

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

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him." (Genesis 2:18)

As I write this, Charleen, Ian and I are preparing to leave for Virginia, where I have been asked to officiate the wedding of my nephew. Mark's fiancé is from Germany. We are looking forward to seeing family that we haven't seen in several years as well as meeting members of her family who are flying over for the wedding.

Wedding are joyous occasions but, sadly, we know that not all that starts well ends well. The initial love that brought couples together grows cold and they decide to part ways, and almost always with a great deal of pain.

Marriage is one of three "creation ordinances" found in the opening chapters of the Bible. Along with the sabbath (worship) and labor (tending the garden) God established marriage prior to the fall to serve as pillars of life. Together they are part of what it means to be created in the image of God.

Sadly, in the fall of Adam and Eve everything changed. Martin Luther wrote that sin has made us *incurvatus in se*, "turned in upon ourselves". God is no longer the center of our universe, we are. Work has become a necessary evil as we struggle against the thorns and thistles, and the marriage relationship is not always characterized by the harmony Adam and Eve once enjoyed.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church." In writing that he borrows a biblical analogy from the Old Testament. God is as a husband to his people, and his people are as a bride to him. Is it any wonder that we see the same analogy in the New Testament with regard to Jesus and the church?

There are various words for love in both the Greek and Hebrew languages. One word, *eros*, which incidentally is never found in the New Testament, is broader than just sex. It has to do with our emotional response to what pleases me or fulfills my desire. It's all about me. (*in curvatus in se*). Is it any wonder that this word is most associated with the world of Playboy? Another word means "brotherly affection". Close friends, comrades in arms, etc. The other word, *agape*, is really almost exclusively a New Testament word. I'm convinced that Jesus and Paul in using this word are reflecting back to an Old Testament word, *chesed*, which is closely associated with God's covenant. It is best translated "steadfast love" and is almost always used in conjunction with the word "faithfulness".

We read in Romans (5:8), "God shows his love (*agape*) for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." Jesus willingly gave himself to the cross, not because we were worth it, but in order to redeem us from the curse of sin. If that is not the opposite of *in curvatus in se* I don't know what is.

So, when Paul writes, "Husbands love (*agape*) your wives as Christ loved the church.", he's talking about more than just the emotional response that comes as a result of our wives satisfying us (or vice versa). He's talking about an action, a commitment, something we do for the other person, not just about using our spouse to satisfy our own needs or desires.

Many of us are getting older and have been married a long time. (Charleen and I will celebrate 43 years next month.) I have to say how thankful I am that my wife has exercised real *agape* love toward me for all these years, and I trust that I have done the same for her. (Happy Mother's Day, dear.) But we need to pray for and encourage our younger families as they face the daily challenges of living as husbands and wives. Marriage is a commitment, true. But it's one that has its rewards because God has established it from before the Fall.



Pastor Tom Bridgman

Missions Corner

From the Dromas

Dear family, brothers and sisters,

Hope you are very well!

As you know, Arame is making great progress. We are very excited about the upcoming ministries here in the States, especially the days of fasting and prayer and the youth ministry.

The ministries in Romania are continuing very well. We try to faithfully support them in prayer but also by sending financial support for the men in university and seminary, children's ministry, fuel for the weekly preacher, and the church utilities: about \$542 total each month.

We have been praying and seeking the Lord's guidance regarding our future. We would like to kindly ask for your prayers and advice as we are considering whether the Lord might be leading us to London, UK, possibly next year: summer of 2020.

By doing that, Arame could continue her treatment in English, which is very important for her speech therapy. The other reason for considering London is also for ministry. There are about 30 Kurdish believers without a Kurdish church and there are more than 70 Silversmith gypsies who live in London and some of them are inquiring about the "Way". We pray and hope that maybe we could plant a church in each of these groups.

However, in order for Ciprian to be able to stay in the States until the summer of 2020, he would need to apply for a Green Card. We would like to ask, especially American citizens, whether they would consider writing a recommendation letter (affidavit). Whoever is interested in helping in this way, please email Eve at evedroma@gmail.com.

Thank you all ever so much!



Nkosi Sikelel' Africa

by Ian Bridgman

This summer will be 9 years since I spent a month in South Africa for the 2010 World Cup. I was able to share in some experiences and meet some outrageously cool people, and I've always had a desire to go back. South Africa has had its share of struggles in the past, from its hideous apartheid years to the rampant crime since, but for this one month while hosting the world's biggest sporting event, the present looked pretty good. I was surprised to see recently that South Africa is slowly legislating its way towards the seizure of white-owned farms without compensation. Most with a Caucasian complexion, apart from those on the leftist political fringes, will react with consternation to the news. Some, but nowhere near all, of my African friends are all for it. The whole issue may feel distant and foreign, but as Christians, it should cause us to think seriously about right and wrong, and vengeance and justice.

Many will be quick to point out that when Zimbabwe tried the same thing 20 years ago, the result was catastrophic. The land reform policies, meant to restore the vast amounts of white owned rural land to the African people, were arbitrary, violent, and corrupt. They enriched dictator Mugabe and his allies, while destroying one of the continent's model economies. Critics will point out that the country's most successful farmers, most of whom had been there for generations, were forcibly deprived of their land just because of their race. Many of the same critics, however, will shy away from the other questions, such as how huge amounts of African land became white-owned in the first place.

The motive for land reform should be easy to understand. As early as the 1600s, Dutch settlers (Boers) and English traders were arriving on the coast of South Africa, carving out ever growing territories and forming alliances with various chiefdoms. By the 1800s, with the discovery of diamonds, Europeans were pouring in, and with tensions rising, the British invaded Zululand, southern Africa's premier military force. Superior firepower and tactics led to British victory in the Anglo-Zulu war of 1867, and Zululand was restructured as a British colony. In the following years, as the British colonies and competing Boer republics consolidated their power, laws for blacks, Indians, and other non-whites gradually became more restrictive. By the end of World War II, while the rest of the world was celebrating the Allied victory, South Africa was transforming itself into a grotesque, Nazi-inspired, segregationist's fantasy land. Unlike the United States during the horrors of the Jim Crow days, where the majority population oppressed a smaller percentage of the population, white South Africans had managed to disenfranchise an entire country in the service of a tiny minority.

Apartheid finally collapsed in 1994, and the transition was miraculously peaceful. Many changes have come quickly under democratic, majority rule, but ownership of rural farmland is still a sticking point. While many non-whites have risen from rags to riches, a government audit in 2017, 23 years after equal opportunity was restored, shows that 72% of private farmland remains in the hands of a 9% white minority. For many South Africans, those statistics are unacceptable; progress is too slow. The land was taken once, and it must be taken back.

While we may not have to wrestle with an issue quite like this, our brothers and sisters in South Africa do. So where do we even start? Over the past year or so, mostly with the inmates at the jail, I've had the chance to study and discuss God's law as given in the Old Testament, its purpose, and how we apply it today. For starters, we have the 10 commandments and their summary in what Jesus called the greatest commandments. Far from being a simplistic list of do's and don'ts, these commandments are a picture of God's own character, and a blessing to all peoples for all time. We also have, in detail, how these principles were to define a specific culture for a particular time, in the laws given to the Israelites in Exodus and Deuteronomy. So how do these things apply to a place like South Africa? Some have said that what happened is inevitable when two such disparate societies collide. Is it though? What does "you shall not steal" look like in 1652 on the shores of Cape Town, or on the Great Trek inland in the 1830s, or on successful commercial farms in 2019? What does it look like to "love your neighbor as yourself" in Johannesburg in 1950? Or 1994? Or now?

"Nkosi" continued on back

“Nkosi” continued

It is neither my place, nor in my capacity to make judgements on how South African society should move forward, but there are a couple things we can remember. Land reform critics often reflexively ask why we can't just leave well enough alone. The argument is often the same here in the U.S. The laws have been righted, the playing field is now level, can't we leave the past where it belongs and progress from where we are now? Can't everybody just do the best they can to live a decent life? Can't we just get over it and move on?? Well, no, we can't. Because the official policy of an entire country, both in South Africa and the United States, for a vast majority of its history, was evil. It was sin, and sin has consequences. Serious, long-lasting, dire consequences. For the entire nation. When farms are sacked, or neighborhoods burn it's not just because a group of thugs is acting out at random in a historical vacuum. "Sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov 14:34b) and we don't get to indignantly wish away the consequences just because they are inconvenient.

At the same time, there is a sharp distinction between justice and vengeance. In select cases, some kind of land reform may be the right thing to do, but a vengeful heart will never be satisfied by farmland or cash equivalents or race quotas. From the French revolution to Zimbabwe's land seizures, vengeance has only led to destruction and despair. The only thing that that will truly bring peace and closure is the gospel, in all its glorious, restorative power. More than anything else, South Africa needs Jesus.

Most South Africans support some kind of land reform, but a majority also opposes seizure without compensation. If the country moves in that direction, the economy will almost certainly suffer. Yet this too, would be more ripple effect from errors already made. If South Africa can act in a genuine pursuit of righteousness, and with it, justice, then the whole country and all its people will be blessed as result (Prov 14:34a).

I didn't arrive in South Africa that summer until the second week of the tournament, so I had to settle for watching the opening match here on TV, South Africa vs Mexico, played in the sparkling new Soccer City Stadium just outside Johannesburg. The whole country was buzzing; they had been waiting in eager anticipation of this moment for years. As kickoff approached and teams lined up for the national anthems, the US commentators, in a rare move, went silent, saying, "Listen to this. This is going to be special." Then 80,000 people stood and sang *Nkosi Sikelel' Africa* (God Bless Africa). Of all the World Cups I have followed, it is still the opening ceremony I remember the most. *Nkosi Sikelel' Africa*. Amen to that.

**While researching for this article, I learned that there was a line of the Bridgman family that spent almost 90 years in South Africa as missionaries to the Zulu people, from 1860 until 1949. Their work there ended the year after the apartheid regime came to power. The Bridgman Memorial Hospital, in Johannesburg, was the largest hospital for women in the southern hemisphere until it was forcibly closed in the 1960s because of its service to black Africans in a mostly white part of the city.*

-Oberlin College Archives <http://oberlinarchives.libraryhost.com/?p=collections/controlcard&id=394>



Location X 3

It's the real estate agents' mantra. These property experts say there are only three things to consider when buying a home: **Location, Location, Location.**

The same needs to be said about our spiritual lives. When you understand your location, you will live in a radically different way.

Location 1: Your World

You live in a dramatically broken world. It groans as it waits eagerly for redemption (Romans 8:19-23). Trouble surrounds you on every side. That means you have to live with realistic expectations and preparedness. If you don't bring a biblical understanding to the location where you now live, you will constantly be caught off guard, disappointed, and unable to function as God intended.

Location 2: Your Heart

You must acknowledge where you live, but you cannot give way to spiritual environmentalism where you blame all your struggles on external factors. The most prominent location battle is fought internally, on the turf of your heart. There is something dark and deceitful that still lurks in every one of God's children who has not yet been fully glorified, and it's only ever first the sin in your heart that draws and hooks you to the sin in your world.

Location 3: Your Refuge

In the middle of your trouble, be it external or internal, you will run somewhere for refuge. There are many faux fortresses where we tend to hide: another person, entertainment, a substance, food, sexual pleasure, etc. Since none of these can provide the actual shelter, putting your hope in them only adds disappointment to the trouble you're already experiencing! There is only one place to run where legitimate protection, rest, and strength can be found. You and I must learn to make the Lord our refuge (Psalm 7:1, 31:1, 57:1, and countless others).

Location 4: Your Destination

Real estate agents may repeat location three times, but we need to add in a fourth.

Before I do that, as if I haven't driven home the point of location, location, location enough, you could summarize the biblical story with three locations:

- **The Garden of Eden**, a place of perfection and beauty that became a place of sin and trouble;
- **The hill of Calvary**, a place of horrible suffering and death that by transforming grace led to life;

The New Jerusalem, our everlasting place of peace, lit by the brightness of Christ, which will be our final refuge forever.

Where you are heading, trouble will be no more. Because of the Cross of Jesus, your story will not end with daily trouble and temporary refuge. Your final location will be unlike anything you have ever experienced, even on your best and brightest day. You are headed for the New Jerusalem, where the final tear will be dried and trouble will be no more.

Today you will face trouble of some kind. Today you will run somewhere for refuge. Today there is hope and help to be found. May God be your refuge, and as you run to him, may you remember that he has promised you that there will be a day when your trouble is no more.

This content was originally posted by Paul Tripp on www.paultripp.com
<https://www.paultripp.com/wednesdays-word/posts/location-x-3>



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Thank You!

Thank you to all those who came out on Saturday, May 4th for our **Spring Spruce Up Day** at the church. Mulch was carted and spread, windows were washed, the upper parking lot and driveway were swept, and other cleaning accomplished. Teamwork was in evidence and fellowship was enjoyed!



Ladies' Bible Class Wraps Up

The Tuesday afternoon Ladies' Bible Class will wrap up their year with a luncheon on **Tuesday, May 14th**. For location and details see Betty Barbour.



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 *The Godly Man's Picture*, by Thomas Watson. The meeting will be at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge and breakfast will be served.



LOOKING AHEAD

Live Coals Prayer

Join us in the sanctuary on **Sunday evening, June 2nd, 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 things.



Grace Fellowship for Women

Women of all ages are welcome to be a part of the Grace Fellowship for Women on **Saturday, June 8th**, from **9:30-11:30 a.m.** Join us for a time of study and discussion as we grow in applying the Scriptures to our daily living.

Happy Mothers' Day





MAY 2019



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			1	2	3	4 9:00 Spring Spruce Up Day
5 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	6 7:00 Addictions Victorious	7 1:00 Ladies' Bible Class	8	9	10	11 9:30-11:30 am Grace Fellowship for Women
12 Mother's Day 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	13 7:00 Addictions Victorious	14 1:00 Ladies' Bible Class luncheon	15	16	17	18 7-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
19 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	20 7:00 Addictions Victorious	21	22	23	24	25
26 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	27 Memorial Day 	28	29	30	31	