



Do you understand how He moves the clouds
with wonderful perfection and skill?
Job 37:16 (NLT)

TRAIL NOTES

The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying 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.



SPRING FORWARD
MARCH 9TH

St. Patrick's Day
MARCH 17TH

HELLO
March

If My People

Several days ago, while reading about the huge celebration and worship surrounding the opening of Solomon's newly completed temple of God in 2 Chronicles 7:14, I sensed that the Lord was bringing me to this Scripture in preparation for the March *TrailNotes*.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Lent starts Wednesday, March 5, and extends to April 19. For the church, over the centuries, it has been a time to slow down and carve out some time each day or each week to reflect both individually and as a group on our strong need for the saving and life reshaping work of Jesus.

Lent is a time to humbly face our sinfulness, to seek a stronger presence and loving work of Christ in our lives and through our lives to others. It is a time for naming our stubborn sin patterns and asking for His forgiveness and His help in turning from them. It is a time for inviting the mercy and healing of Jesus into our personal lives, our families, our neighborhood, our workplace, our fellowship at Grace Fellowship, our nation, and the world. With few if any exceptions, healing is needed in our minds, hearts, bodies, and relationships. Healing is needed at Grace Fellowship Church and certainly in the world around us.

The 2 Chronicles 7:14 text is a call and a promise to us from the Lord. It is timely for us as individuals, as couples and families, and as a church family at Grace Fellowship.

The temple is finally complete! Israel is now an established great nation of wealth and power. God's blessing has been poured out in great abundance, and the people are overwhelmed with gratitude, joy, peace, worship and praise to God.

These words from the Lord are preceded by thousands and thousands of Israelites gathering in Jerusalem for the celebration of the newly built temple in which

GREG FRANKENFIELD

God will dwell in the midst of Israel. The Ark of the Covenant had been brought into the Holy Place with hundreds of priests in attendance. The Levites played musical instruments. One hundred twenty priests sounded trumpets of celebration. Scores of singers sang praise to the Lord: "He is good; His love endures forever!"

Thousands of bulls and sheep and other offerings were in place before the temple, and the huge crowd



An unknown 21st century artist's depiction of what it might have looked like as King Solomon addressed the crowd.

grew silent. Suddenly the temple was filled with a dense cloud as the glory of God's presence entered it. No one moved; no one talked. Here is the reality of God's presence. This is not a story passed on to them. This is not the memory and hope nurtured since Moses completed the tent of meeting in the desert and the cloud of God's presence descended on it. This is here; this is now. What they had known as stories and a hope deferred for so long was happening before their very eyes.

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If My People *(Continued from p. 1)*

So many generations had come and gone, filled with wandering, fighting, seeking the Lord, turning away from Him, suffering, and returning again to Him as He had promised them. Israel was finally a strong, secure nation with a great king. The power and the holy presence of God were here in a way that every man, woman, and youth could now see and feel.

Then King Solomon, alone, in front of thousands of worshipers, surrounded by the evidence of that incredible fulfillment of God promises and that awesome, heavy, living silence of the Lord's presence, first blesses the huge assembly, reminding them that the Lord has truly fulfilled His promises.

He then turns toward the temple and acknowledges God's faithfulness and His incredible kindness in choosing to dwell here in the midst of His people even though He is far greater than this temple, far greater than the earth. Knowing the stubborn sinfulness of people's hearts, he prays that God will not only continue to dwell with His people, but that He will also hear the repentant prayers of the people...and that when He hears, He will forgive.

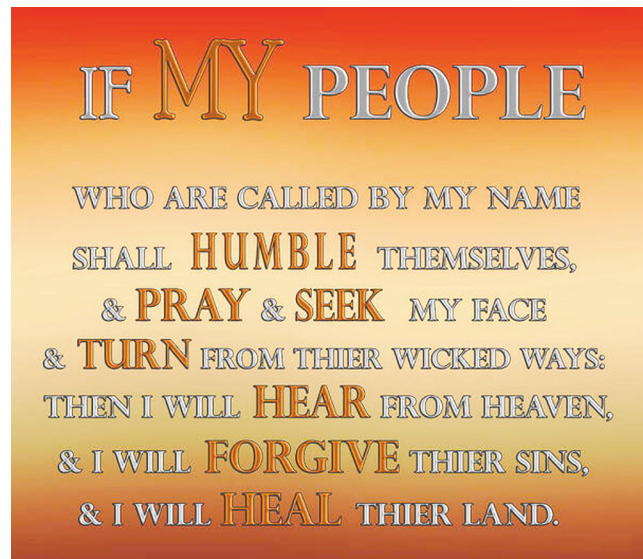
In response to Solomon's prayer, with no words of reply, the Lord God causes fire to consume the sacrifices placed before Him. He has accepted the sacrifices for their sin. The people's joy is boundless.

This dedication and the following feasting and celebrating last for two weeks before Solomon finally sends everyone home.

Later, and again in the quiet of Solomon's bed-chamber, God appears and reveals to Solomon things that will happen in the future. Israel will sin again, and God will again punish them. But God also promises that despite their history of faithfulness alternating with sin, rebellion, and being seduced into the ways and to the gods of the nations around them—despite this pattern, "If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves..."

Today the Lord is present with us: "Whenever two or three of you are gathered in My name, I will be with you." (Matthew 18:20) The sacrifice has been made by Jesus, our great high priest. Our sins have been forgiven, and as we continue to struggle with our sin and rebelliousness in real time, He is ready to forgive. Let's apply God's words in 2 Chronicles 7:14 to our lives, our time.

"If": We are continuously called to live as God's obedient servants. Yet we are constantly tempted by the world, the flesh, and demons. Sometimes it seems that we are enslaved to patterns of unrighteousness, living



2 Chronicles 7:14

Art work by B. Guilliams (Fine Art America)

in a world that is so broken. We can yield to the lie that it is hopeless. Scripture is filled with examples of struggles with unanswered prayer. God knows us in our struggle to persevere.

"My people who are called by my name": We sing about how His name is written on our hearts. We praise Him because we are utterly forgiven. We are His own by our confession of trust in Him for salvation and life in and with Him. Yet many of us miss the call to continue to seek Him in our daily battle with sinfulness.

"Will humble themselves...": How do we judge our actions? Do we judge based on our personal sense of what is good and bad? Do we tell ourselves that we have "messed up," "blown it," or give in to the wrong thing like everyone else? Or do we accept the Lord's words for sin and His description of sin and its terrible consequences? Do we humble ourselves and accept His word about good and evil, sin and virtue, right and wrong?

Pride opposes humility. Pride makes us hide our sin and our need of both His mercy and the guidance and help of others. Pride looks down on others, quietly comparing ourselves with others, sometimes consoling ourselves by noticing their weaknesses, their flaws.

"Pray": What kind of praying is God calling for? A recent poll by the Pew research group found that 30% of Christians surveyed said that they prayed once a day and 16% stated that they prayed several times a day, 23% prayed either weekly or a few times a month. About one person in five said they prayed seldomly or never. How much do you pray? How much time do I spend watching a screen of some sort?

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If My People *(Continued from p. 2)*

According to a 2018 study from Nielsen Media Research, the average American adult spends nine hours a day watching or interacting through screens. It's hard to say how this applies to truly committed Christians, but when my cell phone told me I typically spend 2 hours a day on my phone, I was shocked. Interestingly, people I shared that with laughed that it was so little. Ask the Lord to help you to pray more during Lent.



2 Chronicles 7:14 type prayer as depicted by an unknown 21st century artist.

How can you pray? Less screens, more seeking Him. Use a Scripture passage or worship song that has somehow caught your attention as a springboard for prayer. When you pray, take time to become quiet... and listen...to notice a thought, an image in your imagination, a desire (even a quiet one), an emotion, a physical sensation that comes from your prayer. Notice if a word from the Scripture or worship song you started out with stands out to you. Ask the Lord if in one of these ways He is showing you something to pay attention to.

“Seek my face”: Did you know that we are constantly seeking, desiring, imagining, and noticing things even when we don't know we are doing it? We do desire, are drawn to, imagine, and notice things. We feel frustrated, restless or empty in the absence of what we desire. This is so true of us, but do we seek Jesus? Do we desire Him? Do our thoughts drift to Him?

His face toward us is a blessing. His watchcare is like a mother looking at her infant, or a proud and loving

father, watching his little son or daughter take his or her first steps by himself or herself. When thousands of Israelites were marched off to Babylon, God told His prophet that His eyes would be on them, His face would be toward them to preserve and prosper them, and one day return them to their homeland.

Like those exiles, His face, His gaze is upon us. Do we believe that? Do we seek His face? When we are happy, do we seek His face? When we are angry, do we seek His face? When we are tempted or offended...? When we know we have done wrong or are in a bad mood, do we seek His face? Jesus wants you to. He is looking at you and loving you. Ask Jesus to open your heart and the eyes of your heart. Your history won't stop His love. Your sins won't stop His love. Ask Him. Seek His face.

“Turn from their wicked ways”: I don't have wicked ways, do I? What is God's definition of wicked? What is our definition of wicked? What is the world's definition of wicked? Read the opening section of Ps.119:129-136. What is the Lord saying with these words from a person who is both yearning to be obedient to God's ways and knowing he or she is not there yet? These words are for you...and me.

“Then, I will hear...I will forgive their sin... I will heal their land.” This Lenten season, let us take the Lord at His word. Let us follow His loving, serious call. Let us stir up hope for our lives, our family's lives, our friends' lives, the lives of Grace Fellowship Church.

THE IDEAL CHURCH...BUILDING

DANIEL SILLIMAN

Outreach-minded Christians have often argued that church buildings need to be less “churchy” to draw in would-be seekers. But that might not actually be true, according to recent research from Barna Group and Aspen Group asking a random sample of 2000 Americans questions about the architecture of sacred spaces.

When Americans close their eyes, they can picture a church, even if they rarely or never attend one. They have an idea of what one should like—and have a preference for. That preference is quite traditional.

Nearly 90% of Americans say a church should be “easily identifiable” and eight out of ten say that they want the building to “reflect the beauty of God.” There are some, to be sure, who prefer that churches feel modern (38%) and trendy (28%). but most feel more timeless and transcendent. 75% prefer calming, 25%

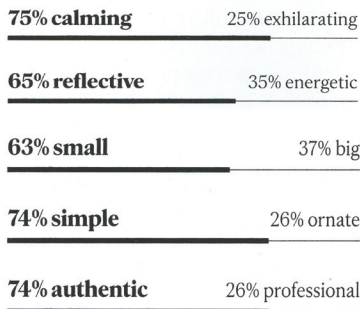
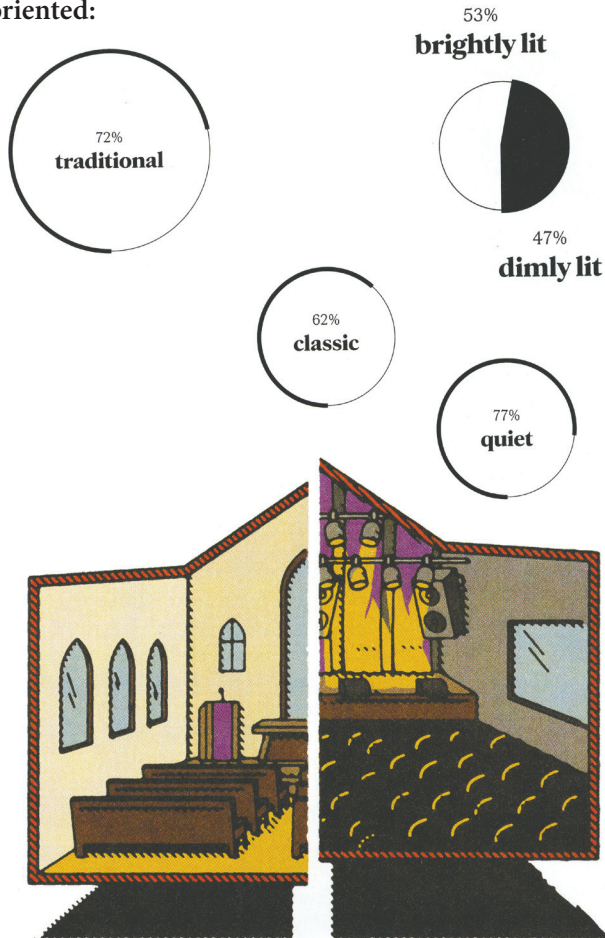
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THE IDEAL CHURCH...BUILDING

(Continued from p. 3)

exhilarating; 65% reflective, 35% energetic; 63% small, 37% big; 74% simple, 28% ornate; 74% authentic, 26% professional.

Here are some of those statistics (and a few more) in graphic format for those who are more visually oriented:



The above Illustrations by Mike Haddad

Editors note: This is adapted from a short article which appears in the March 2025 issue of *Christianity Today* magazine and is used by permission. Where do you fit in as to your own Ideal Church...Building?

March 2025

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- 1** Games Reach Family Game Night, 6:30-8:30 PM.
 - 2** 1 Peter 5:12-14 (Matt Godsil). Teen DTS planning meeting, 12:45.
 - 9** Keys to Freedom: Setting the Stage (Greg Frankenfield) 🍷🧀
 - 10** GFC hosts March of Prayer, 6-8 PM.
 - 16** Keys to Freedom: Committing and Connecting to Christ (Eric Byrom). Kids DTS planning meeting, 12:45.
 - 23** Keys to freedom: Renewing Your Mind (Eric Byrom). 🍷🧀
 - 25-31** Orientation for teachers going to Japan, at GFS.
 - 30** Celebration Sunday. MCS's Image choir here today. Potluck meal after worship. Last date for a discounted fee for Table Fellowship Conference (April 10-12, at GFC).
- Upcoming: April 10-12: Table Fellowship Conference at GFC.**

Grace Fellowship Church

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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor

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