they could quiz the children and the adults on the catechism on a regular basis, enabling the congregation to continue to grow in grace as well as be prepared to receive the Lord's Supper at its next occurrence in the church. This has been a helpful historical tool for the Westminster Shorter Catechism Sunday School class for the church.

96. **COVENANTAL BAPTISM (Blessing of the Faith series)**, by Jason Helopoulos (2021). Most people cannot make theology proper into a page turning book but Jason has. Next to John Murray and Geoffrey Bromiley's classics on Baptism, this book stands alone in our current time as a very helpful tool in aiding Christians in their understanding of Covenantal Baptism. Much is debated on this issue and Jason says at one point... "while a correct understanding of this isn't salvific that doesn't mean that it is any less significant." He states, *"As I said, this covenant event is not strange to Abraham. But then it becomes quite strange. God puts Abraham into a deep sleep. A smoking torch, which foreshadows the pillar of clouds and fire that will lead Israel through the wilderness and will appear on Mount Sinai, alone passes through the severed pieces. This is unique! We possess no ancient Near Eastern documents that show a king making a self-maledictory oath and calling down curses upon himself as he gives covenantal promises to one of his subjects. As the only party to pass between the divided animals, God alone promises to take the punishment if either party breaks the covenant. And, in his eternal infinite knowledge and according to his divine decree, he knows that his covenantal pledge to bless Abraham and the nations will lead to the crucifixion of the very Son of God in the flesh. This should astound us. God has no need to enter into a covenant with Abraham. He has already promised him—and God's word is trustworthy. **"God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind"** (Num. 23: 19). Then why does he make this covenant with Abraham? The answer should make our souls leap with joy. He enters into this covenant to reassure him. By cutting this covenant, he says to Abraham, "I want your faith to be as solid as possible." And this action of reassurance will cost our God severely. At the very beginning of this passage, before Abraham asked a single question, God said, **'Fear not . . . I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'** Now God shows Abraham—and us—what it means that he is a shield, and we see that he is in fact our great reward. He will prop up Abraham's faith on every side. It is truly astounding. God enters into covenant with a fallen man! You and I have not even begun to comprehend the steadfast love and kindness of our God. We will have all of eternity to contemplate this, and still we won't even begin to fathom its depths... Our God knows that we exist as physical beings and that, as physical beings, we gravitate toward the visible. In fact, we desire not only to see but to touch, feel, smell, and even taste. His promise spoken to us should prove enough. Yet, like Abraham's, our faith remains weak. Like the father of the boy in Mark 9, all disciples of Christ can say, "I believe; help my unbelief." Through the sacraments, God meets us in our weakness and says, "I will keep, and I have kept, my promises." What kindness! Notice that the sign of circumcision was applied to the male organ of reproduction. That is not accidental. Adam brought sin into the world, and "all mankind, descending from him, by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression," as the Westminster Shorter Catechism states. The sign*

of circumcision also signified God's covenant promise that he would send forth a Messiah, a Redeemer—the seed of the woman, a child of Abraham, a descendent of David—to be born into this world. God reminded sinners, through their own personal corrupted flesh, that even though mankind was fallen, he had promised to save his own through One who would be born. Every Jewish male bore this sign in the flesh as a continual reminder of God's covenantal promises that would come about through the seed of the woman. As the Dutch theologian Bavinck summarized, "Seals . . . are distinguished from signs by the fact that they do not just bring the invisible matter to mind but also validate and confirm it." Notice the language that Paul uses in that verse from Romans: he says that circumcision was "a seal of the righteousness that [Abraham] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised." That wording is important. Circumcision was not a seal of Abraham's subjective expression of faith. It was not a seal of his response to the gospel. Rather, circumcision functioned as a seal of the righteousness that he received from God through faith. 14 This means that the sacrament was not first about Abraham but about God. It was not first about what Abraham had or had not done but about what God had promised and done for him."

On one hand, I am sorry for the lengthy quote above but on the other hand, it is the likes of this theology and writing style that makes this such a page turner. This book is part of a teaching series of 3 books so far...one on persistent prayer (reviewed above) and another on preaching. These books follow in the historical line of "primers" that educators and scholars used to prepare young people...giving the "highlights" of subjects...almost like a catechism so that they would pique the interest of the reader to do their own more extensive study. This book ought to be in every pastor's and every believers list of books to read and re-read.

97. **ACHERON INHERITANCE (Federation Chronicles Book 1)**, by Ken Lozito (2020). I had already read the prequel novella **ARCHERON RISING** which introduced many characters and possible directions of the Federation Chronicles series of books. It interested me enough because there was a combination of space battles and some really cool tech possibilities to play with. Well, when I began reading this book I discovered that the author went with the tech theme. The author says, "*The Federation Chronicles, I wanted to explore technology that I hadn't used before in my stories (Along with some familiar ones). Man-in-a-machine or Man-Computer Symbiosis isn't a new concept, but this is my own version of playing 'What if...' in a galactic society. It's fun and sometimes a little bit scary to think that no matter how far we advance, we're still vulnerable to technological leaps and how we use them.*"
- Interesting as the first book was, this was a whole new cast most of the way through the book and the time period is roughly 100 or so years in the future from the prequel so everyone is dead from that story...or are they?!? We meet new people like Quentin who wakes up on a dying planet out on the fringe of Federation space. He doesn't know how he got there and why he is not what he expected to be. You see the tech from the first story revolved around a technological breakthrough where a person's consciousness/essence could be captured and placed into a machine or a device called a Personality Matrix Construct with his knowledge and experiences—stored in an Energy Storage System (ESC for short). In short, due to some malfunction and the possibility of losing all that he is in his essence he had been uploaded into a robot...an agricultural robot with extreme limits from what Quentin had been told he would be able to do 100 years previously when He signed up for this program...a military program, of course. The search for his "real self" is what makes this first book interesting. Between the antics of trying to get to know his new body (think ley stone cops meets dumb and dumber)...being chased by techno hunters from a far

past...running with a bunch of pirates (think Pirates of the Caribbean in space)...to finding himself but choosing to protect his friends...the action is nonstop even if there are not any real space battles. Oh, a name from the prequel shows up towards the end that opens up the story line for the next book and some possible space battle. Obviously he is in the next book so just a clue he does get a “body” (think Vision from Marvel). As I said before his writing is superb even if this wasn’t what I thought I was signing on to when I started reading the book. I will read the next one- **ACHERON SALVATION**. Knowing that this is an on-going series... we will see how long I hang in there.

98. **THE GODLY MAN’S PICTURE**, by Thomas Watson (first published 1666, republished throughout time and e-published again by Monergism... and is free at their site). Its original title had to be longer than this, since most treatises had super long titles...and this one is no exception. Originally it was titled, **The Godly Man’s Picture Drawn with a Scripture Pencil or Some Characteristic Marks of a Man who is Going to Heaven**. Neither of these pulls any punches. Rev. Watson wrote this book, “...so that all into whose hands this book may providentially come, may be enamoured with piety (godliness) as to embrace it heartily.” In true Puritan form he writes about what ALL it takes for someone to be “godly” enough to make it to heaven. This is heavy reading and should be read devotionally (hence, why I have sent pieces of this book to our Men of Valor group over the course of a few weeks). At the beginning he extensively deals with the definition of godliness. Next, he almost, exhaustively covers all the areas that should define a godly man from *A Godly Man is a man of Knowledge* to *A Godly man is a man who strives to be an instrument for making others godly*...24 categories in all. Then, he prescribes helps for us to become and maintain our godliness and ending with showing the mystic union between Christ and the saints. All in all, a great treatise for men (all people really, but especially men) to learn what the Bible (literally, he seems to have used the whole Bible) says about being godly in this life so that we might glorify God to our fullest. Here is a sample of some of his emphatic statements. “*A godly man esteems Christ as precious ‘So the honor is for you who believe...’ (1 Pet. 2:7). In the Greek it is “an honor”. Believers have an honorable esteem of Christ.*” This one is under his call to humility, which also shows his masterful use of the scriptures, “*A Godly Man is a Humble Man. The times we live in are humbling. The Lord seems to say to us now, as he did to Israel, ‘Remove your jewelry and ornaments until I decide what to do with you.’ (Exod. 33:5). ‘My displeasure is breaking forth—I have eclipsed the light of the sanctuary, I have stained the waters with blood, I have shot the arrow of pestilence—therefore lay down your pride—Remove your jewelry and ornaments!’ Woe to those who lift themselves up, when God is casting them down. When should people be humble—if not when under the rod? ‘Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God’ (1 Pet. 5:6). When God afflicts his people, and cuts them short in their privileges, it is time then to ‘sit in sackcloth—and sit in the dust’ (Job 16:15).* One more; “*A Godly Man is a Zealous Man- ‘Fervent in spirit’ (Romans 12:1). Zeal makes us—hear with reverence, pray with affection, love with ardency. God kindled Moses’ sacrifice from heaven: ‘Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering’ (Lev. 9:24). When we are zealous in devotion, and our heart waxes hot within us—here is a fire from heaven kindling our sacrifice. How odious it is for a man to be all fire when he is sinning, and all ice when he is praying! A pious heart, like water seething hot, boils over in holy affections!*” This is an easy read because of the logical step by step approach that he uses but as I said earlier one should take it slowly and read this devotionally as to have your heart burn that we could all live up to

the standard of Scripture through the power of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit.

- 99. UNDERBELLY: The Return of Jax Nandi (A Section 31 Novel Book 1)**, by T.R. Bryan (2018). This book took a while to get me totally interested but by the 10th chapter or so I was hooked. This is the first Star Trek universe book that I have read in many years and it is obvious that the writing has not diminished in the least. This author writes in the tradition of the greats like A.C. Crispin, D.C. Fontana and Diane Duane. This is a book about justice actually though we are dealing with the allusive Section 31 an “underbelly” organization known for their clandestine activity in pursuit of the really bad guys willing to succumb to even the tactics of their enemy “for the greater good” of Starfleet and the Federation. Jackson (Jax) Nandi is an exception to this “rule”. The story is set at a time period after the Founders War when government and whole systems are still recovering from their losses. In the midst of rebuilding there is always the criminal “underbelly” that does whatever they want...the Talesian Brotherhood is no exception. This group has moved from a “mild irritation” to Starfleet to a major threat as they attacked a poorly defended colony and killed a number of Starfleet personnel. Enter Lt. Jax Nandi, an older operative of Section 31. He has suffered great loss at the hand of the Brotherhood and wishes for revenge but he and his crew must set aside personal revenge for justice to capture and take down the Brotherhood. His crew is known in the underbelly of the underworld as the Poison Clan. Describing the key players in this group sounds like the beginning of a galactic joke...into a bar walks an aging female Ferengi, a fierce Nausicaan, 2 humans and a Jem'Hadar. Are they able to complete their mission of justice or does it turn into revenge? Like I said it takes a little while but when the action picks up it is smooth sailing with this book as I am looking forward to the next one.
- 100. UNDERBELLY: Captain Aziz (A Section 31 Novel Book 2)**, by T.R. Bryan (2019). This is starting off better than the first one... and with the addition of the back story that was only alluded at in the first book about where Lt. Nandi gets his start to where Crewman Kaso came from and then the back story on Captain Aziz... *“In less than one year of graduating from Starfleet Academy, Aisha had gone from Cadet to the rank of Lt. Commander, a feat that had only been accomplished twice in the history of Starfleet. After much thought, Aisha accepted a position as head of security on board the USS Lincoln where she received several commendations for bravery in preventing pirates from taking over outer colonies of the Federation. She was promoted to Commander before her twenty-seventh birthday. Three years later, Aisha was promoted to Captain after she was involved in the First Contact with a species called the Bellatrix, a matriarchal society where women controlled the military. Her abilities as a warrior and a diplomat were invaluable in the Federation establishing positive relations with them with the hope that they would someday become a member.”* This is simply great writing getting better. I love the allusions to the other youngest captain in Starfleet History Captain James Tiberius Kirk and how their stories mirror one another. (as an aside, there are rumors of a Star Trek: Section 31 television show...if so this has the possibilities of making a great show set just after the Founder's War from Deep Space 9 timeline.) As to the recurring theme of underbelly, here is a brief exchange with Jax, who we now know is a Section 31 operative planning a

mild-mannered engineer, *"I remember Admiral Blaine saying that all governments have an underbelly but until now, I didn't know what the extent of it was."* *"Captain, being ignorant on such matters is probably best but when you're dealing with people like Maiekar Brax, it's best to know what you're getting yourself into."* *"Knowing this changes your perception of what the Federation is all about."* *"As governments go, the Federation is up near the top and has been since its inception. That's something to feel good about. But now and then, situations come up that can't be resolved through the normal channels and some people work behind the scene to make sure that it is resolved."* There is a new enemy emerging that will take us into the next book...a whole new enemy not previously known in the Star Fleet universe...that may align Starfleet with the Romulan Empire to defeat. Stay tuned to **UNDERBELLY: Changing of the Guard (A Section 31 Novel Book 3.**

101. **ACHERON SALVATION (Federation Chronicles Book 2)**, by Ken Lozito (2021). This was an excellent character study of all the players from the original book tying the story into to the prequel **ARCHERON RISING**. The sentinels are on the move to locate and destroy PMC's that are for some reason activating from a hundred plus year old sleep...and of course, when the PMC's are destroyed the ESS's die...the "soul" of the person placed in the ESS so that they could be better troops for a war long fought and lost. The Sentinels seem to have the upper hand but there is someone behind the movement with yet another movement that is mirroring every move of the Sentinels looking for something of importance. Quinton, a commander in the now non-existent Acheron Confederacy Navy, is looking for the source of the activation which will bring him on a collision course with who or what is controlling the Sentinels because the Sentinels are actually looking for him...or a Galaxy class PMS just like him. But Quinton has gotten an avatar (think Vision from Marvel) that allows him full access to all his capabilities as a Galaxy class PMS and he has help from a ragtag bunch of ex-pirates trying to set the galaxy right again...at least to be safe from the Sentinels that kill without discretion. Part of this group is a couple of more PMS in different stages of learning their new robot bodies. The comedy in these books is so compelling that they are worth the price. As I said, everyone now is racing toward something called Code name Salvation, who will find it or them first? Will the universe be brought back to order? Well...not in this book. We have to wait for the next installment of the **Federation Chronicles** out before the end of the year. But just a hint...Quinton and his crew does find something and deal with many of the bad guys...here is a peek, *"He (Quinton) had to set aside the paralyzing knowledge that he was about to fly a planetoid-class starship that was six thousand kilometers in diameter. He checked the specs multiple times, even though he knew they were accurate. Questions kept mounting, but he had to ignore them. He was going to fly a ship meant to be crewed by half a million people."*
102. **MONGOOSE BRAVO: VIETNAM: A Time of reflection Over Events So Long Ago**, by Sgt. Timothy McCullough; B Co., 1/ 5th, 1st Cavalry Div.(2019). The book starts this way, *"I really can't say that I was proud to do my "patriotic chore"; probably would rather have stayed home and watched it on television, but go I did. War really isn't for the faint of heart. It is a dirty, nasty business; not at all like that portrayed in Hollywood. The truth being, as an infantryman in a wartime army, you are nothing*

more than a pawn on a world chessboard, to be used at will by those who really do not have your best interests at heart. It took many years to finally come to the realization that, in my war, we were nothing more than a walking target. Collectively, we were bait, to get shot at in order for the full might and fury of Uncle Sam's Army to be directed at those doing the shooting. There wasn't anything noble about it. The Vietnam War was fought as a war of attrition; meaning we could kill more of you than you could of us. Earlier, the French tried doing the same. They too failed. I guess in the end we did kill a lot more of them than they did of us, but as with the French, the North Vietnamese still won the war. Even after so many years, it's hard to admit. I was drafted into Uncle Sam's Army on September 7th, 1966, and was released from active duty two years later, discharged in September 1972. It would be an understatement to say that my time served on active duty was a life-altering two years. Try as I may to convey my emotional state during this time is perhaps reaching too far. In reality, only those who have walked the walk can truly understand the tragedy of those times. Fortunately, I kept a simple journal during". I have started and stopped so many books from Vietnam because of how coarse and crass they were trying to be, or how political...rather than telling the story of the soldiers, their agenda was anything but. This story hit close to home because my father was in Vietnam attached to the 1st Calvary Division during the same time period. But this story is told so humorously and warmly concerning comrades and enemies that it was especially hard to put down. It was written in the same vein of many of the WWII memoirs that I have put up here from time to time. It is important to read these stories so that we don't forget the cost of what we have. This is also the story of a faithful husband and while there was some over drinking and a few drugs...only once by the author...for the most part you see a young draftee just trying to make it home to his bride. This story is a compelling one...one that others need to hear especially if you weren't over there. And just like so many others who finally put their story to paper, they find peace. He ends the book just as he begins, "Life goes on and with it, the locked-up memory of an old man. Did all this actually take place as here indicated? I believe, or should I say I hope so. In the end and after much soul searching; was it all worth it? HELL NO! Either way, now that this is complete, I can finally say: "GOOD BY VIETNAM."

- 103. CHRIST HAS SET US FREE: Preaching and Teaching Galatians**, edited by D.A.Carson and Jeff Robinson Sr. (Crossway book in conjunction with The Gospel Coalition, 2019). This is a re-do if you will of Luther's Classic work on Galatians...Luther's favorite book of the New Testament. A re-do in the sense that The Gospel Coalition pulled from many authors to decipher the Scriptures and made it palpable to the preacher and teacher alike. For as with Luther's commentary, he desired that everyone would use it so that the church could be trained well on the most important doctrine for a Christian to understand...justification by faith alone through Christ alone. As the authors stated, "*This doctrine isn't just a subject of debate between Protestants and Catholics; it's not merely a shibboleth of the evangelical church; it makes all the difference in the world, for several reasons. First, since in believing it you trust solely in the work of Christ and not your own, you give him alone all glory, all praise for your salvation. Second, since you place none of your trust in your own works, you can, you must, be assured of your eternal salvation, since his works are unchangeably, perfectly righteous. Third, your sanctification is now possible because in Christian holiness, your motives are essential. Because your justification is accomplished solely by Christ's work, your motives are not slavish fear and unresolved guilt. Increasingly, your motives are the beautiful passion of*

gratitude and deep reciprocal affections. Fourth, this doctrine transforms love. For example, if you're married, your marriage is radically transformed. If you have been completely accepted by God in spite of your lousy performance, how good does your spouse have to be before you fully love and accept him or her? Whether married or not, how good does a brother or sister have to be before you love them?" These chapters came from the Gospel Coalition's biannual National Conference to celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation. Speakers delivered sermons from each chapter of that great Reformation epistle, Galatians, and this book has been adapted from those talks and supplemented with important introductory material to give pastors and teachers a resource to help them interpret and apply Galatians faithfully for a new generation of Christians who desire to breathe the rich gospel air of the Reformation. Authors that were called upon for this were Thomas Schreiner, professor of New testament at Baptist Theological Seminary; Gerald Bray, professor from Beeson Divinity School; Thabiti Anyabwile, pastor in DC and a member of TGC council; Peter Adam, retired vicar from Australia; Tim Keller retired PCA pastor and council member of TGC; D.A. Carson, president of TGC and professor at Trinity Evangelical ; John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist church and council member of TGC; Jeff Robinson Sr., pastor of Christ Fellowship in Louisville ad a member of TGC and Sandy Willson PCA pastor at Covenant Presbyterian in Birmingham and a member of TGC. Even with the diversity of backgrounds all were united one this one doctrine and the force to which Paul taught it to the Galatians and to God's church for centuries. As was said, *"Paul wants to reform the Galatians and uses Scripture to do so. James Smart wrote, "Without the Bible the remembered Christ becomes the imagined Christ, [a Christ shaped] by the religiosity and unconscious desires of his worshippers." Let me rephrase Smart's quotation: Without the Bible, the Christ you preach to others is the Christ of your own imagination as you attempt to make others in your own image, not into the image of Christ."* There has always been a desire to determine what the rub was that caused to Galatians to turn so quickly from the faith they professed and I will end with this, *"It becomes clear now why Paul's teaching was misunderstood by and horrified Jews who read Moses with a veil over their faces (2 Cor. 3:14). Redemptive-historically, Moses and the temple were never built to last. In fact, the rending of the temple curtain was an act of divine deconsecration, marking the end of the Mosaic economy. It was always intended to be a merely temporary structure—a disposable working model of salvation which was to be deconstructed following the fulfillment of its purpose in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the builder (Heb. 3:2–6). He buried it forever in his garden tomb. This inevitably seemed staggering, horrific indeed—unless it was understood that it was always how it was meant to be."* Such a good book...one that Luther, I think, would desire to use.

104. **AN EXPOSITION OF THE ASSEMBLY'S SHORTER CATECHISM**, John Flavel (1691 and redone by Monergism.com 2020). He began this original work by extolling the virtues of catechizing our children and of catechization period. For when God's people from early on can answer the simple questions of the catechism they are ready to stand firm in the Lord before a world who is looking for answers and a much too weak church I biblical doctrine. John Flavel died before it was completed and so Increase Mather finished this work in its final questions. In fact, Increase Mather's eulogy of John Flavel is worth the book all on its own. Both authors were of the mind that they must make this book easy for even the youngest reader to use it without outside help and to the degree that they could they have structuring its part in such a way to make working through these catechism questions among the easiest

produced by anyone at that time. I have been using this “exposition” as we have walked through the shorter catechism this time...in fact, you might say that I followed much of the question answer structure as well. This was an extremely helpful tool. This book was less analytical and maybe a bit more devotional in its presentation. I like books written for our children that can actually be used by them. I don’t know of anything today that falls into this doctrinal category for children. If someone would take the time to modernize the language and the biblical text, of which there are many, this could be an attractive book for parents to help in the catechizing of their...our covenant children.

105. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF ZION’S KING: Being the Substance of Several Sermons

on Psalm 2:6, by Ebenezer Erskine,, 1737 (republished many times...now digitally through Monergism 2021). This “book” (primer) contains 3 sermons that do as full of an exposition of **Ps. 2:6 “Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion...”** as any. He begins by proving this point of God with scripture setting a foundation so true of all Puritan preachers of Scripture interpreting and proving Scripture. He says, “From the scripture-prophecy: **Gen. 49:10, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come.” Luke 1:32, 33, “The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” Mic. 5:2, “The Ruler of Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”** He is also, **“The King eternal.”** As his kingdom is from everlasting, so it is to everlasting; **“and of the increase of his kingdom and government there shall be no end.”** There are 3 sermons here and the exposition is amazing, thoughtful and powerful. I had thought about doing one of these sermons for Reformation Day 2021 and then realized that all three sermons go together. Although excellent material, I didn’t think anyone would sit that long at one setting, because the totality of these sermons takes up 70 plus regular sheets of paper. There are so many reasons to pick this booklet up, from the person of Christ and His sovereign rule to the purpose and reason for the Church, *“All the sacred things of God were kept in Zion; there was the law, the oracles of God, the Shechinah, the pot of manna, the mercy-seat, the tabernacle. So the church of Christ is the repository of all the sacred things of heaven; to her belongs the adoption, the promises, the covenant; the ordinances, the doctrine, the worship, the discipline, the government, and truths of Christ are committed to her custody. O how zealous should the New Testament church, and every minister and member thereof, be for the preservation of these in their purity and power?”* ...to how Christ’s kingdom relates to God and His people. But the way he answers objections to the faith is really worth the whole price of the book (which is free on Monergism through ePub.) *“Objection 1. I have been in rebellion against the King of Zion, he will never shew favour to me. Answ. All Adam’s posterity are rebels, and if he did not receive such, he should have no kingdom on earth. But see what is said of Zion’s King, Ps. 68:18- ‘He gives gifts unto men, yes, even to the rebellious.’ And therefore let not this stand in the way; break your covenant with hell, and submit. Object. 3. I am such a miserable, wretched, and worthless creature, that the King of Zion will never look upon me. Answ. Though Zion’s King be high, yet so condescending is he, that he regards the most worthless and wretched sinner that is out of hell, that will submit to his righteousness and sceptre. His cry is, ‘He that hath no money, let him come and buy without money, and without price.’ Object. 12. What if I be not among those that are given to the King of Zion by his Father? in that case he will never receive me among his subjects. Answ. That is none of your business, at the first instant to leap in among*

things secret, which belong unto the Lord: "Things revealed belong unto us, and to our children." The voice of the King of Zion, in his word and ministry, is unto you, "Unto you, O men, do I call, and my voice is to the sons of men." And therefore come in upon the King's proclamation, for that is your warrant, and not the secret thoughts of the King's heart. " But in the end you gotta love the fact that these Puritans did not give invitations to Come to Christ but rather they expressed God's command to come. "Mean time, I say, I desire, as one of the meanest of his heralds, to invite and call, to entreat and beseech, yea, in his name and authority, I require all hearing me this day, to believe in his name, to trust him for salvation from sin, Satan, wrath, and hell, and to submit to his authority, to receive the law at his mouth, and to own him as their alone Judge, King, and Lawgiver: "Thou art my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth." An excellent read.

106. TRUTH'S VICTORY OVER ERROR: A Commentary on the Westminster

Confession of Faith, by David Dickson (written after his lecture series in the 1650's, published first in 1684 after his death later transcribed to digital by Monergism 2018). This is the earliest published of the commentaries on the WCF that had been just completed in 1647 and the most comprehensive and easily read. It is not long in length of pages (just over 300) but it is full in content as one would be being a contemporary and ministerial associate of the divines of Westminster. With the Bible and the Confession in hand he set out to confront error with the absolute truth. Although each chapter follows the confession he does not limit himself just to the Confession showing his full knowledge of the Confession in each discussion. Rev. Dickson said, *"What is come of all the blood and prayers of many years, now when all is overturned? Says I, There is the Confession of Faith and Catechisms; and these are of more worth than all the blood or prayers that have been!"* By the time you finish this book you will have been filled with a treasure of wisdom and application. It has been a joy to read, meditate on and use for class for the Men of Valor as we have talked through the WCF the last couple of years...so I now can conclude this book and put it on the pastors reading list. Such a helpful tool whose final printing was in 1726 but has been "resurrected in the 20th Century much to the delight of many. Oh, and the list of heresies at the end of the book is great in its brevity and content.

107. THE ASSEMBLY'S SHORTER CATECHISM EXPLAINED, BY WAY OF QUESTION AND ANSWER. IN TWO PARTS: PART I-OF WHAT MAN IS TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD; PART II-OF WHAT DUTY GOD REQUIRES OF

MAN, by James Fisher, Ebenezer Erskine and other ministers of the Gospel (1753 and 1765) One has got to love the length of this title...Lo! This work is the most scholarly of all the works (over 1000 pages in length) I referred to for the Sunday School class on the Shorter catechism. Many ministers worked on this but 3 were chosen, 2 of them being named above to collate and condense all the material submitted. This was worked on and published in 1753, but Rev. Fisher kept perfecting it as a tool for teaching adults until its final publishing with extra index and other helpful materials in 1765. These men were tremendous servants of the church seeking to capture most "all" the questions that could be raised by people as they studied through these catechisms to make sure that God's church was thoroughly prepared for the world in which it exists. Here is an example of the thoroughness of this work, *"QUESTION 89. How is the word made effectual to salvation? ANSWER: The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in*

holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation. Q. 1. What is meant by the word in this answer? A. The whole of divine revelation, contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Q. 2. What has God appointed with reference to his word, that it may be effectual to salvation? A. He has appointed the reading, John 5:39; "but especially the preaching thereof," 2 Tim. 4:2. Q. 3. "Is the word of God to be read by all?" A. "Although all are not permitted to read the word publicly to the congregation, Deut. 31:9, 11, yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves, chap. 17:19, and with their families, chap. 6:7" [113] and this type of exchange goes on for 14 more pages. So, yeah, it is thorough...really good reading for someone teaching this material for the first time, 2nd time or 5th time...good stuff.

108. TRUTHS WE CONFESS: A layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1-3), by R.C. Sproul (2007). Much after the Commentary above, R.C. uses the structure of the Confession to do a great commentary on the Confession but also a great application from Scripture on the topics of the Confession. His expressed purpose was not to root out heresy in our day and age though he does do that. His expressed purpose was that after reading and meditating on this work that his readers would come away with a greater understanding of the doctrines of grace that are so clearly taught in the confession and that through that understanding we will be drawn to the Scriptures themselves for conformation of what is said within. These are written with R.C.'s normal flare of wisdom, wit and candor for he was always seeking to transform the convictions of evangelicals so that we might be found glorifying God and enjoying him forever. Like the commentary above, this set ought to be on every pastor's easy access shelf of books as well as any and all who wish to know more about the WCF as well as teach it to others. Now if I had to choose between the 2, I would say R.C.'s work might be the best and more helpful but if you want to know deeper also but the one by Dickson...or download it for free from Monergism.

109. INVASION, by Jay Allan (2021). The story is...or could be an interesting one. Aliens come and invade the planet Earth in somewhat modern times (contemporary to us time). They destroy all the earth's major cities and ports and killed billions...maybe up to 2/3rds of the entire population of the planet...but not all of it. There are cells of people all over the planet left with the question, Why? Why did the aliens come here? Why are they leaving us alone for now? What do they want since they have not destroyed the whole population? Are we going to be slaves or what? Just a year ago we thought we were alone in the universe now we are almost decimated by a race that we don't know anything about. Anyway, the author focuses on one of the cells...from New York City. They hid away in the subway tunnels to stay alive when the bombing started and they have built up their numbers while scavenging for food among the ruined drug and grocery stores in Manhattan and the Boroughs. They put together a large group of people and decide to attack their "hosts" and at the same time send out a team to try and figure out just why they are here. What they find out is both greatly disturbing and frightening at the same time. So now they are committed all the more to removing this plague called the Gavicons from the planet while at the same time these Gavicons make a much anticipated discovery. As I said...it could be interesting...but there is so much narrative by the main players from the alien insurgents to the leaders of the cell from NYC...that is has become tedious. I stayed with it only because I have enjoyed the others series that Jay Allen has penned...he piles words upon words of description with very little action and when the action does occur it is short lived. Too much narrative not enough interaction and action through

dialogue like his previous books. I will probably pick up his next one to see if it gets any better...but if not then I probably won't finish it.

110. OUTLAW PLATOON: HEROES, RENEGADES, INFIDELS, AND THE

BROTHERHOOD OF WAR IN AFGHANISTAN, by Sean Parnell, with John Bruning (2012). This was a riveting account of the men of the Third Platoon, Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiments, 10th Mountain Division Rangers.... "the Outlaws they called themselves." This is more than a history in the life of a particular platoon but this is a story of survival, companionship, death, deceit, redemption and growth of everyone especially the author who was left after his tour with traumatic brain injury that would end his military career. In his own words he says, *"This book displays no political agenda nor is it a review of U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan. This story is not intended to hurt anyone's feelings but rather to provide an honest assessment of what combat was like for these young warriors. Regrettably, it was impossible to mention every member of the platoon in this book. The men portrayed herein are representative of the unit as a whole. My goal was to show the world their sacrifices and, in doing so, provide readers with a much-needed window into the heart of American infantry soldiers everywhere."* And he delivers on this desire showing us his sacrifice and his commitment to his platoon as the platoon does the same for him. He was "baptized" on his first day in country and was left with wondering would he make it, *"How could those men be so matter of fact after what we experienced today? Then the realization hit me. Everyone at the sergeants' table had already seen combat. They'd already experienced a moment similar to this one. It had made them hard long ago, and now they wore their calluses like armor. Is this the kind of man I am destined to become? I regarded the bloody uniform at my feet. I'd never get the blood out. My stateside ACUs were a lost cause now. I didn't want to even touch them. Survival. That's what they had already learned. Greeson, Sabatke, First Sergeant Christopher—they'd all learned how to navigate these psychological waters. This was my test. I closed my eyes and forced the pain down into a deep and remote place."* Each trip outside the wire looked pretty much the same until it didn't... *"After only four hours on the road, we were already broiling in the sweatbox the armored Humvees became after any duration under the sun. After a day in such heat, it was not uncommon for our body temperatures to hover at 103 degrees. We called it 'baking brain cells.' Within hours, our temples throbbed; our bodies leached salt and fluids. No matter how much Gatorade or water you drank, there was no way to replace everything you lost. When we stopped to pee, our urine looked like apple juice, a sign of perpetual dehydration."* But then they would go to work in these condition and if "lucky" they would come out on the other side, *Emerick stumbled out of Sabo's truck. He and Newton were friends, and the big redhead marveled at our artist's head wound and the burns on his neck and face. 'What the hell happened to you?' he asked. 'Check this out,' Emerick said as he held up his helmet. There was a splintered hole in the front and a bigger hole in the back side. The chin strap had been severed. 'I got shot in the head, Sergeant Newton! Can you believe this? It knocked me out cold,' Emerick let out a peal of crazy laughter. The bullet had grazed his left side, exited the back of his helmet at a downward angle, and gone through part of his vest to ricochet around inside the truck."* The raw...gut wrenching...is on so many pages it is hard to put down and even harder not to feel deeply for these men who served in our place.

111. UNDERBELLY: Changing Of The Guard (A Section 31 Novel Book 3) by T. R.

Bryan (2020). Again, I can't say it often enough...this whole UNDERBELLY series has

been a great surprise to me, a Trekkie, but one who had given up on Star Trek books simply because they became too predictable and stale. But this series is as I have said before...lively, robust and humorous. The dialog between parties whether it is the regulars like Lt. Nandi, Captain Aziz or others that come and go...is absolutely like you are eaves dropping in such a way that you just can't pull yourself away from it. These section 31 novels by Bryan have filled a spot left when I finished up the **Blood in the Stars Series** by Jay Allen. (With his latest endeavor...reviewed above...leaving me less than enthused). Anyway, this book continues on the heels of the surprised alien race...The Peccarians...from last time seeking to infiltrate the Federation and what Captain Aziz, the USS Fermi and Lt. Nandi and the section 31 Marines do to quell this invasion, which is only the beginning of a long war that I am sure will be the subject of the next book in the series. This one sees a number of people from Captain Aziz's Starfleet Academy days as well as many from her other exploits like Reman soldiers that have bonded with her from the past as well as the Bellatrix clans that call her Mother affectionately for her accomplishments on their planet. Aziz's fame continues to grow to the point that like all good heroes they become a source of jealousy to people of lesser quality who believe they must be given accolades simply because of who they are. They win this conflict which irritates many because it sets off an investigation within Star Fleet as to the bad apples who have been pulling strings they shouldn't have been. Captain Aziz is recalled from the Fermi but she is given the opportunity to train the next generation of leaders who like herself are above and beyond the rest...hence one of the first references to the changing of the guard but her journey does not end stuffed back in Starfleet. She receives a new commission, *The Joan of Arc was designed by a combined Starfleet, Romulan, and Klingon engineering team that took the best features from each ally and merged them into the most technologically advanced ship ever built. Although it kept the basic Starfleet starship design, its mass was larger than a Warbird and it was equipped with the best shield generators and weapons systems available. It has a crew of over 600 with additional room to house and support 1,000 Marines. Also, there are two entire decks of holodecks on the ship dedicated to running combat simulations to improve the Marines' effectiveness. As Adm. Blaine had said months ago, "It's an awfully big ship."* But with the book closing and looking forward to the next chapter we read this last reference to the changing of the guard stated by Lt. (Captain) Nandi (now how does that happen?), *"You're sounding like someone who's trying to build a whole, new society," said Drid. "Yeah, well, one that isn't dependent on one person running things." He became serious. "Being an autocrat is hard work. And worst of all, you have to worry about someone trying to take your job... Let someone else do it... I'm a spy, not a despot." "So what do we do next?" she asked. "Next?" He chuckled. "People our age are running out of 'next'. It's time for someone else to do the heavy lifting." "So, it's kind of like the changing of the guard for us, then?" she asked. "Yeah, I guess you could say that."* This book captures your attention from the beginning and doesn't let go of you till the end. Now I am going to read the prequel... **UNDERBELLY: The Legend Begins**...that just came out I this last month just for fun. The legend is Lt. Nandi and what will be interesting is what more is revealed...who did turn the Golden Gate Bridge blue for their senior project in Starfleet Engineering, anyway?

- 112.COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS BY MARTIN LUTHER**, translated and condensed by Theodore Greabner (1940's). Dr. Greabner (1876-1950) was a Lutheran theologian and professor at Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO. when he was approached in the late 1930's to write or translate a book for

publication and he chose this with an interesting caveat, *"The preparation of this edition of Luther's Commentary on Galatians was first suggested to me by Mr. P. J. Zondervan, of the firm of publishers, in March, 1937. The consultation had the twofold merit of definiteness and brevity. 'Luther is still the greatest name in Protestantism. We want you to help us publish some leading work of Luther's for the general American market. Will you do it? I will, on one condition.' 'And what is that?' 'The condition is that I will be permitted to make Luther talk American, 'streamline' him, so to speak—because you will never get people, whether in or outside the Lutheran Church, actually to read Luther unless we make him talk as he would talk today to Americans.'"* An interesting approach to a book that Michael Horton has said is one of the 5 books every Christian leader and lay person ought to own. Dr. Greabner under took a tremendous task of condensing over 1400 Latin pages down to a couple of hundred without losing Luther's meaning, intent, or purpose. He treats this work as if it was his own as Martin Luther did. Martin is known to have said about this book, *"The Reformer had lectured on this Epistle of St. Paul's in 1519 and again in 1523. It was his favorite among all the Biblical books. In his table talks the saying is recorded: 'The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it, I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine.'"* In this commentary Dr. Luther's love for the Church is not missed...as well as his abhorrence of the Church of Rome and the Pope in particular. It is also interesting in one place he says as Christians we need to pray for the Pope and priest and in other places he makes it clear like the false teachers Paul was dealing with in Galatian they should all be accursed. This has been an excellent read. Earlier in the year I read a collection of essay on Galatians put together by D. A. Carson and it was good...but they do not even come close to the force of this commentary. Luther speaks with such clarity in these book that one can only close their eyes and think that he is talking about the 21st Century even with the knowledge that he is stuck in the 16th Century. His words and this translation of the text is so timeless that I concur with Michael Horton (who in his right mind would disagree with Horton?)...every Christian should have this book...not only for Luther's defense of justification by faith alone but for the practical nature of daily living that are spread throughout the pages of this commentary. One does not often read a commentary for pleasure but this one truly is as devotional as it is analytical and in both it is enjoyable. Oh and it is free to download from Amazon. BONUS!!!

113. LUKE: PART 2: AT HIS FEET STUDIES, by Hope Blanton, Christine Gordon (2019).

This is what I said after I finished the first book in this Luke study; *"This is a one of a kind Bible study in my opinion because these 2 women combine real scholarship with probing questions that lead to challenge and change and on top of that each lesson can be done in less than 30 minutes' preparation. With each lesson the reader is given the "big idea" as well as the contextual insight needed to not only understand the Word of God but also to incorporate it into your life. Of course, this is written for women. I say that, not in any condescending way but because it is so efficient and rewarding all at the same time. I wish there were more of these...of wait... there are this is book 5 in the series after all!"* Well, by the time I finished this one I was not as impressed. I know the Women of Virtue are appreciating this one as well...but I just did not find it to be as scholarly or as challenging as I studied through this book. The wonder of the first book was that I looked forward to the reflective questions at the beginning and end of each and every chapter ...not so much this one. That is not to say that I didn't find anything of value here...I did... it just didn't move me to want more like the last one. There were a few along the way that struck me like, *"The 'leaven' of the Pharisees that would work its way through any group of people was*

hypocrisy. It was that quiet temptation to be one person in public and another in private, to be so afraid of what other people might think that you change your actions in front of them, to speak certain words in front of a group but then whisper what you really believe to your friend behind closed doors. Jesus warns them that the whispers spoken in the dark, private room would eventually be broadcast for everyone to hear. On judgment day, all of our hidden words and actions will be brought out into the light. Verses 4-7. Jesus continues to talk” I would still recommend this book but it doesn’t compare with the first one as far as how it compelled me to think and feel deeper. Hopefully, the next one will be better.

114. THE WISE VIRGINS GOING FORTH TO MEET THE BRIDGROOM, by Ebenezer Erskine (From his Works published 1826, this series of sermons were pulled out and published by Monergism 2021). Ebenezer Erskine was one of the leading clergymen of his day that helped start the church that would ultimately be called the Church of Scotland. This is part of a multi-volume Works of Ebenezer Erskine. It was a series of 6 expository and almost exhaustive sermons that he did on **Matthew 25:6-“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’”** He took up this subject because so many believers are unsure of their status with the bridegroom given this was the early 18th Century and there was so much trouble in the land. He has a way of making things like assurance clear so that if you are wondering, *“Thus you see what unspeakable ground of consolation and eternal triumph there is for the soul that is espoused unto Christ: but the ten thousandth thousandth part of it cannot be told; for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath the heart of man conceived, what is laid up for her in Christ.”* Like a good Puritan preacher, he spread the scriptures upon every page to show us just how all of scripture proves the point of our being His bride from all eternity even if there are times of discipline from Him, *“God the Father, from all eternity, had a purpose of marriage betwixt his own beloved Son, and a select company of the fallen race and posterity of Adam: hence Christ tells us, Matt. 22:2. ‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain King who made a marriage for his son.’ The marriage was made in the purpose of God from eternity, and the bride was given unto the Bridegroom before ever she had a being, ‘Thine they were, and thou gavest them me,’ John 17:8; Psal. 2. ‘I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.’ And that they were given him in a design of marriage, is plain from what the Lord says to, and concerning the church of the Gentiles, by the spirit of prophecy, long before their being called by the gospel, Is. 54:1, 5. ‘Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; for more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife.’ And ver. 5. ‘Thy Maker is thine Husband, the Lord of hosts is his name.’”* After reading all 6 of these sermons you are left with the knowledge that I was chosen...I am loved...I have an identity and a purpose...I am forever in His grace. A message that we all need to hear today.

115. THE WEARY WORLD REJOICES: Daily Devotions for Advent, edited by Melissa Kruger (2021). This wonderful devotional for the Advent season catches you off guard and undergirds you all at the same time. The book is broken up and named after the candles of the Advent wreath. The editor says, *“For generations, churches and families have used Advent wreaths to help prepare their hearts and minds for celebrating the Lord’s birth at Christmas. The evergreen wreath symbolizes eternal life and includes four candles, typically three purple and one pink. Often, there is a white candle in the middle of the wreath symbolizing the purity of Christ. Various traditions assign different topics to each individual candle, and the candles are usually given*

names to remind us of the good news of Christ's birth. WEEK 1 (HOPE) Prophecy Candle (John 1: 45); WEEK 2 (PEACE) Bethlehem Candle (Mic. 5: 2; Isa. 9: 6); WEEK 3 (JOY) Shepherd Candle (Luke 2: 20; Isa. 35: 10); WEEK 4 (LOVE) Angel Candle (Luke 2: 13–14; John 3: 16); WEEK 5 (FAITH) Christ Candle (John 1: 29; Eph. 2: 8–10)." The devotionals that are attached to each week's theme are very uplifting and telling for as Christians I think we all too often take this time of year for granted. The authors of these brief devotionals are all people who write regularly for the Gospel Coalition from Melissa Kruger herself, to Brett McCracken to Megan Hill...some names known other not but in most cases you will be glad that you met them in their articles. For these devotions arrest us and cause us to think differently about the Incarnation of our Lord God our Immanuel...GOD... WITH... US!

- 116. 52 LITTLE LESSONS FROM IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE**, by Bob Welch (2012). I don't know how I never saw this book before this year. 52 lessons equal 52 chapters of a book that spans the entire movie for insights that apply to our daily lives as well as mesh with scriptural principles. One such quote to show this is, *"It ends with a promise that eternal life awaits not those who live perfect lives, say so many Hail Marys, never miss church, or donate so much money, but to those who believe with childlike faith. **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2: 8).** Without winds of grace, we're easily motivated by ill winds—the winds of legalism. Greed, fear, and guilt. The winds of popular opinion. When we're guided by the freeing winds of grace, however, we're more likely to make good choices—not out of guilt or greed or legalism but out of gratitude. Gratitude for the grace God showed us when He sacrificed His Son so **"whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16 NKJV).** The material world of old man Potter works another way. It says, If your net worth is this much, you have arrived. If you use this product, you will be popular. If you live in this neighborhood, you are somebody. If you win this award, your worth is validated. The material world demands that you do something to earn favor, often something underhanded, as in the case of Potter. God doesn't work this way. His grace is a gift. There's nothing we can do to make God love us more. There's nothing we can do—or have done—to make God love us less. And when we accept this—not just nonchalantly agree that it's true but hide it in our very hearts." And this one... "The irony, of course, is that the guy who seems to live life best is also the guy who's standing on that snowy bridge on Christmas Eve, considering throwing his life away. And it's not until Clarence, in effect, temporarily takes away his life that George understands what it's all about. So he proclaims, "I want to live again. I want to live again. Please, God, let me live again." The message is this: living life the right way begins with an appreciation for what we have. An understanding of how precious life is. An attitude for living life to its fullest. That's what we're meant to do. **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full," said Jesus in John 10: 10.** And what does that fullness of life hinge on? Strangely enough, the scripture suggests, on giving it away. **"The reason my Father loves me," He said "is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again" (John 10:17).** It's in giving that we receive. In sacrifice that we realize life to the fullest. **"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15: 13).** In lifting up others, we find the essence of ourselves. Isn't this the way George Bailey has lived his entire life? In the first scene, he lays down his life for his brother—risks death to save Harry. And in less dramatic but no less profound ways, he keeps doing that the rest of the movie, whether it's giving up his and Mary's honeymoon nest egg so people won't defect to Potter during the bank run, giving up his dreams so Harry*

can go off to college, or giving from his own wallet so Violet Bick can get a start in New York. But the movie suggests that “doing good works” is empty without an understanding of the importance of grace.” This book causes the reader to go back to Bedford Falls as often as they read it or watch the movie and for those of us who watch it almost every Christmas, it brings to life areas that could easily be missed and highlights those areas that are obvious. Some have said that the movie is too sentimental and to that I have always asked ...Have you actually watched the movie? Sure it is there but there is a lot of “life” in this made up community. The author says it so well and I will end this review with this quote, “Those who find the movie laced with too much sentiment fail to realize that we live in a world with far too little of the stuff. Tender emotions are what connect us with the God who created us and those around us. They’re what make us human. But too many people wall themselves away from them, à la Potter, and bravely pretend they’re trivial, sentimental hogwash. Deep down, though, it’s what we long for: to love and to be loved. To care for others and to be cared for. To serve and to be served. It’s what we were made for. Relationship. And, yes, it necessarily comes with heart tugs, some of joy, some of sorrow. Without it we are dust. So, yes, bring on the sentimental hogwash. It’s what reminds us we are, like the Baileys’ living room on Christmas Eve with so many of his friends —alive.