



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. This is a monthly publication of Grace Fellowship Church, Mansfield, Ohio.

ElderTalk: Prayer is more than a wish list

Jadaé Fox

Perhaps you’re reading this title and thinking, “I already know how to pray.” This tool may not be primarily for you. It may be for the disciple God has placed in your life. We are continuing our discipleship tools series. These tools are most valuable when we can use them to teach others.

When many people think about prayer, they think about asking God for things. We pray for healing, provision, guidance, protection, and help. Those are all good things to pray for. In fact, God invites us to bring our requests to Him.

At its most basic level, prayer is about pursuing a relationship with the God who made you, loves you, and has a purpose for your life.

When we are young in our faith, it is natural for prayer to focus on our needs and concerns. Like children running to a loving parent, we bring everything to God. He welcomes that. He cares about every burden, fear, and need.

The greatest purpose of prayer is not simply getting what we want.

It is getting to know the One who is meeting those needs.

Every healthy relationship requires communication. Friendships grow through conversation. Marriages deepen through intentional time together. The same is true in our relationship with God. Prayer is one of the primary ways we spend time with Him.

The Bible reveals God’s character, priorities, promises, and will. Prayer allows us to respond to what we learn and bring our lives before Him.

Perhaps another way to say it is this:

Prayer is less about convincing God to care about what matters to us and more about bringing what matters to us to God and learning what matters to Him.

As we pray, our hearts begin to change. Our desires become aligned with His desires, and our priorities

become shaped by His priorities. Prayer is not simply a way to get things from God; it is a way to grow closer to God.

A Simple Prayer Template

When Jesus’ disciples asked Him how to pray, He gave them a model prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). The diagram below is another discipleship tool that summarizes that pattern in two simple sections.



Praise God

Before we focus on our needs, Jesus teaches us to focus on God.

- **Thank You for being my Father**
- **Let Your kingdom come.**
- **You are holy.**
- **Your will be done.**

The Lord’s Prayer begins with God Himself. We are reminded who He is, what He is doing, and what He desires. Praise lifts our eyes above our circumstances and refocuses our hearts on Him.

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Prayer is more than a wish list

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Ask God

After focusing ourselves on God, Jesus teaches us to bring our requests.

- **Ask for what you need.**
- **Help me not to sin.**
- **Ask for the needs of others.**
- **Help me know and want Your will.**
- **Forgive me and help me forgive.**

Prayer is not abandoning our needs; it is bringing them before our Father. In the process, we learn to seek His wisdom, strength, and perspective.

God's Promises About Prayer

The graphic shown below highlights three encouraging promises about prayer from Philippians 4:6-7, 1 John 5:14-15, and Jeremiah 29:12-13.



Prayer is how we walk with God

Yes, bring your needs, fears, burdens, and requests for yourself and others. God cares deeply about all of them. But do not stop there...

Praise Him. Seek His kingdom. Ask for His will. Listen for His voice. Spend time in His presence. Because the greatest gift prayer offers is not merely what God gives...it is God Himself.

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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor

Jadaé Fox Elder

Matt Godsil Elder

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

Update from Tamura City, Japan

日本・田村市からの更新情報

June 1, 2026, 2:28 AM

2026年6月1日 午前2時28分

Hello everyone,

みなさん、こんにちは、

This month has been full of travel, ministry events, and bears! Since this month started on a break, known as Golden Week (because it contains four national holidays), I was able to do some hiking in my town and travel to Aizu (pictured below). This was a great break to refresh as we start the longest stretch with no breaks in the school year. During this break, I was also able to serve at a nearby church in Iwaki for a Children's Day Camp. The day was filled with outdoor activities, worship, crafts, and learning about the Holy Spirit. The children were very responsive to the gospel, and I ask that you continue to pray for more opportunities for the church to share the Word and have events like these.

We have also had an interesting situation of a bear coming into town. This has been a rising problem throughout Japan, but one day this concern was so great that the schools decided to send students home early. The students could not walk home, and they were all issued bells to wear on their school backpacks for safety. Please pray for everyone's safety as bear sightings become more frequent.



Tsuruga-jō Castle in Aizu 会津の鶴ヶ城

As for the team, we have been focused on our daily lives and ministry. Since being moved to a new school, I have been able to build new relationships with my co-workers. This elementary school has been a nice change in pace from the junior high as my schedule is more full and I have a closer relationship with my Japanese English Teacher (JTE). As the summer season approaches, we are hoping to host some forms of outreach events. I am unsure yet what these plans may look like, but please pray that these times we gather with the community are used by God, and we can plant seeds for Jesus Christ in the hearts of the Japanese

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Facing up to Mary *Peter E. Gillquist* (Continued from the June 2026 TrailNotes issue)

3. Mary is the Mother of God.

Now things get a bit more touchy for some of us. Here is one of those emotional trouble spots I mentioned earlier. Whether we like to face it or not, the Bible teaches Mary is the mother of God.

First, let's look at the text; then we will discuss why this title is so important to our lives as Christians in the Church. After Christ had been conceived in her womb, Mary paid a visit to the home of relatives Zacharias and Elizabeth, soon-to-be parents of John the Baptist. When Mary greeted her cousin, Elizabeth called her blessed and said, "Why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43) Elizabeth knew that her Lord, the Messiah of Israel, was in the womb of Mary. The title "Mother of God" took on great importance in the fourth century when a heretic named Nestorius—a man who held high office in the Church—claimed that the one in Mary's womb was certainly man, but that He was not God. The orthodox Christians, with one accord, said, "Wrong!" To see Jesus Christ as something less than God in the flesh is sub-Christian. For unless the one in Mary's womb was and is God, we are dead in our sins.

To safeguard the full deity of Christ, the Church has always insisted that Mary be rightly called—as Elizabeth called her—"the Mother of God." This title, of course, does not mean mother of the Holy Trinity, for the Holy Trinity has no mother. Neither does it mean she originated the Person who is God the Son. It refers instead to Mary being the mother of the Son of God, who assumed full humanity in her womb. Just as we insist on the Virgin Birth of Christ, we also insist that for the nine months Mary carried Him in His humanity, He was at every moment fully God as well. Thus, we say boldly and with great insistence that Mary is the Mother of God, *Theotokos* (Θεοτόκος) in Greek, God-bearer. To say anything less is to side with those who deny His deity.

When a man buys a large plot of land and turns cattle out to graze on it, he fences in his acreage. He does so to protect his cattle, to keep them from wandering off, and to discourage rustlers. Similarly, the Church sets doctrinal fences around its foundational truths. And nothing is more basic and important to us than the deity of Christ. Because Christ is God, we set a firm and non-negotiable fence around His divinity by our unmovable confession that Mary is the mother of God.

4. We are to honor Mary and call her blessed.

Now comes the toughest test of all. Not only is Mary

the most blessed of women, our model for obedience, and the Mother of God, we are indeed called to honor her and to bless her. How do we know? The Bible tells us so. During her three-month stay at Elizabeth's house, Mary offered one of the most beautiful prayers of praise to the Lord in all the Scriptures. It begins, "My soul magnifies the Lord," and, thus, it has become known as "The Magnificat." In that prayer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Mary prophesied, "henceforth all generations will call me blessed." (Luke 1:48) Essentially, all generations in Church history have done so; only the last few centuries have faltered. Our generation of American Christians is filled with those who refuse to bless her, and we must change our ways. Some Christian bodies have come to stand dogmatically against Christ and the New Testament by refusing to bless her.

From the beginning of recorded Christian worship, Christians have taken special care to venerate or honor Mary in the liturgy. There is an ancient hymn which begins, "It is truly right to bless you, O *Theotokos* (Mother of God)." She is also called in this hymn "ever-blessed and most pure." The biblical injunction to honor Mary needs to be followed and taken seriously. We do not, of course, worship Mary, for worship is reserved for the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But she is most certainly to be honored and venerated. And because Christ is our elder brother, the firstborn of many brethren, we should honor the Virgin Mary as our Mother as well. Just as Eve was mother of the old Adamic race, so Mary is the true Mother of the new race, the Body of Christ, the Church.

Perhaps in part because we refuse to honor Mary, our generation seems to struggle with honoring anyone. For example, next time a presidential news conference comes on TV, watch closely how most of the press corps behave! Far from merely trying to get the

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Icon of Mary Playtera behind the altar in the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation, Muskegon, MI. — The Greek letters MP and ΘΝ in the top line stand for "Mother of God" and the words below Η ΠΛΑΤΥΤΕΡΑ ΤΩΝ ΟΡΑΝΩΝ mean "wider than the heavens." Thanks, Ernie Obregon, for the help!

Update from Tamura City, Japan

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people. I was able, with another teammate, to hike a mountain with the Tamura International Alliance. This helped us build relationships with people in the community from Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Please pray as we continue to join community events to help build our relationships with locals.



Double rainbow ダブル・レインボー

Overall, the church has been about the same. We have been so blessed with a new team member who can play guitar for worship! We have recently had a new local couple come more frequently as well. While the changes may be small, they truly make a big difference. Please continue to pray for the church, the members of the church, and Shinji Okubo, the pastor. We hope God uses this small church to change the hearts of many in Japan. Your prayers make that happen.



A Local Shinto Shrine
地域の神社



Wisteria
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Thank you for those prayers, and I look forward to continually updating you all.

Maria

Maria McCreadie

マリア・マクレーディー

JULY 2026

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5 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Matthew 6:22-23.

5-11 Kids Discipleship Training School (kDTS).

12 Mitch Schwartz preaching on Matthew 6:24-34. 🍷🍞

12-18 Teen Discipleship Training School (tDTS).

19 Elder Matt Godsil preaching on Matthew 7:1-5.

20-24 Clear Fork High School band will be renting and using our facility.

25 Ladies' lunch at Hanley Rd. Bob Evans at 1 PM. RSVP to Holly Anschutz by July 23!

28 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Matthew 6:19-21. 🍷🍞

Facing up to Mary (Continued from page 3)

story, many are out for intimidation and willful dishonor. While God's word tells us to honor the king (1 Peter 2:17) and to give preference to each other (Romans 12:10), our generation seems to delight in challenging and humiliating other people, especially those in authority. Not only are we who are Bible-believing Christians urged to give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7), we are called by God in no uncertain terms to bless the Mother of our God. We cannot get around that point in Scripture.

(To be continued next month)

Ed's note: "Excerpted from Facing Up to Mary by +Fr. Peter Gilquist, from Ancient Faith Topical Series. Published by Ancient Faith Ministries (formerly Conciliar Press), 1987, second edition 1994. Full copies, as well as other publications by +Fr. Gilquist, are available at store.ancientfaith.com."