



The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, pang attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing.

ELDERTALK: Philemon’s Love and Faith “A Testimony to Christ’s love and faithfulness”

JERRY MATHIAS

INTRODUCTION

In the human head there has always been a great desire to be free. But right now there are millions who are slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world. We are living in a day when people pride themselves on being free.

Jesus answered them, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.*”
(John 8:34)

“*And that is the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.*”
(Galatians 4:3)

They think they are free, but the Lord Jesus said, “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*”
(John 8:36)

What you do learn is the freedom that is above all the slavery of this world. It is the freedom that every one of us wants to have and it is in Christ Jesus.

Have a look at Philemon 1:4-18.

“**4 I always thank my God when I pray for you** **5 because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God’s people.** **6 And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ.** **7 Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God’s people.**”
(Philemon 1:4-7)

The primary purpose of this epistle is to reveal Christ’s love for us in what He did for us

before God in pleading our case. This is the finest illustration of substitution. Paul said, “*If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge it to me.*”
(Philemon 1:18)

We can hear Christ agreeing to take our place and to have all our sin imputed to Him. “*For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin.*” (2 Corinthians 5:21.)



The Apostle Paul sending off a letter — from a 1372 illuminated manuscript in the National Library of the Netherlands.

Jesus took our place in death, but He gives us His place in life. Paul said, “*So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.*”
(Philemon 1:17)

We have the standing of Christ before God, or we have none at all. He took our hell, and He gives us His heaven so that **we could be made right with God through Christ.** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Onesimus, an unprofitable slave, was to be received as Paul, the great apostle, would have been received in the home of Philemon.

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ELDERTALK *(Continued from page 1)*

The practical purpose is to teach brotherly love.

Paul spoke of the new relationship between master and servant in the other Prison Epistles. Here he demonstrates how it should work. These men, belonging to two different classes in the Roman Empire, hating each other and hurting each other, are now **brothers in Christ** and they are to **act like it**.

“...I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ.” (Philemon 1:6)

Jesus said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23.)

COME TO JESUS DAILY!

Reread Philemon 1:4-7.

Questions:

1. Do you always thank God?
2. Is your faith in the Lord Jesus growing?
3. Is your love refreshing God’s people and others?



FEBRUARY 2024

- 3** Games Reach Family Game Night. At GFC, 6:30-8:30 pm.
- 4** Elder Matt Godsil preaching on Hebrews 8:1-13.
- 8** Women of Grace, prayer and Bible study, 9-10 am.
- 11** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Hebrews 9:1-10. 🍷🍷
- 18** Elder Jadaé Fox preaching on Hebrews 9:11-22.
- 24** Women of Grace, Praise Moves. At GFC 9-10 am.
- 25** Eric Byrom preaching on Hebrews 9:23-28. 🍷🍷



Lori Barker and Brian Judd Wedding at GFC on 1/13/24.



Grace Haven Farm...at the beginning

GORDON T. WALKER (1932-2015)

Mary Sue and I fell in love with Grace Haven Farm the first time we saw it. But the farmhouse already had tenants—the principal of the Christian school and his family. We wondered where on the farm we could live. We were overwhelmed when Hod and Lillian Bolesky offered to build us a new house on the farm especially for our family. I made a sketch of what we'd need: extra bedrooms for troubled youth who would stay with us and a big basement for our retreats. Hod's brother-in-law, who was in the construction business, agreed to build it. In November 1968, I sent Bill Bright my formal resignation from Campus Crusade.

Within days after I resigned, Mary Sue and our three-year-old daughter Grace drove out to discuss a few details with the contractor. Mary Sue was crossing a busy highway and didn't see the car that was barreling straight toward her. At the last minute she hit her brakes. The driver of the other car turned and avoided hitting Mary Sue broadside. But the impact of the collision carried both cars over an embankment on the other side of the road.

I was in Columbus teaching a class on the OSU campus. At noon someone came into my midday class and told me that Mary Sue had been in an accident and I needed to call the hospital. I spoke to a nurse who said, "Now, don't get excited, your wife and daughter are okay,



Above: Ray and Gordon at a Grace Haven Pond baptism in the early 1970s.

but they're here in the hospital and you need to come on up here."

...I found that Mary Sue and Grace were not okay, but fortunately, their injuries were not life-threatening. By the grace of God they both recovered over the next few weeks.

Since I'd resigned from Crusade, we had no medical insurance and no idea how we were going to pay the medical bills. But when Bill Bright learned about our situation, he kept me on staff temporarily so that we could use Campus Crusade's benefits to pay our medical bills. I'll always be grateful for that.

We'd been at the farm about a year and a half when Ray Nethery joined us. Ray, a former Campus Crusade vice president, was one of my closest friends. He had resigned from Crusade before I did and was an active member of our study group. The Boleskys built a big, beautiful house for Ray and his family on

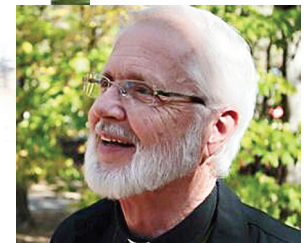
the hill above our house.

I enjoyed having Ray with us. It was good to have someone who shared the questions and concerns that had led to our departure from Crusade. But there were some significant differences in our views. Before coming to Mansfield, Ray had spent a year at L'Abri, Francis Schaeffer's community in Switzerland. I'd also made a couple of trips to L'Abri, and the atmosphere there didn't appeal to me. L'Abri had a more philosophical approach to Christian faith. I believed very deeply that the Bible-centered teaching was what these young people who had come to us needed. We agreed to disagree.

Mary Sue's care and concern for our guests was a wonder in itself. Hospitality and creativity seemed to come naturally to her. One weekend almost 200 kids showed up for a retreat. There was no fee; all they had to do

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Below: Gordon in the early 2000s.



Grace Haven Farm *(Continued from page 3)*

was bring their own food. Mary Sue took the assortment of items the kids had brought and made it into edible meals. It wasn't the miracle of the loaves and fishes, but she managed to make that food last all weekend....

The kids who came to the farm wouldn't attend church. They wanted me to hold services at home. "You can preach and teach. Why don't we have church here?" Our son Tom asked, "Why don't we have communion here?"

I replied, "Okay, I will. But if we do, we'll do it the New Testament way. We're going to have communion every Sunday." It was the first time I'd ever celebrated communion outside of a church. I wondered if I'd be struck by lightning.

Mary Sue and I loved our four years at Grace Haven Farm. Some truly amazing things happened. Every baptism is a little miracle. But there are twenty-seven of them I'll never forget. It was the end of February in a big snowstorm.

It was close to midnight. We had a large floodlight over the water so we could see. By the time I had reached the house to put on warm clothing, seven or eight students had asked to be baptized. I knew them all well, so I knew their faith was genuine, and I said okay.

When I got into the bedroom Mary Sue said, "What are you doing?"

G: "I've been asked to baptize some kids down at the pond."

MS: "Have you lost your mind?"

(That was a very good question!)

G: "Well, I couldn't talk them out of it."

From the twenty-seven who were baptized that night came the leaders of campus Bible classes throughout central Ohio and two megachurches in Columbus.

Adapted from *Led by His Love*

by Gordon Thomas Walker,

(with Phillip Walker and Andrew Attaway).

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Gordon Walker was diagnosed with prostate cancer in December 2014 and died eight months later on July 23, 2015. Mary Sue suffered from Alzheimer's disease. She fell, broke her hip, and died a week later—partners in life and death.



Above: Gordon and Mary Sue's burial site in Franklin, Tennessee's Grace Valley Farm's small cemetery. Photo taken at Gordon's funeral.

Below: A view of the St. Ignatius Antiochian Orthodox Church in Franklin, Tennessee, which Gordon started in 1986, as it appeared in 2015.



Happy 97th Birthday to Dale Black! GFC misses you!!!



Thanks to Fred Linger for this photo and the 1/24th reminder!

Grace Fellowship Church

365 Straub Rd East • Mansfield Oh 44903
419-526-4699 • gracefellowship01@gmail.com

(The complete list of church functionaries will return next month)