

# CROSS & SPIRE

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## From Pastor Ryan's Desk:

Hi, FBC Family,

I hope you all enjoyed Dave's installment in last month's newsletter.

We have been working through the Relational Approach for ministering to those in our lives who God is bringing to us. Up to this point we have talked about being humble and honest, vulnerable, faithful and persistent. We then hit two of the big three elements of this approach: we must listen, and we must love. Without good listening skills and without love for the person that we are ministering to, we will be much less effective in our ministries. Finally, the last of the big three elements, and probably the most important, is Letting Go and Letting God.

Where this is probably the most important element of any ministry, it is often the hardest for people to implement. I know for myself letting go and letting God do His work in ministry is one of the most challenging things for me. James 4:14-15 says, "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'" James 4 gives us a clear understanding that our desire for control is, ultimately, futile. How, if we are like "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes," can we expect to have control over most anything in our lives? But this seems to be a consistent struggle for most Christians. This struggle to let go becomes even more difficult when we are talking about the salvation of a loved one.

So, for the final installment of the Relational Approach for ministering to others, I just want to give some Scripture to help each of us with our struggle to let go of control. First, Romans 11:33 says, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out." We must first recognize that as the world continues to turn and we continue to have our wants and hopes for this world around us, we will never fully know or understand what God is doing. His wisdom, knowledge and judgments are far greater than we will ever comprehend. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purposes that prevail"; and Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." While it is our desire to surrender all things to God, it is important to recognize that we have plans—according to Proverbs 19 we have many plans—and according to Philippians 4 we should bring our plans (requests) to God. It is not a bad thing to have wants and desires, and it's good to bring those things before God in prayer, but Psalm 115:3 makes something very clear: "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." Ultimately, God is going to do what pleases him. Yes, we have desires in our hearts and they may seem good and right to us, but our wisdom falls far short of God's, so when God acts in our lives, we know that he is doing what pleases him, and if something pleases God, then it is good for us in turn.

I want to leave you with this encouragement. Mark 4:26-29 says, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” It is our job to scatter seed, the seed being the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But pay attention to verse 27: “He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.” After the seeds are scattered, the man is passive in the growing of the seed. In fact, not only are we in a passive role during this time of growth, we are totally ignorant of how the growth is taking place. It is not our job to make sure the seeds take root, it’s not our job to make the plant grow, it is simply our job to scatter the seeds, to share the Gospel with those in our lives and then we stand back and put our trust in God that he will do what he is going to do, and whatever that is, is pleasing to him.

So, after the coffee cups are empty and the conversations are over, all we can do is trust that God is going to do what he is going to do, and there is nothing we can do except trust in him.



## ***Get Involved!***

### **Mark Your Calendar:**

[Correction: *The Hospitality Committee is planning a once-a-month after church event. These events will not necessarily be on Communion Sundays. Sorry for the misinformation posted last month.*]

November 30: Beginning of Advent

December 7: New Adult Sunday School class led by Dr. Schwamb begins at 9 a.m. in 2<sup>nd</sup> floor lobby.  
See article below.

December 24: Christmas Eve Service at 6:30 p.m.

### ***Highlight from November:***

The annual **Church Bazaar** was held on Saturday, November 15 and drew 98 people purchasing handmade crafts, baked goods, and a hot lunch. Terry Bolduc reports that the bazaar raised \$2000.60 for the Food Pantry and Community Dinners ministries. What a great effort by all who donated and participated in this event to support our outreach ministries!



### **Ongoing Small Groups:**

If you want your faith to grow, joining a small group is for you! Whether the group is in the middle of a study or just beginning a new one, you are welcome to join. There is always room.

**Tuesday evenings:** Angie Stephens reports that the Tuesday evening Women’s Bible Study is growing, but there is always room for more ladies to join. Currently, we are learning about extraordinary women in the Bible using John MacArthur’s *12 Extraordinary Women*. So far, we have learned about Eve and Sarah, two great examples of strong women. Each chapter is self-contained, with a study guide included. With the upcoming holidays fast approaching, the group will meet on December 2, January 6 & 20 at 6 p.m. in the sanctuary. If you are interested in attending, please reach out to Anne Pinilla or Angie Stephens.

**Wednesday mornings:** 10 a.m. at the church, Carol Rataj and Betsy Wotton co-lead a women’s group in a study using *Battlefield of the Mind*. See Carol or email her at [carolrataj3@gmail.com](mailto:carolrataj3@gmail.com).

**Thursday evenings:** 5-7 p.m. at the church, Pastor Ryan leads a Millennial group. Dinner is from 5-6 p.m. with a study of the book of Romans from 6-7 p.m.

**Thursday evenings:** 6:30 p.m. at their home in Newport, NH, Rick & Anne Pinilla lead an in-depth study of the book of Romans. See Rick or Anne for details.

**Thursday evenings:** 6:30 p.m. at homes on a rotating basis, Roger & Betsy Wotton lead a study of the Gospel of John. Come at 6 p.m. for light refreshments, with the study beginning at 6:30. See Roger or Betsy for details.

Prayer is vital to the health of a congregation, and First Baptist has a prayer group that meets each **Monday evening** at 6:30 in the church. Led by Betsy Wotton, the group prays for requests from the prayer box in the lobby, as well as for individual concerns, praises and thanks for what God is doing in our lives, our families, our communities and around the world.

**COMING DECEMBER 7: NEW ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL** class begins 9 a.m. in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor lobby. Would you consider yourself a saint? Do you want to know what it means to “become more like Jesus”? Do you know what it means to be “sanctified”? This seven-week class led by **Rev. Dr. Kevin Schwamb** will answer these questions and discuss the life-changing truth every Christian needs to better understand who we are in Christ. Home-made muffins and coffee will be provided each week!

### **Ministries:**

With the coming of the winter months, we expect an increase in traffic for both our Community Dinners and Food Pantry outreaches.

Held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month from 5-6:15 p.m. in the 1<sup>st</sup> floor lobby, the **Community Dinner** is run by Mike Barragan and Deb Girdwood. Meals are designed for take-out or eat-in. It’s a great time to meet our neighbors and show God’s love.

Held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of each month from 10-11 a.m. outside on the Green St. side of the church, the **Food Pantry** is run by Catherine Souza. Bags of non-

perishable grocery items are handed out to anyone in need. Additional help inside packing grocery bags is always welcome. This ministry helps fill a need for those with marginal incomes and is a great way to serve our community.

Two of our lesser-known church ministries are the Shepherds’ Fund and the Pastor’s Discretionary Fund. The **Shepherds’ Fund** (the Deacons’ Fund) is a budgeted item administered by the Shepherds Board to assist members and regular attenders of First Baptist Church who may be going through an unexpected or particularly tough time. The **Pastor’s Discretionary Fund** is a budgeted item administered by the Pastor to assist people in the community who come to the church for help. Both of these ministries can be vital lifelines to people who are struggling. Please consider supporting them in these difficult times.

*Interested in becoming a member? See Pastor Ryan.*

### **Opportunities to Serve:**

In Matthew 20:28 Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” Serving others is a way to reflect Christ to others. Consider the following opportunities:

- Children’s Sunday School is looking for teachers and helpers. Both men and women can volunteer to help with our Christian Education program. Our children are our future. To volunteer, please contact Catherine Souza or Deb Girdwood.
- The church cleaning crew has a rotating schedule for cleaning the church, so volunteers are not committed to come in every week. Of course, the bigger the crew, the less often you will need to come in. Typically, a crew of 2 people come in on Saturday for about 2 hours. To join the crew, please contact Terry Bolduc.
- The Food Pantry is open from 10-11 a.m. on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of each month and provides bags of non-perishable groceries to those of our community who need assistance. It is a great way to show God’s love for our neighbors. See the article above in our Ministries section, or speak to Catherine Souza.

- The Community Dinners are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month, and with more help, could expand to an additional Sunday. As word continues to spread of this outreach, we will see more people who need a meal come to dine in our lobby or take out a meal for themselves or for others. Volunteers to help serve, or just sit with others while they enjoy a hot meal, are always welcome. If your family or your church group would like to host a dinner, please contact Deb Girdwood or Mike Barragan.

- Our Worship Team is looking for people who love to sing or play an instrument as they worship God. Please contact Dan Merritt to audition. Practices are Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings before the service.

**Shepherds’ Report:**

At the time of this printing, Susan Cole Realty has the parsonage under contract, due to close in early January, 2026. Bobby Souza and Keith Davio are working in the basement of the church to ready it for occupancy. Both ARC Mechanical and MEI Electric have given proposals for completing work in the basement. Proceeds from November’s church bazaar will go toward the food pantry and community dinner outreaches. With the Baptismal tank ready to go, Ryan will begin scheduling baptisms.

**“God’s Light for Dark Times”  
by Rick Pinilla, Pastor Emeritus**

You don’t have to be a sociologist or even a particularly astute observer to see that our country is deeply divided. That division is apparent in increasingly hostile political discourse and a rising enmity between people who disagree. Friends have said to me that our country has never been more divided. When we think that, we should try to recall our eighth-grade social studies class and the American Civil War. It was the bloodiest of all American wars, and the hostility lasted for generations after it ended. Nevertheless, I think it is fair to say that things have gotten extreme for us.

It isn’t hard to figure out why. All of Western Civilization was built on the covenant view of life. We were united by the idea that we were accountable to God for moral norms that come from the Bible, including things like loving our neighbor and even our enemies. We were far from perfect in keeping these norms and many did not believe the Bible, but this was the center of our culture—the glue that kept us together.

Of course, it is not news to anyone that that consensus is gone now. Obeying moral absolutes coming from God has been replaced all over the modern world with self-expression as the goal of life. Now we consider ourselves good when we accept the ideology of our group. Virtue signaling has become a buzz word for us. People flaunt trendy opinions in order to be accepted as good people by their group. It is pretty convenient because you don’t have to do anything hard like loving your neighbor or forgiving those who sin against you to be seen as virtuous. Social

media has made this division worse because it enables us to live our lives in air-tight echo chambers. It is amazing how many people don’t know anyone who disagrees with them. Plus, nothing gets clicks or likes like controversy and outrage, so the temperature rises. In the last few years, hating those on the “other

*People flaunt trendy opinions in order to be accepted as good people by their group.*

side” has become a rite of passage for people, and politicians recognize that these expressions of animosity are necessary to rally their base voters. Calling an opponent Hitler or his idea Jim Crow 2.0 or saying this guy “threatens the republic” or his election “is the end of democracy” seems to be necessary to get a following on the internet or to get elected. There are even those who are saying in public that violence is justified because of the evil of the opposition. Is it any wonder that the unhinged have resorted to riots and assassination?

It is this setting in which Christians are sometimes targets of hate and even violence, like Charlie Kirk, that has led me to ask the question found in Psalm 11: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" It is clear that the foundations of our culture have been destroyed, so what can we do? In the Psalm, David concluded that because God is still sovereign and his promises still good, withdrawal into silence is no option. But the question is still a good one.

It is all too easy to join one of the groups and try to beautify the ideology with Christian veneer. Many Christians have done this and have descended to the put-down language of our contemporary civil discourse with attacks against the "enemy." For the follower of Jesus, this is forbidden. "Love your enemies," says Jesus, and, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people," says Paul.

*"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people"—*  
Romans 12:18

Make no mistake about it, we are in a fight; but we need to begin by identifying our enemy: "Our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the world powers of darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." That's right, our true enemy is Satan and his servants in the demonic realm.

I know, you can hear the sneers and the flippant mockery of your non-Christian friends as you read this. But consider this: people are flippant and sneer when they assume the joke has been made and everybody knows it; but sneers are not an argument or a reason not to believe something. I accept the Bible's teaching about spiritual evil because it is the only way to fully explain the diversity and depth of evil there is in the world. For example, ask you doubting friends to explain the reality of temptation they experience. "How do you account for that voice you hear egging you on to acts

that when you think about them later, you despise them?" Ask them how they account for the existence of occult crime? Talk to cops who investigate it. What explains the voices in the heads of kids and others and their conviction that the Devil is driving them onto their evil? Or explain the many documented cases of demon exorcisms witnessed by psychologists. On October 7, those who attacked the Israelis and murdered many people, including children, filmed it, boasted in it and wept for joy over what they had done. How do you explain that depth of evil? There are many secular people who study the evil machinations of humanity, who acknowledge that there is a force for evil working in human society. All the Bible does is say that that force is personal. Take time to think about the evil in your own heart and in our world, and you will see that the Bible's teaching about spiritual evil is the only idea that explains it.

He is our enemy, not those who disagree with us or hate us. Think of his chief purpose in the world: "the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they may not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ"; or "You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you used to walk according to the contemporary world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air and the ruler of the spirit which is now at work in the sons of disobedience." His chief purpose is deception so that people can't see the glory of Jesus in the Gospel. He does this by affecting contemporary worldview and animating the attitudinal wellspring (spirit) of each successive age. He does this to make unbelief and evil seem smart and good.

The point I am making is that we are in a fight, but it is not with those who disagree with us. It is with the force of evil behind their deception. This is why Jesus said the Devil is a liar and a murderer. He lies and passes off the lie through media of contemporary society's values and worldview. The murder he is most interested in is the murder of our souls through evil and unbelief that will cost us forever when we stand before God.

Here is where you must keep in mind, if you are deceived, you don't know you are deceived. Those who disagree with us, and even those who because they disagree, hate us, are deceived and think they are right and good—just as we did before God opened our eyes to the truth. They are not the enemy. They are the victims of the enemy.

Here is also where we must recognize that we need to use God's weapons in this fight because our enemy is far smarter and stronger than we. Ephesians 6 gives a list of God's armor for the fight. Meditate on it. Paul adds there that prayer for ourselves and others is the way we arm ourselves with the armor. Paul adds where he talked about the god of this age blinding the minds of unbelievers, "The God who said, 'out of darkness light will shine' is the one who shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." He does this by the Gospel, which is "the power of God for salvation," and "faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of Christ." Isaiah said of this message, "it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish that which I purpose and will succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Don't allow yourselves to be diverted by putting your hope for societal change in politicians or political or societal movements. Of course, we need to vote, but the Devil will not release his captives at the bidding of mere mortals. We are stewards of the Word of God, the Gospel.

The fundamental thing to remember is that we are in a fight, but our enemy is not those who disagree with us and may even hate us. They are the victims of the enemy. We need to refuse the cultural fight. We need to have compassion on the people who disagree with us, even if they hate us. It is our job to "proclaim liberty to the captives and opening the eyes of the blind" (Isaiah 61:1-7), remembering that what God proclaims accomplishes what he announces.

The *Cross & Spire* is published and sent out during the last week of each month. Copies are also available in the church lobby. All articles, announcements, and updates are due in the church office no later than one week prior to publication.