The “Sonship” Program For Revival: A Summary And Critique
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The Sonship program originated as a Bible study led by C. John (Jack) Miller for New Life Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown (Pa.) that trained church members in evangelism. The program actually stemmed from Miller’s own efforts while with his family in Spain. Overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, alone with his Bible, Miller studied the promises of Scripture for three and a half months culminating in a mountaintop experience, or its seaside equivalent. He returned to America with two things on his mind, adoption and revival.

First as a pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and later in the Presbyterian Church in America, Dr. Miller was an increasingly enthusiastic evangelist, and in the early 1980s thought he would steer the outreach of his local church into a non-denominational mission organization. He did it, and World Harvest Mission, with Sonship as its main teaching vehicle, has been flourishing ever since. The ever-growing community which Sonship serves is a source of encouragement and support for World Harvest. And if Sonship is not a movement yet, it is designed to be. World Harvest promotional material proudly announces that “Today over one hundred people serve [World Harvest] on four continents.” World Harvest “is a member in good standing of the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies,” of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, and, of course, it has a website.

The teaching of World Harvest through its Sonship course is the focus of this article. What follows is an analysis of Sonship from a Reformed and Presbyterian perspective, first, because it is primarily Presbyterians who are advocating Sonship, or, in the case of certain missions boards, requiring Sonship, and second, because the architect of the program, C. John Miller, was himself a Presbyterian minister. While he could never resist a joke at the expense of Presbyterians, Miller delighted in his church and its doctrinal standards and held firmly to the Scriptures and, secondarily, to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. After a description of Sonship this article raises several questions about the program. Although Sonship has succeeded admirably in emphasizing the sovereignty of God’s grace, it n...