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Shepherd's "Praying through Hard Times: Finding Strength in God's Presence" (Book Review)

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Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin: Three Views of Romans 7,

By Terry L. Wilder, Chad Brand, Stephen Chester, Grant R. Osborne,
and Mark Seifrid. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011. 213 pp. \$24.99.
ISBN 9780805447910.

*Reviewed by Dale R. Jensen, Director of Library Services,
Evangel University, Springfield, MO*

The purpose of this book is to compare and contrast three similar but different interpretations of Romans 7. The authors of each chapter describe how they have come to their conclusions and cite others who have similar views or dissimilar views. Each author is given opportunity to respond to each viewpoint, emphasizing where they agree or disagree with that particular interpretation.

I believe that each of the five men involved in this project have excellent credentials for tackling a work such as this, but I found myself wondering if anything was accomplished. The very opening line of the acknowledgments on page ix states, “Christians have discussed Romans 7 for years.” The first line sentence of the conclusion on page 201 states, “I think we have seen that there is much here to debate, but there is also much on which we can agree.” I have concluded that this debate will not be settled until Jesus comes, and then it will not matter. Although fascinating, this book has little value because it does not bring the reader to a conclusion but perpetuates a never-ending debate over a theological issue that doesn’t merit the price of the book.

Praying through Hard Times: Finding Strength in God’s Presence,

by Linda Evans Shepherd. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2014. 192 pp. \$12.99.
ISBN 9780800723125

Reviewed by Karen Gallacci, Assistant Librarian, Greenville College, Greenville, IL

Praying through Hard Times: Finding Strength in God’s Presence, by Linda Evans Shepherd, is written for anyone looking for a stronger prayer life and walk with the Lord. In twelve chapters, numerous personal circumstances or situations are presented. The reader is shown how to break through extremely difficult situations, fight against the power of darkness, trust God, have peace, and find real joy through prayer. Bible passages are interspersed throughout the book with reference to how Bible characters handled different situations. Quotes from many other respected writers, as well as the author’s own personal experiences, add extreme value to each concept. The most unique parts of this book are the sample prayers woven throughout. These prayers are remarkable because it is as if the author has already seen right into the

reader's thoughts and heart. Some of the prayers are based on scripture and bring passages to life in uplifting new ways. Study questions are provided at the end of the book and short video clips are available on the web to make this book an easy tool for a group study. Whether individually or in a group, no one should miss the opportunity to read and study this excellent book.

**Reading for Preaching: The Preacher in Conversation with
Storytellers, Biographers, Poets, and Journalists,**

by Cornelius Plantinga Jr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. 133 pp.

\$14.00. ISBN 9780802870773

*Reviewed by Steven Paschold, Research Services Librarian,
John Brown University, Siloam Springs, AR*

Arising from a series of seminars for preachers, this book, by noted author Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., President Emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary, aims primarily to encourage preachers to read widely, given the limitations on their time to do so. He expects preachers to read to gather material for sermon illustrations, but beyond this, he promotes wide reading as a means for preachers' own growth and well-being. As per the subtitle, Plantinga recommends reading fiction, biography, poetry, and journalism, to which he adds essays, children's literature, and blogs, but he emphasizes fiction, both novels and short stories. The author effectively shows how, while the Biblical text is always paramount, other literature can illustrate or supplement that text and the great themes that the preacher seeks to expound in the sermon. The works that the author cites are understood to be representative of many other worthwhile texts. Plantinga treats the reader to winsome and pithy discussions of, and quotations from, a number of these works, including Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*.

Plantinga seems to aim the book toward preachers of his own Reformed background or other Protestant mainline traditions as he speaks of the perhaps standard 24-minute sermon that exegetes a scriptural text and its themes, without acknowledging other possibilities for the sermon. Evangelical readers may be puzzled, perceiving this type of sermon as almost *passé* because sermons have more variety in evangelical churches: for example, preaching through a whole book of the Bible, or preaching on topics or issues using multiple scriptural texts. Also, the widespread practice of preaching a sermon series rather than separate stand-alone sermons goes unacknowledged.