



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: Do I have space in my life for deep friendships? ERIC BYROM

This year we are exploring the core value of relationships here at Grace Fellowship. Our moniker has been: “*Grow together in a right relationship with God and each other.*” Part of my reading this year has been from the book, *Friendships That Last—7 Ways to Build Lasting Relationships* by Keith R. Anderson and also from *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Both of these books have a wealth of good quotes and nuggets of thought regarding friendship and community in the church.

As I have observed in my life, most people are attracted and stay at a church because of the relationships they have developed. Those who do not “stick” usually have something that has gone awry in a relationship with someone else. This leads to the question: “*How are we at Grace Fellowship doing in our relationships with each other?*” It also leads to the question: “*How are we in Grace Fellowship doing in community?*”

If you will indulge me, let me share from these books some thoughts that have occurred to me and that I am working on. In regards to friendships that run deep, Anderson writes, “*Friendship is creating hospitality; it is creating a free and open space where I can receive another as a gift for my life.*” He goes on to write, “*I write from a deep and certain conviction: God has given friendship to the human family as a means of grace. Friendship is sacramental in the sense that*

*God cares about friendship, honors it and shows us love through numerous human relationships.*”

As I have read this book twice now this year, I am aware of the need for intentionality and also flexibility in regards to friendships. I cannot require others to be hospitable to me but I can be hospitable to others. I can regard friendship as holy and seek to be a good friend. I cannot expect others to be good friends. So, what can be done when we seek to be a good friend but do not have others reciprocating? One thing I have seen is that those who are loving, will receive love eventually. Those who are good friends will attract good friends. Those who make space in their lives for relationships will develop good relationships.

So, the question I am considering and would encourage you to consider is, “*Do I have space in my life for deep friendships?*”

In the Bonhoeffer book he writes of community. “*In Christian brotherhood everything depends upon its being clear right from the beginning, first, that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality. Second, that Christian brotherhood is a spiritual and not a psychic reality.*”

In respect to the idea of it being a divine reality rather than an ideal, he speaks of a term I would think he has coined, “*the wish-dream community.*” This is the ideal of community that many people have in their minds and seek to

create. He writes, “*Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it has sprung from a wish-dream. The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be, and to try to realize it. But God’s grace speedily shatters such dreams...By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world...A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community.*”

He goes on to say, “*He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.*” Bonhoeffer writes with force and passion, and his words cause me to pause. Have I accepted this community which God has given me or am I destroying that community in seeking after my wish-dream? This is a question we all must face individually and also as a corporate body.

It is my hope that this year of focus upon a relationship with God and others has caused us to grow in the understanding of the grace we have received from God through Jesus Christ that has enabled us

*(concluded on p. 2)*

# Never Alone

JOHN CALDWELL

*"I just wrote a poem about old age, and since I have no clue if it makes sense, I thought I'd bother you to see if you have a moment to see if it is fit for TrailNotes and if and when it could fit in.*

*"Putting my thoughts outside of myself is scary to my pride. I don't like to deal with rejection. But this was a labor with the Lord so it's on Him if you dislike it. I'm learning to accept what comes.*

*"Thanks for being there for my meanderings. You are a blessing to folks like me."*

*John Caldwell*

In old age  
My body failing  
Familiar words  
Go off a sailing.

Eyes are dim  
My nose has lost  
Sensations leaving  
The line's been crossed.

Still am breathing  
Thoughts continue,

There is awareness  
In every sinew.

Words are forming  
Feelings quicken  
All around me  
Rings this rhythm.



Listen, my soul,  
I know that voice  
He lights the darkness  
I softly rejoice.

## Elise Nunn is "Annie, Jr." orphan



Elise Nunn used her gymnastic skills as the Tumbler Orphan in "Annie, Jr." at Ashland's Kroc Center on May 13-15. Orphans were chosen from third to eighth graders in this "outstanding performance." Elise is the daughter of Gerry and Christy Nunn.

## JUNE 2022

- 1** Tabletop Game Club, 5th-8th graders are invited to join the summer game club on 4 Wednesdays in June from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.
- 2** Meet in the sanctuary to pray for REACH MADISON. The first Thurs. of each month we will meet in one of the community churches supporting REACH MADISON. 9:30 am.
- 4** Ethan Byrom's and Sarah Heininger's Grad Party, Waffle Bar, 10:00 am to 1:00 pm at GFC.
- 5** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching: II Cor. 6:3-13. High school grads Ethan Byron, Amy Gardner, Elijah Gates, and Sarah Heininger will be honored. Systematic Theology class meets in the Multi-Purpose Room from 4:00-6:00 pm. Eric Byrom will lead the discussion on chapters 21 and 22.
- 8** Tabletop Game Club, 10:00 am to 3:00 p.m.
- 12** Elder Jadaé Fox preaching: II Cor. 6:14-7:1. 
- 15** Tabletop Game Club, 10:00 am to 3:00 p.m.
- 16** Women of Grace, Bible Study and Prayer, 6:30 to 8:00 pm.
- 18** Kingdom Men monthly prayer breakfast at McDonald's, 9:00 am.
- 19** Elder Jerry Mathias preaching: II Cor. 7:2-16. Systematic Theology class, ch. 23-24, 4-6 pm.
- 22** Tabletop Game Club, 10 am to 3:00 p.m.
- 25** The Young Ladies and Women of Grace are invited to Mad Hatter. Check out your closet for a decorative hat and spring dress as we join for a potluck. Details to come.
- 26** Eric Byrom preaching: II Cor. 8:1-15.  KidsDTS July 10-16. TeenDTS July 17-23.

## Do I have space in my life for deep friendships? *(continued from page 1)*

to have an "abba" Father type of relationship with God that then allows us to show grace towards each other. May we not be just a "surfacy" community that doesn't go deep. May we not be a community so longing for an ideal that we become critical of the real in such a way that it results in destruction. May we truly be living out the call of this year to "Grow together in right relationship with God and each other."

# Salvation came to my Iranian household

NATHAN ROSTAMPOUR

*When a relative arrived at our door to proclaim Jesus as Lord, her words had an unexpected power.*

I was raised in a Muslim family in Tehran, Iran. My mother was a teacher and the principal of an elementary school. She knew a lot about Islam and did her best to follow its teachings. She helped me learn to read the Qur'an, taught me to pray at least three times a day, and encouraged me to fast during Ramadan.

As a Muslim teenager, I remember being full of fear—specifically, the fear that my parents would die. This was because my Islamic beliefs gave me no sense of security on whether they, or any other practicing Muslim, would be saved. I had big questions about the afterlife experience that my faith couldn't answer. Thoughts of losing my parents would scare me to the point where I would go into their bedroom late at night just to ensure they were still breathing.

## MEDICINE FOR MY SOUL

One day when I was 17, a relative came to visit. She had recently become a Christian through her relationship with a missionary working in Iran. And so she decided to come to our home and attempt to share the gospel. *"Jesus is Lord,"* I recall her saying. *"And He has come to save us from our sins."* She supported her claims with several Bible verses including John 3:16 and John 8:32: *"Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."*

As a young Muslim, I had been taught that the Bible was corrupted, that the version we read today is a distortion of its original contents. But as I listened to this woman read from the Scriptures, I felt something of its power—and I felt sure that a book capable of grabbing my

heart that intensively couldn't be corrupted after all.

Typically, my mother would get offended if someone disagreed with her Islamic values. On that day, however, something surprising happened. Instead of fighting back, she listened peacefully and asked questions. She wanted to hear the truth. (Later, our relative revealed she had been praying for us.)

One thing our relative said stood out: *"Jesus can set you free from fear and save you from eternal death."* These words were medicine for my soul. I thought I could sense God's presence and authority in what she said. I had no understanding of praying a prayer for salvation. But suddenly, in my room, I found myself on my knees. Looking up, I said, *"Jesus, I know You are Lord. Save me and set me free from my fears."*

Initially, I was afraid to tell my mother that I had become a Christian. As it turned out, however, she was having her own spiritual awakening. When she told me about coming to faith, I dared to tell her that I had too. My father and brother had converted to Christ also.

Our relative rejoiced with us and connected us to a secret house church. The Holy Spirit gave us much courage and desire to share the gospel with Muslims.

Over the next ten years, I began traveling to Christian conferences outside the country. I began to pray every day that God would use me as a full-time minister.

I had a dream in which God told me I would go to another land. He didn't reveal the name of the country, only the year I would make my journey. In that very year I ended



up a refugee in Turkey, having had to flee my country.

For 21 years I have been involved in ministry for the persecuted church. After moving to the United States, I discerned a call to equip the Persian church through social media platforms. My goal is to use the power of online education. I mentor all my trainees online, meeting with them in person a few times a year in a safe country in Central Asia.

## SET FREE FROM FEAR

One year after I gave my heart to Jesus, my father died of cancer. It was a great sadness for our family. But he had become a great believer, and in his last days, he was praising Jesus on his bed even during his toughest moments of chemotherapy.

When he went to be with the Lord, the Holy Spirit gave my family and me an incredible sense of peace. I realized that God had healed me and set me free from the fear of death. I rejoiced in the certainty that because of Christ, some day soon we would all be found in the presence of the living God forever.

**NATHAN** is currently a church planting pastor in Summit Church, Raleigh, N.C.

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From May-June Issue, 2022.*



## Paint and Pray

On Friday evening, May 20, twenty-seven painters gathered in the Youth Center, bringing a favorite Bible verse and a finger snack. Samuel Heininger spoke from Ps. 43 and Amanda Heininger directed the painting. Alexi Vega and Kay Berry made the arrangements for the evening. Some beautiful paintings were the result!



Samuel Heininger leads in a study of Scripture.



Amanda Heininger demonstrates how to do the painting.



Karen Godsil and daughter, Andrea, display their results. You be the judge!

## Rick Jacox has retired



Former GFC elder, Rick Jacox, has retired. He has taught physics at Ontario High School for many years and wanted to teach this last year to move into a higher level of retirement pay. Continue to pray for good health for Rick and enjoyment in this new chapter of life for both Rick and Sue.

TrailNotes JUNE 2022

## Thank you, Deb and Steve McKee!



God has big plans ahead for Steve and Deb McKee. They just don't know all the details yet.

The next big thing in their family is the wedding of their son, Brian, later this month. He and his bride (both school teachers) will be living in Toledo. Their other son, Cory, and his wife, have a potential baby adoption in July. Lots of excitement there!

What they *do* know is that their time here at Grace Fellowship Church has come to an end. Thank you, Steve, for your lengthy service as an elder, imaginative sermons and *TrailNotes* articles, (remember "Wisemen, who is your travel agent?"), Sunday School teaching, along with nature walks for many.

Thank you, Deb, for ten years of being our champion *TrailNotes* proof reader! We will miss your monthly corrections and suggestions. And thank you both for your leadership of the Circle Church group and all the meals for the homeless of Mansfield you helped provide.

Please come back once in awhile and bring us up to date! For now, along with our thanks, we send you off with our love and prayers.

### Grace Fellowship Church

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Eric Byrom	Presiding Elder/ Pastor
Jadaé Fox	Elder
Matt Godsil	Elder
Andy Heininger	Elder
Jerry Mathias	Elder

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