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The Reformed Handbook



The Reformed Handbook

About “Winking Calvin”

The wink on John Calvin’s face indicates that even though theology is serious stuff, we should nonetheless remember that it is not our theology that saves us, but Jesus Christ. Therefore, our life in the church can be buoyant, and our theological wranglings can be done with a sense of humor and love for our neighbor.

The Reformed Handbook



Faith Alive Christian Resources
Grand Rapids, Michigan

THE REFORMED HANDBOOK

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This Book Belongs To

Name _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

Telephone _____

Birth date _____

Baptism date _____

Date of public profession of faith _____

Parents' names

Churches I've belonged to:

Years of membership

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



About My Congregation

Name _____

Address _____

Year organized/founded _____

My pastor(s) _____

Number of members _____

Average weekly worship attendance _____

Facts about my denomination _____

Other information about my congregation and faith



PREFACE

Please Be Advised:

Many books, pamphlets, and booklets have been written through the centuries as companions for ordinary people who wanted help navigating their way through a complicated subject. Even in the age of Google real paper and print books are helpful resources for learning the basics of a given subject or for handy review. *The Boy Scout Handbook* comes to mind, for example. So do *The American Red Cross First Aid and Safety Handbook*, *Tune and Repair Your Own Piano: A Practical and Theoretical Guide to the Tuning of All Keyboard Stringed Instruments*, and *National Audubon Society's Field Guide to North American Reptiles and Amphibians*. They stand as testimony to the ordinary person's need for a guide to both the vast truths and complex detail that make up a particular area of interest. These books turn complicated, inaccessible ideas into simple, easy-to-understand concepts, and, if necessary, into action steps that are easy to follow.

The Reformed Handbook follows the format of many handbooks. Here, you will discover a combination of reliable, historical, and theological information alongside some fun facts and very practical tips on being a churchgoing follower of Jesus Christ. Because we consider anyone who purchases or receives this handbook to be a discerning reader, we have occasionally added some outrageously fictitious items that test your skills of sifting fact from fiction, thus raising the IQ of English-reading Reformed people.

You will also discover that this book is intended for learning and enjoyment. (Some Reformed people have trouble doing the latter until they've first suffered through the former.)

It's meant to spur conversation, to inform and edify, and to make you laugh. Think of the book as a comedian with a dry sense of humor and a degree in theology (with about a B-average). It can be used in the classroom with students or at the dinner table with family or in solitude.

But however you use it, use it! We've cut the corners off so you can throw it in your backpack or stuff it in a pocket. It's printed on paper that accepts either ink or pencil nicely, so feel free to write and highlight in it (and there's room for notes in the back). The cover is this fancy, nearly indestructible stuff that will last nearly forever too, so don't worry about spilling soft drinks or coffee on it. We've even heard it can sustain a direct hit from a Play Station Three! (But don't expect it to protect you from a bullet through the heart like the proverbial New Testament of soldiers the world over.)

Anyway, the point is this: Being a follower of Jesus is hard enough without having to navigate the faith journey—let alone the maze of church culture—all alone. Sooner or later everyone needs a companion.

—THE EDITORS

HOW TO SURVIVE FOR ONE HOUR IN AN UN-AIR-CONDITIONED CHURCH

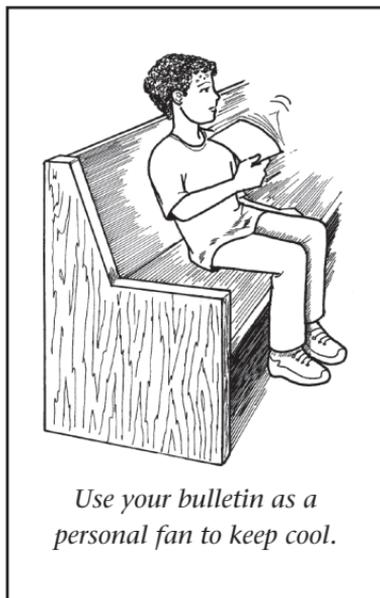
Getting trapped in an overheated sanctuary is a common churchgoing experience. The key is to minimize your heat gain and electrolyte loss.

① Plan ahead.

When possible, scout out the sanctuary ahead of time to locate optimal seating near fans or open windows. Consider where the sun will be during the worship service and avoid sitting under direct sunlight. Bring a bottle of water for each person in your group.

② Maintain your distance from others.

Human beings disperse heat and moisture as a means of cooling themselves. An average-size person puts off about as much heat as a 75-watt lightbulb. The front row will likely be empty and available. Think of it as a box seat at the most important game in town! Your pastor will notice if you sit there.



Use your bulletin as a personal fan to keep cool.

3 Remain still.

Fidgeting will only make you hotter and sweatier. You may wish to assume a comfortable posture of sitting slightly forward and clasping your hands.

4 Think cool thoughts.

Your mental state can affect your physical disposition. If the heat distracts you from worship, imagine you're sitting on a big block of ice.

5 Dress for survival.

Wear only cool, breathable fabrics.

6 Pray.

Jesus survived on prayer in the desert for forty days. Lifting and extending your arms in an open prayer position may help cool your body by dispersing excess heat. If you've been perspiring, though, avoid exposing others to your personal odor. Be sure to use deodorant.

Be Aware

- Carry a personal fan—or use your bulletin as a substitute.
- Worship services scheduled for one hour sometimes will run longer, especially if there are baptisms, Lord's Supper, or commissioning of mission teams. Plan ahead.

HOW TO RESOLVE INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Disagreements are part of life. They often occur when we forget that not everyone sees things the same way. Conflict should be viewed as an opportunity to grow, not a contest for domination. Many Reformed people are traditionally shy, but when push comes to shove they value healthy relationships above all.

1 Adopt a healthy attitude.

Your frame of mind is critical. Approach the situation with forethought and calm. Prayer can be invaluable at this stage. Do not approach the other party when you're angry or upset. Yet remember the apostle Paul's good advice: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Ephesians 4:46).

2 Read Matthew 18:15-20 beforehand.

Consult the Bible to orient your thinking. This is the model Jesus provided and can be used to call to mind an appropriate method.

3 Talk directly to the person involved.

Avoid "triangulation." Talking about someone to a third party can make the conflict worse, as the person may feel that he or she is the subject of gossip. Speaking with the other person directly eliminates the danger and boosts the odds of a good outcome.

4 Express yourself without attacking.

Using "I statements" can avoid casting the other person as the "bad guy" and inflaming the conflict.

“I statements” are sentences beginning with phrases such as “I feel . . .” or “I’m uncomfortable when . . .”

5 Keep “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) as your goal.

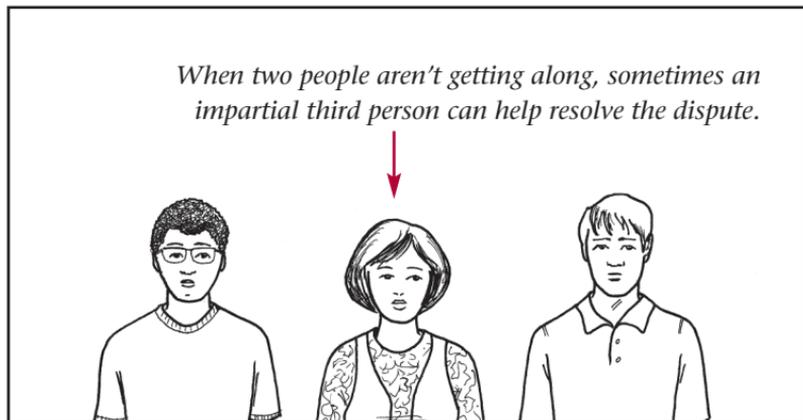
Your “truth” may not be the other party’s. Your objective is to discover and honor each other’s “truth,” not to put down the other person. Be ready to admit your own faults and mistakes.

6 Seek out a third party to act as an impartial witness.

If direct conversation doesn’t resolve the conflict, locate someone both parties trust to sit in. This can help clarify your positions and bring understanding.

7 Build toward forgiveness and a renewed friendship.

Agree upon how you will communicate to prevent future misunderstandings.



Be Aware

- Seemingly unrelated events in your or the other person's life may be playing an invisible role in the conflict at hand. Examine yourself and be ready to shift the focus to the real cause.
- You may not be able to resolve the conflict at this time, but don't give up on resolving it in the future.

THE TOP TEN ATTRIBUTES TO LOOK FOR IN A SPOUSE

While no single personality trait can predict a compatible marriage, the following list frames the basic things to look for in a spouse. With all attributes, some differences can be the source of a couple's strength rather than a source of difficulty. Statistically, Reformed people appear to be about as successful at choosing a spouse as other people.

① **Similar values.**

Successful couples may be very different in personalities, but values that concern religious beliefs, life purpose, financial priorities, and children are a foundation on which to build the relationship. Contrary values tend to create discord.

② **Physical energy and physical space compatibility.**

Consider whether the person's energy level and physical space needs work with yours. Realize that *compatibility* can mean a complementary match of opposites, or it can denote a match based on strong similarities.

③ **Physical and romantic compatibility.**

If the two of you have a similar degree of interest in or need for physical and romantic expression in your relationship, the chance of lifelong compatibility increases.

④ **Intellectual parity.**

Communicating with someone who has a significantly different intelligence level or educational background can require extra effort.

5 Emotional maturity.

A lifelong relationship of mutual challenge and support often helps each person grow emotionally. A lifetime spent waiting for someone to grow up could be more frustration than it's worth.

6 Sense of humor.

A sense of humor can provide an excellent measure of a person's personality and an important means of couple survival. If he or she doesn't get your jokes, you could be asking for trouble.

7 Respect.

Look for someone who listens to you without trying to control you. Look also for a healthy sense of self-respect.

8 Trustworthiness.

Seek out someone who is honest and acts with your best interests in mind—not only his or hers—and who tries to learn from his or her mistakes.

9 Forgiving.

When you sincerely apologize to your spouse, he or she should try to work through and get beyond the problem rather than hold on to it. Once forgiven, past mistakes should not be raised, especially in conflict situations.

10 Kindness.

An attitude of consistent kindness may be the most critical attribute for a lifelong partnership.

Be Aware

- If you live to be old, you will probably experience major changes that you cannot predict at age 15 or 25 or 35. Accepting this fact in advance can help you weather difficult times.
- Use all of your resources—intuition, emotions, and rational thought—to decide about a life partner.
- Family members and trusted friends can offer invaluable advice in this decision-making process and should be consulted.



*A sense of humor is an important
means of couple survival.*

THE SEVEN FUNNIEST BIBLE STORIES

Humor isn't scarce in the Bible; you just have to look for it. For example, God tells Abraham (100 years old) and Sarah (in her 90s) they'll soon have a son. Understandably, they laugh. Later, they have a son named Isaac, which means "he [or she!] laughs." Bible humor is also ironic, gross, and sometimes just plain bizarre.

❶ **Gideon's dog-men (Judges 6:11-7:23).**

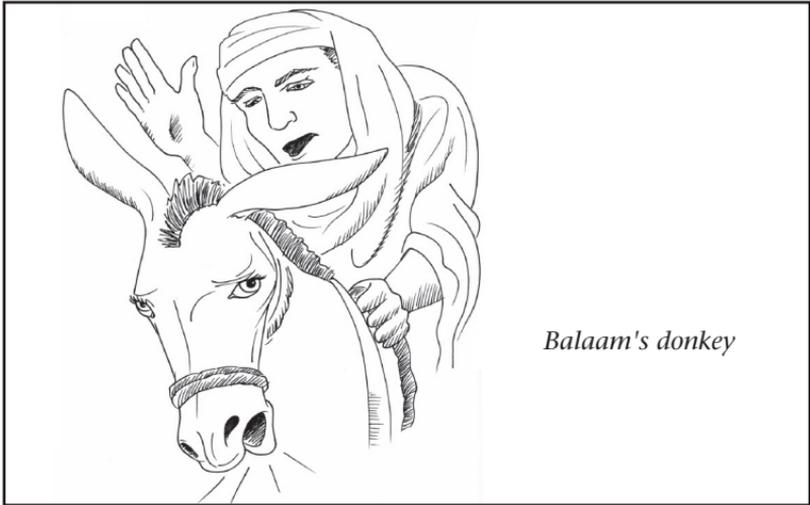
God chooses Gideon to lead an army against the Midianites. Gideon gathers an army of 32,000 men, but this is too many. God tells Gideon to make all the men drink from a stream, and then selects only the 300 men who lap water like dogs.

❷ **David ambushes Saul in a cave while he's "busy" (1 Samuel 24:2-7).**

While pursuing David cross-country to engage him in battle, Saul goes into a cave to "relieve himself" (move his bowels). Unbeknownst to Saul, David and his men are already hiding in the very same cave. While Saul's doing his business, David sneaks up and cuts off a corner of Saul's cloak with a knife. Outside afterward, David shows King Saul the piece of cloth to prove he could have killed him "on the throne."

❸ **King David does the goofy (2 Samuel 12-23).**

David is so excited about bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem that he dances before God and all the people dressed only in a linen ephod, apron-like underwear that covered only the front of his body.



Balaam's donkey

4 Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:21-36)

When Moab's King Balak hired a well-known fortune teller named Balaam to curse the Israelites, God's angel stood in Balaam's way. His donkey saw the angel, though Balaam himself did not. After he beat the donkey three times, the animal actually asked Balaam why he was doing that. As if that's not funny enough, Balaam even answered. After that, Balaam blessed the Israelites instead of cursing them as his boss had demanded. Makes you wonder if King Balak ever paid Balaam's fee for services.

5 Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20).

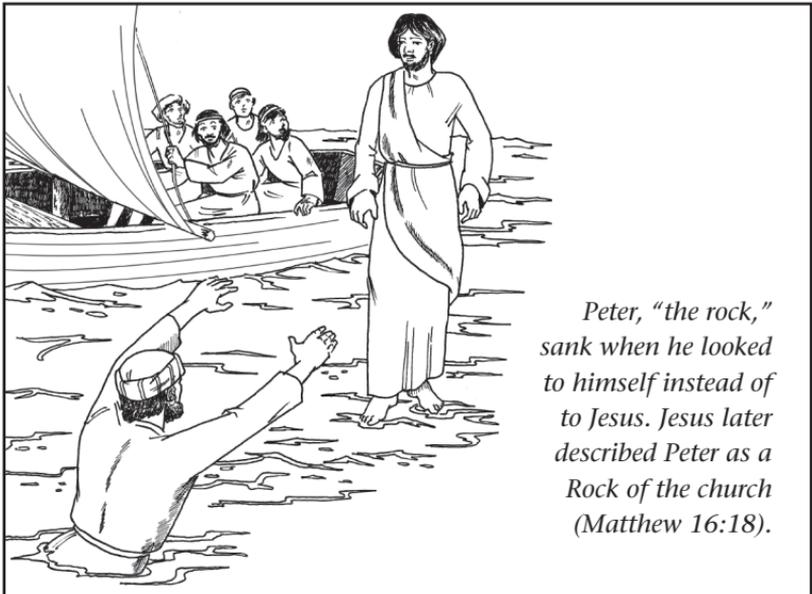
A man is possessed by so many demons that chains cannot hold him. Jesus exorcises the demons and sends them into a herd of 2,000 pigs, which then run over the edge of a cliff and drown in the sea. The herders, now 2,000 pigs poorer, get miffed and ask Jesus to leave. If the owners were Jewish, why did they admit to even owning pigs?

6 Disciples and loaves of bread (Mark 8:14-21).

The disciples were there when Jesus fed 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. They also saw him feed 4,000 people with seven loaves. Later, in a boat, the disciples fret to an exasperated Jesus because they have only one loaf for thirteen people.

7 Peter can't swim (Matthew 14:22-33).

Blundering Peter sees Jesus walking on the water and wants to join him. But when he looks down at the water, Peter panics and starts to sink. In Greek, the name Peter means “rock,” which he most resembled when he sank.



Peter, “the rock,” sank when he looked to himself instead of to Jesus. Jesus later described Peter as a Rock of the church (Matthew 16:18).