

FIRST *words*

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

SENIOR SUNDAY, MAY 23

by Austen Winfrey

On May 23, we will celebrate the high school class of 2021 in our morning worship service. Last year, we had a virtual ceremony because we were in the height of the pandemic, but this year we will be returning to an in-person presentation. We will have the graduates presented before the church and then ask their families to join them at the front where we will have a time of prayer and commissioning for these graduates. We will keep social distancing in mind and we will ask all who participate to wear masks for the safety of everyone gathered. This church has a beautiful history of celebrating big milestones in our student's journeys, as well as blessing them as they prepare to journey forward to where God leads. Our church has committed to and celebrated these students through VBS, Sunday school, youth camps, and mission trips. Now, we have an opportunity to bless them as they continue their journey with Jesus.

Senior Journals will once again be online this year because it gives an opportunity to many different folks to encourage and share memories to the students. Please write a prayer, blessing, encouragement, or recount a shared experience in each student's journal. Your message does not have to be lengthy to be meaningful!

The journals will be available soon on our church's website. All you will have to do is click on the link on our website and it will take you to the senior journal screen. From there, click on the picture of each student and write your message to them. We will collect all the responses and bind them in a nice journal and present them to each student. Remember, whether you know all the students well or not does not change the impact of what a word can mean to them as they graduate!

Thank you for supporting our students!



Class of 2021

Griffin Camp

Shaelee Caspell

Currian Cole

Jacob Elliott

Alexia Martinez

Melia Messer

Kyle Monroe

Cole Patterson

Katie Rogers

Daniel Romines

Harrison Smith

Dixon Whisenhunt

Cade Yarbrough



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

In Philip Yancy's book, *Church: Why Bother?*, he shares his journey of moving from a skeptic to an advocate, from a spectator to a participant. He said that nowadays he can't imagine life without the church. When he has moved, finding a church community was one of his urgent priorities. If he missed a Sunday, he felt a void. After the changes with COVID-19, we need to hear his story.

As he confessed, his commitment to the Church was not always such a priority. He grew up in the fundamentalism of the Deep South. He recognizes that the church of his youth, which was full of fierce condemnation, void of humility, and had little sense of mystery, stunted his faith for years. He questioned whether the church was necessary in following Jesus. He identified with Winston Churchill who once said he related to the church like one of those flying buttresses on those European Cathedrals: he supported it from the outside.

Yancy talks about what changed his attitude. He started sensing the Spirit at work as the church has filled in him a need which could not be met in any other way. The words of Saint John of the Cross started to burn in him: *"The soul that is alone...is like the burning coal that is alone. It will grow colder rather than hotter."* As he started looking for a church, he realized the key was to search his soul about *his way of seeing*.

Looking Up

He stopped looking for a church as a consumer. What matters most, takes place within the hearts of the congregation, not among the participants on the platform. When we leave worship ask yourself not, *"What did I get out of it?"*, but rather, *"Was God pleased with what happened and my worship?"* Church exists not to entertain, encourage, or facilitate friendships. The church exists for the worship of God. Yancy acknowledges he no longer worries about the style of music, the order of service, the "trappings" of church, when he simply went church-shopping.

I remember one of my most significant worship services was when I worshiped in the Baptist Church in Moscow. It was more than people standing outside the sanctuary in the freezing cold leaning in through the windows. I did not understand one word of the service since it was all in Russian. Yet, in the mystery of that worship experience, I was moved beyond words or my taste to look up and worship the God of the nations.

Looking Around

We forget that the Christian church was the first institution in the history of the world to bring together on equal footing Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free. Unlike other religions, Christians welcomed men and women alike. The Greeks excluded slaves. The Christians included them. We still can grow in our diversity and inclusion. But, look around. We are a different church than we were twenty-five years ago. We can learn from each other as the people from all walks of life worshiping together. One of our great strengths resides in being an intergenerational church where we walk with people of all ages and from all walks of life.

Look Outward

It has been said, *"The church is the only cooperative organization that exists for the benefit of its non-members."* We have looked outward to the needs around us and started a daycare center, a family life center, a counseling ministry, and a downtown ministry to the *"least of these."* Now there are plans for the Hope Center, which will also include a center for non-profits to reach out to the needs of our community.

Yancey believes that looking outward may be the most important factor in a church's success or failure. Some fear it will drain the church's resources and energy. Yet, Yancy has found the opposite to be true.

Thriving on Hope

Matthew Broyles shared a conversation he had with one of our young adults. This person owns his business and has done well in advising his clients about making

Continued from Page 2.

investments. Like Philip Yancy, he has been more of a spectator than a participant in the church. He shared about wanting to become more involved. The young man said as he counseled his clients about making a major or wise investment, he would make an investment in the future of First Baptist Church and what we are doing.

I pray you will make such an investment in the Kingdom.

Hopefully,
Phil

COMING THIS SUMMER!

Summer FUN NIGHTS at the flc

Starting June 9, we will be meeting at the FLC on Wednesday evenings for fun & fellowship. From 5:30 to 6:15 p.m., there will be a light meal available for \$3 with a weekly entree such as hot dogs, hamburgers, Frito pie, etc. From 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. you can bowl, skate, play dodgeball, shoot some hoops, or just visit with friends. There will be toddler toys available for our little ones. Please come!

We would love to see you there!



VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL 2021

Vacation Bible School will look a little different again this year as we are planning to have multiple sites for Neighborhood VBS. These sites may be in backyards, drive-ways, front yards, or cul-de-sacs. We will be “digging up” evidence that proves Biblical events were not just stories and exploring real-life archaeological finds that have helped to uncover the truth about Jesus!

Locations, dates, and times have not been finalized so be looking for more information in Wednesday First Reminders and on social media. We are needing volunteers to lead Bible study, music, crafts, recreation, as well as bring snacks. If you are interested in hosting an event or helping with one please contact Jennifer at 675-8105.

Hope to see you at one of the events!



DISCIPLE NOW 2021 LEAD WITH LOVE

In a season riddled with so much doubt and uncertainty, Disciple Now is just what we needed.



Disciple Now 2021 was not like those we have had in the past in this church (as far as I know). Because of the on-going pandemic, we had to eliminate the sleepover portion of Disciple Now to maintain safety within our community. That didn't stop our students from having a formational weekend. Since we did not have the chance to have a Middle School Retreat this year, Middle School students were invited and participated in Disciple Now this year. The joy of our students being together shone throughout the weekend. We ate together, worshiped together, studied Scripture together, served City Light Community Ministries together, and celebrated the love of Jesus together!



Lead with Love was our theme this year. We learned how God's love has been embedded within our very being in creation and because of this, we are called to live our lives with God's love at the forefront. Love is the very foundation our lives are built on. We celebrate joy and love others well because this is how we show our obedience to God, who loves all people deeply.



Disciple Now cannot happen without the help of this church family and many faithful leaders. Your tithes and offerings go towards a budget so we can plan a ministry of empowering youth through the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Our Bible study leaders sacrifice their own time to spend the weekend with students and teach them the Love of God we find in Scripture. Host Home Leaders volunteered their backyards for a Saturday lunch and an afternoon of fellowship. We had a wonderful guest preacher and guest worship leaders who encouraged our students to live into the love God has given to us. We had great volunteers who served our students out of the love in their hearts.



I am grateful to serve at FBC Abilene and specifically our outstanding students here. I continue to find much joy in watching these students grow in their faith and journey through life together. I learn from them every day. I am encouraged that God is leading us on this journey together.

LET US LEAD WITH LOVE.



SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- HOST HOME LEADERS:** The Varghese Family, The McAdams Family, The Fink Family
- BIBLE STUDY LEADERS:** Joel Allen, Claire Preston, Morgan Rains
- GUEST WORSHIP LEADER:** Tyler Daniel
- GUEST PREACHER:** J.R. Cochran
- VOLUNTEERS:** Steve and Debra Clemmer, John and Beverly Moore, "Jersey" Diramondi III, & Mike Brady

FBC is so grateful to have wonderful students involved in our college ministry. We want to celebrate them and their great accomplishment of graduating from their universities. We will recognize all university seniors connected to FBC in worship on May 2. Here we have highlighted the seniors who have been involved in the university ministry of First Baptist during their time in college. Thank you for the way you love and support our students in our ministry to university students.



Charae **PITTS RICHARDSON**

Hardin-Simmons University
Major: Biology

Plans after Graduation: I'll be attending UT Southwestern Medical Center's Doctorate of Physical Therapy program in Dallas.

First Baptist has been a constant source of support throughout my entire college career. I began coming as a freshman in college while Meredith Stone was the interim college pastor and to this day I still remember our first semester-long Bible study over Galatians. I had never been involved in a Bible study that was so in-depth, that included not only the text within the verse, but also the context in which it was written, and that encouraged us to ask questions of any and all kinds. Eventually Matthew came along and our group continued to grow and evolve. I've never been with a group of people who were more honest about the difficulties of life, doubts within faith, and the questions which accompany reading the Bible and examining our relationship with God. The people of FBC have not only encouraged my growth as a person, but have also helped me understand how to navigate living my faith holistically through my thoughts, words, and actions. Thank you for pouring into me these last four years, I am forever grateful.



Lucas **LOPEZ**

Hardin-Simmons University
Major: Biology

Plans after Graduation: Attend Genetic Counseling School at the Emory School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia

FBC Abilene's intimate college ministry has been invaluable to me. I've greatly appreciated the intellectual thought put into our discussions and the goal to teach us how to think and not what to think.



Natalie **NEILL**

Abilene Christian University
Major: Communication Sciences
and Disorders

Plans after Graduation: I will be going to UT Dallas to get a MS in Speech-Language Pathology

What was significant in being involved with FBC and our college ministry? - I found an uplifting and supportive community when I started coming to FBC. The group became a place for me to make friends, develop my faith, and grow as a person. Being involved in the church has really helped me discover who I am as a person and as a Christian.

FBC MISSIONS: ACTING IN *love*



Small groups working on discussion questions during the Kampot seminar.



We are excited that this month we finally got a dining table after 6+ months living in this home. It was a weird saga full of termites and other turns, but now we are excited about the life and ministry that will happen around this table.



A peek at Phnom Penh's ever changing skyline.

Hello from Phnom Penh!

In our last newsletter, we asked you to pray for the pastor training seminar that was taking place at the end of January. Many of you wrote to tell us you were praying, and we have to believe that many of you were joining in with those prayers because everything went smoothly. Travel to the province was uneventful, and the teaching time itself went as well as we could have hoped given it was my first time to do this. I had the privilege of sharing with over 40 people. It didn't go perfectly, but it went well, and we learned a lot of lessons about how to continue to improve the seminars and, hopefully, how to expand them for other provinces in the future.

Even more interesting than the seminars I did, was meeting and hearing from just a few of the pastors and leaders attending that day. I heard a testimony from a woman who does evangelism ministry in the local prison. She led a young man to give his life to Christ, and since he had recently been released, she brought him to the meeting that day and introduced him to us. I met another young man, who lives in the nearby city during the week to attend medical school, and comes back to his village each weekend to lead worship at his church. Every month he takes a day to fast and pray. I learned about the baptisms that were taking place in a few weeks as several people were publicly declaring their allegiance to Jesus.

As I listened to these stories and prayed and worshiped alongside these leaders, I thought about how God was using this group of people to influence many different corners of society. This group was not wealthy or politically powerful, but they were following the Holy Spirit, and through their obedience, the kingdom of God was coming in Kampot Province in new ways. As you pray for us and our ministry, pray that these seminars we are preparing would play some small role in equipping these believers to further proclaim the kingdom of God in their communities.

Regrettably, the February seminar had to be cancelled. On February 20, the government detected an outbreak of COVID-19 cases after a couple of months with no community transmission here. As of this newsletter, more than 260 cases have been detected here in just a few days, mostly in Phnom Penh, and the government has requested that nobody travel in or out of the city for non-essential business. We hope and pray this outbreak will be contained before it spreads and overwhelms the fragile healthcare system here. Our hope is that seminars could resume in March, but we will follow the government's advice and trust they will resume in God's timing.

With much thankfulness for your prayers and encouragement,

David, Lauren, and Chloe

At the beginning of February,

I was on Zoom with the community relations and AmeriCorps Program coordinator at **Ryan Chelsea-Clinton Health Center** (one of our close partners) on 10th Avenue in Hell's Kitchen. We were meeting about a nutrition workshop she and one of her AmeriCorps staff would be leading for our Living Well domestic violence program. We started talking about the clinic's vaccine distribution. She offered to bring some of their nurses over one day to vaccinate our staff, as long as we had 10 people who needed doses.

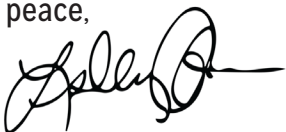
We don't have 10 people on staff, but we could definitely find 10 people who needed vaccines. Over the next week or so, we started thinking through this opportunity as a team. We knew vaccine access in February was limited to those who were savvy and lucky enough to get an appointment. So, we went back to Ryan Health and asked about opening up appointments to our clients. We settled on offering 40 appointments during our food pantry distribution one Saturday.

So on a very rainy Saturday in February, one of our faithful food pantry volunteers and I crowded under the tent outside the church building to sign up anyone who wanted to get the vaccine. Carlos was the first person I spoke to. He said "yes" very quickly. At some point in the middle of filling out the three forms needed to register for the appointment, he said, "Thank you so much for doing this! I don't have a computer and I don't have family to help me, so I couldn't ever get an appointment." We signed up about 15 people that morning. Between our own homelessness support programs, a local nonprofit, a high school, and the shelter across the street, we quickly filled all 40 spots and had a waiting list.

At the beginning of March, during our food pantry, Ryan Health's nurses set up in our sanctuary space, and (following strict COVID safety precautions) folks filed in to receive their first Moderna dose. At the beginning of April, they all came again to receive their second. I am so proud of this vaccine effort. Not only did it engage incredible local partnership collaboration, but it also tangibly held the hope our community desperately needed.

After a year marked heavy with trauma for our city (I'm not sure how long it will be before the sound of sirens no longer triggers anxiety and grief), we're finally starting to breathe a little deeper. I pray that you all are also starting to breathe a little deeper. We have all been courageously living through the desolation of this year-long winter season, but spring may be blooming finally. And, our God creates out of desolation. So here are some signs of resurrection I'm noticing: The traffic has picked back up, Times Square is not nearly as abandoned as it once was, and since becoming fully vaccinated, we have been able to go out to dinner and to see our friends. We have churches calling again to schedule mission trips for their teams, and we're looking forward to offering a very safely operated summer camp for our neighborhood. We are still grieving the immeasurable loss of this last year and will be for some time, but our hope is expanding every day. Thank you for continuing to pray with us. And thank you for supporting access to vaccines for shelter staff, high school teachers and staff, and our community's most vulnerable residents.

In peace,



(Those tear-filled eyes and gratitude-filled heart brought to you by vaccine dose !)

STAY *connected*



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STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

May 1, 16 years

Daphne Garcia

GLO Teacher

May 1, 2 years

Laura Taff

Counselor

May 5, 7 years

Tina Hoffman

Counseling Receptionist

May 26, 21 years

Teresa Garcia

GLO Cook

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

April 2021

Budget	April	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 260,060	\$ 1,083,740
Given	\$ 214,317	\$ 1,005,410

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



Support City Light Community Ministries through ABILENE GIVES on Tuesday, MAY 4!

Click on the link to give to
CITY LIGHT COMMUNITY MINISTRIES.
www.givegab.com/nonprofits/city-light-community-ministries

City Light continues to:

- Provide hot meals for those who are hungry
- Make boxes of food available for family meals at home
- Deliver "thank you" meals to first responders and those in need
- Meet many financial needs and give hope in those conversations
- Partner with other groups to be Christ's witness in our community!

If you need more information about City Light Community Ministries, please contact John Moore at 325-675-8114 or Melinda Norris at 325-675-8112.



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH • ABILENE

1333 North 3rd, Abilene, TX 79601
fbc@fbcabilene.org | www.fbcabilene.org
325-673-5031