

# Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational  
1055 Williams Street  
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*Volume IV, Issue 7*      *September 2015*



Welcome to the September 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

*For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing....  
Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:19, 24)*

I have known Christians who are convinced that they have moved beyond the influence of temptation and able to live the “victorious Christian life” without sin. There are also certain denominations that include that possibility in their doctrinal beliefs. They believe that it is possible either by exercising certain spiritual disciplines or by having a certain spiritual experience.

Oh that that were possible! I have to confess I have yet to have attained such a spiritual level personally and that my experience is more akin to the Apostle Paul’s testimony in Romans 7. Now I’m not by any means advocating that we throw up our hands and give up on the pursuit of holiness. But if we are honest, the problem is that the gold ring seems just beyond our reach.

Charleen and I have been reading together the book, *Extravagant Grace*, by Barbara Duguid. (She is the wife of the well-known Scottish preacher and Old Testament Professor, Iain Duguid) In this book she makes herself quite vulnerable by being open about her own struggle with ongoing sin in her life. (She herself was an MK, having been born and brought up in Nigeria). Now I’m not talking about real soap opera stuff, although that could certainly be included, but rather the underlying heart issues that all of us struggle with which are equally offensive to God--things like selfishness, anger, bitterness, etc. She has found great encouragement in the writings of the famous hymn-writer, John Newton.

Newton compares the journey of the Christian life with the Israelites’ wandering in the wilderness. What a powerful sense of God’s presence they experienced at their deliverance from Egypt, seeing the glory cloud and the parted water! Yet it was no time at all before they began to complain about all they had left behind--water, food, idols, etc. So for forty years they wandered through a no-man’s land. Was it just to test them to see how they would respond, or did God have something else in mind?

As new believers, we too are often overwhelmed by the reality and power of God’s grace, and then eventually reality sets in – the reality of the continuing presence of our sinful natures still lurking inside. Where is our deliverance? Where is God? Are we even regenerate? Longing for the assurance of salvation is really not uncommon among believers from time to time in their Christian walk. We may find ourselves surprised by our sinful propensities, but God is never taken by surprise.

Why doesn’t God just eradicate sin in its entirety instantaneously in our hearts the moment we believe? Is there is a sense in which even our wilderness falls within the scope of his providence? When God walks us like the Israelites into the wilderness of temptation, what is he doing? Is this not a mechanism by which he shows us what we are really like, what is really at the heart of our sin, and how great is his grace in response?

As our author reminds us, “Sin blinds us to ourselves, causing us to believe we are much better than we really are and much better than others are too. But God lovingly opens our eyes so that we can repent and can marvel that Christ willingly left the glories of heaven to suffer and die for profound sinners like us. The more deeply we see our sin, the more grateful we become for the perfect obedience of our Savior credited to us.”

Newton doesn’t point us to our own performance for comfort and assurance, but rather to Jesus. “The richest fruit of God’s work in our hearts would be evidenced by increasing humility and dependence on Christ for everything, rather than in a ‘victorious Christian life’”.

Perhaps this is the victorious Christian Life.

Pastor Tom Bridgman



## Praying for Your Pastor from Head to Toe

**Head:** “Father, continually renew my pastor’s mind, resulting in a transformed life. Help him bring every thought into captivity to Christ. Give him a greater understanding of Your Word. Help him to think on things that are pure and right and praiseworthy.” (Ps. 119:15, Ro. 12:2, 2 Cor. 10:5)

**Eyes:** “Lord, keep opening my pastor’s eyes to deep spiritual truths. Help him to see things as You see them. Guard him against looking at worthless things.” (Ps. 119: 18, Ps. 119:37)

**Ears:** “Father, let my pastor hear Your voice clearly. Help him to recognize your voice with certainty. Protect him from listening to anyone who is out of step with You. Help him not to be affected negatively by what others say.” (Is. 30:21)

**Nose:** “Lord, help my pastor discern between good and evil. Give him the ability to determine what is of You and what is not.” (I Kings 3:9, I Jn. 4:1)

**Mouth:** “Enable my pastor to speak the truth in love. Help him to be swift to hear and slow to speak. Give him the ability to confront when necessary. Let the words he speaks be Yours, not his own. Help him speak with words that bring grace to the hearers. I also pray that you will help him to grow in his speaking and preaching ability.” (Ps. 19:14; Ps. 119:13, Ps. 141:3, Eph. 4:15, Eph. 4:29, James 1:19)

**Heart:** “Give my pastor a heart that seeks hungrily after You. Teach him to guard his heart with all diligence. Help him deal with anything in his heart that is not pleasing to You. Create within him a pure heart. Enable him to lead Your people with integrity.” (Ps. 78:72, Ps. 119:10-11, Prov. 4:23, I Thess. 3:13)

**Hands:** “Lord, I pray that everything my pastor does would be done with his whole heart, serving You rather than man. Help him not to ‘dirty his hands’ by doing things that are not pleasing to You. I pray that You will also help him to increase his skills and his abilities. Bless everything he puts his hand to.” (Ps. 24:3-4, Col. 3:23)

**Feet:** “Help my pastor walk in a way that is pleasing to You. Help him walk with the wise. Cause him to go where You want him to go. Give him wisdom when he inadvertently walks into bad situations.” (Ps. 25:12, Ps. 27:11, Prov. 13:20)

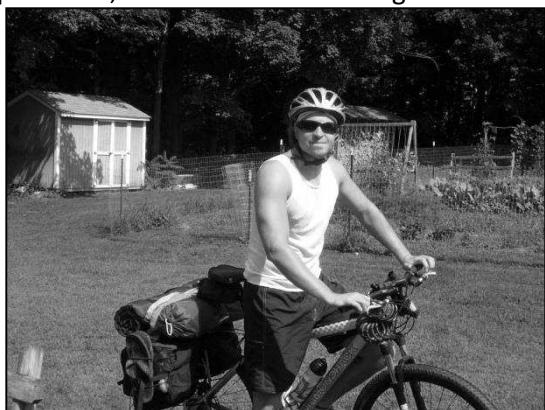
*submitted by JoAnn Kulberg*

*Editor’s note: suitable for praying for one another and for ourselves!*

## Massachusetts to Montreal, On a Bike

*By Ian Bridgman*

A couple weeks ago, I loaded up my bicycle with saddle bags and camping gear, and set off on a 5-day ride from Pittsfield up to Montreal, Quebec. It was my first bicycle tour in 5 years as well as my first solo ride. I know many of you were praying for my safety and for a pleasant ride, and those prayers were certainly appreciated, so the least I can do is give a little summary of the tour.



Day 1: The first day was a pleasant, fast ride up Route 7 to Bennington, VT and then on some unpaved back roads into Arlington, where I made camp at a nice spot along the Battenkill River at the base of the mountains. Thankfully, what seemed to be the only open restaurant in the whole town was within walking distance of the campground, so after a nice dinner, I crawled into my sleeping bag happy and well stuffed.

Day 2: The rain started just before daybreak. I stayed curled up in my sleeping bag, hoping for it to stop, but the rain kept coming. I finally emerged from the tent to find standing water in my bags and was good and wet myself by the time I had loaded up my bicycle again and started riding. While it was my shortest distance day, it was also the most rugged terrain I would cover on the trip; just over 40 miles of steep mountain passes and remote, unpaved back roads, and most of it in steady rain. Even with the difficult terrain and wet conditions, Day 2 brought some of the most spectacular scenery, as challenging climbs opened up into incredible views of distant farms tucked into valleys surrounded by mist shrouded mountains. I was especially thankful for being able to spend the night indoors with family friends in Middletown Springs, where I could relax, refuel, and most importantly, dry out.

Day 3: With the steepest mountains behind me, I now had to cover my longest day, at 70 miles. Dry clothes and sunshine were a welcome change from the previous day, and while much of my route was still on little-traveled and unpaved back roads, I was now rolling through populated farms instead of empty mountain woods. I couldn't ride through Vermont without stopping in the town where I was born, so I made a detour into Orwell. It was really nice to see the village again, but the detour also added 10 miles to an already long day. The hills gradually became shorter and the flat stretches longer, as I worked my way further up the Champlain Valley, but I was unable to outrun the rain clouds moving in from the lake. By the time I arrived in Middlebury, I was soaked for the second time in 2 days. I was also getting tired, and still had a good chunk of distance to go. Thankfully, the sun returned and helped dry everything out again as I headed for my campsite at Mount Philo State park. Although flat terrain was becoming more the rule by this point, Mount Philo proved to be a serious exception. I was met at the entrance by a friendly park ranger along with a seriously steep road that wound its way up to the campsites at the top. The final mile of the longest day would be a grueling slog that required every bit of remaining strength. The view from the top was amazing, and the stars later that night even more so, and I was finished. I went to bed exhausted but happily satisfied.

Day 4: The heavy mileage from the previous day made for a slow and sore start to the next leg of the journey, which would take me into Burlington, over Lake Champlain and up through Grand Isle towards the Canadian border. Burlington is a great place for bicycling. Its popular bike trail runs along through residential

*continued on next page*

neighborhoods, along the lake, and then out onto a causeway, and all the way to Grand Isle. The lone gap in the causeway is covered by the “bike ferry”, designed specifically to carry bicyclists and runners across 200 feet of water to where the trail resumes again. The trail made for a very unique and enjoyable ride, but my late start was catching up to me. The afternoon was fading and what my sore legs really wanted was to ditch the bike and just go jump in the lake, whose cool blue waters had been taunting me all day. On top of that, I still wasn’t sure where I would be spending the night. My goal was to be as close to the border as possible, but it was looking like I would either have to cut the mileage short that day, or choose between a terribly overpriced motel across the state line in New York and an RV campground known for its rude staff and obnoxious and racist guests. I wasn’t thrilled about any of those choices, and no one I asked along the way seemed to know of any others. It was time to make the call to “mission control”, aka, Mom and Dad. Their research turned up yet another site, even closer to the border, and right on the lake. I straggled in as the shadows were growing long, hoping it would be the answer to many prayers throughout the afternoon. The office was already closed but I found the owner nearby, and when he saw that I was on a bicycle, he dropped the price for the night. The campsite turned out to be the most pleasant of the whole trip, sunset swim in Lake Champlain included. It was, most definitely, a very gracious answer to many prayers.



Day 5: I was thrilled to cross into Canada, fueled by the anticipation of completing my journey. The quiet road leading to the border suddenly split at an official building that looked incredibly out of place among the woods, houses and farms all around it. Crossing took all of about 2 minutes, and the rolling farms and woods of Vermont soon gave way to the wide open, pancake flat farmland of southern Quebec. Pedaling was a breeze all the way to St. Jean-Sur-Richelieu, a small city about 25 miles outside of Montreal. I knew that beyond this point, I would soon start to hit city traffic, and that many of the roads leading into the city would not be bicycle friendly, if not closed

to cyclists entirely. I needed a safe route in, and the maps in my collection were no help. I was losing time and growing frustrated when I pulled into a local bike shop, hoping for some better information. The shop owner was very helpful, and steered me onto the *Routes Vertes* (Green Routes), Quebec’s extensive, well-marked bike trail system, generally regarded as one of the best in the world. It was my golden ticket into the city. I zipped over the path as it ran along the Richelieu River, past kayaks and boats cruising the Chambly canal, then cut across the back streets of picturesque bedroom communities, through the busy suburbs, and finally up over the towering Jacques-Cartier Bridge and into downtown Montreal. I had made it, and successfully completed my first solo tour.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to do this trip and for the prayers that followed me along the way. There were no flat tires or breakdowns of bicycle or body, and many opportunities to enjoy the stunning beauty of creation in this part of the world. I learned to appreciate the peace and quiet of the campsites as great places to do some Bible reading and memorization. I am also thankful for a great “Couchsurfing” host who provided a free place to stay and showed me a great weekend in Montreal. It was also special spending time in the city together with my parents, who took their own mini-getaway, and made it possible to come home the easy way, in the car. Massachusetts to Montreal was a great ride, and I’m hoping to take a longer, more adventurous ride in the future, although some of the ideas I have up my sleeve make my Mom cringe (as any good mom would do, I guess). Maybe she’ll mind less if I have company. Any takers?

## LEARNING & ARRIVING: FISHING FOR LEVIATHAN

*by Doug Rose*

*Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?*

*Or press down his tongue with a cord?*

*Can you put a rope in his nose*

*Or pierce his jaw with a hook?*

*Job 42:1-2*

Having spent the first semester of last year's Sunday school engaged in a discussion of *Biblical hermeneutics* – the science of interpretation of Scripture – this coming semester we will endeavor to apply that somewhat abstract concept to a concrete Bible study. 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 *Job* – the eighteenth book of the *Old Testament*. Our textbook for the class is simply the Holy Bible. I am recommending, however (as we learned from our textbook last year), that we each obtain a good, functional biblical translation, preferably a reference or a study Bible. Additionally, each student is encouraged to find a decent commentary to advise our classroom discussion. I am using Tremper Longman III's *Job: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Ada, Mich.: Baker Academic; 2012) (ISBN-10: 0801031079) and Francis I. Anderson's *Job: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic; 2009) (ISBN-10: 0830842144). Commentaries are available in hard-copy, in software versions, and even on-line. Now that we have approached a methodology concerning how to learn from Scripture (I styled last year's class "Learning to Fish"), so this year we will be undertaking a prolonged discussion about what does this monumental book of the Bible actually mean to us as twenty-first century Reformed evangelical Christians (hence the title "Fishing for Leviathan").

I have prepared a syllabus dividing the book up into twelve segments, along the generally recognized lines of commentary, with the first week focused on an introductory discussion of the hermeneutical issues we identified last year. I intend to continue to build with you 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., not 9:34 or 9:41 a.m.), adjourn *timely* (that means at 10:30 a.m.), attend *regularly*, prepare *thoroughly*, participate *vigorously*, interact *courteously*, and learn *prayerfully*.



# GRACE CHURCH NEWS



## Fall Schedule to Resume

Beginning on **Sunday, September 13th**, 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.** The adult Sunday School class will be looking into the Book of Job.

## Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men of the church are invited to be a part of the Men's Prayer fellowship on **Saturday morning, September 19th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Join us as we look into Andrew Murray's *Humility*, and pray for one another, and enjoy fellowship and refreshments.



## Guest Preacher and Presentation

Mark your calendars for **Sunday, September 20th.** We will be welcoming Bob and Jeannie Hall. Bob is a fellow 4C's pastor of the Bronx Household of Faith, and will bring the message. Worship will be followed by a luncheon and a presentation by Naomi Woodmansee of the newly established Hope Academy, a ministry of the Bronx Household of Faith. Come and enjoy the fellowship and be encouraged by this story of God's faithfulness and provision.

## Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to come together in prayer before the Lord as we seek His face and His direction for our part in His kingdom work. Join us in the sanctuary from **5:00-6:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 27th** for a special time of corporate prayer. *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."* Luke 11:9



## New Direction Open House

New Direction is a Christian Pregnancy Resource Center located at 98 Church Street in North Adams. They are having an Open House on **Friday, September 11th from 4-7 p.m. and on Saturday, September 12th from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.** This is an opportunity to meet staff and volunteers, tour the facilities, and let them know how they can better serve the Berkshires. Refreshments will be served. Please RSVP by September 4th to 413-346-4291.

## Thank you

Thank you to the members of the Ladies' Bible Class who provided mulch for the flower beds at the church. Thank you also to Linda and Millie for their faithful upkeep of the flower beds. Their green thumbs and hard work are much appreciated!





# September 2015



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		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6</b> 10:00 Worship	<b>7</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>13</b> 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	<b>14</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>  <b>Men's Prayer Fellowship 7:00-8:30 a.m.</b>
<b>20</b> 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship  <b>Fellowship Meal and Presentation</b>	<b>21</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>27</b> 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship  <b>5:00 Prayer Gathering</b>	<b>28</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>  