OUR MISSION IS TO SUPPORT THE CHURCH IN HER CHARGE OF PRESENTING EVERY PERSON MATURE IN CHRIST (COL. 1:28).

REFORMED FORUM

SPRING/SUMMER
2025
MAGAZINE

ENGAGING CHILDREN IN SENSORY WORSHIP

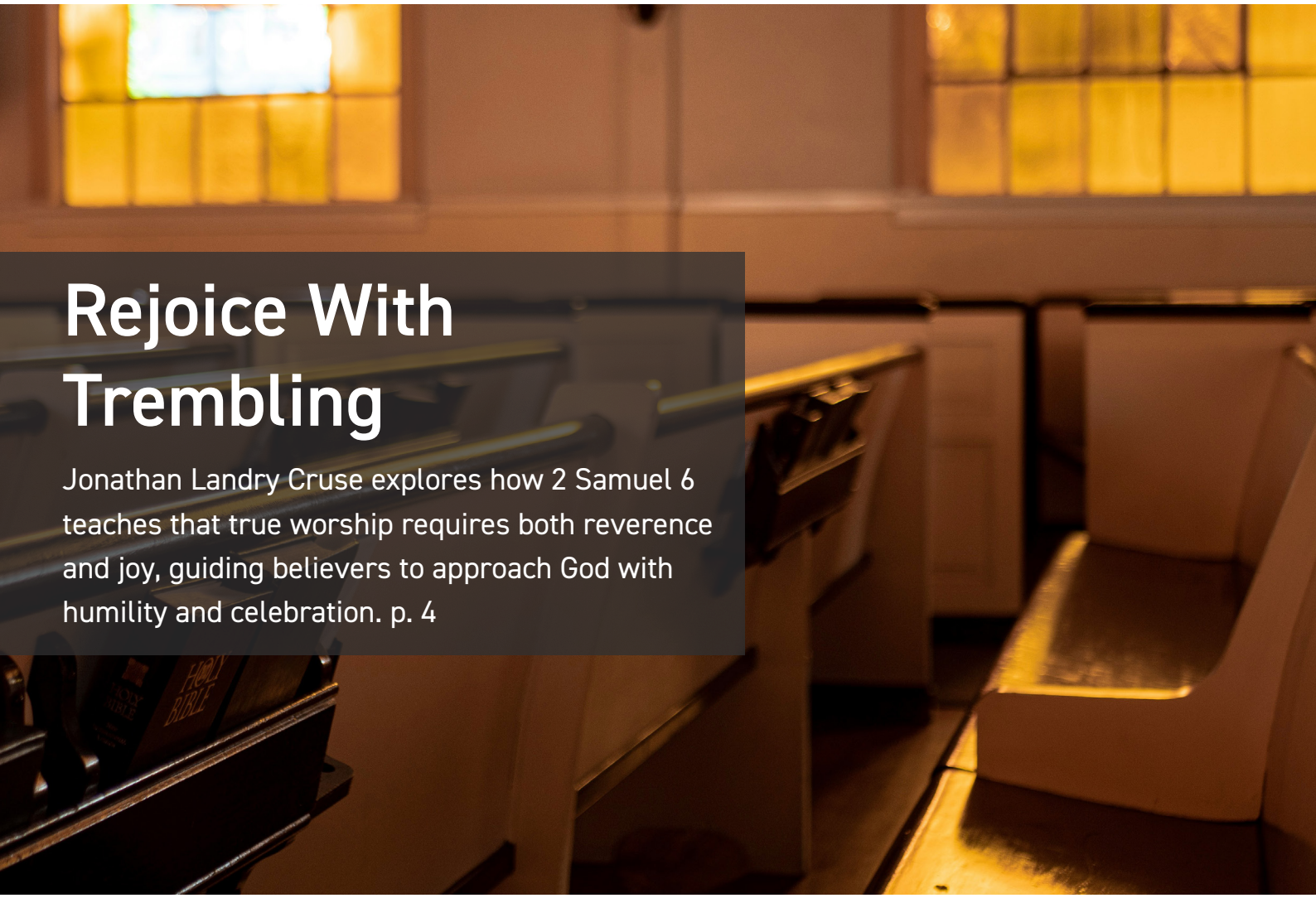
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As we enter a new chapter in our life as an organization, I find myself reflecting on the journey of Reformed Forum since our first *Christ the Center* episode aired in January 2008. What began as three individuals recording in a Philadelphia apartment has grown into a ministry reaching pastors, scholars, and laypeople across the world. Through this growth, our theological compass has remained fixed on the North Star of Reformed orthodoxy.

This year marks an important strategic shift in our focus—not away from our theological foundations, but rather toward making those foundations more accessible to every believer. We are renewing our emphasis on biblical theology and redemptive-historical hermeneutics through our "Discovering Christ in All of Scripture" initiative.

Recently, we hosted a seminar in Oklahoma City centered on this theme, developing materials that will soon become part of a comprehensive "launch kit" for people new to Reformed theology. This initiative will be accompanied by an improved website and new video courses specifically crafted to introduce these concepts in an accessible way.

Why this strategic focus? Since our inception, Reformed Forum has been known for providing advanced theological resources primarily tailored to pastors and scholars. While *Christ the Center* continues to serve this audience, Reformed Forum's mission is broader: to assist the church in presenting *every person* mature in Christ (Col. 1:28). That means everyone, not merely the theologically trained.

Our biblical-theological approach transforms how believers understand and apply Scripture. When Christians grasp how all of Scripture reveals God's redemptive purposes in Christ, they discover a coherent narrative that brings clarity to even the most challenging biblical texts. The resources we're developing walk readers through three key aspects: how God has spoken through his revelation, the unfolding message of Christ throughout Scripture, and what it means to be God's people today. These practical insights help believers move beyond fragmented Bible reading to a deeper faith and richer worship.

What makes our approach distinctive among the many ministries providing theological education is our commitment to Vosian biblical theology and Van Tilian apologetics. We maintain this focused theological position while making these transformative insights accessible to everyone. Our ultimate goal remains presenting the message of Christ crucified and raised for sinners to every person—whether they're seminary-trained or opening the Bible for the first time.

As we move forward with this initiative, I invite you to partner with us in prayer and support. Our desire is that through these resources, more believers will discover the richness of seeing Christ in all of Scripture and grow in their understanding of God's redemptive purposes.

In Christ,

Camden Bucey
Executive Director

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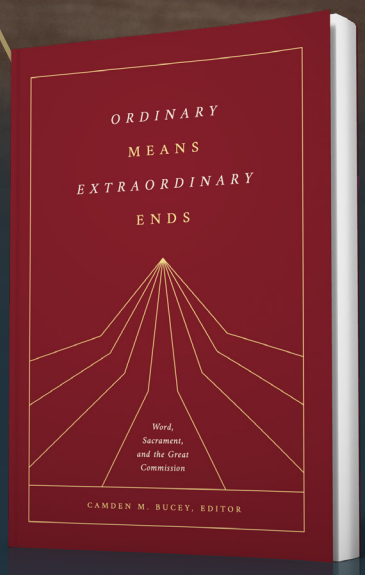
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GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES

To the end of the age. The Great Commission stands as both a mandate and a promise. Christ commands his church to make disciples of all nations, yet he does not leave us to this monumental task alone. He promises his presence and power until the end of the age. As *Ordinary Means, Extraordinary Ends: Word, Sacrament, and the Great Commission* demonstrates, the Great Commission is not merely a historical artifact from the early church—it is a living commission that propels the church forward today. To get your copy, visit **reformedforum.org/store**.





REJOICE WITH TREMBLING

JONATHAN LANDRY CRUSE

Domenico Gargiulo, David Bearing the Ark of Testament into Jerusalem, Public Domain

The high point in all cooking competition shows is when the contestant has to present their dish to the panel of judges. The chef stands there, exposed and alone, awaiting the experts to pronounce their verdict. Considering the skill level that one must have in order to compete on this stage, what would average joes like you and me say if we were judging? Unless they really screwed something up, dish after dish we would exclaim, "This is delicious! Exquisite!" But the judges' palettes are more refined, and their expectations much more demanding. And so, a plate that you and I would devour, a judge would turn up his or her nose and say, "That cake is missing just a touch of nutmeg." Or, "That chicken was braised for about thirty seconds too long." Or, "There's a pinch of salt missing from those baguettes."

The trouble with our public worship finds a corollary. We are often easily satisfied with how we come to and what we offer in worship, all the while God the Judge looks on at what we do in church, what we do in our hearts, and says, "This can't pass. There is something missing." A study of 2 Samuel 6 can serve as a needed refresher on the essentials of worship. This is a chapter about the right way to come "before the LORD"—a phrase that is synonymous with worship, and which is used no less than six times here (vv. 5, 14, 16, 17, and 21 twice). Here we learn two essential ingredients in the right worship of God: fear and joy.

The Fear of the Lord

David has recently been anointed and appointed king publicly by all the people. He conquers Jerusalem and it has become the capital of God's kingdom. Second Samuel 6 is therefore about the first official act of an official king residing in an official capital. And what does David do? He immediately diverts attention from himself by bringing the ark of the covenant back from the outskirts of the nation into the heart city. In other words, David makes it all about God. He oversees a massive procession of the thirty-thousand men to bring the ark into the new capital (vv. 1–5). It's loud and exuberant—until suddenly, it's not. The oxen trip. The cart tips over. The ark it was carrying tumbles out. The music cuts. The procession screeches to a halt. A scream goes up from near the front as someone points to the motionless figure face-first in the dirt. Uzzah—one of the men who has taken care of the ark his whole life—is dead. Verse 7: "And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God."

Error? Trying to keep the ark from crashing into the mud? Isn't our natural instinct to be offended at the God who would be so callous as to call this an error? Well, as R. C. Sproul once put it, the error was that "Uzzah assumed that his hand was less polluted than the dirt."[1] One of our greatest troubles in life is our inability to see sin for what it really is. The other side of that coin is to not see the holiness of God for what it is. We have little appreciation for the chasm that stands between holiness and sin. We do not understand what tremulous ground we stand on when unholy people come into the presence of a holy God. In fact, every time we come to worship, it's because a death took place. Because Christ hung on the cross and took the penalty for our sins, we can enter God's house without the constant fear that we might get struck down like Uzzah. But Christians can then presume on that privilege. It's one thing to acknowledge that we can come into God's presence and live; it's another thing to assume we *should* live when we come into God's presence. That is Uzzah's error.

And while this is indeed an error on Uzzah's part, the greater error lies with David, the king, the one who was overseeing this entire operation. David knew no carts were allowed in transporting the ark (see Numbers 4). But what he would have appealed to justify this act? The detail we're given in 2 Samuel 6:3: it's a *new* cart. We can picture David saying, "Lord, don't see how much we care for you that we went out of our way to get your ark fancy new wheels!" But all God saw was a people who cared so little for him that they went out of their way to disobey.

Intentionality is no cover for disobedience. There is little solace in excusing an action—in worship or otherwise—because "God looks on the heart." God looks on the heart, and he knows that it is desperately sick (Jer. 17:9). I don't want my unholy heart to be my guide to an encounter with a holy God—I want his holy word to guide me. David ignored God's word here and then pouted when God enforced it (2 Sam 6:8). David is so mad that he gives up the entire mission and lets the ark stay at Obed-edom's house instead (v. 10). And what happens? Verse 11: "And the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household." We do well to reflect on the important lesson here. You can pout if you like that God is in heaven and you are on earth, and that he gets to call the shots in worship and you don't. But if you follow David's path and give up on it, it's you who misses out, not God. Blessings

1. R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1998), 130.

are to be had when you worship the Lord in holy fear.

The Joy of the Lord

It appears that those blessings that manifested themselves in Obed-edom got David's attention and lured him out of his bad mood. After several months, he gathers his men again and renews his efforts to bring the ark into Jerusalem. David brings the ark into the city "with rejoicing" (v. 12), sacrificing to the Lord nearly every step of the way (v. 13). Most importantly, the ark now comes in the God-ordained manner, carried by the priests of God (v. 13). When they reach the city, it's as though all heaven breaks loose. Everyone is overcome with joy that the Lord has been pleased to consecrate their new kingdom with his holy and gracious presence (vv. 14–15).



Agostino Ciampelli, King David (Design for a Lunette). Public Domain

Everyone, that is, except for one: Michal, the king's wife. We can picture the well-known scene quite well. David steps into his home, heart still pounding with excitement, perhaps he is still swaying or dancing slightly to the music that's in his head, he is catching his breath when suddenly, from the bedroom: "Here comes *the king*!" Each word drips with sarcasm and disdain. Michal's attitude kills the mood as quickly as God's wrath had killed Uzzah. She goes on: "You made yourself look real mighty today, King. Dancing with the common folk, like you're just one of the herd. Have you no self-respect?" Three times in this chapter Michal is called "the daughter of Saul," which tells you everything you need to know about her sour response. She is saying to David, "My father never would have behaved like this. What a disgrace you have brought to his throne." And David's reply is that he doesn't care what he looks like in her eyes or in any one else's. "It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD—and I will celebrate before the LORD" (v. 21).

Would you dare use the word *celebrate* to describe your activity on Sundays the way that David does? Some Christians have a misconception that to crack a smile in church is to commit a sin. I know far more Christians who never smile in church, not because they are trying to be sober, but because *they're bored out of their minds*. Can this ever be acceptable for the redeemed? The God we meet, and the gospel that allows the meeting to take place, must produce joy! Of course, this does not necessitate that we start dancing until we are half-naked like David. But the old Scottish Bible scholar William Blaikie said it best: "There are, doubtless, times to be calm, and times to be enthusiastic; but can it be right to give all our coldness to Christ and all our enthusiasm to the world?"[2] We laugh, cry, and sing with our movies. What about with our Maker, Redeemer, and Friend?

I believe it is no accident that these stories are put side-by-side. If the first story teaches us that we must have the fear of the Lord in our worship, this story tells us that the fear is not enough—we must have joy, too. God confronts David for lacking fear in his worship; now, through David, he confronts Michal for lacking joy in hers.

This fact necessitates a return to a previous point. We already established we need to order our worship according to God's word. That is, we need to do what he commands, and only what he commands. Now a further layer must be added: *just doing that doesn't mean you've worshiped yet*. While our hearts must not direct our worship, they cannot be absent in our worship, either. Isaiah says, and Jesus himself agrees, "This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me" (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8–9). You heart *does* matter. Just as good intentions cannot substitute for wrong actions, right actions cannot excuse wrong intentions. God demands right hearts that love his word *and* ready hands that will do it. We need to revere God and rejoice in him. We need to worship God the way the psalmist commands us in Psalm 2: "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (v. 11).

Two Wonders

How can we possibly strike up this balance between proper fear and the proper joy? How can we worship with a right heart attitude that leads to right actions? The answer is to look to the cross. Elizabeth Cecilia Clephane, in her famous poem, said she saw two things when she looked at Christ on the cross: "And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess, the wonders of redeeming love, and my unworthiness."[3] To look at the cross is to see your sin. To see Jesus hanging on the tree is to see the one who became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), and thereby to see your own unworthiness. The cross displays a God who is so righteous that the slightest affront against his character and being demands death as a just penalty. That ought to instill a holy fear of the Lord in all worshipers.

But to see Jesus dying there is also to see a God who loves you so much that he would do anything to make it so you can get to him. This is the wonder of redeeming love. How can that not move you? How can that not melt your eyes to tears and move your heart to praise? We could spend weeks parsing out the dos and don'ts of worship—but for this Sunday, it may be best to return to these two essentials: The Lord wants you to come to him humbled because of your sin and rejoicing because of your Savior. Let holy fear of God's Word and holy joy in God's Son bring you before the Lord.



Jonathan Landry Cruse (MDiv, Westminster Seminary California) is the pastor of Community Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo, MI, where he lives with his wife and children. He is the author of several books including What Happens When We Worship *and* Church Membership.

2. W. G. Blaikie, *The Second Book of Samuel* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1898), 96.

3. Elizabeth Cecilia Clephane, "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," 1868.

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"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."
Colossians 3:17



ENGAGING CHILDREN IN SENSORY WORSHIP

MARIE VALLE

Seeing. Hearing. Tasting. Smelling. Touching. You probably haven't thought about your five senses much since elementary school. Yet God gave us these sensory organs to enable us to understand and interpret the world around us every day. Children seem to be more keenly aware of their senses, always exploring in these sensory ways.

Yet sensory encounters are not limited to the realm of creation. God's prescription of worship in the Old Testament was a full engagement of the embodied soul. In the instructions for the tabernacle in Exodus 25–30, God prescribes various aspects of this house of worship that could be experienced in tangible ways. Psalm 141 summarized this embodied worship in vivid imagery in its description of the sounds of calling to God, the smell of incense, the feeling of raised hands, the utterance of self-controlled words, and the gaze of fixed eyes.

While worship looks different under the new covenant administration of the covenant of grace, many churches would benefit from a revival of intentionally in our sensory worship. The interruptions that young children bring to worship services are often evidence that they need more sensory interaction in worship. Of course, there are occasionally valid reasons for their disengagement from the service, but by and large, it should be our goal to include even the youngest members of the covenant in the worship of Almighty God. They are most readily engaged as they are included as the ensouled bodies that God has given them.

Here are some ways that adults and children can participate together in multisensory worship of the triune God in a worship service:

- Help even pre-readers to follow along in bulletins, hymnals, and Bibles. Let them hold them in their hands and follow along with their eyes as they hear the worship of the Lord in song and readings.
- Sing boldly and expect children to do the same. Babies and toddlers benefit from hearing Mom or Dad sing in their ears. Allow their ears and thus, their minds, to be filled with the songs of worship.
- Let the littles put the offering in the plate as it's being passed. Placing paper currency in the offering on behalf of their parents makes kids feel important, but coin money typically makes a fantastic sound. Demonstrate the joy in giving by your own excitement to give.
- Encourage children to listen for specific words during a sermon, like God, Bible, or another key word that may be heard frequently. Have them whisper the word to you, squeeze your hand, or keep written tally marks when they hear it.
- Allow the Lord's Supper to be as sensory engaging as it was meant to be. Before they are permitted to taste the elements, children can utilize the other four senses to worship in this unique moment. Hearing the words of institution, seeing the elements, smelling the juice or wine, and touching the bread are ways for them to begin to see the benefits of communion while also instilling a healthy longing for the day they can rightfully participate.

Worship was never intended to be a boring hour. We do a disservice to our children (and ourselves!) when we don't enable the senses to engage in worship of our God. Allowing children to attend church while not participating (often under the false understanding that they will be a disruption or won't understand) betrays our lack of understanding of the way that God designed worship in the first place. Let children see and be seen. Let children hear and be heard. Enable and expect children to engage in worship as fully as their development allows. The church of God is multi-generational and ought to be multi-sensational. God gave each of us five senses in order to engage with us through all of them.



Mrs. Marie Valle has spent the better part of her life supporting families in various settings. She studied at Westminster Theological Seminary where she earned a master's degree in 2023 and is presently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Counseling at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. She has concerned herself with teaching theology to children and training their parents to do the same since she was a teenager. In addition to counseling and writing, she homeschools her four children while supporting her husband, Angelo, as he pastors Christ Reformed Church (PCA) in central Pennsylvania. She also loves to bake bread, coach her kids' sports teams, and watch superheroes movies with her husband.

WHERE WE WORSHIP: JOINING THE HEAVENLY ASSEMBLY THROUGH CHRIST

CAMDEN M. BUCEY

Where do Christians truly worship? If someone asked you this question, you might point to your church building or describe your congregation's meeting place. But the answer Scripture provides is far more profound and wonderful than we often realize.

The Bible tells us something astounding: When we gather for worship, we join a heavenly assembly. Through our union with Christ, we participate even now in the worship of heaven itself. This is not mere symbolism or poetic imagery—it is a present reality that should transform how we think about every aspect of Christian worship.

To understand this remarkable truth, we need to trace God's story of redemption, which begins in a garden, proceeds through multiple mountains, and culminates in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a story that reveals how God has progressively opened the way for his people to enter his presence, and how Christ has accomplished what humanity could not achieve on its own.



Thomas Cole, The Garden of Eden. Public Domain

From Garden To Mountain: God's Plan For Human Ascent

The story of where we worship begins not with church buildings or even with the temple, but in a garden. When God placed Adam in Eden, he put him in what Scripture reveals was no ordinary place. Eden was a mountain-garden, a high and holy place where God would walk with his creature. Ezekiel 28:13–14 makes this connection explicit, describing Eden as "the holy mountain of God," confirming its elevated status. We see additional hints of this elevation in how the river flowed outward from Eden to water the whole earth—water flows down, telling us Eden stood as a height above the surrounding lands.

But Eden was not just about location—it was about vocation. God placed Adam there to "work and keep" the garden. The same Hebrew words are later used to describe the priests' service in the tabernacle. Adam was meant to serve as a priest-king, tending God's holy place and guarding it from defilement. More than that, the tree of life stood in that garden as a promise—a sign that pointed to an even higher life, a more glorious existence in God's very presence.

Yet we know what happened. Adam fell. Instead of ascending to glory through obedience, he plunged humanity into exile. Cherubim with flaming swords now guarded the way to the tree of life. The path upward seemed forever blocked.

This raises the haunting question that echoes through Psalm 24: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?" (v. 3). The answer—"He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (v. 4)—only heightens our dilemma. Since Adam's fall, who could claim such purity? Yet God did not leave humanity without hope. Through a series of covenants, he began to show how he would bring his people back into his presence.

Consider Mount Sinai. God descended upon that mountain in fire and smoke, but the people could not approach. Only Moses could ascend, and even he could not see God's face and live. The mountain revealed both God's desire to dwell with his people and the barrier that our sin introduced. The tabernacle and later temple system carried this lesson forward—God provided a way to approach him, but it was limited and provisional. This all testified that the full resolution was yet to come.

Then there was Mount Zion, where David established his throne and Solomon built the temple. This mountain became synonymous with God's presence, the place where heaven and earth met. But even Zion, in all its glory, was just a shadow of something greater. The prophets spoke of a new mountain, a new temple, a new way into God's presence that

would surpass everything that came before.

All of these mountains—Eden, Sinai, Zion—pointed forward to what Christ would accomplish. As the last Adam, he succeeded where the first Adam failed. He lived a life of perfect obedience, facing temptation without sin. Through his death, he reconciled us to God. In his resurrection and ascension, he blazed the trail into God's presence, becoming our forerunner into the holy places.

This is why Hebrews tells us we have not come to Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion—to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. The mountain we could not climb by our own efforts, Christ has ascended on our behalf. The presence we could not enter because of our sin, he has opened to us through his blood.

This biblical story—from garden to mountain to heaven itself—is not just ancient history. It tells us something crucial about where we worship today. When we gather as God's people, we do not merely remember these events or try to recreate them. Through our union with Christ, we participate in the reality they all pointed toward: true worship in God's presence in the heavenly places.

Our Present Reality: Worship In Heaven

The book of Hebrews makes a stunning declaration that should transform how we think about Christian worship: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22a). Notice carefully: not "you *will* come" but "you *have* come." This is a present reality. Even now, while we remain on earth in our mortal bodies, we participate in heavenly worship through our union with Christ.

This seems almost impossible to grasp. After all, we gather in ordinary buildings. We still feel the weight of our earthly struggles. We walk by faith, not by sight. How can we claim to worship in heaven itself? The answer lies not in what we see but in what Christ has accomplished and where he is now.

Consider where Jesus is at this moment. After his resurrection, he ascended bodily into heaven, where he now sits at the right hand of God. As our great high priest, he ministers in the true tabernacle, the one built by God and not by human hands. But he does not minister there in isolation. Through the Holy Spirit, he unites us to himself so that where he is, we are also—not physically yet, but truly and spiritually.

When we gather for worship, we join what the author of Hebrews calls "the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (12:23). We worship alongside "innumerable angels in festal gathering" (v. 22) and "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (v. 23). Though we cannot see them with our eyes, we are part of a vast congregation that transcends time and space. Every Lord's Day, our voices blend with those of saints from all ages and angels who never cease to cry, "Holy, holy, holy!" (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8).

This heavenly reality shapes how we should understand our worship. When we pray, we approach the very throne of grace with confidence. When we sing, we join the eternal songs of heaven. When we hear God's word proclaimed, we receive it as those who stand in the heavenly assembly.

Think of it this way: just as we live in between two ages—the already and the not-yet—between our current earthly "tent" and our future resurrection body—we also experience two dimensions of worship. Physically, we gather in local churches with concrete walls and wooden pews (or padded seats). But spiritually, through our union with Christ, we participate in the worship of the highest heavens. Both dimensions are real, though we currently experience the heavenly dimension by faith rather than by sight. This explains why the New Testament describes us as already seated with Christ in heavenly places. Our spiritual union with him means that where he is, we are also—even as we await our final bodily resurrection. We worship from earth, yes, but our worship ascends to heaven through our mediator and joins with the perfect worship already occurring there.

This truth should fill us with awe and comfort. When you feel alone in worship, remember—you stand with a great cloud of witnesses. When you struggle to pray, remember—Christ himself intercedes for you in the heavenly sanctuary. When you are weak, remember—your access to God does not depend on your worthiness but on Christ's perfect priesthood.

We are citizens of heaven, pilgrims and sojourners on earth. Our true worship happens in our true home—the heavenly Jerusalem. Though we await the day when we will see face to face, we already participate in the worship of heaven through faith in Christ. This is not mere symbolism or poetic imagery. It is the profound reality of Christian worship, made possible by our ascended Lord who has brought our humanity into God's very presence.

The Nature Of Heavenly Worship

What does it mean to worship in heaven while still living on earth? Consider Paul's metaphor of our earthly bodies as tents in 2 Corinthians 5. Like ancient Israel's tabernacle, these temporary dwellings serve their purpose, but they are not our final home. We groan in these tents, Paul says, not because we wish to be unclothed—that is, to exist as disembodied spirits—but because we long to be "further clothed" (v. 5) with our heavenly dwelling. This teaches us something vital about worship: Our present experience, though real, points toward something even greater.

This is why our worship must be in Spirit and in truth. Jesus emphasized this to the Samaritan woman, shifting her focus from the question of physical location—whether to worship on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem—to the reality of spiritual communion with



Henry John Dobson, A Scottish Sacrament, Public Domain

God. True worship transcends geography because it occurs where Christ is, in the heavenly sanctuary (John 4:1–26).

Through the Spirit, we commune with God in the true Holy Place, not made with hands. Yet this spiritual nature of our worship does not make it less real—if anything, it makes it more real. When we gather, we join what is already happening in heaven. Think about what that means: Your local congregation's worship on Sunday morning is not a separate event from heaven's worship—it is a participation in it. The angels who cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy," the elders who cast their crowns before the throne, the martyrs who cry, "How long, O Lord?"—we join their ongoing worship through our union with Christ.

This explains why our worship follows patterns revealed in Scripture. The heavenly throne room scenes in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4–5 show us the reality our worship enters. But here is the wonder of it: We do not have to generate this worship ourselves. That is a problem with much of the church's worship today. It is about setting the right mood or creating an emotional environment. We are not ultimately setting the tone. God calls us to worship, joining something that has already begun.

We are joining the perfect worship that Christ himself, as our Great High Priest, is already offering to the Father. Our imperfect prayers are gathered up into his perfect intercession. Our faltering praise is joined to his perfect declaration of the Father's worth. Our weak faith is upheld by his perfect faithfulness.

This profoundly affects how we approach worship. We come not primarily to express ourselves to God, but to join what Jesus is already doing in heaven. We come not to achieve a certain emotional state, but to participate by faith in heavenly realities. We come not to create an experience, but to enter by faith into the experience of perfect communion that Christ has opened to us.

Does this make our physical gathering less important? Not at all. God has ordained that we experience heavenly worship through ordinary earthly means—through water, bread, and wine, through human voices raised in song, through the spoken word of Scripture and preaching. These physical elements are not obstacles to true worship; they are the means God uses to join us to heaven's worship.

Think of the ladder that Jacob saw in a dream, with angels ascending and descending. Our worship creates a similar connection between heaven and earth—not through our efforts to climb up, but through Christ who has come down and ascended again, bringing us with him into God's presence. This is the nature of heavenly worship. We worship now by faith, but we do so in the confidence that one day faith will give way to sight, and we will join fully and finally in the worship we now taste by faith.

Practical Steps On The Heavenly Ascent

Understanding that we worship in heaven itself through Christ should transform how we view and participate in Christian worship. Let us consider several practical implications of this profound truth.

First, recognize the dignity and privilege of Christian worship. When we gather for worship, we enter the very throne room of God. Though we see only the visible church—perhaps a handful of people in a modest building—we participate in something far greater. We join the assembly of the firstborn, the great cloud of witnesses, and innumerable angels in glorifying God. This should fill us with holy reverence and immense joy.

Second, approach God with confidence. The author of Hebrews urges us to "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (10:22). We can have this confidence because our access does not depend on our worthiness but on Christ's perfect work. He is our great high priest who has entered heaven itself on our behalf. When you feel unworthy to approach God, remember that you come not in your own name but in Christ's. His blood has opened the way, and his intercession maintains our access.

Third, let this shape your preparation for worship. If you were granted an audience with a great king, you would prepare carefully. How much more should we prepare to enter God's presence! This means coming with hearts ready to receive, minds focused on heavenly realities, and wills submitted to God's purposes. Come expecting to meet with God, because you will.

Fourth, participate fully in worship. You are not a spectator watching a performance but an active participant. Do not be passive—you are part of something magnificent.

Fifth, let this heavenly perspective shape your daily life. If you are seated with Christ in heavenly places, if your true citizenship is in heaven, this should affect how you live Monday through Saturday. Your conduct should reflect your heavenly citizenship.

Finally, maintain an eternal perspective in trials. Paul reminds us that our present afflictions are light and momentary compared to the eternal glory that awaits us. When you gather for worship, you taste that glory already. When life feels overwhelming, remember that your true life is hidden with Christ in God, secure beyond all earthly threats.

Conclusion

We have discovered a profound reality that stretches from Eden to eternity. Through Jesus Christ, we have received what Adam lost and more—actual participation in heavenly worship even now. This should infuse every aspect of our worship with new meaning and purpose. Carry this truth with you: If you are in Christ, you worship in heaven itself. Let this shape how you prepare for worship each Lord's Day. Let it lift your eyes above the trials of life to see your secure position in the heavenly places. Let it remind you that in Christ, you have come home—not to an earthly building, but to the city of the living God.

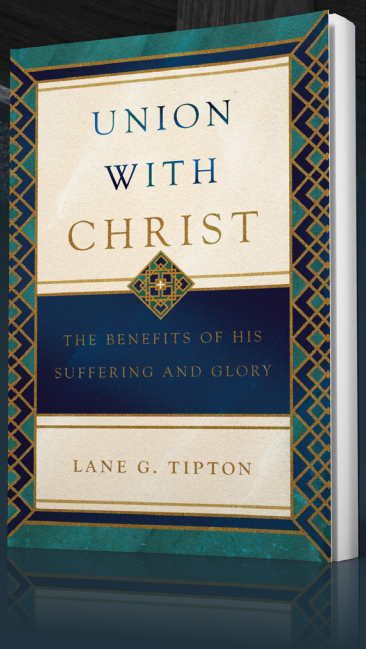
We still live in earthly tents, groaning as we await our full clothing with heavenly glory. But the day is coming when faith will give way to sight. Then we will see face to face the one whom we now worship by faith. Until that day, let us worship with growing wonder that God has, through Christ, brought us into his very presence. Let us join with all the company of heaven in declaring, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13b).



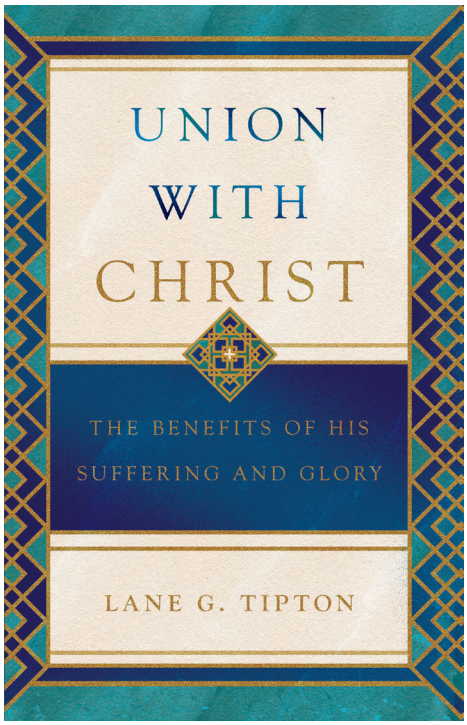
Camden Bucey is Executive Director of Reformed Forum. He is a minister at Hope Presbyterian Church in Grayslake, IL, and Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Why We Worship

Know the glory of the self-contained triune God. *Union with Christ: The Benefits of His Suffering and Glory* offers an account of how union with Christ is central to the application of redemption in the church. In this resource, Lane Tipton explores the summary of biblical teaching in the Westminster Standards regarding the accomplishment of redemption by Jesus in his earthly estate of suffering and heavenly estate of glory. Learn how the glory of the self-contained triune God permeates every aspect of Scripture and how the Holy Spirit unites the church to Christ by faith and raises her heavenward for communion with the ascended Christ. This book is an essential resource for anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of the nature and benefits of union with Christ. To get your copy, visit **reformedforum.org/store**.



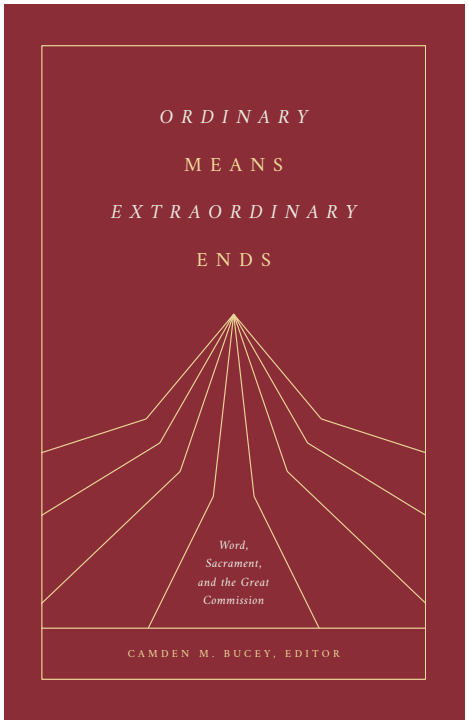
NEW REFORMED FORUM PUBLICATIONS



The manuscript for *Union with Christ: The Benefits of His Suffering and Glory* grew out of a series of lectures I delivered in the summer of 2021 for a Reformed Forum course. As the title indicates, the Holy Spirit applies to the church the whole Christ, both in his estate of suffering and in his estate of glory. Union with Christ therefore brings to the believer both a conformity to Jesus's suffering and death on earth and a participationin his resurrection and life at the right hand of God as ascended into heaven.

I wrote the book at a level suitable for adult Sunday school, sought to avoid technical terms as much as possible, and included a brief glossary of terms. I pray that this short and nontechnical volume helps by the grace of God to fuel a passion for the Christian to confess along with the apostle Paul that he wants to know Christ "and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10–11).

Lane Tipton, preface excerpt, *Union with Christ*



Ordinary Means, Extraordinary Ends: Word, Sacrament, and the Great Commission arose from two significant gatherings in 2024 where pastors and theologians explored the depths and im-plications of Christ's commission to his church. Two chapters originated as addresses at a pre-conference event prior to the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary conference in Taylors, South Carolina, on March 5, 2024. The remaining chapters are adapted from addresses delivered at the Reformed Forum Theology Conference held at Hope Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Grayslake, Illinois, on September 28, 2024.

The Great Commission stands as both a mandate and a promise. Christ commands his church to make disciples of all nations, yet he does not leave us to this monumental task alone. He promises his presence and power until the end of the age. As this volume demonstrates, the Great Commission is not merely a historical artifact from the early church—it is a living commission that propels the church forward today.

While the task may seem daunting, Christ has equipped his church with everything needed for this global mission. We need not resort to novel methods or pragmatic strategies. The Lord has provided spiritual means perfectly suited for this work: the ministry of word and sacrament, empowered by his Spirit.

COURSE HIGHLIGHT—CALVINISM: THE PLAN OF SALVATION

LANE TIPTON

Taught by Dr. Lane G. Tipton, this course combines exegetical, biblical, and systematic theology to set forth the glorious truth of the Reformed doctrine of the plan of salvation.

Building upon the work of Benjamin B. Warfield in his classic book, *The Plan of Salvation*, students will examine historical views of the plan of salvation, such as Pelagianism, Roman Catholicism, various forms of Arminianism, post-Reformation Lutheranism, and Calvinism. As the course unfolds, Dr. Tipton answers the following basic questions: Who saves? How does God save? On what basis does God save? He concludes the course with a defense of Calvinism in light of biblical teaching drawn from Romans 9 and Ephesians 1.



VIDEO LESSON TITLES:

TOTAL COURSE DURATION: 3 HOURS, 49 MINUTES.

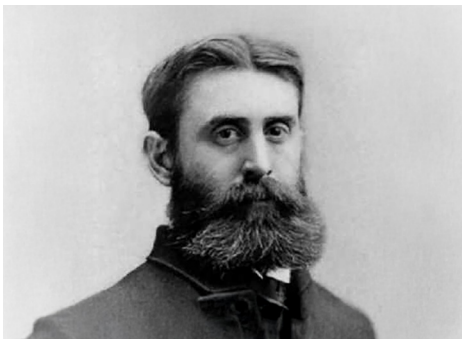
- Biblical and Systematic Theology
- The Eternal Decree
- The Plan of Salvation: Historical Options, Part 1
- The Plan of Salvation: Historical Options, Part 2
- God's Sovereign Election (Romans 9:9–23)
- Trinity and Salvation: Eternally Elected by the Father (Ephesians 1:3–6)
- Trinity and Salvation: Redeemed by the Son (Ephesians 1:7–11)
- Trinity and Salvation: Sealed with the Spirit (Ephesians 1:12–14)

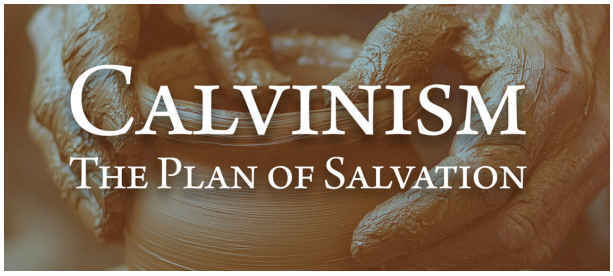
I'm grateful for this course by Reformed Forum. Dr. Tipton presents the material in a clear and engaging way, making deep theological truths easier to grasp. It strengthened my understanding of the doctrines of grace and deepened my faith in the God who seeks and saves his people. It's not only a valuable resource for personal growth but also one I'd highly recommend to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of God's redemptive plan.

Nate L.

Thank you, Dr. Tipton and Reformed Forum, for this course. It was a timely reminder of the scope of soteriology within God's plan for redemption. Your course will be helpful to teach this material to church members as a part of our commitment to evangelism in our community and as a starting point for a deeper study of the blessings poured out on us through Christ's sacrifice.

Michael T.





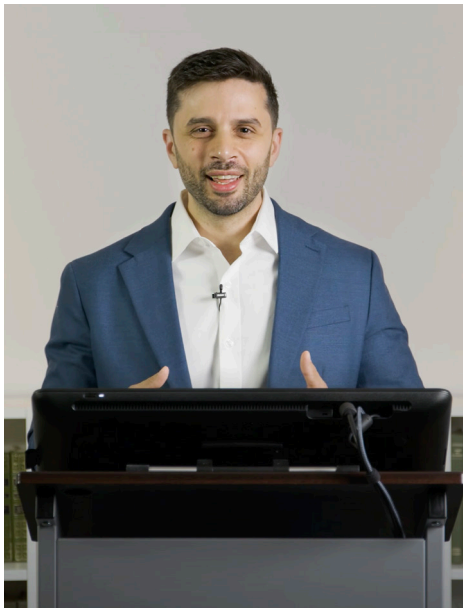
ACCESS THE COURSE HERE



REFORMED ACADEMY UPDATE

RYAN NOHA

At Reformed Forum, we often speak of supporting the church in her charge to present every person mature in Christ (Col. 1:28). This mission drives our work, shaping every effort to serve the greater work that God is accomplishing through his church, even to gather and perfect a people for his own glory. We are profoundly grateful for the many friends, prayer partners, and donors who contributed to this mission last year, especially through our year-end giving campaign, Equipped to Grow, which crowned our largest year of giving with an unprecedented outpouring of support. God's abundant provision has positioned us to enter 2025 with renewed vigor, bringing numerous Reformed Academy projects to completion and launching new initiatives to equip students worldwide with accessible, rich, and confessional Reformed theological education.



Daniel Ragusa, course teacher and author of Fullness of Joy: A Biblical Theology of God with Us.

Equipped to Grow and Serve the Global Church

Reformed Academy now serves more than 7,000 registered students across 96 countries, with many more accessing our 27 free video courses on YouTube and via serialized podcast releases every Monday. Reflecting the truly international impact of this platform, the Philippines now has more students enrolled than any country outside the United States. In the past six months, we've also welcomed our first students from Algeria, Thailand, and Myanmar. As our student base grows and diversifies, so does our commitment to providing theological resources for believers at all stages of discipleship, equipping laypeople, pastors, and scholars in their respective callings—and increasingly in their own languages.

Through the dedication of Reformed native speakers, our courses—and now companion books—are being translated to strategically align with the needs of Reformed and Presbyterian foreign missionaries, churches, and presbyteries. Currently, friends in Brazil, Mexico, and Taiwan are adding subtitles to one of our most popular courses of 2024, Daniel Ragusa's Fullness of Joy: A Biblical Theology of God with Us. Even more exciting, Dr. Ragusa's companion book, with the same title, will become our first official Reformed Forum publication in Spanish. Additional translation projects are underway in Korean and both Simplified and Traditional Chinese, ensuring that confessional Reformed resources reach those with limited access to sound theological training.

New Introductory and Advanced Courses

As part of our long-term objective to create a clear pathway for all students to reach maturity in Christ, Camden Bucey is developing a foundational core curriculum. This curriculum is intended to serve both as an onramp for students new to the Christian faith and as a gateway to more advanced content already available in Reformed Academy. The first two courses will be:

- God's Gift of Himself: What Makes the Gospel Truly Good News—a clear and compelling overview of the gospel message as it unfolds in redemptive history, highlighting the wondrous fact that God himself is the believer's inheritance and very great reward—and
- Discovering Christ in All of Scripture—a three-lesson course exploring how God has spoken the unfolding message of his Son to his people.

The following adult Sunday school–level courses are also projected for release in 2025:

- Defending Our Hope: An Introduction to Christian Apologetics, by Camden Bucey
- The Gospel of John: A Study in the Truth (Chapters 11–21), by Jim Cassidy



- Citizens of Heaven: An Introduction to the Doctrine of the Church, by Jim Cassidy

On the advanced side, Will Wood's Redemptive History and the Regulative Principle of Worship is now available. This course expounds the thesis that worship on earth is to be patterned after heaven above, even as it looks forward to being "heavenized" at the consummation of all things. In addition, Lane Tipton will return to the studio to record three ThM/PhD-level courses on the theology of Romans and the theology of Hebrews.

International Cohort Reading Groups

One of the most exciting developments of 2025 is the launch of our International Cohort Reading Groups, designed to connect Reformed pastors, missionaries, and church leaders outside the United States in faculty-led cohorts focused on the great works of our tradition. As an intentional extension of our mission to strengthen the global church, these cohorts specifically target ministers in regions where formal Reformed theological training is sparse or inaccessible. Their goal is to provide supplemental theological education and ongoing discipleship to those who labor in ordained gospel ministry.

The first cohort, launching in May 2025, will be led by Lane Tipton and Adam York, focusing on Edmund Clowney's *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*. The first hour of direct instruction will be recorded in a conversational Vos Group–style format and later published as a "reader's guide" in Reformed Academy. Participants will also engage in live theological discussion, fellowship, and prayer, all with the aim of supporting the Great Commission in their native contexts. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of a longtime partner, we are pleased to be able to offer these cohorts completely for free to worthy students.

Looking Ahead

As we reflect on the remarkable growth and expanding reach of Reformed Academy, we are humbled by God's faithfulness and immensely grateful for the friends and supporters who make this work possible. With new courses, new translations, and new opportunities for fellowship, we pray that God will continue to bless these resources to build his church and magnify his glory among the nations.



Ryan Noha is Director of Education and Advancement for Reformed Forum.

Donate today to support global theological education.

REFORMED FORUM

1585 N Milwaukee Ave.
Suite 113
Libertyville, IL 60048



The Things Concerning Himself

Christ in All the Scriptures

(Luke 24:27)

2025 Reformed Forum Conference

September 26–27, 2025
Lakeland Church, Gurnee, IL
reformedforum.org/conference