

“It’s All Grace”  
the best of Eppinga

JACOB D. EPPINGA

“It’s All Grace”  
the best of Eppinga

JACOB D. EPPINGA



Grand Rapids, Michigan

Cover Illustration: iStockphoto

Unless otherwise indicated, the Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, ©1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

*It's All Grace: The Best of Eppinga* ©2008 by Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560. 1-800-333-8300.

All rights reserved. With the exception of brief excerpts for review purposes, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the Publisher.

Printed in the United States of America.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Eppinga, Jacob D.

*It's all grace : the best of Eppinga* / Jacob D. Eppinga.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-59255-466-9 (alk. paper)

1. Meditations. I. Title.

BV4832.3.E67 2008

242--dc22

2008031367

# Contents

Foreword . . . . .	7
1. Always Something . . . . .	9
2. Debut. . . . .	13
3. Blue Marble . . . . .	17
4. Blue Marble II. . . . .	21
5. A Little White Ball . . . . .	25
6. Why Me?. . . . .	27
7. Little Things. . . . .	29
8. The Bishop and the Quaker . . . . .	33
9. The Brothers. . . . .	37
10. Deep Purple . . . . .	41
11. Sequel . . . . .	45
12. Love Is Kind. . . . .	49
13. Of Batteries and Silverware . . . . .	53
14. The Lonely. . . . .	57
15. Canine-ology . . . . .	61
16. Jelly Beans . . . . .	63
17. My First Picture Show . . . . .	67
18. The Burning Bush . . . . .	71
19. It Could Be Worse . . . . .	75
20. The Preacher Factory. . . . .	79
21. Fabrication. . . . .	83
22. All Creatures Great and Small . . . . .	87
23. A Rambling Conversation . . . . .	91

24.	Grump . . . . .	95
25.	Cheap . . . . .	99
26.	Fighting the Devil . . . . .	103
27.	Two Pastoral Calls . . . . .	107
28.	The State of Matrimony . . . . .	111
29.	A Missed Opportunity . . . . .	115
30.	Ever Seeking, Never Finding . . . . .	119
31.	The Milk (Pea Soup) of Human Kindness . . . . .	121
32.	Mezuzah. . . . .	125
33.	Excommunication . . . . .	129
34.	Verne Barry . . . . .	133
35.	The Barrel . . . . .	137
36.	Things . . . . .	141
37.	Rookie . . . . .	145
38.	Sunday School . . . . .	149
39.	Heaven. . . . .	153
40.	Of Death and Grace . . . . .	155

“The time has come,” the Walrus said,  
“To talk of many things:  
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing wax—  
Of cabbages—and kings—  
And why the sea is boiling hot—  
And whether pigs have wings.”

—LEWIS CARROLL.

“THE WALRUS AND THE CARPENTER”

From *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872



# Foreword

**Y**ou might say Rev. Jacob Dirk Eppinga (1917-2008) was pastor to the entire Christian Reformed Church in North America. Although he served LaGrave Avenue CRC, a large congregation in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan, for 33 of his 63 years in ministry, he is best known for his column “Of Cabbages and Kings,” which appeared in the denomination’s magazine, *The Banner*, from the fall of 1968 to the fall of 2008.

It is no small feat to write a column for 40 years, let alone remain a magazine’s most popular author (a fact borne out by every survey conducted by *The Banner* during that time). Well-read, a keen observer of human life, and a gifted storyteller, Rev. Eppinga stayed true to the magazine’s original request to write using “a light pen with a point.”

With wit and wisdom he inspired us through stories about everything from blue marbles to shaggy dogs to dreams of heaven—pointing always to the grace and goodness of God shown to us through Jesus Christ.

He also taught us to laugh at ourselves. In an interview on the 30th anniversary of his column, he mused: “All those nights our consistory spent pondering issues like whether we should serve coffee after church. Was it worth it? We have only one life to live. We shouldn’t take ourselves too seriously. Sometimes we have to laugh at ourselves, to remember that we’re all in this church together.”

In featuring “the best of Eppinga,” this compilation focuses especially on the last decade of his columns. But you’ll also find it somewhat autobiographical. Like any good pastor, Rev. Eppinga could not help but draw stories from his own life—sharing the best

of himself (including his foibles) with the church he loved. We've also included a few family favorites chosen by his children, Dick, Jay, Susan, and Deanna and their families.

In giving thanks for the life and stories of Rev. Eppinga, a word of thanks is also in order to the "inimitable Mrs. Ruth Snoek," as Rev. Eppinga called her, who was his administrative assistant at LaGrave for nearly 30 years. She continued to assist him in retirement, readying the final drafts of his "Cabbages"—which he either hand-wrote or pounded out on his failing 1914 Woodstock typewriter.

From his very first article ("Always Something") to his last ("Of Death and Grace"), Rev. Eppinga remained a faithful, creative pastor who encouraged *Banner* readers. Even during his final hours, he imparted one more gift to his family and to us, one more—albeit brief—story pointing to the reality of the kingdom of heaven:

Asked about the look of wonder on his face as death drew near, Rev. Eppinga replied, "I see angels. . . . Lots of them."

Jena (Rich) Vander Ploeg  
Features Editor  
*The Banner*

# 1 | Always Something

**D**r. Henry Kissinger is a very wise man. He is a political scientist, a member of the faculty at Harvard University. Sometime ago he showed a little of his wisdom.

He addressed himself to the more hopeful of his fellow citizens who hold the cautious belief that the war in Vietnam may soon be over. He tried to temper their optimism with some realism. "It is a mistake," he said, "to think of peace as some final state of nirvana that beckons seductively somewhere around the bend.

"We have to get rid of the idea that there is some terminal date," he added, "after which we live with a consciousness of harmony."

Dr. Kissinger sought hereby to articulate his conviction that after Vietnam there will be some other problem or crisis; that, indeed, as the years and the decades come, there will always be something standing between life as it is and life as we would like it to be.

Always something! I recall sighing these words already at the age of 10 or thereabouts. The elder who came with the minister for family visitation showed that the generation gap existed then already. Patting me on the head, he said to my father, "If life could only be as simple for us as it is for this little lad." I felt resentment at this. Couldn't he understand that I had worries too—as large to me as his to him?

I recall sitting in the fifth grade, for example, dreading the examination in arithmetic coming up the following week. However, once that was over I would have no clouds on my horizon. But after the test was passed, more or less, there was something else to be deeply concerned about, as my mother announced a forthcoming visit to the dentist. "At least," I thought, "when that is over, I'll have

clear sailing. No more concerns." But along about the time of the dental appointment, the lot fell to me, so to speak, to render a piano solo, as the twelfth number on the annual spring program at the church, sponsored by the Men's Society. And so, one cloud merely replaced another. Sometimes there were several. Never were there none. Always something.

I have since discovered that my childhood experience is the history of humanity in microcosm. If only the first world war would end! It did. But it was replaced by the twenties roaring to their Wall Street crash.

Then came the threadbare thirties. Surely the forties would be better. Instead, however, they were worse—what with the second world war and the atom bomb. In the fifties we had Korea and Russia's worrisome saber rattling. In the sixties, presently, we have Vietnam abroad and social upheaval at home. Who will say, then, that the seventies will calm the mortal storms? Says the Bible, "There will be wars and rumors of wars." In others words—always something.

"Always something," however, is a line that can be delivered in at least two ways. It can be spoken with a shrug; with drooping shoulders; with the sigh of a fatalist, world weary, longing for the better existence by and by. Such a posture is often equated with high spirituality. There are even some Scripture passages that are cited in its support. It is doubtful, however, whether such a stance reflects

---

There will  
always be  
something  
standing  
between life  
as it is and  
life as we  
would like it  
to be.

---

all the light of sacred story. The Christian armor, of which the Bible speaks, would hardly be necessary if all we were called to do is decry the times.

“Always something,” then, can be sounded as the Christian’s challenge. Standing in the ferment of the years, we must not only look past the present troubles to the times beyond, but at them too. The church must bring itself to bear on matters that try the world today. And when the seventies come, troubled, as all the previous decades in the history of humanity, Christians must know, as Mordecai said to Esther amid the clouds of a more ancient day, that they have been brought to the kingdom “for such a time as this.”

*(Rev. Eppinga began writing for The Banner in September 1968. This first “Cabbage” was published November 8, 1968, as part of what was initially planned to be a three-month series of articles.)*