

# RTC Monthly

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## College News

- Over the last couple of weeks the RTC has been host to a number of visitors. We hosted the CRCA Candidacy Committee last week and the RCNZ Deputies this week. They have come from our supporting churches to oversee their students studying for ministry at the RTC. We have hosted the CRCA TRAIN workgroup that works to encourage effective training and discipleship in the local church. This week we also host a special visit by Dr Michael Goheen, newly appointed as Professor of Missiology at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids. He will be speaking to the students on aspects of a Christian worldview. Visitors are most welcome this Thursday at 12 noon. This week we also host a special prayer initiative for the nation of Mali. This is being organised by one of our former students, Brendan Short, who works for SIM.
- The RTC Board met on 19 April. Considerable time was spent discussing bigger picture issues for the College – how do we increase student numbers, especially among supporting churches, should the membership model the College uses be changed, how should the Board itself be structured, and how can the College best be represented among the churches? These are ongoing matters for the Board to wrestle with. The Board also gave thanks to God that the 2012 year saw a small surplus of funds even though we had forecast a deficit for the year. We are constantly thankful to the Lord for our many prayerful and generous supporters.

## Book Recommendation

(by Rev John de Hoog)

Nancy Guthrie is a prolific author who is currently pursuing graduate study at Covenant Theological Seminary in St Louis, Missouri. One of her current projects is working on a series of books in what Crossway Publishers are calling the "Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament" series. Current volumes in the series are *The Promised One: Seeing Jesus in Genesis* (2011); *The Lamb of God: Seeing Jesus in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy* (2012); and *The Wisdom of God: Seeing Jesus in the Psalms and Wisdom Books* (2012). Each book is styled in the form of a 10-week Bible study, but the volumes are far more substantial than simply a set of questions with blanks to fill in the answer. Each "week" includes a Personal Bible Study, a Teaching Chapter including a section called "Looking Forward" and a Discussion Guide. Guthrie's approach is hermeneutically sound and she writes warmly and with great clarity. Her great concern is to show how the Old Testament points to Christ. These books would be useful for both personal study and group work.

## Faculty News

- The second Advance Together conference for the CRCA was held in Victoria this past weekend. The next conference is in Brisbane on 18 May. For more details, go to the RC website.
- Several faculty members will be attending the CRCA ReCharge conference in Sydney next week. We look forward to this as a valuable time of learning and networking with ministry colleagues across the country.

## You're invited to join an RTC Study Tour to Israel and Jordan



Have you ever wanted to explore the lands of the Bible first-hand? An opportunity to do just that is available now.

The RTC is planning a student study tour to Israel and Jordan from 17 Nov to 6 Dec 2013, and there are still some places available for others. You can join with our Old Testament lecturer, John de Hoog, and a group of keen students, as we travel to many of the places in Israel where Jesus lived and worked, including seven days in Jerusalem.

Full details of the 20 day itinerary are available at <http://www.missiontravel.com.au/rtc2013>. It's a very exciting itinerary.

A trip that offers so much is not cheap, but the cost of \$6,499 includes all airmiles, 18 nights 4 star hotel accommodation in twin rooms (with a single room supplement available), all breakfasts and dinners, and most other expenses for a twenty day trip (see the full list at the end of the itinerary). Also included will be a study guide that we will produce for students to help you make the most of this trip. A fair bit of walking is involved for many of the places we will visit, but you don't have to be super-fit, just independently mobile.

We have had some advice from an accountant that it will be possible (in Australia at least), with some minor paperwork, to claim the expenses of this trip as a PD experience for people in Christian ministry, so making it tax deductible.

It's going to be a great experience. The images above are photos John took on a trip to Israel and Jordan in 2012. If you are interested in joining us for this trip, please contact the RTC without delay.

## Ministry Spot

(by Dr Murray Capill)

Discipline isn't a particularly fun word. It sounds hard, difficult, demanding, taxing. Spiritual adventures, discoveries, opportunities or possibilities sound more enticing than spiritual disciplines. But while the Christian life is the most wonderful adventure, full of endless discoveries, great opportunities and diverse possibilities, the fact is, it requires discipline. Without discipline we will not grow in Christ. We have seen in the previous two articles that growth in godliness requires discipline, not because discipline makes us grow, but because we need to have the discipline of placing ourselves in the current of God's grace. The most fundamental way we do that is through disciplines that help us cultivate personal relationship with God – in particular the disciplines of prayer and bible reading.

In focussing on them above all else, however, there is a danger that we begin to think that spiritual discipline is chiefly a private matter. We easily get the impression that the most spiritual people are those who are most disciplined in having personal time with God. Surely those who spend much time in personal prayer, who are regular in personal bible reading, who journal, and memorise Scripture, and spend time meditating on God's Word, and maybe practise regular times of fasting, are the most godly of people. Well maybe so, but if we emphasize personal spiritual disciplines ahead of corporate disciplines we are out of step with the Bible itself.

Beginning with Abraham, God's plan of salvation was always a plan to save a people not just many individuals. God has formed a community for himself – a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. Believers are gathered together in church communities, and the church is the body and temple of Christ. Just as no one in the Old Testament era could claim to belong to God if they didn't belong to the covenant community of Israel, so no one can rightly claim today to belong to God if they do not belong to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course there are plenty of people who do claim exactly that. They claim to have a strong personal faith in God but say they are disenchanted with the church and disconnected from it. But that is not a spiritually healthy place to be. In fact biblically, it is just not an option.

So what are the corporate disciplines we need to cultivate if we are to grow in godliness? What must we do with other believers in the context of the church to advance spiritually? Perhaps the best answer is found in Hebrews 10:25 where the author writes, 'Do not neglect meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.' The most fundamental corporate discipline is to meet with other believers. That is really what church is all about – it is coming together with other Christians for spiritual fellowship. We come together to hear God's Word, to pray, to serve, to love, to give, to share, to sing, to build others up, to participate in the Lord's supper, to give testimony to others of God's work in our lives, to find help and encouragement, to receive counsel. The exhortation to 'not neglect meeting together' is not specifically tied to worship services but to a diverse array of ways in which we can meet with other believers for mutual edification.

Meeting with other believers is a God designed formula for our growth in grace. For one thing, it will mean that we rub shoulders with difficult people! The church is made up of sinners and we will inevitably bump into other people's pride, insensitivity, small-mindedness and a hundred other frustrations. These are God-given opportunities to grow in love, acceptance, patience and mercy. Thankfully, we will also bump into people who are wonderfully inspiring and encouraging. Church is the context for forming strong spiritual relationships with people who love God and are passionate about serving him. You don't find many people like that in the work place, but you do at church.

Church is also the context for serving others. Spiritual growth takes place when we use our gifts to build others up. It is the testimony of many Christians that they never grew as much as when they had to take a bold step in Christian ministry. They had to step up to teaching Sunday school, or leading the youth group, or sharing their faith on a church mission, or preach their first sermon. Other Christians have grown massively as they have quietly served needy people or befriended those who struggle. It is hard to develop spiritual muscle if you never exercise spiritual gifts.

The centrepiece of corporate spiritual life is the discipline of hearing and studying God's Word together. The public proclamation of God's Word is especially designed by God to build us up in the faith. There is no spiritual substitute for being under faithful and powerful preaching. And alongside that, there is enormous value in wrestling with the Scriptures with other believers in a study group. Others may well ask questions we haven't thought of or give perspectives we need to hear.

All this requires discipline. It takes discipline to get to church, attend a home group, engage in a church ministry, extend hospitality to other believers, and develop your gifts for service. It takes time and effort. Many an evening, around dinner time, I don't feel like going out again – to an elder's meeting, or a home group, or a pastoral visit, or a prayer meeting. But time and again I have come home at the end of the evening encouraged by the time with others. The discipline has been a blessing. It's easy to justify not going. It's easy to get slack in church attendance. It's easy to leave ministry, and difficult people, and church business to others. But the simple fact is, no one can grow to spiritual maturity if they are disconnected from the community of God's people. God has designed us to live in community with each other. That's why Christians for centuries have confessed not only that they believe in God the Father Almighty, and not only that they believe in Jesus Christ his Son, and not only that they believe in the Holy Spirit, but also that they believe 'in the communion of saints, the fellowship of believers.' Do you believe in that? If so, you'll cultivate the disciplines that are a part of meeting with other believers.