

“Feed My sheep!...Feed My lambs!...
Feed My sheep!”

John 21:15-17

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalms 91:1



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 Journey Home

MATT GODSIL

We all have an idea of “home” that is embedded deep in our hearts. For many of us, this idea was not a reality. Home represents a place that we could trust. The ideal home is a stable environment where our needs are met and where we feel safe. It is also a place where we live with others that we love and who love us. As a high school art teacher, I revisit the drawings of my students’ childhood. One particular activity involves each student recalling the landscape drawing he or she did at around age 5. The composition includes a house with a door, windows, a chimney with curly cue smoke coming out, a tree with a convenient limb for a swing, a hole for a small animal, a sidewalk, a sun, a fence, etc. Every house drawn by these teenage students recalling the landscape of age 5, always included a door, because that’s how you would get inside—an absolute requirement for any child.

I understand that many of my students did not have the trust, stability, and safety of the home depicted in these drawings. But the idea was intrinsic. Due to conflict, we all have had to leave our homes and go to a foreign land. We have come to call this exile.

In the 6th century B.C., the people of Israel found themselves in this situation. They were conquered, captured, and collectively led to Babylon, living in exile far from their home.

They asked themselves two questions: How did we get here? Do we have any hope of getting home?

The whole story of the Bible is built upon the answering of those questions. We can start with the garden: the perfect home. There was one condition for living there: obey God’s one command.

They didn’t. The result was banishment from the garden. If you continue to read on, the exile from the garden led to the building up of a particular city: Babylon.

Genesis 11:4 “Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for our selves: otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the



Original artwork by one of Matt Godsil’s students

whole earth.’” (NIV)

The people of Israel were then given another garden, the Promised Land. Again, there was one condition: obey God by being faithful to the terms of their covenant relationship made with God. They didn’t. And boom—banishment from the Promised Land to a particular city: Babylon.

After the first exile from the garden, God calls out a man named Abram to leave Babylon and travel to a new home, a promised land. He enters into a covenant with God and thrives because of his faith. But his offspring have to move into Egypt due to famine. They prosper there but become enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. God anoints a rescuer by the name of Moses, who is used by God to free His children. God re-establishes the covenant between them. They return to their home, the Promised Land, after wandering in the the wilderness for 40 years. God leads Joshua into the Promised Land to reclaim it from the occupying nations, the Gentiles.

After taking hold of the Promised Land, they begin
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to break the covenant they had made in the wilderness with God and Moses. They start to blend into the Babylonian culture, which led them away from God. After many warnings from God's prophets and subsequent violations by the kings and the people, the Jews are banished by conquest to Babylon. Eventually, they are released and return to their home, but it is occupied repeatedly by pagan nations. They continue to be ruled by conquering pagan forces over many centuries. Throughout Scripture, the prophets refer to the Babylonian exile as an image for exile from home we all feel, the sense that we were not made for this world. It is a feeling of alienation and longing for something more homelike, no matter where you are. Exile is the human condition, repeating our pattern of corruption and disobedience, all of which leads to the Babylon of our own creation, one, it seems, as if we can't escape.

However, the Word of God gives us hope that He would send us a rescuer from exile. This rescuer would free us from whatever Babylon we find ourselves in and bring us back to our home of trust, stability, safety, and love.

After a period of quietness between the testaments, we are introduced to a new and different kind of exile Who was from heaven itself, named Jesus of Nazareth. He was even born as an exile in Bethlehem, who was then exiled even further to Egypt. In truth, He never had a home here. But Jesus was anointed by God to rescue any who would believe in Him. Jesus would rescue us from exile, not back to a place here on earth, but as a new citizen of the heavenly kingdom He had come from and to which He would later return. As believers, we are now citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. As believers in Jesus, we become His ambassadors in this foreign place. We participate with Jesus in His rescue of other exiles. We are on a mission in the kingdom of this world, but it is not the home of our citizenry. Our mission comes from Jesus, who has a great concern for those in exile, without a home. He was always inviting those who were homeless or were excluded from community to join Him. Jesus told many stories of gathering the homeless to celebrations and feasts, a home where they would be loved, to live in trust, stability, and safety.

His way is love, service, and forgiveness. He was exiled with us, but then leads us in the way home. Jesus is the way. For those who follow Him find a new life, a new way of living, free from the crushing burden of exile in Babylon. He invites each of us to travel the



"The Life Line" - Winslow Homer -1884

same path He made and walked ahead of us.

Jesus also calls us out in our tendency to create artificial or false homes under our own control or authority. We live in the "babylons" of our own making. Jesus is our way out of Babylon and the only true way home. He showed us the way by carrying His cross and inviting us to carry ours.

As followers of Jesus, we remain geographical exiles here on earth, but we are given ambassador status. Upon our rescue, we are now called upon to participate in the rescue of our fellow exiles who are trapped in the Babylon of our time. We love Jesus, and we are now in a new covenant with Him to love others, built on faith and expressed in obedience to the anointed and worthy Rescuer.

We joyfully join Him in the future rescue of those still in exile, the captives of Babylon. The kingdom of Babylon is a brutal place. It exploits its citizenry while leading them to their own destruction. It is in this foreign kingdom to which believers in Jesus are called to serve as representatives of the Kingdom of Heaven. We do not need to compromise or negotiate our true home in the Kingdom of Heaven, but we take on the Holy Spirit of the One who is not finished with us or the loss of this world.

Let us be obedient in love and service to Him, albeit under the duress of spiritual warfare. The reality of our situation is stated in Ephesians 6:12 (NIV): "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Our response of choice is proclaimed by the angels in heaven. In Revelation 14:7-8 (NIV): "He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of

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Barnabas Ensemble in Cuba – ‘96-‘97

DONNA KURTZ

Barnabas Ensemble was formed in 1988 as a nonprofit, interdenominational ministry designed to encourage Christians and to reach out in evangelism through the performing arts—instrumental and vocal music, dance, mime, and drama. Ministry oversight was extended by the Alliance for Renewal Churches (now Table Fellowship), particularly Ray Nethery and Rick Widener who traveled with us.

Barnabas began when two friends from Oberlin Conservatory, Karen Stahl and I, were joined by our college-age children for a tour in Great Britain. *“A talented team. British reserve finally disappeared thanks to some American penache. A charming evening. Be encouraged, Barnabas. Your ministry and gifts are precious ones!” -Clive Manning, Christian Music, London.*

Throughout the ‘90s the group gave worship concerts in England, Scotland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Mexico, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Cuba, Brazil, and the U.S. We were in Cuba the summers of 1996 and 1997.

“What a miracle to present the gospel at The Festival of the Caribbean in the midst of voodoo!” After a successful audition, we were added to the festival, which was held in a huge outdoor square surrounded by tall buildings.

“I have never felt in my spirit the effects of prayer as I did on this trip.” One of our members, Kim Walimire (now Carillo), an Anderson University student, saw a very tall angel on each of the four corners of the buildings surrounding us. How’s that for protection?



Barnabas Ensemble ‘96 outside GFC.
You may recognize some of these faces!

One of my favorite experiences in Cuba was a high school performance where the principal said, *“The staff and workers have felt very happy with your presence for the quality of the program and the love that was manifested. We hope that you can return.”* We did—for their graduation.

That first summer in Cuba, 1996, we had open doors: elementary schools, a medical school, a mass in the cathedral, Christian families Matthew and Bethany Roggio had been corresponding with for several years. *“The trip changed my life and gave me the opportunity to see the lives of others changed by the power of God.”*

At the Methodist Church in Guantanamo, we learned that our program would put the pastor in danger. After a time of prayer with the local believers, we drove several hours and spent the night sleeping on the beach.



Barnabas ‘97 in Cuba brought a message of peace and freedom—but not what the Cuban government had in mind!

The second summer, 1997, we were arrested in Cienfuego as we sang a Cuban Christmas carol and performed a Stomp-inspired history of the Bible. We were kept overnight and then sent back to Havana with two armed guards in a ‘49 truck. One of the challenges was getting 800 Bibles off the truck. The truck driver examined “a bad radiator” while we amused the guards by giving them gifts. A couple of our men smuggled the Bibles into an apartment as we neared Havana for interrogation. Later we heard that the Bibles had been distributed to churches in Havana and we were shown pictures of the Bibles being handed out. What a joy!

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water. A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.'

Barnabas Ensemble in Cuba '96 - '97

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Sometimes we may wonder if short-term missions are really "worth it." Recently I heard from Becky Saccenti Alford, the "mime girl" of Barnabas. She (the girl next to the guitar in the Barnabas '96 photo) wrote,

"I have thought of you often over the years. The investment and example you contributed to my developing years of ministry have greatly impacted the decisions I have made. Kyle and I have taken a career missionary assignment to Sri Lanka. We are working on a Bible translation project and church planting development."



"Our trips to Cuba planted a seed in my heart to assist the persecuted church around the world that has continued to grow over the last 20 years. I have longed to let you know the impact you have had on my life.

*Love,
Becky"*

The Alford family have been in Sri Lanka for eight years now. Below is a glimpse of the Alford family in 2022.



May 2023

- 4 National Day of Prayer. Prayer and parade in downtown Mansfield. 6:30.**
- 4, 11, 18 Madison Middle School Game Club: 2:30-4:30.**
- 4-6 GFC Rummage Sale.**
- 7 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching: I Timothy 6:1-2. Image (MCS choir) joins us for worship at 10:00. Kids DTS meeting 12:45-1:45 at GFC.**
- 12 Pizza and fellowship for game club participants and families with GFCers. 5:30-8:30.**
- 13 GFC spring workday.**
- 14 Elder Jadaé Fox preaching: I Timothy 6:3-10. **
- 21 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching: I Timothy 6:11-21.**
- 24 Connect: End-of-year party. 6:30.**
- 28 Elder Matt Godsil preaching: 2 Timothy 1:1-7. **

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Eric Byrom	Presiding Elder/ Pastor
Jadaé Fox	Elder
Matt Godsil	Elder
Jerry Mathias	Elder
Cameron Karger	Treasurer
Kay Berry & Karen Gates	Women
Lori Barker	Missions
Andy Heining	Worship
Judy Nichols	Prayer Chain
Kay Berry & Jadaé Fox	Office
Andy Anschutz	Sound/Power Point
John and Donna Kurtz	TrailNotes