

TRAILNOTES

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.

JANUARY 2021

ElderTalk

One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
Psalm 27:4 (NKJV)

These words are the cry of my heart. I long to dwell truly in the manifest presence of the Lord; that is to say, to be continually aware—actually sense—that He is right here with me. From the times that I have spent in His presence, I am absolutely convinced that this is a wonderful place. There is much love there. There is complete acceptance. There is healing. There is restoration.

My approach to ministry has been to encourage others in their communion with the Lord, knowing that any spiritual and emotional needs they may have must be met by the Lord and not by me. I cannot meet anyone’s needs by myself.

Yet, with the presence of the Lord being such a desire of my heart, how is it that I have such a hard time getting there, and staying there? Some have said that we cannot expect to live on the mountaintop—that we must come down and live in the valleys of life.

There must be a measure of truth there; however, the Lord’s presence is *home*. It is the place where our heart must return at the end of the day. Those whose jobs keep them away from home for days (or weeks) at a time are not able to maintain the same level of relationship with their families

The Cry of My Heart

ROBERT KEY

as those who come home every night. Some are even blessed with being able to work at home with their families. Likewise, if we are not able to return to the presence of the Lord for days or weeks, our relationship with Him will never be as close as when we are routinely in His presence. I know these things; this is the desire of my heart, and yet I struggle.

The Lord speaks to us in many ways. Each of us may relate to Him in a different way. For me, the way that I most frequently have sensed direct input from the Lord, revelation if you will, is as I study the Scriptures in preparation for preaching. However, that is still the analytical side of my brain. It is not the same as when I sit in His presence and enjoy Him—“*To behold the beauty of the Lord,*” as the Psalmist says.

Some years ago, I was introduced to the concept of deliberately *looking* for the Lord to speak to me, not just hoping that it would happen. Notice that I said *looking* rather than *listening*. This is because the key for me was opening my eyes to look for visions rather than opening my ears to listen for words.

A quick Bible word search on the word “vision” will reveal how very important this communication device is. Numbers 12:6 says, (Then God said), “*Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.*”

The first verse of the books of the

prophets Isaiah, Obadiah, and Nahum identify the book as the “vision of...” even though the book is filled with both words and visions. The beginning of Amos and Micah begin with “*The word... which he saw...*” Throughout the Old and New Testaments we see many accounts of visions. This begs us to ask, “*Can we deliberately look for a vision?*” Yes, we can.

For many years after I was introduced to looking for the Lord to speak to me through visions, I was able to routinely come into His presence in this manner. I have several journals that describe times I have spent in the Lord’s presence, just being with Him. I visually saw myself sitting or walking with the Lord, enjoying Him and letting Him show me things.

(continued on page 2.)



Poster depicting Joel 2:28
by David Sorensen (21st century)

The Cry of My Heart *(concluded)*

I seldom heard words which told me what to do or say, or how to minister to someone. These were not words of wisdom, words of knowledge, or prophecy. They were more like going on a walk with someone and looking at the flowers. They were sweet times.

In the midst of this, my wife and I were called into a cross-cultural mission, the details of which I don't have time to elaborate on now. Because of where it was, it was never recognized by our church as a mission, and so we didn't have the prayer support we needed. Because of what it was and the circumstances by which we were there, intrigue and conflict developed among the people, with the result that we lost the friendship of folks whom we had counted as close friends. When we left, it was with a bitter taste in our mouth.

As this conflict arose, the Lord seemed silent. There were no more visions, or maybe I wasn't looking. In any case, I began to question the Lord. I wondered

why He hadn't warned me about what was happening, why He didn't comfort me in the midst of it. I questioned whether I was ever hearing from the Lord at all, or if it was all a deception. I quit trusting the Lord to speak to me. I walked in doubt and unbelief.

Now, years later, the bitterness is healed. Trust is restored. My heart remembers the sweet times and longs for that again. Yet, it doesn't come easily anymore. I am beginning a deliberate search for restoration.

In several of my sermons I have ended with a call to join me in searching for more of the things of the Holy Spirit. At the present time, I am praying about how I can encourage us all to make this pursuit. If your heart is hungry for more communion with the Lord through vision, contact me and let's take this journey together.

*"And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions."* (Joel 2:28)

NOTICE: On Sunday, December 27, 2020 Dr. Mark Hamilton, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Ashland U. died of kidney and heart failure. Mark was 67 years old. He was active in the early years of Grace Haven and helped establish the home church in Bucyrus. Mark is survived by his wife, Pat, and two adult daughters.



Justice and Kera Gardner carry out the candle lighting and reading for the Advent IV service on December 20.



JANUARY 2021



1 **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

2 **New Dates: "Rediscovering Joy"**

musical presented by the Grace Youth Production Company under the direction of Samuel Hejning, writer and composer. 6:30-8:00 pm.

3 **Jadae Fox** preaching. Dan. 9:1-27.

"Rediscovering Joy" 2:30-4:00 pm.

6 **Connect Groups** reconvene. 6:30-8:00 pm.

10 **Eric Byrom** preaching. Dan. 10:1-21. Circle Church Leaders Meeting. 2:00 pm.

16 **Men's monthly breakfast.** 9:00 am. Meet at church. Bring a sack breakfast.

17 **Eric Byrom** preaching. Dan. 11:1-45. **McKee Circle** feeding the hungry at the 72 Bowman St. lot. 11:45 am.

24 **Eric Byrom** preaching. Daniel 12:1-13.

31 **Celebration Sunday!**

How to Pray over a President

Regardless of who wins this election, there are right and wrong ways to intercede

BONNIE KRISTIAN

When you sit down to read this, the presidential election may or may not be over. The results may or may not be announced. Between pandemic-occasioned mail-in ballots and the lawsuits and recounts I expect will follow, this column seems to me a distant, ominous smear on the calendar of a helter-skelter year. What can I write to such a future?

There is one certainty, however the election ends. A president of the United States *will* be chosen, and he will be in dire need of prayer.

Calls to pray for political leaders are familiar to evangelicals. We know Scripture requires it: “*I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone,*” writes the Apostle Paul in I Tim. 2:1-2, “*for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.*” (NRSV) We know, too, that prayers are commanded no matter what we make of our leaders politics. We pray for their prudence and success for the sake of our neighbors, even if we would never give them our vote.

But I think we can pray more. Here are four ways to pray over a president, whoever he may be.

1. Pray honestly, but with mercy. Around the time of the 2012 election, billboards in several Southern states urged passersby to pray Psalm 109 for then President Barack Obama: “*May his children be orphans and his wife a widow. May his children wander about and beg; may they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit:*” (vs. 9-11). Imprecatory Psalms like this appear in

Scripture because God wants us to speak truthfully to Him. (Job 42:8). We should not conceal our emotions in prayer, as if we could fool God. But at the same time, as bitter honesty is preferable to decorous pretense, so mercy in our prayers is better than cruelty.

2. Pray for winners and for losers. The COVID-19 pandemic; a summer of police brutality, protest and riot; and Trump’s cunning omnipresence in our political conversations have combined to intensify what is already the most intense date on the political calendar. For many Americans, this election feels apocalyptic. I don’t think forecasts of widespread violence over its outcome are correct, but neither can I confidently dismiss their possibility. For those whose candidate wins, we should pray for responsibility, humility and grace. Insofar as conscience permits, let us “*rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*” (Rom. 12:15).

3. Pray for wisdom, peace, and justice. Every presidency is much shaped by its staff, and the space between Election Day and Inauguration day is a crucial time for the selection of presidential advisers. “*Where there is no guidance, a nation falls,*” says Prov. 11:14, but bad guidance can take a nation down also. Prayers for peace are needed, because our Constitution assigns the president perhaps his most unfettered power in the conduct of war—and its conclusion. And some policies of every presidency, whether at war or at home, inflict unjust harms. We should pray for our president’s victims, for their receipt of justice and restoration.

4. Pray for perspective and discipleships. The presidency, we must remember, is not everything. Who occupies the Oval Office cannot singly determine every course of the next four years. In the smaller scheme of things, many policies that most affect our daily lives are set at state and local levels. There is good to do in our communities, whatever happens in Washington. In the bigger picture, the president is not our true king and America is not our true kingdom. Our hope is in Christ, not “*in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.*” (Ps. 146:3) Neither is the president our exemplar, the life around which we conform our own. Still, let us pray that discipleship will cultivate in us any of his virtues we admire—and that sanctification will excise from us any of his vices we revile.

PRAYERS ARE COMMANDED
NO MATTER WHAT WE MAKE
OF OUR LEADERS’ POLITICS



BONNIE KRISTIAN is the author of *A Flexible Faith: Rethinking What It Means to Follow Jesus Today* CHRISTIANITY TODAY, (NOV. 2020)
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Living in Bethlehem

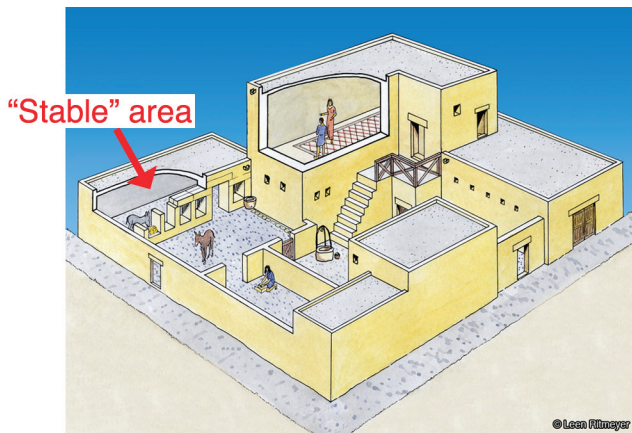
DONNA KURTZ

About five years ago we had a delightful and gripping story/sermon, “*Wise Men, Who Is Your Travel Agent?*” written and preached by Steve McKee, one of our elders at the time. It got me thinking about the details of the birth of Jesus.

Recently, I was reading about first century Bethlehem houses that have been excavated to reveal three levels. At the top was the family sleeping area along with a guest chamber. This floor was called the “*inn.*”

When Luke 2:7 says, “*There was no room in the inn,*” it was this level of the house that was full. (The inn mentioned in the parable of the Good Samaritan is a different Greek word.) The New English Bible, by the way, translates this, “*There was no lodging in the house.*”

Underneath was the family living and eating area. At the ground level was a sort of “*garage*” for animals so that they could be brought inside on cold nights. Sometimes this was carved out of a Judean hill like a cave. In the mornings, the animals would be put out and the area cleaned. On warm evenings they would be left to stay in the fields.



An architectural reconstruction* of a typical house at the time of Jesus
(*by Rilmeyer Archaeological Design)

Now in light of these archeological discoveries, let's consider the following scenario:

1) Mary and Joseph travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem with a caravan of travelers. It would not have been safe to journey alone...robbers, rocky roads. Joseph would have taken the utmost care to protect Mary.

2) Since Joseph's kinfolk were from Bethlehem, he had made arrangements ahead of time to stay with rela-

tives. Even distant relatives would have welcomed them in those days. There was no last minute panic here. The Scriptures indicate that Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem before Mary was ready to deliver the baby.

3) The guest area of the relatives' house was already full (the “*inn*”) because of the influx of people in town for the census. Perhaps Mary and Joseph bunked in the family living quarters or perhaps Baby Jesus was born in the upstairs family sleeping quarters, then wrapped in swaddling cloths and carried downstairs where He was placed in the feeding trough and a temporary private bedroom was set up.

However it was worked out (and we all know what it's like to “*make room*” when that's necessary), I opt for a safe Mary with kind people helping and an organized Joseph who knew how to make all the necessary arrangements for the arrival of the Messiah.

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for You.*

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|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Eric Byrom | Presiding Elder/Pastor |
| Jadaé Fox | Elder |
| Andy Heining | Elder |
| Jon Vega | Elder |
| Rick Widener | Treasurer |
| Kay Berry & Karen Gates | Women |
| Lori Barker | Missions |
| Andy Heining | Worship |
| Circle Church Serve Group | Greeters |
| Angel Vega | Dance |
| Judy Nichols | Prayer Chain |
| Kay Berry & Jadaé Fox | Office |
| Kathy Barth, Manfred & Janet Adalem | Communion |
| Andy Anschutz | Sound/Power Point |
| John and Donna Kurtz | TrailNotes |

2021
HAPPY NEW YEAR