

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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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





From the Pastor's Desk

So passing by Mysia, they went to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (Acts 16:8-9)

I spent a month in the location of ancient Macedonia while on NATO military exercises when I was in the Army years ago. I sometimes wonder if my feet touched the very sand Paul's did 2000 years ago. Maybe I'll have the chance to ask him in heaven.

I preached a sermon on the "Macedonian call" a couple of weeks ago. It is a text that is often used in the context of a call to the mission field. And why not? It was certainly God's way of calling Paul to a new field.

We typically associate missions with going to a different country where people have never heard the gospel. That is certainly the call of the church. My grandparents answered that call when they went to China almost a hundred years ago, and another ancestor ninety years before him. And Grace Church has always supported missionaries since our very beginning, even committing ourselves to Ralph and Polly Brown to Pakistan even before the church called our first pastor. Since then we have had missionaries in Africa, Asia, South America and Europe. We look forward to seeing the Schmidts, who have been in Japan for over twenty-five years, in just a few weeks. We love to hear firsthand what God is doing around the world, and If I had my way, our missions budget would be ten times the size it is now.

But what if that "Macedonian call" comes from closer to home as well?

Charleen and I took a week of vacation in Quebec City a couple of weeks ago. We had a wonderful time relaxing. Quebec City is only seven hours away by car. Quebec is largely Roman Catholic by tradition, but that commitment is very nominal. It is really quite secularized. A former student from the seminary which I attended (Westminster) has been involved in a church planting ministry there for the past seventeen years. Charleen and I were privileged to worship with them while there. He and his wife left Ontario when they heard the "Macedonian call" to serve in Quebec.

We had Bob and Jeannie Hall visit us a year ago. Bob heard the "Macedonian call" to the Bronx in New York City over forty years ago. They have recently started a Christian school (Hope Academy) that meets in their church building. Bronx, and Quebec City are all within driving distance for anyone who would like to see firsthand what God is doing there.

Not long ago I heard that Pittsfield, Ma was ranked number five in the nation for opiate addiction. I knew it was serious, but I didn't know it was that bad. Most of us don't see it although its effects are becoming more noticeable. Could it be that this is a "Macedonian call"? This is why I believe that our addictions ministry is so important for us as a church. I feel the same way about the jail ministry. Perhaps we can hear the "Macedonian Call" in our places of work. Perhaps from our own neighbors.

We may not actually hear people say, "come over and help us." Then again, maybe they will. But then the vision Paul received came not from a man but from God. What I do believe is that we as a church are at a crucial juncture in our community.

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



Schmidt Prayer Letter, August 2016

God's grace has been flowing through our Home Assignment. **The time in Switzerland was really blessed.** Relationships were strengthened at the International church in Buchs, plus with friends and family, especially Dieter's parents. We had a busy, yet fulfilling time. It was great to have Andrea visit too.

When we arrived in the USA we had a **three-day family reunion with Shelley's siblings** and crew. We loved the time with the American side of the family again, and glad that Rebekah could fly out from Vegas to be with us. The 24 of us spent time remembering our brother Dale who passed away in December 2014. His wife, Janet, brought many Brazilian memorabilia to share, and gave the siblings a collection of letters we had each written Dale during our many years apart. His presence, and Mom's, was sorely missed.

At the end of July we flew to **Littleton, CO, to the OMF US headquarters.** For a full week we were with 37 other missionaries, also on Home Assignment. We got to know the Home Staff and received valuable input to help us during our time in America. We left reconfirmed in our call, plus with much to digest.

We are so **thankful that Andrea has a place big enough for us to stay** with her while in the Atlanta area! We have enjoyed getting to know some of Andrea's friends. One has lent us a car for the time down south, and that is such a big help! We are praying for a car for our travels up North in the fall. There are some friends we want to see in Texas, so we might even drive there for the first time!

Please pray for us as we firm up our travel plans for the fall. We hope to meet up with many of you dear friends who have partnered with us for a long time. If you would like us to speak in one of your groups, please let us know. (Contact information below.) We would love to share what God is doing in Japan and in our ministries!

Thank you for praying for **Hannah!** God worked it out for her to work with her old company again after three months with no work! She did individual English teaching jobs to hold her over. She also received a three-year visa! We are so thankful for her, as she is a catalyst in the **ESF group** which has had some ups and downs lately, so we pray that relationships would glorify God, and that the Bible Studies continue to stay true to the Word. Two of our leaders will be returning to their countries in September. Pray for others to fill the gaps, and we are thankful to hear that new folks have joined.

We are thankful too, for the Shums who have been a huge help with the ESFers. Their work at the Guest Home is going great! What a provision for us while we are away!

Praise for: *God's daily Grace and Love

- * Our safe arrival in US and blessed family gathering with Shelley's family
- * Valuable time at the OMF US headquarters for the Home Assignment Reunion and Training (HART)
- * Shums doing a great job at the Guest Home and helping in at Sapporo International Church (SIC)

Please pray for: * Refreshing time with Andrea and new contacts with her church friends

- * Dieter's parents now in a nursing home in Switzerland
- * Planning and preparation of our travels and presentations up North, as well as a suitable car for the trip
- * Meaningful time with many of you, our partners
- * Profitable On-line Counseling Course for Dieter in September
- * Ongoing strength and health for Shums, filling in for us in Sapporo
- * Unity in the ESF group and growing in God's Word
- * Strength for our daughters as they start teaching again
- * Kevin's restaurant's business to pick up

Thankful for your love and prayers,
Dieter and Shelley

The Fruit of Faithfulness

by Ian Bridgman

I love my parents. I think they're cool. Apparently, so do my friends. 10 years ago, we were all in Zurich, Switzerland. My Swiss friend, my sister, and I were trailing along the sidewalk while my Mom and Dad walked on ahead. My friend watched them for a minute, then piped up. "Your parents are cool", she said. I had never really thought of it quite like that, but now that she mentioned it, OK, I guess I could agree. More recently, another friend and I were stuffing our faces with pancakes at the kitchen table after he had crashed at our house one night. I was explaining that I had never resented living at home, especially since I was so often far away on one adventure or another. "Well yea, man," he answered between bites. "Your parents are mad chill. If I had a family like yours, I'd want to live at home too!" There's yet another one, who, while living in New York City, decided to make our house her regular rural retreat. I've concluded that she enjoys hanging out with parents just as much as she likes spending time with me. Maybe more.

This all got me thinking, what it is then, that makes my parents, and our home, so attractive to my friends. Our house often seems busy, stressed, and chaotic. But after listening to my friend spill her soap opera-like sob stories of one failed attempt at a relationship after another, I realized the harmony and stability that she sees in my parents stands in stark contrast to New York's predatory free-for-all of a singles scene. After spending time in the respective homes of my other friend's separated parents, I can see where he would appreciate the warmth, love, and encouragement present in my house that was markedly lacking in his. I've also realized that when I come home from some far away place, I take it for granted that I'll be returning to two faithful parents who love the Lord and, love each other, and love their kids. I can expect my house to be place of peace and rest. Almost none of my friends as well as many of the backpackers I encounter on my travels will have that luxury.

My parents aren't just cool to my friends that know them, they're even cool to the ones they have never met. I'm often surprised at how quickly a girl that I barely know will ask if my parents are still together. Theirs almost never are. It's not just the "nice girls" that ask. It's just about everybody, from college students in the U.S. to school teachers in Brazil; from Swedish social workers to the strip-club dancers I came across at the motels on the road. And when they find out I have happily married parents, my market value as a single guy almost always goes up. So thanks, Mom n Dad.

Let's cut the fuzziness for a minute though, and be real. Is my house always peaceful and restful, warm, loving and encouraging? Of course not, at least not on the surface. Nobody is perfect. We get tired and grumpy and sometimes get short with each other. What we do have, though, along with other Christian homes, is a foundation, built on the Gospel, Biblical authority, and Christ's love for us, on which we can build everything else. As Christians, we may not necessarily notice the difference this foundation makes, but I believe the rest of the world does.

There is a whole lot of blah blah blah going around about how young people are rejecting traditional marriage and rejecting the Church and rejecting this and that or whatever. As if the mentality of every new generation to come of age were something new under the sun. Are most of my friends confused? Resentful? Many times, yes. Hostile to the Gospel? Maybe, sometimes. It is ironic though, that although they may not be interested in a Biblical foundation, they are attracted to the very fruit it produces. Can my friends see the difference in a Christ-centered home? Yes, they can. In our current culture, I would even argue that Christian couples are a witness to the Gospel simply by staying married.

As of this summer, my parents have been married 40 years. By doing so, they've been a testimony to people they don't even know. So here's to my parents, and to all the other Christian couples that are proving the world wrong and displaying Christ's transforming power, 2 imperfect people but 1 faithful marriage at a

“A Journey through the Beatitudes”

Using the book entitled “Studies in the Sermon on the Mount” as a guide, authored by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was minister of Westminster Chapel in London, England.

In Matthew 4:17, our Lord had gone to be baptized by John the Baptist and in v. 17 it says: “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’.” Jesus starts His ministry with this tremendously short sentence. His whole ministry is going to be centered on the kingdom of heaven, or in other parts of scripture it is called the kingdom of God. He is saying that this kingdom is at hand, in other words it will become available to persons living here on earth. But there is a qualification; if we want to be included in this kingdom of God we must repent. Now repent means to turn around. For us it means to stop taking what the world is calling truth and turn to Jesus Christ himself for truth. As the Apostle John tells us in his gospel (1:7): “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Let’s remember that verse as we go along because it is a very important part of what Jesus has to say.

What truth about the kingdom of God does the Lord want us to know? The answer is found in Matthew, chapters 5-7. We know this section of Scripture as “The Sermon on the Mount.” Now the Sermon on the Mount is God’s decree as to how to enter the kingdom of God and what we are to become as we walk out our lives within that kingdom.

Starting with Matthew 5:3-11, the Lord gives us a beautiful overview of a Christian. Our Scriptures call this part “the Beatitudes.” When reading and studying the Scriptures it is always best to get a general understanding of what is being said and then to delve into the particulars. Here are 5 general principals when studying the Scriptures, which will help us to get to the truth of what is being taught to the Church in these “Beatitudes.”

First: All Christians are to be like this.

What our Lord is saying is that every “born again” Christian is to have these characteristics; they are not for some special super holy person.

Second: All Christians are meant to manifest all of these characteristics. Each and every “born again” Christian is to show all of these characteristics as they mature in the Lord.

Third: none of these descriptions refer to what may be called a natural tendency.

Fourth: We must understand clearly the essential difference between the Christian and the non-Christian. The Christian is in the kingdom of God and under the direct influence of the Triune god; the non-Christian is in the domain of Satan, the world, and their own sinful nature.

Fifth: The Christian and the non-Christian belong to two entirely different realms. The first and last Beatitudes end with the promise, “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” What does this mean? Our Lord starts and ends with it because it is his way of saying that the first thing we have to realize about ourselves is that we belong to a different kingdom. We are not only different in essence from the non-Christian but we also are living in two different worlds. We are in this world but we are not of it.

Matthew 5:3: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Now all of the Beatitudes start with this word “blessed” which means “happy.” They are saying that if these Beatitudes are beginning to show up in our lives we will be happy. Remember now the Lord is talking about persons who are in the kingdom of God and his kingdom is not of this world—it is spiritual. So this blessedness or happiness is not the happiness that the world is constantly seeking but it is the happiness that is spiritual and touches our very souls no matter what this world or Satan does to us. To be poor in spirit means to have an understanding of our true condition as God sees us. That true condition as God sees us is that every person on the face of the earth is spiritually dead and is under the wrath of God. There is nothing

A Journey, continued

within ourselves that we can do to change that judgment of God.. He is saying that the first step to entering the kingdom of God is to know that you are poor in spirit; your spirit must be alive to hear the truths of Jesus Christ. It is the beginning of the Gospel—the Good News! If we understand that we are spiritually dead, that makes us poor in spirit. But listen to what Jesus then says; *“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* It’s the doorway (if you will) into the kingdom of heaven.

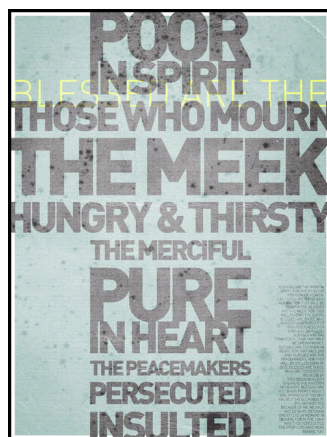
Verse 4: *“Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* First off, we must understand that this beatitude is not talking about mourning for the death of a loved one or some sad happening in our lives. So what is this mourning that the Lord is speaking about?

First, we must mourn for ourselves. Having insight into our true spiritual condition before God should cause great distress and a real sense of mourning within us. Then we should mourn for the state of the church as a whole. Finally, we should mourn for the lost who cannot see the truth in Jesus Christ. But, listen to what Jesus says is the outcome of spiritual mourning: *“for they shall be comforted.”* Did we have comfort when we entered the kingdom of God; do we still have that comfort as we continue to walk our walk with the Lord?

Verse 5: *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* With this beatitude a slight change is made in relation to the two listed before it. Being poor in spirit and mourning have to do with each of us as individuals understanding our true condition before a holy God. This beatitude changes the focus to a concern about other people. This shows the consistency of the Scriptures. The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes all follow the same pattern of our relationship to God, and to others. We need spiritual meekness to have a *“true view of ourselves, expressing itself in our attitude and conduct with respect to others.”* The promise with this beatitude is *“for they shall inherit the earth.”* These are no idle words; this is a promise from the Creator God of the universe. If this spiritual meekness is manifesting in our lives we have the victory over Satan and this sinful world while we are walking out our walk here on earth. We are persons who are happy, content, and at peace with God and the world. That is what being spiritually meek is all about.

Next month we will continue our *“Journey through the Beatitudes.”*

Submitted by Tom Ross, Elder Emeritus





GRACE CHURCH NEWS



FALL SCHEDULE

Our fall schedule will resume on **Sunday, September 11th**, with **Sunday School** for children and adults at **9:30 a.m.**, and **worship** at **10:45 a.m.** The adult class will be studying the book of Judges, using a Bible study guide by Tim Keller.

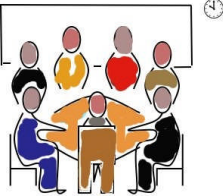


WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Women of all ages are invited to meet for a time of study, discussion of Paul Bunyan's *Christiana*, and prayer on **Saturday, September 10th**, from **9:30-11:00 a.m.** at the church. Breakfast goodies will be served.

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Men of all ages are invited to meet for a monthly time of study, discussion, and prayer on **Saturday, September 17th**, from **7-8:30 a.m.** at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. The men are using Joel Beeke's *Walking as He Walked*, and breakfast will be served.



YOUNG ADULT BIBLE STUDY

The young adults will start a study of *Get Real*, by John Leonard, this **Friday, September 9th**, at the home of Pastor Tom and Charleen, beginning with dinner at **6:30 p.m.** For more information, call 413-499-3040.



LOOKING AHEAD

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Our church will once again serve as a Relay Center for this ministry of Samaritan's Purse. **National Collection Week is November 14-21** (only 2 months away!) Volunteers will be needed to staff the Relay Center. If you would like to know what it's all about and how you can serve, please see Charleen Bridgman, Coordinator.





September 2016



Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4 10:00 Worship	5 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	6	7	8	9 6:30 pm Young Adult Bible Study	10 9:30-11:00 am Women's Fellowship
11 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	12 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	13	14	15	16 6:30 pm Young Adult Bible Study	17 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
18 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	19 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	20	21	22	23 6:30 pm Young Adult Bible Study	24
25 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	26 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	27	28	29	30 6:30 pm Young Adult Bible Study	