

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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Honor Your Mother



Any suggestions or submissions for the next newsletter may be sent to **secretary@gracecongregational.org**, or put in the tray on the secretary's desk.



From the Pastor's Desk

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she became the mother of all the living.

(Genesis 3:20)

I'm writing this article for the newsletter leading up to Mother's Day, so I thought it would be appropriate to do it on motherhood.

Having young children in the church seems to run in waves. We went through a dry spell, so it is quite refreshing to have little ones napping in their mother's arms or navigating their way between the chairs at a high rate of speed after worship again. The Bible speaks of children as a blessing from God and so should we. After all, they are the next generation of the church.

Seeing moms and dads tending to their kids reminds me of Charleen's and my experience a generation ago, not to mention the experience of our parents before that. My own mom had five boys under the age of ten, and after having children of my own and grandchildren now, I have a new appreciation for the energy and constant attention it takes.

You'll notice that the text above is taken from the chapter that records the fall of man. It might seem a bit out of place, except that, I believe it helps us understand the challenge of motherhood better. For one thing, parenting takes place in a fallen world with all its attending difficulties. But on the flip side we have the joy of knowing that parenting involves preparing our children for God's glory.

It appears that Eve, when she gave birth to her first born had high hopes. God had given the promise, couched in his curse on the serpent that her seed would crush the head of the one who had caused such destruction. This man-child would perhaps be the deliverer of whom God had spoken. Can you imagine her devastation when she learned that he was a murderer? That he would take the life of her second born in a fit of jealousy? What had gone wrong? Had she done something wrong?

Paul, in Romans 5, reminds us that, *sin came into the world through one man [and woman], and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* St. Augustine would later call this "original sin". We all own it from the moment of birth. Infants too. Children are not born blank slates, completely dependent on their parents and society to form their moral responses. No matter how hard we as parents may try to forestall any contingencies in order to create a utopian life for our children, there will always be way too much that is beyond our control. We live in a fallen world and we are all fallen people.

But all is not lost. The rest of the Bible from Genesis 3 is about redemption. God's promise about the "seed of the woman" is not annulled with the death of Abel. It just took the sovereign providence of God working through the centuries until, *in the fulness of time*, the "Seed of the woman" (Christ) would willingly absorb the blows of many Cains; in so doing he planted his heel firmly on the head of the serpent.

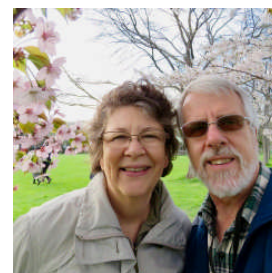
What does that mean for moms (and dads) today? Nobody said parenting would be a piece of cake. certainly not if we take it seriously. It means committing ourselves to the task of "teaching them to observe all things that [Christ has commanded us]" as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. A challenge in a fallen world? Yes. A glorious privilege? A double yes.



Pastor Tom Bridgman

Missions Corner

From Schmidt News, May 2018



“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Phil. 1:2

Thank you for praying for the **OMF Field Conference** with 250 people attending. It was a real blessing to have time with fellow missionaries. Thank the Lord that the children’s program went so smoothly! Dieter and I were busy with various jobs during conference. Dieter arranged all the needed equipment, toys, etc. to be brought to the hotel and back. Shelley and a friend were in charge of the coffee/tea times, and she led a small group. The speaker challenged us with “a call to persist in prayer, an invitation from the Lord to renew ourselves in joyful conversation with Him and heartfelt intercession to Him; a call to live holy lives, to understand more of who God is and to be more like Him; and a call to boldness and courage in evangelism.”

The **Sapporo Guest Home** was “well used” before and after the conference, and again for an OMF training week in April. God continues to give us the strength we need. Recently a Swiss short-term worker, who is staying at the Guest Home, helps us out on Mondays. Another short-term worker here from Italy, is helping with Japanese youth work. They get along well and we enjoy an occasional meal and games with them, which Hannah joins in too. **Pray for** these Serve Asia Workers who come for 3-6 month periods to help in various ministries. They are a great encouragement to the missionaries they work with and also bring Christ’s love to the Japanese.

OMF will facilitate a course on Multiplying Effective Evangelists and Disciplers, from May 21- 25 here in Sapporo. The Guest Home will be full again during that time. May 26 Shelley will be attending an OMF spiritual retreat, while Dieter will be preparing the sermon for the English Service on May 27th.

The **Sapporo International Church** staff retreat went well and we enjoyed a relaxing time together in Pastor Ikeda’s hometown even helping make pounded rice and enjoying the resulting ‘mochi’!

With our **English Speakers Fellowship** group we give thanks to the Lord for a good International Welcome Dinner for the new International Students on April 29. **Pray for** wisdom and encouragement, as we seek to give direction to this diverse group within the changing structure of our church. Continue to **pray for** Shelley’s parenting class on the 2nd Sunday of the month.

In **Family News**, we are so thankful to report that Kevin was able to sell his restaurant! Though it was hard to let it go, he is glad to have more time for the family now. Kevin has started training for a new job serving in a hotel restaurant. Please **pray** that God will continue to guide him and Rebekah. In March, Hannah had a skiing accident and tore the ACL of her right knee. She is limping around until she has time for surgery the end of July. Please **pray for** strength and patience for her.

The countdown is happening: Andrea and Travis, Rebekah and Revina have bought their tickets for Japa and will arrive on July 4th! We really look forward to having family tie and getting to know our granddaughter and new son-in-law better. Revina is in a fun age of walking, learning to talk, and being entertaining. Praise the Lord for Skype!

Thank you for upholding us in prayer. To God be the glory,
Dieter & Shelley

Operation Christmas Child Impact Story: Dominican Republic

ANABEL AND A PERSONAL NOTE

Love—that’s the word that jumped out to me on the note written in big, red print by Brittany, age 13. I didn’t know how to read English at the time in the Dominican Republic, but I recognized the word love: “God loves you! Love, Brittany.”

Two photos accompanied the note—one of Brittany with her parents, simply identified as mom and dad, and one of Brittany with her younger brothers, Austin and Brandon. That’s all that I know about the family who packed my shoebox gift—besides that they packed the gift filled with the love of God. There was no last name; no email or address. I long to meet this family who packed my shoebox with God’s love so I can tell them how much that still means to me.

My two sisters and I didn’t usually receive Christmas presents. Our parents made sure we had food and clothes—working hard at multiple jobs for that purpose—but we didn’t have a lot of extras. It was a special treat if we had a few pesos left over to go out for hotdogs after church once in a while.

My dad, a pastor, started our church with nine members meeting in a backyard. Each January 6, the church hosted an “El Día del Niño” (Children’s Day) celebration. The puppet show, cake, and soda were typically our special gifts at Christmastime.

But when I was about 9 years old, the Children’s Day celebration included a surprise—Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes. While handing them out, the church members told us that someone made our shoebox gift especially for us. That stuck with me, especially after seeing the family in the photos.

My shoebox included socks, soap, and a toothbrush—things that, now as an adult, I also love to put in the shoeboxes I pack. All children can use these things. I also received a stuffed animal, a coloring book, a notebook, and crayons—items I also pack in shoeboxes to make each child feel special. My shoebox packing always starts with a note and a photo—I put those in the shoeboxes first.

My dad used to tell my sisters and me, “Everything belongs to God; nothing belongs to us.” Sometimes I wondered why I didn’t get things that other kids had if my family was working in the Name of God, but we believed in His faithfulness.

Leading up to when I received my shoebox, I asked God for a special gift at Christmastime, something just for me. I knew that my shoebox gift was God’s answer to my prayer. To me, it was proof that God is faithful.

Growing up in church, I assumed I was a Christian. But my dad told me that a Christian is someone who makes a decision to follow Jesus Christ. My salvation occurred a couple of years after I received my shoebox, but the gift really started me thinking that since God is faithful to me, I needed to be faithful to Him.

My faith was tested when I was 18. Our parents had just dropped off me and my middle sister at college in the Dominican and were then involved in a traffic accident. Our older sister and both of our parents were killed in the crash.

Losing so much so fast has caused me to not take anything for granted. Everything can change in the blink of an eye. There are times I still feel lonely without them and ask God why they had to leave, but I’ve never doubted the love of God. Though I don’t always understand His plan, I’ve learned to trust in it.

That faith goes back to my shoebox. I needed that message of God’s love that Brittany sent to me—little did I know how much I would need it, but He did. I believe that God always will put the right box in the right hand.

God worked in the heart of a 13-year-old girl to send that message to me. I often wonder where Brittany, now in her 30s, is today and what she is doing. But God knows, and I know He is faithful.

A simple gift bathed in prayer is life-changing. You can be a part of other stories like Daniela’s. It is as simple as contributing items to our year-round collection box located on the table at the back of the sanctuary. As you go through your week, pick up an extra hygiene or school supply item (an extra tube of toothpaste or pad of paper), or a small toy or pair of socks. There is a list of suggestions to purchase month by month, but any item at any time is welcome! See Charleen Bridgman if you have questions.

When Hope Is No More

Life is full of disappointment. In this fallen world of sin, people disappoint us, and we disappoint them. We disappoint our friends, our loved ones, and we even disappoint ourselves. Not only do we ourselves face disappointment in life, we also cannot help but sympathize with our friends and loved ones over the disappointments they face. However, it is not just people that disappoint us. Things disappoint us too. Things we think will make us happy always let us down, and people in whom we try to find our ultimate happiness disappoint. This is particularly the case when we try to find ultimate happiness and hope in ourselves.

Those who think life is all about being happy in themselves by finding happiness within themselves will always be disappointed. That's precisely how God designed us. For it is only when we become utterly hopeless about ourselves that we really hope in God, and God does not disappoint, because He cannot disappoint. Becoming hopeless about ourselves takes a sovereign act of God, who alone enables us to turn from hoping in ourselves to hoping in Him alone. Hope is a gift from God. Out of the good pleasure of His will, before the foundation of the earth, He has chosen to give eternal hope to those whom He elected from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Hope is given to us by God's grace, and it is sustained in us by God's Spirit for our earthly and eternal good and all for

The hope that God gives us is not wishful thinking. It's not merely a feeling we have when everything is going well in life. It's not a personality temperament, nor is it simply a self-help strategy. Hope is a steadfast, unwavering conviction rooted in our faith and overflowing into our hearts and minds and all of life. Hope is not the absence of disappointment, it is the presence of the Holy Spirit. For Paul writes, “. . . Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5 NASB). However, hope is a thing of this world. It will be nonexistent in the new heaven and new earth. We will no longer have any need for hope there, because we will have everything we ever could have hoped for as we dwell with and worship our Savior, who will never again allow us to face disappointment. Therefore, let us not set our ultimate hope on the things of this life, for we will always be disappointed, but let us fix our daily hope on Jesus Christ and our eternal home with Him where no one and nothing will ever disappoint us again.

Is Christ in Your Christianity?

by Paul David Tripp

There are some blunt, tell-it-like-it-is passages in the Bible. One that comes to mind is 1 John 2:19 - "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." (ESV)

This is not merely a historical recounting by John, but a warning for us today: **We must resist defining Christianity as anything other than a deep devotion to Christ, the fruit of which is a lifestyle of daily worship of him and active service in his kingdom.**

We must always be evaluating the motivation of our hearts to be sure that the faith we live by is the true Christianity of the Bible, not an externalistic counterfeit that omits Jesus.

What are some of the characteristics of an externalistic, counterfeit, and Christ-less Christianity? I can think of three:

1. It Mistakes Commitment To Christianity For Commitment To Christ

The traditions of Christianity are engaging and exciting, and they should be. The danger is that they can function as a replacement for a relationship with Jesus. A cruel trick of the enemy is to make us feel most alive when we are participating in the culture of Christianity, rather than communing with Christ.

2. It Mistakes Biblical Knowledge For Biblical Wisdom

It's quite possible to grow in biblical literacy without growing in wisdom and holiness. I love studying the theology of the Word of God, but having worked for twenty years at one of the finest seminaries in the world, I have seen far too many rigorously trained students graduate as immature followers of Jesus.

3. It Mistakes Participation In Ministry Opportunities For A Christ-like Lifestyle

It's good and proper for the local church to organize various ministries for the body of Christ. However, disciples of Jesus are called to offer every aspect of their life to the Kingdom of God, not just those on the church calendar.

It's unbiblical for us to think of ministry as separate from life, as if we step out of one and into the other. Instead, we ought to live with a constant mentality that asks the question: "How can I, right here right now, be part of what God is doing on earth?"

True Christianity

If our Christianity is something less than a surrender of the thoughts and motives of our heart to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and a daily hunger for and pursuit of his transforming grace, then our faith will tend to get reduced to a system of tradition, philosophy, and activity.

Until the day we die, we are called to resist this externalistic, counterfeit, and Christ-less Christianity. We have been given the grace to do so, and the grace to desire something so much better - a soul-satisfying relationship with Jesus himself!

This content was originally posted by Paul Tripp on <https://www.paultripp.com/wednesdays-word/posts/is-christ-in-your-christianity>



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Ladies' Bible Class Wraps Up

The Tuesday afternoon Ladies' Bible Class will wrap up their year with a luncheon on **Thursday, May 17th, at 1:00 p.m.** For location and details see Betty Barbour.

Church Work Day

Mark your calendars for **Saturday, May 19th**, for a church work day beginning at **9:00 a.m.** Come on out with your rake, dust cloth, etc., and enjoy fellowship while we spruce things up for Spring. We'll be starting in the morning and coffee and refreshments will be available.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited for a time of devotional, fellowship and prayer, on **Saturday, May 19th**, from **7:00 -8:30 a.m.** The men are using *Infinite Grace* by Bryan Chapell. The meeting will be at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Breakfast will be served.



LOOKING AHEAD

Grace Fellowship for Women

Women of all ages are welcome to be a part of the Grace Fellowship for Women on **Saturday, June 2nd**, from **9:30-11:30 a.m.** Join us as we share our study of I Peter, pray for one another, and grow in grace together.

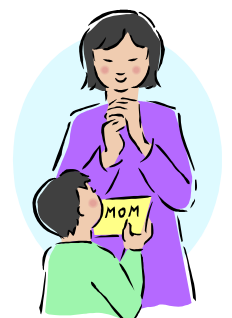


Live Coals Prayer

Join us in the sanctuary on **Sunday evening, June 3rd, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** for our monthly prayer gathering as we seek God's face and acknowledge our complete dependence on Him in all our endeavors.



Happy Mothers' Day





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<p>6</p> <p>9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship</p> <p>5:00 Prayer Gathering</p>	<p>7</p> <p>7:00 Addictions Victorious</p>	<p>8</p> <p>1:00 Ladies' Bible Class</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>12</p>
<p>13 Mother's Day</p> <p>9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship</p>	<p>14</p> <p>7:00 Addictions Victorious</p>	<p>15</p>	<p>16</p>	<p>17</p> <p>1:00 Ladies' Bible Class luncheon</p>	<p>18</p>	<p>19</p> <p>7-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship 9:00 Church Work Day</p>
<p>20</p> <p>9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship</p>	<p>21</p> <p>7:00 Addictions Victorious</p>	<p>22</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24</p>	<p>25</p>	<p>26</p>
<p>27</p> <p>9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship</p>	<p>28 Memorial Day</p> <p>7:00 Addictions Victorious</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31</p>		