

# Grace Notes



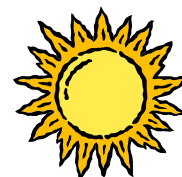
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Welcome to the August edition of the Grace Church newsletter. If you have any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter, please send them to [secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net](mailto:secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net)





## From the Pastor's Desk

*Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil that I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:11)*

Like many of you, I was quite taken aback by the news this past week that the actor and comedian, Robin Williams, had taken his own life. I always found him to be a gifted actor- I had seen *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Dead Poets Society*, and several other of his films. I always thought he was one of the most natural and witty comedians of our generation. Thus his death came as quite a shock to many of us.

There are reports that he had previously battled alcoholism and other substance abuse, but apparently he was clean and sober when he died. Other reports indicate that he suffered from bipolar disorder. Looking back now, the manic side of him showed up when he was a guest on the Charlie Rose or Jay Leno Show. His wit raced faster than our ears or brains could follow, at least mine anyway. These episodes perhaps contributed to his comedic genius. But none but his family and closest friends ever witnessed his depression side. Apparently, according to some reports, he was also in the early stages of Parkinson's disease, which I understand can precipitate depression too.

I'm no expert in psychology, but my understanding is that Bipolar Disorder is a bit of a catch-all diagnosis; symptoms can extend from moderate mood swings all the way to borderline psychosis. All of us have mood swings from time to time. After an extra cup of Starbucks I'm ready to run a half-marathon. Five hours later I'm asleep in my chair. Many of us have also experienced more substantial blues, myself included; I also know that more serious depression runs in one side of my family—my dad, my grandfather and great-grandfather. Numerous noteworthy Christians are included in the ranks as well—Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, the hymn writer William Cowper, and C.S. Lewis. So for those who have experienced one degree or another of the down times, we are in good company. Yet, suicide is such a radical and final step.

We need to remember that Scripture speaks to every aspect of life, even to depression. The book of Ecclesiastes, I believe, is a case in point. Life is not just about personal experiences and emotions, existential philosophy notwithstanding. There is more to it than that, such as the impact that our lives have on others. No man is an island, as we are reminded by the Jimmy Stewart film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. Our lives touch everyone else around us, and those closest to us are impacted the most. Yet even as significant as this is, it is still only part of the picture.

Much of modern secular psychology, I am convinced, missed a whole dimension to the human make-up—the spiritual dimension. Not the “spiritual” that has to do strictly with our own emotions and experiences, but the “spiritual” that has to do with the personal and Sovereign God who made us. If God made us, then that means we do not belong to ourselves but to the one who made us for his purpose. That means our individual lives each have a value and purpose that extends beyond our own emotions and experiences, while at the same time encompassing those very emotions and experiences, both good and bad. While we may not understand what purpose there is in our circumstances, we, by faith, learn to trust that God does understand and even more importantly controls them. This, I believe is the underlying message conveyed to us by the author of Ecclesiastes, and it can make all the difference in the world in what we do with the emotional outflow of our circumstances.

I found myself wishing that I had known Robin Williams personally well enough that I could have changed his mind on his decision to end his life. But, of course, such is not the case. Many of us perhaps have known others who have chosen to make the same decision. And yes, we may even know of Christians who have also reached such a state of desperation that they have chosen to take matters into their own hands and end their pain through suicide. Nowhere is Scripture does it say that this is the unforgivable sin. Yet, we need to remember that our lives are not our own because God is God. He has a purpose for us, and in that purpose there is real hope.

Pastor Tom Bridgman



## Snakes in the Garden

by Ian Bridgman

The usually busy and noisy street is silent; the streetlights cast their glow on empty sidewalks. The TV is on, and a young man dashes into the room and seats himself on a stool directly in front. His eyes are fixed intently on the screen as he quietly sings his national anthem to himself, following the example of a stadium full of fans dressed in yellow and green, belting out the same words at the top of their lungs. The music on the screen ends and the crowd crescendos into a massive roar. Suddenly, the silence outside is shattered by a series of loud pops, followed by a wall-shaking kaboom of a firework bomb. It's game time. In Brazil. And this is the World Cup.

Passion for *futebol* runs deep here. While Red Sox Nation quickly fades outside of eastern New England, the Brazilian national team, *a seleção*, has an entire country of 200 million behind it. Victory is a source of national pride, and losing is a shameful disgrace. That passion is why I had to be here for this World Cup. The world's greatest tournament being hosted by the greatest and most successful soccer playing country on earth. This is the World Cup of a lifetime.

I was afraid of maybe being too excited to come here; of having expectations so outrageously high that they could not possibly be met. In reality, though, this time in Brazil has been above and beyond even what I dared to hope for. In Rio, the people have been welcoming and friendly, the infrastructure and transportation excellent, the beaches gleaming and glamorous, and to top it off, the soccer this time has been thrilling, with plenty of goals and exciting upsets. We already know the Promised Land is in and around Israel, but I think I just found my garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden. The real one. They had everything they needed and everything they wanted. Then a snake came along and convinced them that they wanted more. They could have it too, it told them, if only they would disobey God. Adam and Eve did, of course, take the bait, and humanity has been paying the price ever since. I, too, seem to have everything I hoped for here in Brazil, at least during the World Cup. I can play beach soccer all night under the lights on the most famous beach in the world, stuff my face with steak and sausage and tropical fruit, and practice my Portuguese with beautiful girls who are more than happy to help. I know, though, that sooner or later, the snakes will come to my garden. They will tell me that I want more. The 'everything is awesome' tourist phase will fade eventually, and the money I've saved up won't last forever. I don't know what these snakes will look like, or in what form they will come. All I know is that they will come, sowing discontentment, temptation, and false promises.

So truthfully, I am a bit guarded about it all, concerned that I might take the same fruit as my ancestors, and get thrown out of the garden. One false move, and this dream come true gets stripped away, leaving behind only serious consequences. Actually, other kinds of snakes are already in this garden. The neighbourhood we stay in is crawling with transvestite prostitutes; I can see them blowing lines of cocaine in the street right outside our door. Public service billboards in English along the highways give dire warnings for potential sex tourists. A couple of nights, my sleep has been interrupted by very intense dreams. Thankfully, cross-dressing sex workers and cocaine are not a stumbling block for me personally, but they are certainly symbolic of the evil at work here in 'the Marvellous City'.

The World Cup is awesome, and I have no doubt that this is my place for this time. God has provided the

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***“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Psalm 122***

*The following blog entry is from a dear friend of Sorina Higgins, Teresa, who now lives in Israel with her husband and toddler. May we be found faithful in praying for peace in this war torn land and for this dear family.  
submitted by JoAnn Kulberg*

*July 16, 29014* The sirens began ringing at 9:20 a.m. this morning.

Usually, they sound a little distant, as though what I'm hearing is from the next town over. We live in [Herzliya](#), a town to the north of Tel Aviv, on the outskirts of where Hamas is supposed to be able to hit with its missiles. We don't hear as many sirens as people who live in Tel Aviv, and much, much fewer than those who live in the south of Israel, closer to the Gazan border. But this time, the sirens were loud.

I hesitated. My son, who had a high fever, had just fallen asleep in his room. Should I wake him? Is there really a chance of being hit? We live on the top floor of our building, true, but ...

Then I heard the first BOOM. It's the sound, usually, of the [Iron Dome](#) defense system intercepting the missiles on their course and detonating them in the air. It is an enormous relief to have it deployed here, but shrapnel does rain down from these interceptions as well.

The boom shook the building. The sirens kept ringing; this means another missile. There's rarely just one. I lifted up my son, who woke crying, and then, in bare feet, opened the door and began to run down the stairs to the building's bomb shelter in the basement. I passed neighbors outside their doors on the way. In the shelter stood several families, including one with three children wearing towels from the shower. One of the children was crying.

When the sirens stopped, we waited a moment, then began the climb back upstairs. I thought that was it. You pull yourself together, reassure the children. Life goes on; people go to work, meet up with friends for lunch, take the kids to daycare or camp. Unless, of course, you are one of the soldiers being called up for reserve duty, or family members anxiously waiting for their return.

My family and I are lucky: my husband has not been called up for reserve duty; we are far from the main conflict; we have defense systems and a bomb shelter in our building.

Then I heard a knock on the door. It was my next-door neighbor. She had come to see if I was handling the situation all right, as a relative "newcomer" to the experience of missile attacks and as a mother alone with a baby. She told me that if I needed help, I should let them know. I replied that I was quite fine, but tears welled up. I began to cry. I hadn't realized how upset I was.

Many things went through my head as I ran down the stairs. The sirens in and of themselves are scary, but along with them comes the knowledge that there is no ceasefire, or it has been broken; that there will be retaliations for this act, retaliations which might hurt people as innocent of the conflict as my son is; that for the one or two sirens I experience each day, people in Gaza and in the south of Israel have to live with many more, and with the fact that there is not always enough warning to get to shelter.

I can only detail what I know of what is going on here in central Israel. There is fear. One of my friends keeps her windows shuttered and rarely leaves the apartment; she has a three month old daughter and fears being caught outside during a missile attack. Another, seven months pregnant, was caught on the freeway during an attack and had to make a split decision: try to stop on the edge of the freeway and get out, dangerous in itself, or keep going? The recommendation is to stop and get out of the car, so she did, heart pounding. (NB: I don't know why that's safer. Perhaps to stop one from driving into an explosion?)

There is also anger and deep sadness, gratefulness for the Iron Dome, and a strong resolution to try to keep life as normal as possible. Friends with children ages 2-4 try to make the sirens into a game: "That's when we all go out to chat with the neighbors!"

My neighbor told me to come over to her place for coffee. She took my son into the playroom she keeps for her seven grandchildren, pulled out toys and coaxed a smile from my shy boy. She chatted with me, mentioning that things had been worse in 1992 when they feared chemical weapons from Saddam's Iraq and put gas masks on whenever there was a siren. This is a typical Israeli coping method: "Remember when it was worse, and thank god it's not." When handing me my coffee, she told me the phrase that Israelis repeat in times like these: "Ha-kohl ovehr." Everything passes. This, too, shall pass.

## LEARNING & ARRIVING: LEARNING TO FISH

*by Doug Rose*

*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.*

*Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*

Chinese Proverb (sometimes attributed to Lao Tzu).

*And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."* Mark 1:17

As Summer wanes, our attention draws to the adult Sunday school curriculum for the Autumn session. With God's grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, at the Elders' request your correspondent will endeavor to lead and moderate a thirteen-week study and discussion of *Biblical hermeneutics* – the science of interpretation of Scripture. Our textbook for the class is *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edit.) (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), co-authored by Dr. Gordon D. Fee, a professor of New Testament studies at Regent College in British Columbia, and Dr. Douglas Stuart, a professor of Old Testament studies at Massachusetts' own Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Our goal in this course of study will be to learn how to learn from Scripture, so we will be undertaking a prolonged discussion about a book written about how to read another book – the holy Bible. We will explore the concepts of *exegesis*, the systematic study of the meaning of the Scriptural texts, as well as *narratology*, the study of the structure of the Biblical narrative, in order to attempt in our hermeneutical task to uncover what the Bible actually means to us as twenty-first century Reformed evangelical Christians.

The program will track the thirteen chapters in the textbook, and we will be utilizing some of the discussion guide from another book, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2009), by Eugene Peterson (also from Regent College), to motivate our conversations about Biblical hermeneutics. The Fee / Stuart textbook is *not* required reading, but I believe that it will provide each and all with a firm footing to ground the discussions. There will be a sign-up form to order the text, which costs \$11.00, and runs approximately 300 pages. Each class will cover about 25 pages, or so. I intend to continue to build a covenant believing community from the Sunday School class – a group of disciples of Christ committed to learning the wisdom, beauty, and meaning of Scripture – so, as has been our practices in classes past, we will commence *promptly* (that means at 9:30 a.m.), adjourn *timely*, attend *regularly*, prepare *thoroughly*, participate *vigorously*, interact *courteously*, and learn *prayerfully*.



# GRACE CHURCH NEWS



## Fun and Fellowship



All are encouraged to join in on some fun and fellowship, **Sunday, August 17th**. We will start **between 12 and 12:30** with a cookout at the home of Dave and Ruth, followed by a round of miniature golf at Baker's Golf in Lanesboro for those who are so inclined, then back to Dave and Ruth's for dessert, conversation and lawn games. Dave and Ruth will supply hot dogs and hamburgers. Please bring a side dish, salad, drinks, or dessert to share.



## Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men of the church are invited to be a part of the Men's Prayer fellowship on **Saturday morning, August 16th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** Join us as we look at the Psalms and pray for one another. Light refreshments will be served.

## Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to come together in prayer before the Lord as we seek His guidance for our church and our ministry in the community. Join us in the sanctuary from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** on **Sunday, August 24th** for a special time of corporate prayer.



## LOOKING AHEAD TO FALL



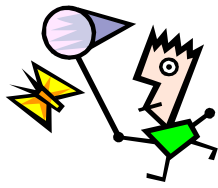
## New School Year Begins

Remember to pray for the school staff and students in our church as they return to work and study the last week in August. Pray for wisdom and witness as they interact with other staff and students, and that their work and study would be blessed.



## Fall Schedule to Resume

Beginning on **Sunday, September 7th**, our fall schedule of **Sunday School** for all ages will resume at **9:30 a.m.** Sunday School will be followed by **worship at 10:45.**



# AUGUST 2014



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3 10:00 Worship	4	5	6	7 7:00 Addictions Victorious	8	9
10 10:00 Worship	11	12	13	14 7:00 Addictions Victorious	15	16 <b>Men's Prayer Fellowship 7:00-8:30 a.m.</b>
17 10:00 Worship <b>Fun and Fellowship</b>	18	19	20	21 7:00 Addictions Victorious	22	23
24 10:00 Worship <b>5:00 Prayer Vigil</b>	25	26	27	28 7:00 Addictions Victorious	29	30
31 10:00 Worship						