



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.

ElderTalk A life that provokes questions

JADAÉ FOX

There are so many things that can keep us up at night: worry about work, school, the stress of providing for and protecting our family, concerns of how to prepare our children or grandchildren for the various struggles that they will face (many of which we have not seen before). In this post-pandemic culture, we have seen an alarming increase in depression, anxiety, and suicide. Sadly, these affect young people, too.

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. [Romans 15:13](#)



***Does my life provoke others to ask
where my hope comes from?***



¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, [1 Peter 3:15](#)

This Christmas season remember that Jesus’ birth is the advent of true hope for the world. He not only knows the answer; He *is* the answer to our need for hope and peace and our reason for joy!

I have the privilege of working with many volunteers (both teens and adults) at Madison Middle School. Once a week we gather in the library and pray before 25-30 students join us for two hours to play tabletop games together. It is truly amazing how this simple activity creates an atmosphere of trust where these students are willing to share about their lives.

Since this after-school game club is not overtly evangelistic, we need to be creative. So, we strive to create an environment and life where our students want to ask questions such as “*Why are you always so happy?* (JOY) or “*You don’t seem angry* (PEACE) or *worried.*” (HOPE) There are a myriad of questions that can arise as we live lives that are anchored in the hope and love of Jesus. It is for this reason that we find these students sharing things that worry them, and they ask for prayer. Consider the words of Paul in [Romans 15:13](#): Hope, joy, and peace are characteristics that believers have as a result of the Holy Spirit working in them, a result of Jesus’ finished work of His death and resurrection. See [Galatians 2:20](#).

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Whether you find yourself on the mission field, standing in line at the grocery store, sitting down with your extended family for Christmas dinner, or busy raising your kids, the charge is the same: *“Always be ready to give a defense (answer) for the hope that you have.”* 1 Peter 3:15. We are told where the confidence to do this comes from. It comes from making Jesus Lord of all your life. The context of this verse is that of a Christian who faces suffering and persecution, and it is there where lives filled with hope, peace and joy present the greatest contrast.

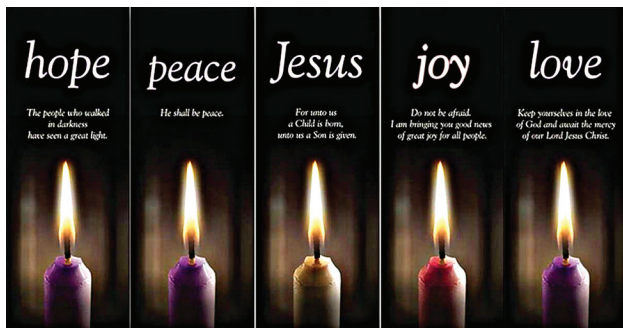
Honestly, in the culture we live, it is not hard for a Christian who stands up for the truth of Scripture in such topics like marriage, sexual identity, and abortion to face persecution. This is when we face a test of our faith. When our enemies look into our eyes, they expect to see anger, hatred, fear and despair. Instead, by the power of the Spirit, we will respond with “gentleness and respect: filled with hope, joy and peace.” 1 Peter 3:25.

It is also worth noting the value of asking good thought-provoking questions. During Jesus’ ministry on earth, He often asked questions that got people talking.

“A good teacher will use strategic questions to facilitate the learning process, and Jesus was the Master Teacher. Jesus at times asked questions in order to set up an opportunity for learning.” <http://gotquestions.org/why-does-God-ask-questions.html> Let this Christmas be a time you are reminded of the reason for and the source of our hope.

Ask yourself some questions. Is Jesus my hope? Do others see that hope in me? Does my life provoke others to ask where my hope comes from? Do I affirm my commitment to live a life dependent on the working of the Holy Spirit? What changes do I need to make?

Merry Christmas and may the Lord Jesus fill you with all hope, love, joy, and peace now and in the coming year!



The real miracle on the set of *The Chosen* is Christians coming together

People around the world have found a passionate community in the hit show about Jesus. With a new season, can it keep navigating fans, investors, and religious demands?

Andrew Cheng and Catherine Williams had their impromptu wedding near craft services, right before shooting *The Chosen* scene of the feeding of the 5,000. The extras, like so many Christians on the set and so many viewers around the world, were surprised at the close community they found in the hit show.

“It was just bonkers,” Cheng told *Christianity Today* after his wedding to Williams. *“Everything was great, except Jesus wasn’t there to turn the water into wine.”* In June, *The Chosen* wrapped filming the scene for the third season that premieres Friday, with about 10,000 fans serving as extras for the multi-day shoot in Texas. Maybe not since Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* has there been a biblical hit like this. Other Hollywood projects like *Noah* or *The Young Messiah* flopped with Christian audiences for various reasons. But because this show is financed through fans, it has a following unlike any studio project.



Picture by Tyler Thompson on *The Chosen* set

Cheng and his fiancée registered to play extras in the feeding of the 5,000—or “FSK” as everyone called it—as soon as they heard about it. Fans could be extras either by donating to the show or winning a raffle. Cheng and Williams had thought about whether to try to get married on set, but the forecast was hitting 100 degrees, and they initially put the idea aside.

“Feeding of the fried thousand,” one extra joked.

On the morning of the shoot, the couple was sitting under a big tent in first-century costumes, talking with some other extras, and mentioned that they had considered getting married there. One woman at their table loudly asked if there were any pastors in the vicinity. Indeed, there were pastors. One pastor

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The Real Miracle... (continued from p. 2)

from Louisiana had just done a wedding and still had the liturgy on his phone, so he said he could officiate the ceremony. Cheng showed that he had the marriage license ready to go.

One extra made Cheng a boutonniere out of antibacterial wipes on hand for COVID-19 precautions. Another extra had brought a harp as part of his costume for the shoot and started playing. Two women showed up with shofars. A woman made a flower headpiece for Williams, and someone appeared with two pots of flowers.

The pastor performed the ceremony, and then someone procured a “wedding cake” from the craft services table: a banana nut muffin and a chocolate chip muffin. Though Cheng and Williams didn’t have family and friends there, Cheng said it reminded him of “an old-time biblical wedding when the whole town came and brought something. A community wedding.”

The “community” of extras that showed up for the shoot hailed from 36 countries and ranged in ages from 91 to 7 weeks, according to the organizers.

Nicholyn Chang, from Malaysia, who lives in Washington, DC, came to the filming with her homemade first-century costume. Her roommate in DC is from Uruguay and got all of her friends in Uruguay to start watching the show too. Between takes on the blistering day, a Catholic couple from Brazil was fanning themselves, and one of their two children was playing in a diaper under an umbrella. Friends had told them about the show many times.

“We were somewhat resistant. I thought it would be cheesy or preachy,” said Carlos Crestana. But by episode 5, he said, “We were all in. We told all of our friends.”

The Chosen’s writer and director, Dallas Jenkins (son of author Jerry Jenkins), always insists that the show is not a replacement for church, nor is it a ministry. Fans disagree. “It is a ministry, in a totally different way. It’s affecting so many different people,” said Cheng who wears a *Chosen* swag everywhere and says it “starts a conversation about Christianity.” Jenkins has said his goal is to create art that reflects a world where faith exists, which he thinks is underrepresented in film.

The distributor, Angel Studios, is trying to continue *The Chosen’s* success in other projects. The first season debuted in 2019 as a massive crowdfunding success, raising \$10 million. Now it has a devoted following all over the world and has been translated into more than



Pictures by Tyler Thompson
on *The Chosen* set

50 languages. The showrunners are planning seven seasons and fundraising \$100 million. People often encounter the show with low expectations of didactic Christian content and are surprised to find something more compelling.

Another project of Angel Studios is the first season of Andrew Peterson’s *Wingfeather Saga*, which will begin streaming in December. It also drew millions as their *House of Cards*, the show that launched Netflix.

The Chosen still operates like a budget version of a Hollywood production in many ways. All of the thousands of extras for the feeding of the 5,000-shoot made their own costumes, with specific instructions from the show’s costume designer, Leila Heise. People around the Midlothian, Texas, area lent ATVs for shuttling people around the production area—900 acres of a Salvation Army camp.

But the show isn’t a simple homegrown product anymore. It just held its first splash premiere at the Fox Theater in Atlanta. Angel Studios now has venture capital funding. *The Chosen Christmas Special*, in theaters last year, raked in nearly \$14 million, by far the largest gross for Fatham Events. Even with all of that, the show’s first two seasons were not reviewed by Hollywood trade press like *Variety*.

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Christmas programs in Mansfield Dec. 9, 10 and 11

Experience Bethlehem – “You will be in Bethlehem as Jesus is born. A live Christmas story!”
Dec. 9 and 10 from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. Dec. 11 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm at Clearfork Alliance Church.

Come to the Manger – “Over 800 Nativity Sets! Sundays, Dec. 4 and 11 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. Immersing the whole building in Nativity things!” Children’s activities. Southside Christian Church, 2055 Middle-Bellville, Mansfield.

Salvation Army’s *Elijah House* has opened its Warming Center for nights 20 degrees and colder. Volunteers are needed for shifts 7 to 11 pm and 11 pm to 7 am. Contact Peggy Powers at 419-525-2012 or 419-564-9542. *Elijah* needs all kinds of disposable supplies. Call Peggy at the numbers above to hear their needs and to schedule a dropoff time.



The **Season of Advent** is upon us! Mitch and Janine Schwartz lit the candle for **Advent I** on Nov. 27. Join with us each Sunday at GFC as we celebrate this period leading up to **Christmas Day**.



DECEMBER 2022

- 4** Elder Jadaé Fox preaching on the **Second Sunday of Advent**.
- 7 & 14** All Connect groups meet.
- 8 & 15** Game Club meets.
- 10** Eric Byrom and Mitch Schwartz return late tonight from Nepal. They were there encouraging pastors and ministering to them through globalLead. Pray for them and their families!
- 11** Elder Matt Godsil preaching on the **Third Sunday of Advent**. 
- 18** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on the **Fourth Sunday of Advent**.
- 21** GFC Christmas Party begins at 6:30 pm.
- 24** **Christmas Eve Service** 7:00 to 8:00 pm.
- 25** **Christmas Service** 10:00 to 11:00 am. Pastor Eric Byrom preaching. 
(No Sunday School or Circle Church!)

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

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Eric Byrom	Presiding Elder/ Pastor
Jadaé Fox	Elder
Matt Godsil	Elder
Andy Heining	Elder
Jerry Mathias	Elder
Cameron Karger	Treasurer
Lori Barker	Missions
Andy Heining	Worship
Judy Nichols	Prayer Chain
Kay Berry & Jadaé Fox	Office
Andy Anschutz	Sound/Power Point
John and Donna Kurtz	TrailNotes



○ Come, ○ Come Emmanuel