



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

“I’m all the LOVE that could make it today”

JON VEGA



LOVE

Ricky was “L” but he’s home with the flu.
Lizzie, our “O” had homework to do.
Mitchell, “E” prob’ly got lost on the way.
So I’m all of LOVE that could make it today.

They came in together. They had been spending the last week or so in their luxury camper at the same pay-by-the-season park they had frequented for over a decade. Most years, they enjoyed one of the many fruit-based festivals in the area. Their camper had a huge canopy on the passenger side, strung with fun lights; sometimes flamingos would shine pink into the night over their picnic table that sat festooned with an equally fun table cloth and (always) a deck of cards in various stages of play.

Each week, they would host a different set of grandkids or spend the weekends entertaining their older friends and a few of their remaining siblings. The grounds had a pool, a pond, a shuffleboard court, and tennis courts. It had been difficult to walk the distance...

...needed to keep up with the growing grandchildren and great grandchildren, so they had bought a custom golf cart to haul the oldest (and the youngest) of their guests back and forth. It had been working out beautifully throughout the beginning of the summer, but this was different. They had been in medical isolation for almost two weeks when he pulled up to the hospital doors. We kept them both in the ICU.

As the days turned into weeks, they kept in almost constant contact with each other with their cell phones. Two rooms apart was the farthest they had been from one another in over fifty years and never for more than a few days. Going from room to room to care for them was like carrying on the same conversation because they always asked for news, but always knew what I was going to tell them. They were never on the phone when

I was with them, but the information was always up-to-the-second.

He was in better shape than she was and they knew it too. She was worn out and couldn’t keep up with his recovery and eventual discharge from both the ICU and the hospital. She spoke with him over the phone less than an hour before we intubated her and placed her on life support: little things, light conversation, not goodbyes.

A few days later, he came back to visit her. He sat at the bedside. He talked and held her hand. He turned on the TV and sat beside her, watching one of their regular shows. He sang to her, just loud enough that we heard notes at the nurse’s station, but couldn’t name the tune. He fell asleep in the chair beside her but soon awoke and after ungowning and unglowing, gently left the room. Closing the door, he rested his head on the

glass between them and tears began to flow.

“How’s she doing?” he asked.

“Only time will tell, but time isn’t on her side at the moment,” I said.

He nodded his head, took a deep breath, and walked through the double doors of the ICU.

What prayer could I pray that he hasn’t already prayed? What comfort could I give his already broken heart? What peace could I bring to his shattered life? Very little. But even that *little* has the power to comfort and to heal.

2 Corinthians 12:9 “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”

Matthew 25:40 “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.”



When plans get interrupted

TRISHA BOWMAN

September was not kind to me. After eighteen months of my four young kids being at home 24/7, they were now going to return to school! I had my own plans for this month: I wanted to clean and organize my house and have it stay that way. But mostly, this introverted woman longed for silence.

However, these plans would be interrupted when the school announced everyone would be home for remote learning for at least two weeks. My house would remain loud and chaotic, and mostly dirty. I would continue to multitask my office workload while managing my children's schooling and my home responsibilities.

I was surprised by the impact this small interruption had on me. The day the school made the announcement, I cried. A lot. At some point a few hours after my good cry, I had a panic attack. At random, in the days since, the attacks have continued. (The only other time I've ever experienced a panic attack was when my brother died suddenly several years ago. That seemed reasonable, justifiable.) This time it was surprising. After all we've endured for eighteen months, why now?

I had no answers and for once, I wasn't actively looking for an answer--mostly because I didn't have it in me to pursue one, but also, because I didn't think an answer would be helpful.

One day I mustered up energy to walk to the back meadow. The trees were turning autumn-yellow and the meadow was filled with goldenrod. I found purpose there. The ironweed was in full bloom and dotted the landscape. The yellow and purple mosaic made a dance floor for the bees and butterflies. The great

meadow ballroom was filled with fluttering butterfly wings in delicate splendor. I sat and watched a butterfly. He had black wings dotted in white and yellow and he fluttered atop an ironweed bloom.

Somehow it brought me momentary bliss. I so wish that the moment permanently transported me out of this sad fog of panic. It did not. I can look at butterflies and bees dancing and know that they dance with delight because God has provided. I can see the beauty of a flowering landscape and know that God is weaving a glorious masterpiece in my life. I can see the trees changing and be reminded that seasons come and go and He remains.

I can see and be reminded and know all of this, and still have my heart race and my breathing grow short and shallow as I do my own dance between my work laptop and my children's school laptops, as I flutter in my labor from my office desktop to my kitchen stove-top. I don't know how I can do both--how I can know and be certain of the promises of God and still feel the despair of this world, literally in the breaths of my lungs. So I just keep walking.

If you are weary today, I encourage you to keep walking in faith even when your circumstances and surroundings don't look to be changing. We can walk in the power of the Holy Spirit even when (*especially* when) our energy is wavering. Keep walking, friend! There are treasures to be found in your steps.

"For we have already experienced 'heart-circumcision' and we worship God in the power and freedom of the Holy Spirit, not in laws and religious duties. We are those who boast in what Jesus Christ has done and not what we can accomplish in our own strength."

- Philippians 3:3 (The Passon Translation)



Deb McKee and a neighbor in front of "Inchworm Arch" in Kane County, Utah. "Camera shy" Steve took the photo!

THE
FOURTH
FROM
FRICAN



No, it's not the "Grace Fellowship Gecko," it's a Great Basin Collared Lizard (*Crotaphytus bicinctores*).

Singing a New Song to God

KIRA FONTANA

A top Hollywood vocal coach changed her tune after encountering the truths of Scripture

Despite all my “spiritual knowlege,” I repeatedly ended up in failed relationships and struggled to find true purpose.



From the outside, my life looked great. I was living in a trendy area in Santa Monica, CA and enjoying a fantastic job as one of the top vocal coaches in Los Angeles. With almost a decade of experience at the highest levels of the music industry, I had worked with major-label and top-40 artists, as well as hit TV shows like *The Voice* and *Glee*. Clients regularly flew in from around the world.

Though I had moved to LA to pursue creating my own music, somewhere along the way that dream got lost. I wasn't a Christian at the time, but my music had a strong spiritual bent— and that simply wasn't popular in LA. I made music and showed it to people but the response always left me cold. Eventually, I stopped singing and writing altogether. The death of this dream was the greatest heartbreak of my life, and the five years that followed were the most creatively barren that I had ever experienced.

PRAYING TO SEE TRUTH

Throughout this dry time, I focused on my soaring coaching career, and I managed to find temporary peace and joy through an LA megachurch for “spiritual but not religious” seekers. The church was transdenominational, which appealed to me. Raised Roman Catholic, I later adopted Eastern beliefs about God and practices like meditation.

After almost 20 years of spiritual seeking, I truly believed I had attained higher levels of consciousness than most people. I believed there were many roads to God and my thoughts were awash with “love and light” and other positive-thinking mantras. However, when I really looked at my life, I knew something was missing. Despite all my “spiritual knowledge,” I repeatedly ended up in failed relationships and struggled to find true purpose.

Around this time, several members of my family became born-again Christians and started talking about Jesus. I remember one of my brothers calling my spiritual center “satanic.” At the time, I thought he was crazy! The word *satanic* conjured up images of evil people doing rituals in a basement. What could be so horrible about channeling love and light, attaining higher consciousness and finding inner healing?

When my brother asked me, “Who do you think Jesus is?” I remember answering, “He was a great spiritual teacher and one of the most enlightened people who ever lived.” My philosophy was all about trying to “live like Jesus lived.” When I explained this to my brother, he said, “How can you live like Jesus when you have no idea who He really is? You've never read the one book that would show you who He is.”

Though I couldn't refute that point, I remember recoiling at what he was saying, and the conversation did not end well. For a time, we stopped speaking, and spiritual division began tearing my family apart. Upset by the turmoil, my mom suggested I “pray to see truth.”

So I did. I wasn't sure whom to pray to, since I believed in a universal force of light and love, not a personal God. Even so, I spent a solid year praying and seeking truth and I began reading the Bible as well. Scripture confronted me with many ideas my mind-set couldn't process much less accept. I asked God to reveal any beliefs that were leading me to reject what I read. As I did this, God began revealing His truth in ways that radically transformed my mind.

In time, I came to see that my most cherished beliefs had all been focused on myself. Even though they were framed in spiritual ways, they were oriented

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Singing a New Song to God *(cont. from p.3)*

ultimately toward self-realization and self-help. I had been consumed with fulfilling my dreams, attaining my career goals, and creating a life that would make me happy. I believed I was a good person and I surrounded myself with friends who agreed.

But discovering the Bible's definition of *good* shattered this confidence. Despite all my years of spiritual seeking, I finally saw that I wasn't capable of being a good person on my own. And I sensed my need for a Savior.

Meanwhile, God gradually opened my eyes to the reality of evil in the world. For most of my adult life, I had dismissed this reality, preferring the ideas of positive, love-and-light spirituality. I certainly didn't believe in the Devil, which sounded as ridiculous as believing in the Tooth Fairy! But day by day, God revealed to me the real state of the world—pulling back a veil and showing the depths of darkness I had never fathomed.

I had been seeking God, but the Enemy had diverted my attention to a counterfeit spirituality—one that simply couldn't comprehend the reality of a fallen world. Even at this point, however, I didn't trust the God of the Bible. If I had been so deceived for so many years, how could I trust anything now? I was wandering in the wilderness like a sheep without a shepherd.

I began attending a local church in Santa Monica, asking God to reveal Himself and praying He would bring me out of the darkness. I attended a course called Alpha, for nonbelievers who were curious about Christianity. I asked a ton of questions and I read multiple books on apologetics. Eventually, I was ready to surrender my life to Christ.

MADE FOR WORSHIP

As a new Christian, I prayed that God would show me how to use my musical gifts for the sake of His Kingdom. I soon realized I no longer belonged in the secular music industry. The messaging in the lyrics of most pop songs disturbed me, and I was concerned about this destructive impact these songs were having on young people. I wanted out, but I didn't know what was next.

After only a couple of weeks of praying, I felt God clearly call me to leave LA and move two hours south to San Diego County. I saw a vision for a Christian music company called Kingdom Sound and began pursuing it, even though I wasn't sure where it would lead. Leaving everything I knew was very scary, and I hoped God wouldn't forsake me.

Alone one night in my new home, I felt I had truly reached the end of myself. I cried out to God with a desperation and sadness I had never felt before, asking, "Why did You even make me?" I felt I had completely failed in so many areas of life, including my own music.



That very night, I woke up from a dream at 3 a.m. In the dream I heard an amazing song, and I knew it was for me. I got up, rushed down to the piano, and recorded the chorus for "Refuge." It was my first worship song. From that day forward, God began to pour out worship songs, and I experienced a complete revival of musical creativity. God had answered my prayer in a radical way—and I knew He was saying, "I made you to worship Me."

Since I put my faith in Christ, God has redeemed everything that was lost in my life. He has freed me from the prison of my selfishness, rescued me from the darkness, and brought me into His glorious light. He has given my life new purpose, equipping me to serve His Kingdom and glorify His name with music. There is no greater joy.

Kira Fontana is a singer-songwriter and record producer and the founder of Kingdom Sound.

From CHRISTIANITY TODAY, September 2021. Used by permission.

October 2021

- 3** Elder Jadaé Fox preaching. 1 Cor. 2:1-16.
- 10** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching.  I Cor. 3:1-23.
- 16** Men's Prayer Breakfast at church, 8 a.m.
Steve Phillips sharing.
Church Work Day, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- 17** Eric Byrom preaching. 1 Cor. 4:1-21.
- 24** Eric Byrom preaching. 1 Cor. 5:1-13. 
- 30** Women of Grace brunch with speaker.
At church, 10:30 to noon.
- 31** Celebration Worship. Tentative potluck.

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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor

Jadaé Fox Elder

Andy Heininger Elder

Jon Vega Elder

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