



Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Welcome to the January edition of Grace Notes

May your New Year be blessed with Grace and Peace

Email suggestions or submissions to secretary@gracecongregational.org





From the Pastor's Desk (A guest article)

Using Gifts for the Good of the Church

by Tim Challies

The Bible is a book full of metaphors—word pictures that God uses to explain who He is and what He requires of us. We are sheep and God is a shepherd. We are treasonous prodigals and God is a forgiving Father. We are trees, able to bear good fruit or bad fruit. Jesus is water, able to refresh the driest, thirstiest soul. From beginning to end, the Bible teaches us using vivid pictures.

One of my favorite metaphors is one we find in Paul's epistles—the picture of Christians, of the church, as a body. In I Corinthians 12:12, Paul writes, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." A human body is made up of many parts, each of which has its own function, and each of which is integral to the functioning of the whole. And in the same way, each local church is made up of a great variety of people. Each of us is given special gifts by God, meant to bless and encourage other Christians. This makes each person indispensable to the functioning of the whole church. Just as there are no superfluous body parts, there are no redundant Christians. We are all gifted so that we can be a blessing to others.

As a pastor, I have the opportunity to meet many people as they come to our church for the first time. Many of them are looking for a new church—they have just moved to Toronto or have just left a church that has crumbled. I meet with these people and tell them about our congregation, and I invite them to participate in the life of the church. It does not take long to learn which of them are burdened with the desire to participate fully in the life of the church and to use their God-given gifts to serve others. And it does not take long to learn which of them are coming to the church with the intention of remaining at the fringes. The sad fact is that there are many Christians who want to be serve but do not want to serve. They mean to

take advantage of the gifts God has given others, but without serving their brothers and sisters with the gifts God has given them.

Ed Welch offers a challenge here:

Persons searching for their gifts think that they can "find" their gifts in isolation from the body. They have forgotten that the orientation of God's people is outward rather than inward. The question should be this: How can I grow in love for and service to the body of Christ? Gifts are the way we naturally love and serve.

Christian, God has gifted you in such a way that you are a necessary part of a body, a local church. Those gifts are the way you are to love and serve others as you love and serve Christ. Will you use your gifts for their good and His glory?

Tabletalk magazine, December 2014

Tim Challies is author of the blog Challies.com and a pastor in Toronto. He is also the author of *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* and *The Next Story: Life and Faith after the Digital Explosion*.

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Website: www.ligonier.org/tabletalk

Email: tabletalk@ligonier.org

Toll free: 1-800-435-4343



Tuvya & Ellen Zaretsky January 2019 Update

Shalom and blessings to all at Grace Church Congregational in 2019! Ellen and I send our thanks to you for your faithful prayers and generous financial support last year. I hope you are encouraged by just a few past highlights.

The spiritual apex of 2018 was the Behold Your God Jerusalem outreach. If you haven't seen the 2 1/2 minute video recap, here is the link: <https://ifj.box.com/s/xint0t3qkkgg46ofevdcge5nz830d3pf9>.

Also, great news! My team, the DAPH outreach squad (Drug and Alcohol addicts, Prostitutes & Abused Women, Homeless) was so successful that it has been established as an ongoing ministry based in Tel Aviv. It is called the Le're'echa Movement, for "loving your neighbor," based on Leviticus 19:18 and Jesus words in Matthew 22:36-40. These are familiar to Israel's and a way to introduce the message of our Savior Yeshua (Jesus). The team composed from our Israeli staff Igal, Danielle, Bekah and Ma'Ayan. Please pray for their ministry in Jerusalem throughout the winter.

Another high point has been the ministrywide focus now toward Jewish-Gentile couples ministry. The most recent IS-SUES vol. 22:8 is wrapped around that subject. You can find it on our website at: <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v22-n08/spiritual-but-not-religious/>

One of the testimonies is written by Phillippe Lewkowicz. I met him and his Gentile wife, while in Paris last month. His is a fantastic story of how Lord is at work reaching Jewish people.

The Lord answered prayer for Alyssa and Tommy, the Jewish-Gentile couple that came to me for help before Thanksgiving. Alyssa's Jewish parents are divorced, remarried and her father is an Israeli traditionalist. Neither of them are sympathetic to her faith in Christ. By God's grace, she and her fiancé navigated the conversation around announcement of their wedding. The folks were initially pretty angry about the idea of "Jesus" being mentioned in the ceremony. But they calmed down with the assurance that the wedding would reflect her Jewish heritage as well. Now the Lord is guiding their plans for a thoughtful testimony to her parents in the ceremony later this year.

Over the next two months, I'm training a Jewish-Gentile couples Discipleship Team. They are a specialized group that is crucial for the follow up to our "Search for Yourself" (SFY) social media outreach, during the Passover/Easter season. I'm also working with the Communications Team in San Francisco to create online content for that outreach. A limited test, during just three days of the Hanukkah festival, produced 84 Jewish-Gentile contacts! For years, I have anticipated a wonderful Jewish response when we go all out to reach the Jewish-Gentile couples. It is a needy population with significant spiritual interest. Thanks for your prayers during these first four months of 2019.

And please include prayers for two of our neighbors, who are in Jewish-Gentile relationships with their spouses. Dane is a Gentile from a Christian background who is trying to find his way back to Jesus. His Jewish wife, Pam, is struggling with the whole spiritual search that might bring Jesus into their family. Around the corner is Loren, a Jewish husband and open seeker who is married to a Gentile Christian. He wants to know how to have the peace that Jesus promised in John 14:27. Both men contacted me just this week, leading to lengthy spiritual discussions. I've known both couples for several years and they have been aware of our faith and ministry. It is wonderful and encouraging to see them making spiritual inquiry "all of a sudden." It's all in the Lord's timing!

There are so many wonderful stories to tell from 2018 and even more opportunities in the coming year. Thanks for being our partners as we relentlessly pursue God's plan for the salvation of the Jewish people. Ellen and I pray you will know the Shalom and Blessings of Messiah Yeshua in 2019.

Tuvya Zaretsky
Jews for Jesus



“Welcome to Russia: This is the World Cup”

by Ian Bridgman

“Ты не понимаешь (Ты не понимаеш’)”, she said with a huff for probably the 10th time. Then she let out a sigh, hands on her hips. She was right. I didn’t understand. There was something about the “ключи (kluchi)” and she kept saying “я приду (ya pridu)” over and over again. I had just flown into the southern Russian city of Rostov after having spent almost 2 weeks further north in St. Petersburg. After waiting awhile at the airport, I had received a Facebook message from someone I had never met with an address which I showed to a taxi driver waiting nearby. He had whisked me into the city and dropped me at the end of a dark driveway in front of 5 non-descript concrete apartment blocks. A neighbor on the sidewalk had shown me which building I wanted, so I rang the doorbell and waited. A few minutes later and I was in the spotless kitchen of a modern, urbanized version of the famous *babushka*, complete with the apron, just without the headscarf. Apparently, she was the mom of a friend of the cousin of *my* friend, the friend who was not arriving until the next day and who had tried to arrange this accommodation at the last minute. It was now almost midnight and from what I could understand, which was very little, this Russian grandma was convinced that this American boy who had just arrived didn’t know how to use the keys to properly lock the door to this apartment. That, and the little kid by her side had tennis lessons at 9 the next morning. At least I knew that much. I was tired, feeling awkward, and wondering if there could not have been a better way to arrange all this. She was probably tired, feeling awkward, and wondering the same thing.

“Ты не понимаешь”, she muttered one more time, shaking her head, before leaving me the keys, taking her grandson by the hand, and stepping out into the staircase. I watched through the peephole as they marched back down the stairs, to another unit in the building, satisfied that this stranger was not a danger to himself or others.

I was here, of course for the 2018 World Cup, my fourth consecutive pilgrimage to the world’s most followed sporting event. The tournament brought me to Germany in 2006, South Africa four years later, followed by Brazil in 2014, and for three weeks this summer, Russia. Of the four experiences, Brazil belongs in a category all its own, but that doesn’t mean that the others, including this most recent edition, weren’t amazing in their own way.

Going in, I had mixed expectations. I knew I would enjoy the soccer and the atmosphere that comes with fans pouring in from all over the world, but as for Russia itself, I wasn’t so sure. I had heard the dire warnings from those living across the border in Finland, where I was staying for the summer. Stories about reckless drivers, lawlessness, and notoriously violent soccer fans. Then there were the legends of doom and gloom from the old Soviet Union, people who never smile, armies of alcoholic men, and brigades of beguiling, gold-digger women. I’ve been in enough countries by now that I should have known better, but by the time my train pulled into St. Petersburg, I half expected to be met by a mix of secret agents, brawling thugs, drug addicts, and perhaps a few James-Bond-girl lookalikes in sparkly mini-dresses. I arrived to find none of the above, and instead hopped onto a very user-friendly subway, and finally checked into one of the nicest hostels that I have ever stayed in.

Over the next 3 weeks, I had the chance to explore both St. Petersburg and Rostov and take in the tournament. Surprisingly, western European fans, with the exception of everybody’s favorite fans from Iceland, were largely absent from the festivities, and those that did make the relatively short trip mostly followed their teams, stuck to themselves and added very little to the festival atmosphere. In contrast, most of the

“Welcome to Russia” continued on next page

"Welcome to Russia" continued

noise was brought by the North Africans (Egypt and Morocco), and fans from Latin America. Unprecedented numbers of Mexicans, Colombians, and Peruvians made the long journey to Russia, along with the ever-passionate crowds from Brazil and Argentina. Tens of thousands descended on multiple Russian cities, setting up camp often for several weeks, each country competing to sing louder, chant more, and dance harder than the other. It was awesome. Those that didn't come missed out. St. Petersburg was impressive from top to bottom, every major avenue fit for an emperor's procession. Its ornate churches and countless canals made scenes fit for postcards, although it would have been even more enjoyable had it not been in the 50s and raining so often.

Rostov, on the northeastern tip of the Black Sea, had none of the old-world grandeur of St. Petersburg, but made up for it with sizzling summer temperatures and a fun in the sun, laid back party atmosphere. My first night there may have been a bit rough, but my remaining 5 days were my favorite part of the trip.

People have asked me if I saw "signs of oppression" while I was there. No, I didn't, nor was I looking for any. I was far too busy taking in sights and sounds and soccer games, but that is not to make light of the well-documented and widespread official discrimination often faced by minorities of every kind, including Bible preaching churches.

I did get to go to one of those Bible preaching churches, twice, while in St Petersburg. The large, international church happened to be walking distance from my hostel and it was a blessing to worship with them. Their services were entirely bi-lingual, even down to the worship songs, which alternated verse by verse between Russian and English. My first Sunday there, we were treated to a special greeting from a large group of Egyptian believers, also attending the World Cup. Although they jokingly invited the church to join them in praying for Egypt to win all its games (their next game was against Russia), the prayers of the Russian faithful appear to have won out, as Russia soundly won the match 3-1 later that week.

I never saw my host in Rostov again after that first night. Her daughter and my American friend both arrived the next day and other arrangements were made for the rest of my stay. Our awkward introduction aside, I am thankful for this woman who provided a complete stranger with a clean and comfortable place to stay late at night. I'm thankful also for my friend's extended Russian family, who helped us explore and enjoy their culture and history on a personal level. I'm thankful for the university students I met through pick up soccer games in the park and for the laughs we shared afterwards, often by passing around phones with Google Translate.

Russia has had its share of struggles, and the people I met were aware of the negative images the world has of their country. Most of them were thrilled that so much of the world would come and find something much better. We should remember our brothers and sisters in the church there, who really do have it harder. We should also remember the rest of the Russian people, most of whom simply want to have a good time, live a good life, and desperately need the Gospel, just like the rest of us. I went to Russia expecting to enjoy the soccer, and left having enjoyed its people even more. Should the opportunity ever arise to return, I'll be happy to take it.

Hope in the Storm

by Cheryl Lanoue

Jesus told us, “In the world you will have tribulation.” Growing up in rural America it has been easier for me to keep His words at arms-length. For my younger self, war, unrest and violence have always been in foreign places. Today, my older self finds it very different; the fallenness of this world is relentlessly breaking in upon my mind like the waves in a storm. Disasters flash in red banners across my computer screen demanding attention: the devastations of addiction; broken marriages and families; the ravages of cancer and disease; the outrageous ambitions of science; consequences of monumental greed and corruption and unthinkable violence. How do I keep my head above water in this broken world? The rest of Christ’s words ([Jn. 16:33](#)) lift me above the fray and place my feet on solid ground: “But take heart; I have overcome the world.” Just as Edward Mote penned in his hymn about the Christian’s hope:

***When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale, my
anchor holds within the veil.
His oath, His covenant, His blood
support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.***

How do Jesus’ promises and shed blood stay my heart and mind? Peter’s first letter teaches us that the ground of our hope is Jesus. By God’s great mercy we have been “born again to a living hope” through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Not a “hope so” hope, but a hope filled with life and energy. We have also been born to an estate, that is “to an inheritance” which is salvation—eternal life! Exiles, leaving homes behind, have no inheritance but this is not the reality for children of the heavenly Father! This inheritance belongs to us for a certainty now, and we will take possession of it in the future. A salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter describes this inheritance as “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading”. As one commentator put it, “In substance incorruptible; in purity undefiled; in beauty unfading” [Alford]. And we are assured that this inheritance is “kept in heaven for you”. Calvin wrote:

“The inheritance is said to be reserved, or preserved, that we may know that it is beyond the reach of danger. For, were it not in God’s hand, it might be exposed to endless dangers. If it were in this world, how could we regard it as safe amidst so many changes? That he might then free us from every fear, he testifies that our salvation is placed in safety beyond the harms which Satan can do. But as the certainty of salvation can bring us but little comfort, except each one knows that it belongs to himself, Peter adds, ‘for you’.”

I Peter 1:3,4 is a passage to help us deal with the tragedies and sorrows of this world that would otherwise crush us. In these stormy times, it is also a word of hope for us to hold out to those who want to know how it is that we can identify with the pain of a fallen world and yet retain hope – “sorrowful yet always rejoicing.” Let us be bold to share our confidence in Jesus that others might draw near and “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”. May God increase our faith to stand even more securely on the solid Rock, Christ Jesus our Lord.



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



“Live Coals” Prayer

All are encouraged to come together for our **monthly time of corporate prayer** from **5:00-6:00 p.m., Sunday, January 6th**, in the sanctuary. Join us as we acknowledge our dependence on the Lord in all things, and seek to know Him and His direction for our part in His kingdom work.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. - 1 John 5:14

Adult Sunday School

The winter quarter adult Sunday School class is a study of God’s covenant using *Covenants: God’s Way with His People*, by O. Palmer Robertson. Pastor Tom is leading us as we explore what it means for God to say “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” Join in on **Sunday mornings at 9:30-10:30 a.m.**



Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men of the church are invited to join together for Bible study, discussion, prayer and fellowship on **Saturday morning, January 19th, from 7-8:30 a.m.** at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. The men are currently using *The Godly Man’s Picture Drawn with a Scripture Pencil*, by Thomas Watson. Breakfast will be served.



Cold Days, Warm Hearts

On these cold winter days, let’s consider how we can bless others with the warmth of the love of Christ. Reach out to a neighbor or a member of our church family with a phone call, a note, an invitation to tea, or a gift of baked goods. Feeling lonely or isolated yourself? Take advantage of the opportunities for the warmth of Christian fellowship through our regularly scheduled church gatherings, or consider planning a fellowship event yourself.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24-25





January 2019



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		1 <i>New Year's Day</i>	2	3	4	5
6 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Live Coals Prayer	7 7:00 Addictions Victorious	8 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	9	10	11	12
13 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	14 7:00 Addictions Victorious	15 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	16	17	18	19 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
20 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	21 7:00 Addictions Victorious	22 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	23	24	25	26
27 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	28 7:00 Addictions Victorious	29 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	30	31		