

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: When the Road Seems Long and I am SO Ready to be Finished

ROBERT KEY

So...here we are three months or so since the COVID-19 motivated shut-downs, social distancing, mask use, and fear of infection began here in Ohio. By the time the economy began to be reopened, I was SO ready for it all to be over that I was ready to throw all caution aside and get back to life as usual, all the while wondering if that will ever be even possible. Yet, they have not said that this pandemic is over yet, simply that we have passed the peak. Which, by my reckoning, means we probably still have more cases than we did when we first started the isolation and sheltering-in-place, and it all seemed so urgent.

Evidently, I am not alone in my feelings of upheaval-intolerance, based on what I see at work and in stores where more and more people are not wearing masks or being careful in their social distancing. This enforced change to my routines and disruption of plans has been a time of stress, and therefore, fatigue. I find all change stressful, even good change, change that I desired and initiated. More so negative change, change that has been forced upon me, change without a clear destination to give it hope. This kind I find to be doubly stressful. This season has clearly been a time of uninvited change. This has been change that portends a new normal ahead, a yet-to-be defined new normal. Society has changed...is changing.

I too have been changing. Have I grown? Am I stronger in the Lord because of this? I don't know. I'm

not through it yet. This has been a time of re-evaluation of priorities and of focusing on those activities which help me to deal with the crisis. Have I re-evaluated correctly? Have I chosen those activities which are beneficial for long-term emotional and interpersonal health? Or only those which help me get through the moment? Time will tell. What have I learned by just living through this time? I am not sure I have “learned” anything yet—it is too soon to know—but I have some rambling thoughts that may congeal into something akin to knowledge at some point. I just can't quite put my finger on what it is yet.

One such thought is where I started this article, “...here we are three months or so since...” and I wonder if three months is really all that long. What about those who have already walked a much longer road of much worse circumstances? How are those among us who are now coming up on two years of an ongoing battle with cancer, answering their questions and coping with their situation? How are those who had their battle with cancer and lost, answering their questions and coping with their personal aftermath? When I consider these, my problems pale.

In the opposite direction, and what is even a healthier approach, one which is available even to those who can't see anyone with a worse circumstance, is when I consider

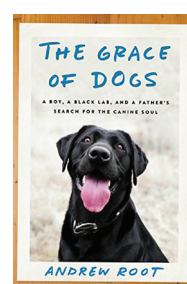
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God's Canine Counselors

ANDREW ROOT

As a child, I struggled with reading aloud. I know well the paralysis that comes with performance anxiety. The mind goes blank, the words get stuck, and nothing comes out. If I was worried what the teacher thought, how I ranked, how I was doing, or what my friends were thinking, I was cooked. What would have helped me was the ministry of a reading dog.

Today, elementary schools and libraries across the country have programs for kids who are like I was. For example, a few days a week at schools in the Northeast, leaders from The Good Dog Foundation bring dogs to the school library. A child sits down on the floor next to a dog and reads aloud from a book. There is something magical about it. After lying next to Pepper, a slightly overweight border collie, and reading him a book, seven-year-old Jessica, who has hated reading, says to the volunteer, “*He loves it when*



The Grace of Dogs:
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A Father's Search for
the Canine Soul

I tell him stories about turtles. So do I. He's the coolest dog in the whole world."

I can vividly imagine what it would be like to be the child in that situation. To read to a dog whose big eyes look to me with simple pleasure, who laid his head on my lap to listen to my voice would have made for an entirely

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A word about grumbling

SARA TUCKER

About a month ago when our Community Bible Study went online, three of our group met in my home to discuss the lesson. We were reading about Balaam in Numbers 22-24. God told Balaam that he must bless the Israelites rather than curse them. Balaam waffled around a bit, but God compelled him to bless them. The question for discussion was this: “Will you do what God is telling you to do?” Very hesitantly and fearfully I decided to share what God was telling me.

In our Bible Study this year, we’ve been studying the Israelites’ journey from the Red Sea to the Jordan River. God had guided, protected and sustained the people with supernatural miracle after miracle, but at every turn they grumbled, criticized, and blamed during the whole trip.

So, God was telling me to stop grumbling, criticizing, and blaming everything and everyone that I disagree with on the news, Facebook, and TV. I must repent and ask God to forgive me. The things we read and see could or could not be true. Do we really need to pass along our opinions, criticisms, rumors that we have heard?

If each Christian would repent, praying for ourselves, other Christians, and those we grumble about, there would be true revival in our country and it would begin with us. God said that “*If my people, called by my name would humble themselves, pray, seek my face and turn back to me, I will hear, forgive, and heal their land.*”

The fact is that sinners sin. We expect that. But remember, Christ did not condemn them. When He

JULY 2020

2 Women’s Bible Study 6:30 pm

5 Worship: Jon Vega preaching:
Romans 11:13-36.

12 Worship: Eric Byrom preaching:
Romans 12:1-8.
Circle Church Leaders Mtg.

16 Women’s Bible Study 6:30 pm:
(Check this date!)

17-19 Family Camping Weekend:
Details coming!

19 Worship: Eric Byrom preaching:
Romans 12:9-21.

26 Worship: Eric Byrom preaching:
Romans 13:1-14.

30 Women’s Bible Study 6:30 pm:
(Check this date!)

met them, they saw themselves as who they were, someone needing a savior, and they repented and followed Him. However, Jesus did condemn the spiritual leaders of the day, the Pharisees. Today, we Christians are the spiritual leaders. We are to show others the Savior by our words, lifestyles, and deeds.

The Israelites that grumbled and would not trust God throughout their journey, did not see the Promised Land. Even Moses, who trusted God throughout the journey did not get to enter the Promised Land. May we pause and examine our words. Are they pleasing to God? Do they show love to our neighbor? Help us to make God Lord in all areas of our lives. May we be a blessing to those we meet.

Heavenly Father, Forgive us for grumbling and finding fault. We put our complete trust in You. We look forward to seeing You in the Promised Land. Thank You for encouraging me to listen to You and share what is in my heart. I love You, Lord. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

God’s Canine Counselors

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different experience. The dog would have exuded patience, unconditional acceptance, and peace. The words I botched terribly would have captivated the dog every bit as much as the ones read perfectly. In that one-on-one relationship, the anxiety, self-doubt, and panic I used to feel about not being able to do something would have faded.

That is the power of a dog’s attention. It moves us out of powerlessness, granting us the clear sense that we matter, that our timeline is the right one, that everything is going to be fine. Barbara Christy, a 3rd grade teacher, concurs. “*Kids who used to slink into a room are walking tall with their shoulders back and heads up. One young man used to stutter; now his speech is nearly stutter free. I tell everyone there’s magic occurring every week in this classroom.*”

I’ll admit, the theologian in me sees at work in this scenario not magic but the ministry of God. Whether it’s my dog, Kirby, on my couch or a reading dog with an insecure kid in a school library, I see a powerful invitation to experience Sabbath. Sabbath is a ritual where we put down all our striving and simply rest by God’s invitation, in God’s promise and provision. It is a time for healing. It reminds us that no matter what the world says about us, (or what we say about ourselves) only another, higher power has the final say—that, at least for this moment, all is well.

Adapted from *The Grace of Dogs: A Boy, a Black Lab, and a Father’s Search for the Canine Soul*. Copyright 2017 by Andrew Root. Published by Convergent, an Imprint of Penguin Random House LLC.

REFLECTIONS

from

Father Gordon Walker

July is the 5th anniversary of the home-going of Gordon Walker who was instrumental in beginning Grace Haven Farm, which would later become Grace Fellowship Church. Here is a report of his early ministry as written in the Winter 2008 issue of A.G.A.I.N magazine.

My wife, Mary Sue and I grew up in the village of Palmerdale—a community of 105 houses 18 miles north of Birmingham, AL—and were very active in the Baptist Church. At age 16, I felt God calling me into the ministry, and through an unusual set of events I was invited to preach in Jefferson County Jail in Birmingham. This opened up opportunities to preach in a number of the largest prisons in AL as a teenager.

After entering college, I was invited to preach in several church revivals in Southeast Alabama which resulted in my being “called” as a pastor for two of them. This required 230 miles of driving (one way) in a ‘41 Ford coupe. Somehow I made it to my 8 o’clock class every Monday of that school year at Howard College (now Samford University in Birmingham).

Between my sophomore and junior years in college, I was asked to pastor a church less than 20 miles from the college. The church had a home for the pastor and wanted a married man to pastor its flock. So

Mary Sue and I married during the summer of 1952.

As an evangelistic pastor, I continued my practice of visiting every home in the community and prayed with many people. A large number “asked Christ into their heart,” and I baptized over 80 people. But after 18 months of conversions and the joy they brought, the church building was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. It was as though all hell broke loose. The division and bitterness that ensued over rebuilding the church became impossible for me to repair.

I appealed to the Baptist Association for help. “Gordon,” I was told, “I’ve been a Baptist preacher for over 40 years, and I’ve concluded that when a group of Baptists decide to split, there’s no power in heaven or earth that can stop them.” That was a huge disappointment to me. Later, I saw the need for the episcopate and realized how much of the animosity could have been avoided had we had a godly, loving bishop to shepherd us through it.

After helping the new converts

and a good number of the older folks start a mission in a nearby city, Mary Sue and I, with our 14 month old daughter, went off to California to go to seminary. I continued to care for the little mission via mail. I sometimes felt the way the Apostle Paul must have felt in his concern and anxiety over the well-being of the little churches he had planted and left behind.

The next summer, Mary Sue and I drove across the country back to AL to visit our families and the struggling mission. They had found an excellent plot of land and the people had begun building. The church was growing strong and persuaded me to take a year out of seminary to be their pastor.

After graduation from seminary, my vision for church planting was strengthened. We went to Xenia, OH to help develop that growing Baptist Church.

My wife and I had planned to go to Africa as missionaries after seminary, but our oldest daughter was seriously ill with bulbar polio. A

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Reflections by Gordon Walker (continued from p.3)

friend introduced me to Peter Gillquist of Campus Crusade for Christ. He was the Big Ten Director and we met at The Ohio State University in the fall of 1962. At that time he challenged me to become a member of the CCC staff. That meeting was indeed a life-altering experience.

Through an amazing set of circumstances, we raised the funds to take our training at Arrowhead Springs, CA and spent years in Columbus, some of the most joyous of our lives. We loved working with students. Later I was designated Coordinator of African Ministries and made two trips to Africa to begin the Campus Crusade ministry in eight different countries.

(Ed's note: It was during this CCC period that Gordon Walker and Ray Nethery became friends. They and five others eventually left Campus Crusade to "search for the Church." Gordon began the ministry at Grace Haven and Ray later joined him. In 1987, after a 17 year study, Gordon and the other five entered the Orthodox Church. Ray did not feel so led.)

Do Not Give Up. There is no doubt that opposition and hostility toward Christianity is increasing in America, especially on college campuses. I deeply believe that because as a nation we have been unwilling to stop the holocaust of abortion, God has allowed the spirit of the antichrist to gain ascendancy in our country. Our president-elect Barack Obama is a strong advocate of all types of abortion, including allowing the babies who survive late-term abortions to be left to die without any medical aid. Mr. Obama voted repeatedly to pass a bill that prevents nurses or doctors from helping these babies. This was not true in the past. Certainly this will not bring the end of Christianity here. However, there will be times of suffering ahead for those who hold to the true Christian faith.

Therefore, my admonition is simple and straightforward: **Do not give up!** Be an encourager—never a discourager. Prepare for the worst but expect the best. You may be privileged to suffer for Christ. Don't be afraid, for He has said, *"I will never leave you or forsake you."* (Hebrews 13:5)

For all who read these words, may God guide your steps and protect you and your family and loved ones as you seek to follow His leadership in our troubled world.

† **Gordon Thomas Walker**

Santa Barbara, CA

Winter 2008

Reposed: July 23, 2015



Aiden Myer Hidey was born to Celeste and Adam Hidey on June 7, 2020 weighing 9 lbs. 2 ounces, 21 inches long. Grandparents are Steve and Juli Parsons. Juli exclaimed: *"I had the best birthday present a Nana could ever have a few days before my birthday! Isn't he beautiful?"*

I am SO Ready to be Finished (continued from p.1)

the wonders of our Almighty God.

"3When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, 4What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?"
Psalm 8:3,4 (NKJV)

Again my problems pale. When I can recount all the goodness of who He is and all the good He has done for me, I can hold onto His mercies even as evil surrounds me. Our good God, who does not do evil to His beloved children, will, without a doubt, redeem any evil situation in which we find ourselves. He will do it both to His own glory and to our eventual benefit, even though it may not seem so in the moment. When I consider these things, it gives me enough hope to put one foot in front of another, to slog through the moments and the days, with a measure of hope that this too will pass and the day will dawn anew.

Ed's Note: It was Robert's request to print his article without editing so as to preserve the stream-of-consciousness format.

BREAKING NEWS

Announcing: There will be a DTS (Discipleship Training School) weekend for grades 7 - 12 at GFC, July 31-Aug. 2. We are also inviting the other Table Fellowship churches. Toledo and Elyria are already "in." Stay tuned!

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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor
Jadaé Fox Elder
Andy Heininger Elder
Robert Key Elder
Jon Vega Elder

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