



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.

## GRACE ON MISSION

### ElderTalk: Grace Gives Us a New Way to Live

JERRY MATHIAS

#### Run from Sin

You will never understand your struggle with sin unless you grasp that, at its very bottom, sin is a heart problem. It is not first a problem of bad behavior although it always goes there. It is not first a location or situation problem although it expresses itself there. Sin is a matter of the heart. Let me explain what this means.



“Lot fleeing from Sodom” (cropped)  
by Benjamin West (1810)

The Bible uses many terms for the inner, spiritual, thoughtful, desiring, motivational you, but all those terms are gathered together and summarized by one big collective term: *heart*. It is one of the most often used terms in the Bible. In fact, I am persuaded that you cannot understand the transforming message of the Bible unless you understand this term. Here’s a definition to carry with you as you read your Bible: the heart is the causal core of your personhood. It is the seat of your thoughts, desires, choices, and motivations. It is the worship center of your self. The heart is the reason you do the things you do and say the things you say. You and I literally live out of our hearts.

Sin lives in our hearts, and because it does, it corrupts our thoughts, desires, choices, and motivations. We were created to be servants of God, but sin makes us lovers of self. We were made to worship the Creator, but sin causes us to worship creation, We were designed to live for God’s glory, but sin causes us to make life all about our own glory, and unless these things bring about change in our hearts, our behavior won’t change at all, or if it does change, it won’t change for very long.

No amount of commitment to self-reformation will change your heart. No amount of work to alter bad habits will change your heart. No amount of beating yourself up with guilt and shame will change your heart. No running from certain situations, locations, and relationships has the power to change your heart. You can’t run from sin because you cannot run from you. The most outrageous acts of penance in the world are powerless to do what needs to be done: radically transform your heart.

So, you and I are left with only one final option. It is the only choice that makes sense. Everything else is insanity. We need to do this again and again until we don’t need to do it anymore. We need to run to the grace of Jesus. Run for forgiveness. Run for power. Run for transformation. Run for deliverance. RUN! RUN! RUN!

#### How Faith Propels Us

God hasn’t just forgiven you (praise Him that He has), but He has also called you to a brand new way of living. He has called you to live by faith. Now, here’s the rub. Faith is not normal for us.

*(continued on page 2)*

## Grace on Mission *(continued from page 1)*

Faith is frankly a counterintuitive way for us to live. Doubt is quite natural for us. Wondering what God is doing is natural. It's normal to think your life is harder than that of others. Envy of the life of someone else is natural. Wishing life were easier and that you had more control is natural. It's typical for you and me to try to figure out the future. Worry is natural. Fear is natural. Wanting to give up is natural. It's natural to wonder if all of your good habits make a difference in the end. It's normal to be occasionally haunted by the question of whether what you have staked your life on is really true. But faith isn't natural. Not only is your salvation a gift of God, but the faith to embrace it is His gift as well.

This means that faith isn't something you can work up inside yourself. Faith comes to you as God's gift: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8).

God not only gives you the grace to believe for your salvation, but He also works to enable you to live by faith. If you are living by faith, you know that you have been visited by powerful transforming grace, because that way of living just isn't normal. If your way of living is no longer based on what your eyes can see and your mind can understand, but on God's presence, promise, principles, and provisions, it is because God has crafted faith in you.

Could it be that all of those things that come your way that confuse you and that you never have chosen for yourself are God's tools to build your faith? By progressive transforming grace, He is enabling you to live the brand new life He calls all of His children to live—the Godward life for which you were created. You don't have to hide in guilt when weak faith gets you off the path because your hope in life isn't your faithfulness, but His. You can run in weakness and once again seek His strength, and you can know that in zealous grace He will not leave His craftwork until faith fully rules your heart unchallenged. He always gives freely what we need in order to do what He has called us to do.

The year's theme at Grace Fellowship is "Grace on Mission." Let each of us accept our Father's gift of grace and go to Him in faith each day.

**RUN! RUN! RUN! to the grace of Jesus!**

*This article is adapted from New Morning Mercies, A Daily Gospel Devotional by Paul David Tripp.*



*"The Disciples" (running to the empty tomb)  
by Eugène Burnand (1898)*

## OCTOBER 2023

- 1** Jay Shifley will be here for a Missions presentation, 10 am.
- 7** Family Game Night outreach to Madison Schools, 6:30-8:30 pm.
- 8** Jadae Fox preaching on Hebrews 3:1-6, 10 am. 🍷🍴
- 14** All-girls hike at Malabar Farm, 10 am.
- 15** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Hebrews 3:7-19, 10 am.
- 19** Women of Grace Bible study and prayer, 6:30-8 pm.
- 20** GFC Fall Family Fun Night, 5-7 pm.
- 22** Eric Byrom preaching on Hebrews 4:1-13, 10 am. 🍷🍴
- 29** Celebration worship with potluck, 10 am.

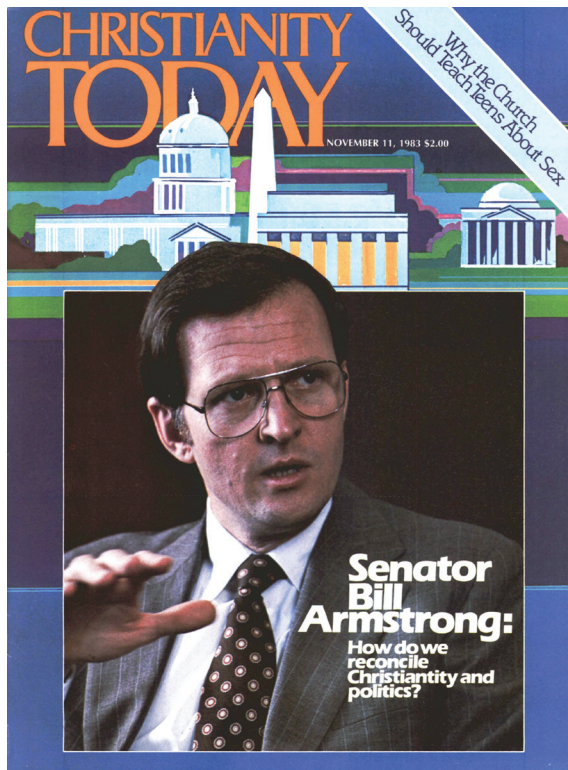
(Nov. 4 *Harvest Church and Grace Fellowship men's retreat at GFC.* Nov. 5 and 12: *Shoebox Collection days at GFC.*)

# How Do We Reconcile Politics and Christianity?

BILL ARMSTRONG (1937-2016) \*  
U. S. Senator and Christian

\* *Note: My first cousin, Bill Armstrong, was born 3 months before I arrived, the son of my mother's sister, Dorothy Armstrong. He served several terms in the House of Representative and then in the Senate. John and I loved visiting with him in the Senate Dining Room. It was in that dining room that we heard the story of his conversion. (I'll start with that!) What follows is from a cover article in a 1983 Christianity Today.*

Donna Kurtz



**Q.** Is there a specific place and time you can recall when you became a Christian?

**A.** Yes. I had been a nominal church-going “Christian suburbanite” all my life. But I accepted Christ as my personal Savior in the Joseph Martin Dining Room in the Capitol after I was elected to Congress 10 years ago.

Some people are led to the Lord as the result of a tragedy. That was not my experience. It was just the opposite. I had dreamed of certain kinds of success, making a lot of money, being elected to public office. I had achieved those things at a rather early age, and now I discovered they were

fundamentally empty. Now I was feeling desperate.

Just at that point, I was converted by a Christian layman who shared the gospel with me in a very direct way. I came to the realization that although I had been a church member, I wasn't truly a Christian in the sense of trusting Christ. So sitting there in the little dining room we discussed the gospel. He said, “Does this express the desire of your heart, to accept Christ as your personal Savior and let Him take charge of your life?”

“Yes, it does. Let's pray.” It was just about in that matter of fact manner.

**Q.** How does your Christianity influence what you do and how you vote on issues?

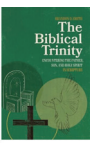
**A.** It makes all the difference in the world! My conception of what a senator is hinges on what his world view is. Scripture tells us to perform any vocation as unto the Lord. I feel that our relationships with other members of Congress are important. Those relationships transcend whatever the political issue is.

**Q.** How do you handle the pressure on your family?

**A.** When I travel, I'm on the telephone with my family every night. Second, my wife travels with me some. Third, when I'm home, I meet with my family every morning at 6:45 for prayer and Bible study. A lot of times that's the only time we're together. My son and I are trying to spend one weekend a year skiing together.

\* *Bill died of cancer in 2016. After leaving the Senate, he served as Director of Campus Crusade for Christ and then became the President of Colorado Christian University.*

*His wife, Ellen, died last week. Her funeral will be Monday, Oct. 2 at Wellspring (Anglican) Church in Englewood, Colorado. She was a friend of Betty Ford, Rosalyn Carter, Nancy Reagan, and Barbara Bush.*



## More on the Trinity— for YOU to read!

JOHN KURTZ

You may recall that earlier this year I wrote an article for *TrailNotes* (July 2023, if you need a refresher) about the Trinity as depicted in Christian artwork. In that Issue I alluded to a book which I had read, entitled *The Mystery of the Trinity* by Vern S. Poythress (published in 2020 by P & R Publishing.) In case you'd tried to read (688 pages!) this rather scholarly tome and given up, I'll now try to give you a couple of less challenging alternatives. If, however, you've begun reading Dr. Poythress' book and just couldn't make it all the way through, do go back and finish it. The Appendices are especially concise and informative.

The first of the three volumes which I've read over the past year, interspersed with other less challenging reads for variety, such as a fascinating book on J. Edgar Hoover and most recently, *Return to the Hiding Place* by Hans Polley, was one entitled, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son and Spirit* by Matthew Barrett. This 368-page book, published by Baker in 2012, has as its primary goal to present and explain, as "simply" as possible, our triune God in His three unique persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The author has done a good job of doing just that, with, of course, the realization that we are still seeing Him, even in the Scriptures, "through a glass darkly."

Following my much slower journey through Dr. Poythress' book, attempting, as best as we humans are able to comprehend The Trinity, while realizing that He is indeed yet "a mystery," it was truly a refreshing conclusion to my reading on the subject to discover the much shorter (only 180 smaller size pages!) volume, *The Biblical Trinity*, written by Brandon D. Smith (published in 2023 by Lexham Press). This book provides relatively "easy reading" and can serve as an excellent summary of what both Dr. Smith and Dr. Poythress were trying to convey in more lengthy volumes on the same subject matter. All three books make frequent and appropriate references both to Old and New Testament Scriptures as well as to the writings of various Early Church Fathers.

Would I recommend all three of these books? The answer is yes. However, if you have the time for a longer read, the sequence I went through would be advisable.

Start out with Dr. Barrett's volume. If you enjoy the longer read, then delve into the Poythress offering. If you're braver, and/or especially if you are visually oriented and like diagrams, you will likely appreciate the Poythress book because the author makes extensive use of them.

As a grand conclusion, or if you're just short on reading time and must select only one book, you can't go wrong with Dr. Smith's contribution. This book has a devotional aspect as well.

There are, of course, many other books, both modern and ancient, still available on this subject which is so foundational to our Christian faith. I've found the subject to be a fascinating one, and I "can't wait" to learn the "rest of the story" from the Author Himself.

Happy trinitarian reading to you all!



### Some memories of G.F.C.'s Community Celebration, 2023



### Grace Fellowship Church

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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor  
(A complete list of church functionaries  
will return next month)