



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:



One reality TV show that I enjoy watching is “Forged in Fire.” It is a show where swordsmiths are given a challenge to make a particular type of blade and are given a time limit in which to do that. The blade is then put through a series of tests to determine the winner.

I also enjoy seeing how the swords are made and how different metals are often folded over and over together to get the properties of both metals in the final blade. The process is brutal with the blacksmith squishing and hammering the blade. Then there is heat quenching the weapon and acid dipping it.

You might wonder why I am talking about all of this in an ElderTalk article this year. We have been looking at the theme: “Grace on Mission.” We looked at the book of Hebrews and are now looking at the book of Habakkuk. One thing that unites both books is the idea of God’s chosen people being tested and put through very difficult circumstances that don’t always make sense.

In Habakkuk 2:4 we have a very often quoted part of a verse, “...the righteous shall live by his faith.” The context of this quote is a contrast to the Babylonians, who lived by arrogance and violence. The first part of verse 4 says, “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him...”

So, in contrast to that, the righteous person is to “boast” in the Lord and not in himself or his abilities. I then think of Hebrews 4:16 which also relates to tough times. It says, “Let us then approach the throne of God with confidence so that we may receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.” The righteous person is to boast in the Lord and not in himself or his abilities. Hebrews 4:16 also relates to tough times. The context

## FORGED IN FIRE

ERIC BYROM

of this verse is made in light of the fact that Jesus is the great high priest who is able to sympathize with our weakness, but who has passed through the difficulty of the cross into the glories of heaven.

In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet is facing the problem of evil in the world and of covenant people abusing one another. God says to him that the answer will be judgment in the form of the Babylonians, who will carry the people into exile.

This was not the answer Habakkuk expected. He is wrestling with all that the discipline of God through extreme hardship will mean.

We, like Habakkuk and like the people to whom the book of Hebrews was written, will face tough times in this life. We are to remember that God has not promised that we will not face trouble in this life, but that He has overcome the world and will not leave us alone to face the trouble.

Like a blacksmith, He will use the trouble to forge us into a useful tool for bringing Himself glory. We may face hammering, grinding, folding, quenching, and being dipped into acidic circumstances. All these can be used to make us into vessels of glory if we will continue to trust in the Lord through them.

Where will we go for strength? Will we choose to rely on our own strength? Or...will we live by faith that boldly approaches the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need?

# The Gospel According to Clean Laundry

Churches large and small are proclaiming the Good News with washers and dryers. Some come with track marks from years of drug abuse. Others come with children in tow.

“I would say that 95 percent are so appreciative that it breaks your heart,” commented one volunteer. “People don’t care what you know until they know how much you care.”



“NONE OF THESE PEOPLE BECAME MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH. THAT WASN’T WHAT IT WAS ABOUT.”

—Barbara Lowery

Some churches buy their own washers and dryers, renovate a space so it has enough electrical outlets, and open a church-run laundry. Others send out volunteers with quarters.

“Christ said we should feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and I think those clothes should be clean,” said Catherine Ambos, a volunteer from Brunswick, NJ.



Of course, it’s not really about hygiene, but dignity. “If someone is dirty, unkempt, you tend not to look at them. You don’t want to meet their eyes,” said Ambos.

Churches have been washing clothes across the US since at least 1997. There may have been others before that. Some buy washers and dryers where others arm volunteers with quarters who go to laundromats. These ministries are all around the country in large and small churches.

They help save people about \$25,000 a year, money they didn’t have, or if they did, they can now spend it on food, gas, or medicine.

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## JULY 2024

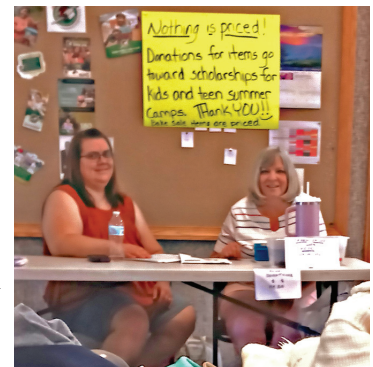
- 6** Women of Grace summer luncheon at Pam Phillips’ house. Please bring a salad, side dish, or dessert.
- 7** Robert Key preaching; Habakkuk 2:1-3.
- 7-13** Kids Discipleship Training School.
- 14** Matt Godsil preaching; Habakkuk 2:4-5.  

- 15-20** Teen Discipleship Training School.
- 21** Greg Frankenfield preaching; Habakkuk 2:6-20.
- 22-26** Clear Fork Band rents our facility all week.
- 28** Jadaé Fox preaching; Habakkuk 3:1-2.  


## AUGUST EVENTS

- 9-11** Family Camping Weekend
- 24** Annual Community Celebration, 5:30 to 8:00 pm.

## GFC Rummage Sale a Big Succes\$!

Heather Schade announced in church that the rummage sale held at GFC on June 20-22 raised almost \$2000. The money will provide scholarships for Kids DTS and Teen DTS. Thanks to all who helped!



## The Gospel According to Clean Laundry

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Belmont Baptist Church in Charlottesville, VA has one of the older laundromat ministries still running. The church started helping people clean their clothes in 2010 when pastor Greg Anderson heard through another ministry that poor people in homeless shelters and long-term-stay motels would regularly throw away their clothes.

“It was just easier to go and get new clothes at a clothing center type ministry as opposed to laundering them,” Anderson said.

The church decided to install five washers and dryers in a building on its property.

“We let them know we care, and God cares, and we share Christ directly through words when the opportunity presents itself. While people are doing their laundry, they talk to each other and the church volunteers, and relationships form.

“It allows us to help people, care for them, and help them to have some dignity. When you’re doing it, you are caring for people God loves,” says Frank Hall, a member of Crestwood Christian Fellowship, a non-denominational church in Santa Maria, California.

*Adapted from CHRISTIANITY TODAY, July 2022.*

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## The Father I Yearned for Was Already There

God wasn’t my ticket out of foster care, but I knew He cared.

TORI HOPE PETERSON



America claims not to have orphanages, but our group homes are actually quite similar. Growing up, I lived with nine other young women who had absorbed a message of worthlessness from the foster care system.

The rules were strict. Cameras watched us from every corner of the house except our bedrooms and the restrooms. The school was on the same property as the home, which meant we weren’t allowed to go very far very often. On Sundays, however, we were allowed to go to church, which at least afforded a brief respite from the sterile group-home environment.

In fact, the pastor’s message about forgiveness—combined with my mandatory weekly counseling sessions—gave me the first stirrings of hope I could remember. I even asked Jesus into my heart, though I didn’t understand what that entailed. I only went up to the altar because I believed it was my ticket to leave the group home. I thought that if I went through the motions

of faith, I’d find relief from the pain of foster care and the continual sense of feeling unwanted.

### ‘DADDY ISSUES’

As I moved through a succession of foster homes, my heart grew increasingly callous toward God and other people. During my junior and senior years of high school, I took an honors English class, where we read Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*. I found the book intriguing, which prompted me to learn more about Rand’s objectivist philosophy.

Watching videos of Rand speaking and debating, I found her more relatable than the Christian women I’d met. She did not appear gentle or open. Rather, she came off as quite angry, which was how I felt. I figured I must be an atheist just like her.

My peers would poke fun at me, saying I had “Daddy issues.” At the time I believed having a father would solve lots of my problems. Perhaps someone

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## The Father I Yearned for Was Already There

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would have been there to love me and calm Mom down when she spiraled into one of her manic episodes. Maybe I wouldn't have entered foster care in the first place. If God were so good, I couldn't help wondering then why He hadn't granted me a father.

During many lunch periods, I enjoyed secluding myself in my English teacher's classroom. For one of my art classes, I received permission to paint a mural on his wall. While I painted, we talked. He never shied away from a good debate on hard questions.

One day he asked if I believed in God. I replied that I didn't. From my perspective it seemed like people claimed belief in God due to social consensus more than any genuine faith. "If most people in society didn't believe in God," I asked, "would people still believe in God?"

He paused for a long time, and I thought he might be searching for something to disprove my point. But instead he responded, "I don't know." I appreciated his candor, which was unusual among the Christians I'd known. Instead of telling me what and how to believe, he admitted he didn't have all the answers.

I didn't either, and my combative attitude was a blanket I used to hide my insecurity. But my teacher's honest admission of uncertainty encouraged me to start asking more questions because deep in my heart I was searching for the Father I'd always yearned for.

I'd recently moved into my 11th foster home, where the parents proclaimed Jesus' name, took me to church every Sunday and did devotions every night at the dinner table. Around that time, I started dating the stepson of a Black Pentecostal pastor who held afternoon services for people who didn't want to get up in the morning.

Between my foster parents and my boyfriend, I spent almost five hours in church every Sunday. Again, I felt drawn toward the life of Jesus. I posted on YouTube a video asking people to forgive me for being a mean and angry person. I tried my best to be kind and caring toward my peers because it sank in that I shouldn't hurt others like

they had hurt me.

One night my boyfriend came over for dinner in the yard. We all laughed when my foster mom told my foster brother to put his hood up and run around, encouraging the dog to attack him.

Afterwards, as we were cleaning up, my boyfriend stopped me. "Your foster mom was acting abusively," he told me.

I shrugged him off, suggesting that it was just something we did for fun. Plus, my foster mom was a licensed social worker. How could she ever abuse anyone? (And of all people, I knew what abuse was. I'd experienced it!)

Even so, my boyfriend opened my eyes to the darker reality. These were people who proclaimed Jesus. I had been on the verge of accepting Him. Now I was farther away than ever. More and more it appeared that Jesus-talk was a mask to hide their sin. I didn't want a mask. I wanted to be seen, known, and loved as I was.

Once again I changed foster homes. My single foster mom took me to church every Sunday and my ears perked up at the sermons. This was a church that supported foster families!

On top of that, my foster mom changed her lifestyle to fit my hopes and dreams. My track coach believed I had the ability to win a college scholarship. My foster mom made many sacrifices, like attending my practices, buying me the best track spikes, and altering her diet to benefit my nutritional needs.

Around this same time, a youth leader re-entered my life. She and my mom patiently answered all my questions about God kindly. My salvation did not happen in a single grand moment but through small miracles. In the end, the father I'd always wanted turned out to be the Father who was always there, the Father who revealed Himself to me in His own perfect timing.

*From CHRISTIANITY TODAY, July 2022.  
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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor

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