



Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is now law."

Galatians 5:22-23

Any submissions or suggestions for the next edition of this newsletter may be sent to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net



From the Pastor's Desk

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8)

This was the question the new believers asked of Jesus, and Jesus' response to them on the day of his ascension. They had witnessed his crucifixion. They were now standing face to face with the risen Christ. This was not everyday stuff. They had great expectations. Yet it appears their vision still fell short. Jesus' response to them was, "Wrong question". They were thinking, "localized kingdom". Jesus was saying, "GLOBAL KINGDOM." They were thinking, "small". Jesus was saying, "BIG". How often our expectations are defined by our experiences or what we deem to be possible when God has something entirely different in view.

I think most of you would agree that Grace Church is going through a difficult time right now. It is easy to get discouraged and expect the worst. If that is true for you, how much more for me since both my livelihood and my reputation depend on the "success" of Grace Church. Yet the more I pray about it, the more I realize that there is more at stake here. And we are forgetting that God may indeed have much bigger purposes than we do.

Besides that, think of what we do have. In practical terms, we are worshipping in a building that is more than suitable. No leaky roof. No broken windows. A heating system that works most of the time and men who know how to repair it when need be. (Thanks Tom and Toby.) We've got musicians who know how to play (Betty, Tim, Jeffrey). We are sitting on a sizable piece of property and don't have a mortgage to pay. I could go on and on. Sometimes I forget to be thankful. How about you? We also have some very dedicated people, including our Elders who meet with me for hours on end almost every week.

I think one of the big things we are dealing with right now has to do with our expectations. Just like the early disciples who had gathered around Jesus before he departed from them, we are thinking of smaller things and Jesus is thinking of bigger things.

We will be having a meeting after worship on April 17. We will gather together for a meal and fellowship together, and then we will put our heads together to do some visioning about what God is calling us to do as Grace Church. I (actually the Elders and I) have passed out a questionnaire in our bulletin in preparation for this to get us thinking. I am listing them below, and we want you to give some prayerful consideration to these things and come prepared to participate in this discussion:

Why do you go to church?

Why do you want others to go to church?

What do you encounter when you go to church generally? spiritually?

Do you encounter a challenge? Do you encounter encouragement?

Then List two or three things that would help us as a church fulfill our threefold mission of worship, nurture, and witness.

Not only do we have all the blessings listed above, but we have the gospel. What more could we want? Along with that we have the great commission. Isaiah wrote over 700 years before the birth of Christ, *Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. (55:4)*

So what do we expect?

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



Luis and the Lamb: An Operation Christmas Child Impact story

Our shoeboxes have been delivered. This is encouragement to continue to be praying for the children and families who received them.

Luis received a shoebox in Panama at age 6.

The stuffed lamb in my shoebox was the first toy I ever received. I still have it. It was really a treasure. It played a little song and was so beautiful. It was so tender, so soft. The little face of the lamb was something I loved. I used to pretend I was playing with a real lamb. After I finished playing with it, I always put it back inside my plastic shoebox. The lamb made me smile every time I saw it because I would remember the day people gave me the shoebox.

The most valuable items in my shoebox were school supplies: crayons, a pencil sharpener, pens, pencils, and notebooks. In Panama in 1996, if you didn't have supplies, you could not go to school. That year I was able to use the pens, the pencils, the notebooks—everything.

The day before I received my shoebox I was begging my mom to buy supplies so I could go to school. She said, "I can't. I don't have the money but if you want you can pray." We never went to church. We never talked about God, but that day she told me to pray. I asked her to teach me how. She said, "You can talk to God like He's right in front of you, but you have to respect Him because He is the Lord."

So I knelt and I talked to Him like He was in front of me. I asked specifically for school supplies and the next day I was invited to a church for a special event. That's where I got my shoebox. Inside the shoebox was a letter that said, "Jesus loves you and I love you, too." That message broke my heart immediately. All that I needed was to know that I'm loved. So to receive that letter allowed me to see the spiritual message behind the box. We were nonbelievers and the shoebox helped us understand that God answers prayers. My mom said, "Now I know that God is real."

Because someone took a moment to write down "Jesus loves you and I do too," it allowed me to see that even though I didn't have a father and even though I don't have a perfect life, He's there for me. I lived in the ghetto. We didn't have anything. I was hopeless. The shoebox allowed me to understand that God cared for me.

My mother and my little sister became Christians right after I received my shoebox, but I didn't understand that I needed to follow Christ. Still the letter in the shoebox was always telling me, "He loves you. He's there for you. He's waiting for you." There were people telling me all the time that God had a better plan for my life. At 14, I realized that I needed Him and accepted Jesus as my Savior.

The shoebox was the first seed that was planted in my life. Today I don't have the pencils but I have something that is more important because the Bible says, "the word of the Lord remains forever" (1 Peter 1:25, ESV). I just needed to know that He loved me, so the shoebox was a beautiful gift.

My Point of Contact: A Cultural Analysis of Beer Budget Jet Setters

by Ian Bridgman

“So, you want me to tell you your fortune or what?” My new friend was shuffling through her deck of cards on the patio outside our hostel in Lima. I sat down across from her, and asked how the cards worked. She explained how she would put her energy into the cards, and then use that connection to interpret what she saw in whichever card turned up, a sort of write your own story, choose your own ending kind of deal. She looked up and smiled sheepishly as she realized it all probably sounded pretty ridiculous. We never got around to my fortune, and I would have declined if it came to that, but we actually talked quite a lot during the three days that our paths crossed. I learned the story of how her parents had fled their native South American country during the dictatorships and death squads of the 70s to settle on the Canadian Great Plains. She had since traded in big sky country for an end-of-the-road surfing town on the Pacific coast, but now she was back in Latin America, exploring the heritage her parents had been forced to leave behind.

A few months ago, I stumbled across an article online by Michele Phoenix, a former “missionary kid” (MK), who later became a teacher in a boarding school for missionary and expat students in Germany. She now blogs and presents seminars designed to help MKs, or TCKs, relate to their mono-cultural counterparts. To clarify, MKs fall under the umbrella of TCKs, or “third-culture kids”. Examples would be children of diplomats, overseas business workers, or military personnel. These are kids who grow up outside of their home country’s culture and, many times, move around too often to put down permanent roots in any one place. In contrast, a mono-cultural person spends their whole life within one cultural context, if not also entirely in one physical location. The vast majority of a population in any country would be considered mono-cultural.

Phoenix argues that one of the most critical differences between the two groups is in how they form relationships. TCKs can be capable of forming deep, long-lasting relationships very quickly, because they have to. It may be one year in a school, or even one week at a missions conference, before it’s time to move on. Not seeing close friends and family for months or years at a time is normal, so they become wired to either latch onto or discard and dismiss potential relationships in a very compacted amount of time. In mono-cultural settings, time is required to form friendships, and for someone who grows up in one place, attends the same school year after year, and takes a job in the same town, time is not an issue. There is a high value placed on basic pleasantries and small talk, and for a newcomer to progress beyond these, he or she needs to become part of the community, building a lifetime of shared experiences in the process. Time is required and expected.

All right, sociology lesson over. I spent the first half of last year crisscrossing the country in a work truck with a crew from the Midwest. Apart from work trips, they had spent their whole lives in one state. They had been working together for over 2 years, and some of them had known each other since long before that. With brownish blond hair and a diet heavy on steak and potatoes, they were as American as they come. Then one day, I showed up, a mixed-race, internationally traveled New Englander. On top of that, I came from a household that ate more rice than potatoes. Very suspicious. Clearly, I was an outsider. We actually got along very well. I couldn’t have asked for a better team to work with I still count them

among my friends. But in the 4 months we spent together, our discussions almost never went beyond the usual talking points of cars, girls, and whether we could get by one more day without doing laundry. Personal stuff was off limits. Spiritual things? Forget it. For this group, four months was just not enough time to get beyond the basics.

In contrast, there is my fortune telling friend from Canada. There's also the Turkish tango dancer headed for an *Ayahuasca* experience in the jungle. There's the middle aged woman trekking through the Andes, looking in the mountains for a meaning to life that she hadn't found in back in San Francisco. There's the European party bro, hopped up on bargain basement cocaine, looking to cram as many wild nights as possible into the limited time he has here. These are backpackers, a whole assortment of more adventurous than average people, who float around from hostel to hostel, country to country, and form a loose community and culture of their own in the process. They may not be full on third culture kids, but they fall more towards that end of the spectrum than your average person. What I've found is that they are much more willing to share their stories and dive into a thoughtful discussion, spiritual topics included. They haven't all come to Peru just for a good time and amazing photos. They're looking for meaning, fulfillment, for answers—and they're willing to talk about it. Some are, on the surface, antagonistic to the Gospel, but they are open to healthy discussion, and in my short time here, I've had far more opportunities to talk about what I believe and why, than I ever did with my mono-cultural, potato packing road crew.

At Grace Church, we've been talking a lot recently about our "point of contact" with those who do not know Christ. Before, I would have said vaguely that everything was my point of contact, since I find myself almost entirely in non-Christian circles. That was before I learned to think of backpackers as a unique group with their own set of values. In reality, they are their own third culture, bound together not by time and physical location, but by the shared experience of pursuing a jet-set lifestyle on a (very cheap) beer budget. By packing my bags and setting off on my own South American adventure, I have, by default, joined their ranks. Backpackers are my point of contact.

I know that many of you pray for me on a regular basis, and I am thankful for it. It is a great encouragement; feel free to continue! You can pray that I would be wise in the discussions that arise, never ashamed of the Gospel, and "always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks for the hope that we have." (1 Peter 3:15)

Peru has been great, by the way. Friendly people, amazing food, and an accessible network of experienced expats ready to lend helping hands. I've been playing regular, competitive soccer again for the first time in years. I've taken some intense salsa classes and finally learned how to dance it properly. I was even featured in a TV commercial here. Life has been very good, but I've decided that after two months, it's time to push on. I've since said goodbye to Peru and I'm writing these last paragraphs from a hillside overlooking the lights of Rio de Janeiro, a city that has captured my heart more than any other in the world. Living in Brazil will bring a whole new set of challenges, and I'll need prayer for those too. What does it look like for a Christian to pack his bags, get on a plane, and stumble his way through surviving in a faraway country? I'm about to find out, and the community of backpackers around me is about to find out as well. Pray for my talk. Pray for my walk. And may God bless this adventure.

*Ayahuasca – a hallucinogenic drink made from a plant in the Amazon jungle, often administered by a shaman in spiritual ceremonies.

Ordinary People Do the Heavy Lifting

by Ed Welch

In a culture of experts and specialists, it is easy to get the idea that only specially-trained people can do the hard stuff. But that's not how the Church works. We're the body of Christ and there are no unnecessary or unimportant parts. We are all called to bring the love of Christ to bear in one another's lives—pastors, parents, spouses, friends, neighbors, one and all. For some very good reasons, the Lord delights in using the most unlikely members to advance the boundaries of his reign. Throughout the Old Testament, God chooses the runt of the litter to save the world from famine or secure the safety of Israel. His judges can be found hiding rather than rallying men into battle—they were, by no means, born leaders. When we come to the New Testament, we find disciples who were unlikely agents of change, women who were known by their sins, and tax collectors who were seen as corrupt. So if you feel like an unworthy misfit, you are the perfect candidate for God to use.

As one who certainly can feel inadequate, I find this very encouraging. I will be fruitful as I abide in Jesus (John 15:5). Repentance, humility, forgetting about myself, considering the interests of others, praying for others—those are more important than innate gifts.

For all of us, this means that we are *more* motivated to grow in love and ministry skill. Instead of resting in our lack of credentials, we are energized. It is like a great coach saying to a young, unaccomplished athlete, "You have what it takes to win Olympic gold." That youngster will suddenly be the first one at practice, the last to leave and will work harder than anyone. Similarly, when we are told that we will be fruitful because of Christ and not because of ourselves, we become more determined to find wisdom and be skillful in how we help others.

While pastors lead us in these efforts, they aren't called to do it all, or even most of it. Rather they are specially tasked to call the rest of us to important action: training and doing some heavy lifting (Eph. 4:11-12).

From the blog at ccef.org/resources (Christian Counseling and Education Foundation)

GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men of the church are invited to join together for a time of devotional study using Joel Beeke's book *Walking As He Walked*, discussion, prayer, and fellowship. The men will meet on **Saturday morning, April 16th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m., at the home of Doug Rose** in Stockbridge. Breakfast will be served.



Congregational Visioning Forum

Please make plans to take part in the congregational visioning forum on **Sunday, April 17th**, following worship. We will be sharing our thoughts on a number of questions provided in advance for our prayerful consideration. A light lunch will be served. Please contact Charleen about what you would like to contribute to the lunch.



Helping Hands



Are you looking for a possible place of service in the church? Elder Tom Ross would love to talk with you about some opportunities. Possibilities include helping to tend the flower beds, helping with the church cleaning, serving on the hospitality committee, joining the coffee rotation, and taking a turn in the nursery. Perhaps you have some other ideas. Please pray about how you can be of service in this local body of Christ.

Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to join together for a special time of corporate prayer **Sunday, April 24th from 5:00-6:00 p.m.**, as we acknowledge our dependence on God, seek His direction for our church and our ministry in the community, and pray for His glory to be made known.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." Psalm 127:1



Women's Fellowship

The May meeting of the Women's Fellowship will be on **Saturday, May 7, from 9:30-11:00 a.m.** Women of all ages are welcome to join us as we look at the power of words, pray, and enjoy warm fellowship and breakfast goodies.





April 2016



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3 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	4 7:00 p.m. Addictions Victorious	5 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	6	7	8	9
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