

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
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Happy Spring!



Any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter may be sent to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net, or put in the tray on the secretary's desk.



From the Pastor's Desk

Lord, teach us to pray.... (Luke 11:1)

One of Jesus' disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray; he apparently felt that he didn't know how. We don't know which disciple this was, nor do we know exactly what he had in mind. Apparently he had observed John the Baptist teaching his disciples to pray, so maybe he was thinking of what words to use or what structure prayer should take.

I, on the other hand, have always felt I know how to pray. After all, I was brought up in the church, and I have heard people pray either formally or informally all my life. Yet as I get older I find myself questioning if I have ever really known how to pray. That may sound pretty shocking, coming as it does from someone who has served in pastoral ministry for over thirty years; but I think we could all say that to one degree or another, especially if we equate prayer with the mere words and mechanics and fail to appreciate what really is at the heart of prayer.

There are many things that we do routinely; I mean we say grace before a meal, or pray when asked before or at the close of Sunday school, and hopefully each morning for our personal devotions. Or perhaps we participate in praying for success for a certain event for the church or other ministry related event, or perhaps for God's healing for someone with a serious health issue. You know the routine; "Lord, just bring a lot of people to our program." Or "Lord, just heal Aunt Sally and help her get better." Of course, we conclude all our prayers with the words, "In Jesus' Name. Amen." I'm not saying such endeavors at prayer are a waste of time, but I wonder if we aren't missing something important.

Bryan Chapell, in his book, *Praying Backwards*, challenges us to begin by praying Jesus' priorities first. If we do, our prayers will change. They will become less self-oriented, and more Christ directed, and ultimately more satisfying to our own hearts. When we treat prayer like a "surefire wishing star", as Chapell puts it, we limit God by the wisdom of **our** wishes and tether him to the leash of **our** understanding. And if perchance God doesn't answer our prayer as we might desire, it forces us to the conclusion that "prayers, like wishing wells, are fantasies." How sad if that's the conclusion we reach.

I am by no means saying that we should not bring our personal requests no matter how big or how small to the Lord, but it is important that we begin with the conviction that God already knows us. He knows our present needs and longings, but he also knows our future and what he hopes to accomplish in us; and when we pray we are asking him (not that he needs our permission) to exercise his wisdom and grace in us, both for our good and for the sake of his Kingdom.

I have to say I'm encouraged as I find myself being moved in the direction of a deeper prayer life, and as I also see many of you simultaneously moving in the same direction. Charleen and I have begun using Chapell's book for our daily prayer time. At least one of you has spoken to me of using Tim Keller's book, simply titled, *Prayer*. Others have used Paul Miller's, *A Praying Life*. We will even be starting a new adult Sunday school class on prayer next Sunday, using Eugene Peterson's study guide, *Psalms: Prayers of the Heart*. All of these books are good and I heartily endorse all of them. But the most important thing is prayer itself.

"Lord, teach us to pray." And may we really become a praying church.

Pastor Tom Bridgman





Missions Corner

Giving God the Glory for OCC Miracles

from a blog by Kim Rowland, Community Relations Coordinator for Operation Christmas Child

About 80 volunteers from more than 20 countries in the Americas and Caribbean gathered in Panama for training, fellowship, and spiritual renewal. I attended the conference to gather stories about children who receive shoe box gifts and participate in The Greatest Journey discipleship program. I left with just a fraction of the millions of stories that could be told. But more importantly, I left with a renewed sense of wonder and reinforced belief that this project belongs entirely to God.

In Honduras, a remote community that received shoe box gifts gave a parcel of land to the church that distributed the gifts, asking them to build a church there.

In the Bahamas, a boy prayed for a black shirt and black hat for Christmas. His mother could not afford the gifts, but two months later he received those exact items in a shoe box.

In Costa Rica, five children who lived and worked in a landfill have been sponsored and are now able to go school—all through a shoe box gift and Biblical discipleship lessons.

In Uruguay, four children arrived at a shoe box distribution without any shoes, and each of the gifts they received contained a pair of shoes. The father and many people in the neighborhood accepted Christ when they saw the power of these simple gifts.

In Argentina, churches that never before worked together are now united in partnership because of the gifts.

In the Dominican Republic, 7-12 churches are planted each year after shoe box gift distributions are held in different communities.

In Venezuela, a girl who received a winter hat, gloves and a scarf in her box exclaimed, “How did God know I would need these? I am moving to the mountains where it snows!”

There are countless more stories, but just one is enough to reassure me that this is God’s project. Each of the volunteer leaders was quick to emphasize that it was God, not them, who was responsible for the incredible transformations they are seeing in their countries.

Editor’s note: Pray for the continuing impact of the shoebox distribution

A Traveler's Tale

I'm thankful we have electricity to light our world during long New England winters, but there is no substitute for the amazing energy of pure sunshine. This cold cloudy winter has given me a new appreciation for a sunny day. It has reminded me of Aesop's fable, the North Wind and the Sun.

These personified forces argue over who is the strongest. Seeing a man walking along the road they agree the debate will be decided by who can successfully rid him of his coat. The wind sends it strongest blasts and only manages to get the man to wrap his garment tighter. The sun, without fanfare, warms the traveler and, lo and behold, the man tosses his coat over his shoulder and

continues on his way.

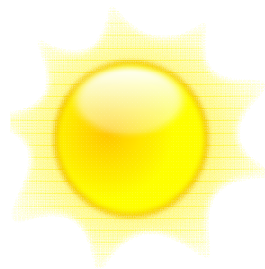
I'm intrigued by the man's responses and the power that ultimately moved him. There must be a lesson

here. The wind grasped and the man held on. The sun gave and he let go. When adverse winds blow

our way, we instinctively hold on with all our might, even as Christians. Trials, small and large, bring us

face to face with loss. It could be loss of financial security, a relationship breaking, illness, a child's

rebellion or even personal failure. Whatever the trial, we feel pressed to let go of something. That





GRACE CHURCH NEWS

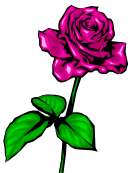
Monthly Prayer Gathering

We will have a time of corporate prayer **Sunday evening, March 8th from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** All are encouraged to join together to seek God's face, acknowledge our dependence on Him in all things, and seek His direction for how we might glorify His name in our worship, nurture, and outreach.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men are invited to join together **Saturday, March 21st, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** for Bible study, discussion, prayer, and light refreshments. The meeting will meet at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge.



Home to Glory

Our prayers are with the family of Betty Vella, longtime former member of Grace Church, who went home to be with the Lord on February 20th in Pennsylvania. Betty taught Sunday School and prayed faithfully for the children of our church. Our hearts go out especially to her daughter and son-in-law, Karen and Alan.



LOOKING AHEAD



Maundy Thursday Dinner and Communion

Mark your calendars for our Maundy Thursday potluck and communion service on **Thursday, April 2nd.** The potluck **dinner begins at 6:00 p.m.** followed by the **communion service at 7:00.** Watch the bulletin for more details.

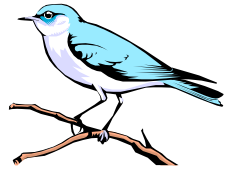
Women's Retreat

- ◆ Reserve **April 17-18, 2015** for the annual OPC Women's Retreat at Lakeside Conference Center in Pittsfield. The keynote speaker will be Kathleen Curto. The topic is "**Keeping the Heart,**" based on the Puritan John Flavel's study of Proverbs 4:23: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."
- ◆ Registration forms are available at the back of the church. See Charleen for more information.





March 2015



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1 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 1:00 Bowling Fun	2 7:00 Addictions Victorious	3 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	4	5	6	7
8 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	9 7:00 Addictions Victorious	10 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	11	12	13	14
15 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	16 7:00 Addictions Victorious	17 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	18	19	20	21 Men's Prayer Fellowship 7-8:30 a.m.
22 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	23 7:00 Addictions Victorious	24 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	25	26	27	28
29 Palm Sunday 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	30 7:00 Addictions Victorious	31 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	April 1	April 2 Maundy Thursday 6:00 p.m. dinner and communion service	April 3 Good Friday 