

FIRST words

TO REACH PEOPLE FOR JESUS CHRIST & TOGETHER BECOME MORE LIKE HIM

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

This month's theme for First Words, Looking Back and Looking Forward, came out of our pastoral staff meeting as we anticipated January 2021. The problem was and still is, we have no clue what January or for that matter, 2021, will look like! Neils Bohr, a Noble prize-winning Danish physicist, is credited with the statement, *"Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future."* And, it would seem that during this pandemic, it is even harder! 6-month goal planning became 3-months, then 3 weeks, and now 10-days. For the staff, the difficult decision of whether or not to have in-person worship or Sunday school is a gut-wrenching decision. As much as we want people together, we know we must be vigilant about keeping people safe and healthy. Weighing the risks about every decision becomes a heavy burden and yet, we are called to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ with a lost and hurting world. But, as the virus hits closer and closer to home (i.e. the church family) those decisions become more real and have deeper meaning.

So, inside this month's edition of First Words, you will hear from the staff as they reflect on the past year and look forward to what is ahead in the coming year. We thank you for your support and look forward to the day, hopefully in the near future, when we can gather as the body of Christ and celebrate in worship without masks or the concern of spreading the virus. Please continue to pray for each other, for our health care workers and first responders, and for the work of the church as we move forward into 2021!



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

I'm not big into New Year's Eve celebrations - usually I'm in bed. But, this year it was different. When they counted down the seconds in Time Square and the ball dropped glowing with 2021, it was an emotional moment - even a religious experience watching this secular tradition.

Well, 2020 is finally over...or at least on the calendar - turn the page on this year. Sure, we still have major challenges with COVID-19 and other conflicts, but the month of January always brings hope, even in the mid-winter or a surging pandemic and strife which hangs on.

January comes from the name of the Roman god, *Janus*. In Roman mythology, *Janus* stands for the "god of gates, doorways, beginnings as well as endings." *Janus* reveals his nature by having two heads. One looking back, the other looking ahead. *Janus* displays the tension of a new year, looking back and looking forward.

As we approach 2021, the double glance of *Janus* asks us, which way are we looking? We tend to focus on either the past or the future. 2020 was a hard year, no question. Never imagined what was before us last January. We all have faced some major disappointments. Some have endured grief and losses of all kinds. I have feared what church will be like in the future - will people come back? How has this past year changed the way we do church?

New Year's Eve has traditionally been a time to first reflect on the past with the melody of "*Auld Lang Syne*." Not sure we want to go back after this year. Yet, the past can be a source of gratitude. The words, "*For all that has been -Thanks*" have always encouraged me to be grateful,

no matter what I faced. Spend time remembering the blessings which emerged from this year. I had my best birthday ever with a drive-by celebration - not what I had planned - but more than I imagined.

Let us learn from this past year, even with "*social distancing*," how closely we are connected and need each other. This Christmas was different for many of us. Yet, remember the joy of Christmas' past you took for granted. As we look back, remember the ways God has kept His promise to provide.



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January becomes a time to turn our faces to the future. *Janus* is the god of doorways and the threshold of new beginnings. But, we have God's face and Word. The prophet *Isaiah* declares a doorway: "*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not see it right before your very eyes? I*

am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland in which we have dwelled."

As we walk through the threshold moment of 2021, we have a doorway with a sign posted: "*For all that will be - Yes.*" We can live confidently with all of the risks. Jesus said, "*I am the door, the gate, and the way to life.*" Now, that is a New Year.... I wonder what doorway God is calling you to walk through which could change your life?

Let us have a blessed New Year, trusting God's face,

Phil

Reflecting back on 2020, I realize there were many challenges we faced...mainly due to the pandemic. But, we also had so many things to be grateful for. We welcomed a new granddaughter in March at the beginning of the pandemic and this couldn't have happened at a better time. With our busy work schedules and events, we would've never had the time with Lily which we were blessed with. Yes, we had to learn a new way of living, but this brought us closer together as a family and gave us the much-needed time together we had been missing.

I'm looking forward to 2021, and I'm praying for a year of normalcy in our church and personal lives. I'm anxiously awaiting to see how God works in all these areas and I look forward to the blessings which will overflow into our community. I pray for peace, health, and God's grace to each of you.

-Candy Rains

Could I have a word with you about last year (and next year)?

In staff meeting a couple of weeks ago, we decided each of the pastors should write a brief article which takes a look back, as well as a look forward. In many ways, we have all had the same experience in 2020. We have all expanded our glossary of terms to include, "coronavirus," "flatten the curve," and "social distancing," to name a few. I didn't anticipate I would ask for a new pair of shoes, as well as a new mask for Christmas. We have all had similar experiences in many ways. This morning as I was getting ready to come to the office, I had this thought: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." That verse is from Psalm 118, which begins with these familiar words: "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever." These truths have been the truth every day of 2020. I believe that.

In March, Phil asked me to record some Bible studies for Facebook, email, and the website. I agreed and I set out to record three or four studies around the theme: Faith is Greater Than Fear. I knew at the time I would not need more than four. Nine months later, I am grateful he asked me to begin teaching this way. I have learned much and I have gained more than I could have imagined from this experience. I have enjoyed the conversations with many of you which have come as a result. I believe they will continue even when we are able to return to whatever we will call normal (normal: an archaic term used before 2020).

I don't know what will happen in 2021. Several months ago, Phil told us that long range planning is now **three weeks**. I think he was being optimistic. Going forward, Joe Frush, for whom I am very grateful, and I continue to talk about how we can better use video platforms like Zoom (another word we added to our glossary of terms in 2020) to reach out to you. We will enjoy hearing from you. In the meantime, continue to meet together in Zoom Sunday School—even if it is on Monday. Oh, I owe you a hug, or two.

-C.V. Blake

During the changes and challenges of the past 10 months, the Worship and Music ministry has continued seeking ways, both new and old, which God would lead us to use in these unprecedented days. Through these days, we have discovered new and effective uses of virtual meetings and non-singing times of rehearsal which have allowed us to maintain, though distanced, a level of contact with each other. In those times, we were given the honor of being joined by people who compose, arrange, orchestrate, and publish the music we sing. It was a rich blessing to hear how the Lord was working in and through them in these days.

In preparing for the challenges of the weekly worship services, the Celebration Orchestra was a wonderful addition. The members could safely distance, mask, and play in worship each week, which added beauty,

majesty, and inspiration. Joining the orchestra has been a group of singers who have served in the worship teams sharing a vital part in leading the worship services.

As we look forward, the orchestra and worship team will continue to lead in weekly services until the time arrives when the Sanctuary Choir can resume rehearsals and prepare to safely take their place in worship.

The primary goal, in every endeavor during this time, is the safety of those who participate. Every effort is made in this regard and will continue as we look toward a day when we can return to worship together.

-Todd Wilson

As I look back at 2020, it would be easy to sum it up with just a few words: sad, frustrating, disappointing...I am sure you could find several more words to describe the year. The frustration and disappointment of not getting to see our church family multiple times a week has been one of the hardest things for me. Not only not getting to see those I love and enjoy seeing, but not being able to hug them or see their faces has been so incredibly sad for me.

Yet, though these words are prevalent in describing the year there have been positives. This pandemic has forced us to slow down, and for many of us given us the needed push to "Be Still" (well maybe just a little stiller).

This year has also given us the opportunity to reach even more children each week through a short "children's time" during the worship service. This has allowed us to send the message of Christ's love to so many more children each week. It has been encouraging to receive pictures of our children watching the "children's time" as they tune in. I would love to continue receiving those pictures.

I know mailing out children's bulletins or crafts, doing videos on Facebook, or having a "children's time" each Sunday does not replace in-person time at church, but we will continue doing these things until we are able to get back to a more normal schedule. Of course, it is my hope and prayer we will be able to meet in-person beginning early in the year and we will be able to bring back the programs which best help our children as they continue to learn about God's love.

I am looking forward to the day when I can see all your faces, when I can hug you or shake your hand.

I leave you with one of the scriptures I have clung to this year: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Blessings to all,

Becky Tucker

Mac Davis wrote a popular song back in 1980 with part of the lyrics stating: "Happiness is Lubbock Texas in my rearview mirror." I believe I would have lots of folks agree if we changed the words to: "Happiness is 2020 in our rearview mirror!" 2020 has been tough in so many ways. Personally, it has been both extremely joyous with the birth of our newest twin grandsons and heartbreaking with the death of my mother. I grow tired of words like: isolation, social distancing, masks, quarantine, and the latest death count and new case numbers. 2020 will be a point in history which future generations will write about and hopefully try to learn from. But for now, we simply look back at a year which changed our lives and hope we never have to re-live it!

So, as we look back, what will we take with us into 2021? I know I will not take for granted the ability to simply shake hands and give hugs to those I care about. I will continue to look into the eyes of people and listen more intently because of how we have had to do so for the past year due to the wearing of masks. I will look for the blessings which come even in the midst of tough times. I will celebrate with those who are not here, but will do so with Zoom and Facetime and not see it as an inconvenience, but rather a gift. I will look to continue to incorporate many of the new ways we have had to do things and not simply go back to the old way if the new way makes more sense. I hope to embrace change when change is needed and it is not forced on us. And most of all, I look forward to being able to gather with all of you in worship where we can continue to "become more like Him."

-Mike Greenfield

Through it all...God is still good! Those are the words which come to mind as I look back on 2020. It's been a tough year filled with many hours of extra work and the things we plan for changing as quickly as the latest news report. It's been a year of worry, concern, and grief over those we've lost or those who have battled great sickness or could become sick because of my actions. It's been a lonely time for so many people and at times a dark place for me, even while trying to do good. The song which comes to mind is Andre Crouch singing "Through it All" (google that now). He sings "Through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God...I've learned to depend upon His Word." That's what I've tried to do this past year. Sometimes it's been easy and other times it's been really hard, but I can see through it all God has been there for me, even in my failures!

The start of the new year brings hope for me. God continues to teach me in 2021 that He is enough for all of my needs, and I must continue to put that into practice. In fact, some things which were the old normal can begin to come back, but in new expressions which come from what we've learned this past year. We have a new opportunity in 2021 to put into practice what we've learned from the many lessons out of 2020. My goal this year is to not waste those opportunities. I've learned to trust more, so I want to trust God more this year in new ways. I've learned to value the small moments of God moving, and I don't want to get too busy to miss that for this new year. And, I've learned that the little things which have caused frustration, fear, and anger are not worth giving time to in this next year. So, may God help me and all of us to live in the hope that through it all, He is there. On a wall in the dining room of City Light you'll find this verse. "But those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not grow weak." Isaiah 40:31 May this bring encouragement to you now!

-John Moore

Looking back...

I'm not going to try and impress anyone with fancy and overused words like "unprecedented" to describe the year 2020. This past year has been terribly difficult. Everyone in the world was affected and many people are still struggling, even though we now have a glimmer of the future with a vaccine which is being distributed right now. For us here at FBC Abilene Youth, we had to do a lot of things differently. We had to cancel summer Youth Camps and retreats, change the way we do Bible study for the most part, and miss valuable time with our students. We mourn over this year, but even in a very dark time, we saw the results of God walking alongside of us. Our students continued to grow in their faith, they found new ways to build community with one another, and they strived to show the love of Jesus to the people around them, even when everything in their lives were unsettled. So, while we mourn for a year that will go down in history, our students can be proud of themselves. Our church community is persevering through this together. As we wait though, don't try to pass over this time of COVID-19 purposely. Ask God, what should I be doing for your Kingdom right now?

Looking forward...

Out of darkness and hopelessness, our God can bring hope, joy, peace, and love. We know God's love gives us purpose. This year, we are hoping to get back into some sense of normalcy. A vaccine being available to the public will bring us a step closer to this goal. We have some exciting things on the horizon in our youth ministry. We will hopefully have some sort of Disciple Now event in the first part of the semester. We should be able to go to both of our Youth Camps this year. As it becomes safer for us to meet, we will continue building up our students in Bible Study. Also, we will strive to learn how to love our neighbors better while serving our community and our city. Let us remain patient, continue looking out for the safety of others by wearing masks and social distancing the best we can, and look forward with hope about what God is doing with us next here at FBC Abilene Youth. As we wait though, don't try to pass over this time of COVID-19 purposely. Let us not waste the life we were given! Ask God, what should I be doing for your Kingdom in the future?

-Austen Winfrey

During the weeks of Sunday school this fall, I was leading a study on the book *Half-Truths: God Helps Those Who Help Themselves and Other Things the Bible Doesn't Say* by Adam Hamilton. In it he addresses the phrase, "God won't give you more than you can handle."

This half-truth is based on 1 Corinthians 10:13 which says, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tested beyond our own strength, but with the testing He will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." The reason the phrase doesn't fit the scripture is because Paul is writing specifically about temptation, not all life circumstances.

Another reason the phrase "God won't give you more than you can handle" is a half-truth is because it implies God gives us all the bad things we experience in our lives. That isn't the way God works. God knows about them and is with us through them, but God doesn't cause them or give them to us to see how much we can endure and then pull off right before our breaking point.

Hamilton writes, "It's not that God won't give you more than you can handle, but that *God will help you handle all that you've been given.*" 2020 has given us a whole lot of pain, heartache, and loss. We've had to learn completely new ways of living and being in our world. I feel confident in saying, "2020 has given us more than we can handle...on our own."

The Bible is full of stories of people who experienced more than they can handle. When we experience difficult times, it's important to remember God uses others to help and encourage us. Moses had Aaron. David had Jonathan. The disciples had each other. Jesus sent out His followers in pairs.

One, of many, lessons learned in 2020 is that we don't have to live life on our own. It's ok to ask for help. We must not buy into the lie that individualism is a sign of ultimate strength, especially for the Christ-follower. Acts 4:32 says, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had."

Think of a burden you've been trying to handle on your own. Commit to sharing that burden with a trusted friend so you don't have to carry the weight of it alone. Now, think of a person you know who may be experiencing a tough time. What do you have you can share with them? Time, money, encouragement, or maybe a free babysitting coupon for the parents who need a break.

In our lives, we will most certainly experience more than we can handle. As we enter into 2021, I pray we will embrace the importance of relying on one another - as a church, as families, as individuals. We may be able to survive on our own, but it is only together that we can thrive. May the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ give you strength to persevere.

-Matthew Broyles



It is time once again for the January Flour & Sugar Drive. The need is growing as the strain of meeting the needs of those less fortunate increases. Our goal is 7,800 lbs. of flour and 6,200 lbs. of sugar. The funds donated to this drive should be designated for the ABA Social Ministries Flour and Sugar Drive. Donations can be made in the church office, or in the boxes located at the church entrances. Funds are preferred.

FBC MISSIONS: ACTING IN *love*

Lesley-Ann Hix Tommey is one the newest CBF Missionaries who your giving supports.

Over Thanksgiving week, our ministry at Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries cooked 32 turkeys and provided more than 800 individually-wrapped, home-cooked Thanksgiving meals to our neighbors experiencing food insecurity. This year, we were especially excited because for the first time we were able to deliver enough meals to four local family shelters to feed every adult and child staying in those shelters.

- Lesley-Ann Hix Tommey,
*field personnel serving in
New York City*



Christmas Store Thank You

Thank you to all who gave gifts, money, and time to the City Light Christmas Store this year! You helped over 170 kids!

We worked with Martinez, GLO, City Light, and our community to contact families to come shop at the store. The gifts you gave and the ones purchased with monies given were set up at City Light for shopping. The parent, grandparent, or guardian came to shop and were able to choose what they would like for each child at a reduced price.

The best part happens while they shop and as we help load presents into their car! We get to visit with them about their children and about what is going on in their lives. Most of them carry a heavy burden. The store helps to relieve a portion of that burden for them. It also builds a relationship for the future with this ministry and helps them see God is real, loves them, and will supply their needs.

2020 has been a year we will not soon forget and has changed many lives for a long time to come and some forever. This store and so many ministries at First Baptist Church and City Light Ministries have been that light and relief so many have needed during this time and will continue to be that light moving forward!

Once again, thank you for your love for God's people and your actions!



STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

January 1, 20 years
Maura dela Cruz
Associate Director of CLCM

January 1, 13 years
John Moore
Pastor for Missions

January 1, 9 years
Lynn Martin
City Light Food Service

January 16, 2 years
Rachelle Phillips
GLO Teacher

January 19, 2 years
Whitney Patterson
GLO Teacher

January 23, 2 years
Courtney Edwards
Ministry Assistant to Senior Pastor

January 28, 2 years
Kayleen Mills
Director of Operations/Chef Trainer

January 28, 2 years
Chris Hufford
Custodian

FBC Foundation Grant Request Forms Are Available

Forms are available in the office.
Deadline to return the form is noon,
Friday, February 5.

STAY connected



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<https://twitter.com/fbcabilene>



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ABILENE, TX

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Remember to join us live for
worship each week at 10:30 a.m. on
KRBC or stream the service by going
to the church website:

www.fbcabilene.org

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

December 2020

Budget	December	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 505,709	\$ 3,507,994
Given	\$ 350,113	\$ 3,091,326

*This does not reflect any year-end gifts by mail

*God continues to bless our faithfulness through
the tithes and offerings given to His Kingdom work.*



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