

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

The Transformational Journey

ERIC BYROM

In the past few months, Ethan and I borrowed the DVD TV series, "Firefly" and watched through the entire first season. According to Wikipedia, "Firefly" is an American space Western drama television series created and directed by Joss Whedon set in the year 2517, after the arrival of humans to a new star system. It follows the adventures of the renegade crew of Serenity, a "Firefly-class" spaceship. The show premiered in 2002 but was canceled after 11 of the 14 produced episodes were aired. Despite the relatively short life span of the series, it has a large fan support base."

The plot of "Firefly" reminds me of the 1938 movie, "Stagecoach." It follows a varied group of people who board a stagecoach in the town of Tonto bound for Lordsburg, New Mexico. Both "Firefly" and "Stagecoach" share a common plotline in which varied people are bound together on a journey which reveals who they are and shows the opportunities for personal growth for those who are willing to step forward.

As we finish up our year's focus on "Growing Upwards in Christ," I am reminded of how much the journey of life is like "Firefly" or "Stagecoach." We are often put together with a group of people that we did not necessarily choose who may or may not see things similarly. We are put through trials together and have opportunities for personal growth if we are willing to step up.

Our key verse for this year has been Ephesians 4:15. "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ."



When we are willing to hold both love and truth close and have the courage to speak to one another truthfully in love with the goal of helping one another grow upwards in Christ, there is great opportunity for personal growth. I was reading in Terry Wardle's book, *Helping Others on the Journey - A Guide for Those Who Seek to Mentor Others to Maturity in Christ* and he describes the journey of the Christian life in this way:

"The Christian life is far more than being freed from the consequences of sin and/or understanding propositional truth related to Christian beliefs. The Christian life is a transforming journey with a clearly defined destination, ongoing challenges that provide opportunities for personal growth, and viral relationships with fellow travelers who do not always seem to like one another."

One of the keys to discipleship is to be faithfully committed to a spiritual family in a local body of believers in Jesus Christ. It is journeying together with others and having others speak into our lives and speaking into others' lives.



This coming fall we will be transitioning to talk about the core value of relationships at Grace Fellowship. Our tagline for next year will be "Growing Together in Right Relationships with God and Others." While this may be a switch away from the core value of discipleship, it also folds nicely into that core value. We grow in Christlikeness when we are around others who are seeking to grow in Christ and who are spurring us on intentionally to seek Him. (concluded on page 2)

The Call to Celebrate

MATT GODSILL

The following appeared in church bulletins in recent years that made their way past the proof reader in the church office. (Not *our* church office!)

“Bertha Belch, missionary to Africa, will be speaking tonight at Calvary Church in Racine. Come tonight and hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.”

“Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.”

“The sermon this morning: ‘Jesus Walks on Water.’ The sermon tonight: ‘Searching for Jesus.’”

“Don’t let worry kill you. Let the church help.”

“Thursday night will be a potluck supper. Prayer and medication to follow.”

“The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to conflict.”

“For those of you who have children and don’t know it, we have a nursery downstairs.”

Samuel and Amanda Heiningner – May 15, 2021!



Transformational Journey (concluded from p. 1)

So, this summer, look around you at the motley crew that God has put in your “stagecoach” and with whom you are journeying in this era of your life. Some of them you may really enjoy; others may be more difficult. All can be used by God to call you to step forward in love and truth and to help them and you to grow up in every way into Christlikeness. **Enjoy** the journey!

Changes are underway at GFC

KATIE FRANKENFIELD RUTHERFORD

Change can arouse many feelings in people. While it can bring the excitement that comes with a new beginning, it can also bring with it nostalgia “*for the way things used to be.*” We at Grace Fellowship Church are experiencing both as we begin the first of three phases to update the sanctuary that has served us so well for many years.



The update of the sanctuary, also called the “Sanctuary Refresh,” has two purposes: first, to replace those items in the sanctuary that are at the end of their life, and second, to create an inviting atmosphere of hospitality as the church anticipates our visitors in the future.

“The Sanctuary Refresh isn’t just about a fresh coat of paint,” said Elder Jon Vega. *“It’s a small piece of a bigger thing happening here at GFC. It’s an optimistic look forward that we as a church are excited and ready for—the next chapter God has for us as a body.”*

The goal is to complete the update in three phases. Phase 1, which is already nearly complete includes painting the sanctuary ceiling, walls and gallery. It will also include the installation of a wood design on the stage at a later date. Phase 2 will cover the purchase of new chairs, and Phase 3 will see the installation of new carpet.

(concluded on p. 4.)

JULY 2021

- 4** Elder Jadaé Fox preaching. Mark 11:26-12:27.
- 10** Women of Grace Progressive Picnic, 11:00 a.m. Meet at church.
- 11** Elder Jon Vega preaching. Mark 12:28-44. 
- 12-16** Kids’ Discipleship Training School 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Bring a sack lunch and snack daily!
- 17** Men’s breakfast 8:00 a.m. at the church . GFC Work Day 9:00 am to 3:00 p.m.
- 18** Presiding Elder Eric Byrom preaching. Mark 3:1-23.
- 20** TrailNotes deadline. Send entries to bucytalent@aol.com
- 25** Elder Eric Byrom preaching. Mark 14:1-26.  Teen Discipleship Training School begins.

The Best is Yet to Be...

DAVID WATSON

Ed.'s Note: In Jan. 1983 David Watson faced the most difficult challenge of his life. This article, a testimony of faith during difficult times, is taken from a BBC radio broadcast the following April. On Feb. 18, 1984, David died. He was one of England's finest preachers.

Death Is swallowed up in victory

The most important lessons I have learned in these past eleven months of suffering is that God loves me, is always with me, and that I cannot trust Him too much. The best is yet to be, once we have put our lives in Christ.

Quite simply, I have cancer. This came to me as a total shock. I was about to go to America for five weeks in January. A few days before I was due to leave I went to my doctor and just in passing mentioned a stomachache. He sent me to a consultant who said, "*You're in serious trouble. You have a malignant ulcer. We need to operate instantly.*" Of course when I shared the news with my wife, it was a shock to her as well.

The operation was successful, but they were very sad to report that the cancer had spread to my liver, which was inoperable.

That was a blow.

I said, "*How long have I got?*" They said, "*We can't tell. It could be a year, two years, maybe slightly more.*" I suddenly had to come to terms with all sorts of realities that I'd talked about. I'd be foolish to say that as a Christian, I had no problems. It isn't as simple as that, I did have times of real panic—I suppose because I love my wife and children, and the work that I'm doing. Panic came particularly in the middle of the night when I was at a low ebb.

Dark nights of the soul

I started praying that God

would heal me. Countless others prayed too. This does not guarantee healing—we still have to come to terms with the fact that we are *all* dying and who knows when that moment is going to come. But I got through to a place of real peace. I really want to be in heaven, the sooner the better!

If God doesn't heal me, I think that there's a mystery about it that one just doesn't understand. I think that God does have a purpose in our lives and it is not measured by the *length* of our lives. There is nothing more glorious than to be with Christ forever, free from pain, suffering and tears and all the problems and injustices of this world.

Changed priorities

The main thing that I worry about concerning death is my wife and children. It is very painful when I go away for a month and have left them behind. If I go away knowing I am not going to return to see them this side of heaven, that for me is the most painful time to come to terms with. Therefore, as an act of the will, I have had to put everything "*on an open palm*" before God. "*Lord, here's my wife, my children, my possessions, my ambitions, my all. You can take them.*" The only place of peace and security for me in my heart is when I have all that on an open palm.

My illness has changed my priorities. Becoming actively involved in Christian work, I had come to the stage of loving God's *work* more than God Himself. This illness has changed me. What I want now is more and more of the Lord. I want to spend more time with Him and I want to listen to Him more than anything.

I still love preaching, writing, and talking, but I hope during these past weeks I've got the priori-

ties right—really loving the Lord even if all these other things are stripped away.

I suppose one looks back and there are umpteen regrets. I think most of us tend to say "*If only I had done that.*" I think the important thing to realize is that God loves us just as we are, and therefore doesn't want us to hold on to regrets. I've tried to be so aware of His love for me and His utter forgiveness, that I have released to Him all these regrets, sins, and "*if onlys.*" I've said, "*Lord, that's in the past. You love me just as I am, and Your love is incredibly great.*"

What will heaven be like? I have only had a foretaste of it all. The most glorious experiences I have had in my life were when I have been caught up in praise and worship. There has been such an awareness of God's presence that time seems to stand still. There is the knowledge that God is God of unutterable love and joy, a sense of well-being—and shalom (peace of God) pervades one's whole being.

If heaven is anything like this, and I believe it is going to be a hundred, thousand times better, I just can't wait!



David Watson was a visiting professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and a canon in the Anglican Church, London, England. His autobiography, *You Are My God* has been published by Harold Shaw Publishers.

From *Commonlife*: 1984 (4.4.)



Phase 1 – underway the week of June 14th

Changes Are Underway *(concluded from p. 2)*

While the Sanctuary Refresh is exciting, there are also general maintenance issues being addressed to keep the church and grounds in good repair. These projects are being managed by Elder Jadaé Fox. Currently the group is working on bids and options for keeping the parking lot and driveway in good repair, and developing plans for fixing the retaining walls in the front and back of the church. *“The parking lot fence repair has already begun,”* Jadaé reports.

If you have an interest in keeping the church in good repair, or special skills in areas related to this, please consider volunteering to be a member of the Buildings and Grounds Team. If you have questions about the Sanctuary Refresh, please contact planning team members: Laura Byrom, Jake or Katie Rutherford.



The Anschutz family recently experiencing some of God's handiwork in Arches National Park, Utah

A visit to Dale Black! (He's doing well!)

KAY BERRY

I was able to visit Dale Black at Colonial Manor in Loudonville about three weeks ago! This was my first in-person visit with him since March 2020 (after waving through the window or looking at him through it as we talked on the phone occasionally during the COVID months.)

Dale is doing well, and it was wonderful to see his kind, gentle personality shine forth. Three weeks ago his son took him to McDonald's for lunch. That was the first excursion he had had since the pandemic started except for sitting outside on the patio.

Dale keeps up with the GFC news through the church bulletins and phone calls. If you would like to visit him, you need to call Colonial Manor Health Care Center and make an appointment. You can meet inside or outside on the patio. The phone number is 419-994-4191. The address is 747 S. Mt. Vernon Avenue, Loudonville 44842.

I'm sure he would enjoy receiving a card or note!

Thanks,
Kay

Grace Fellowship Church



365 Straub Road East • Mansfield OH 44903
419-526-4699 • gracefellowship01@gmail.com

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
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