

CROSS & SPIRE

First Baptist Church of Lebanon
 11 School St.
 Lebanon, NH 03766
 (603) 448-5618
 Email: office@lebfirstbaptist.com
 Website: lebfirstbaptist.com
facebook.com/lebfirstbaptist/

November 2025

From Pastor Ryan's Desk: *[NOTE: Pastor Ryan had an incredibly busy few weeks and was unable to complete his message for November. Filling in for him is a devotion by Dave Cole, Chair of the Shepherds and editor of the Cross & Spire.]*

In the story of the \$100 gift, one morning, a homeowner living alone gets a knock on his front door. When he opens it, a stranger says, "Good morning," and hands him a \$100 bill and walks away. Of course, the homeowner is baffled but delighted with the gift. The next morning, at about the same time, the man hears a knock on his front door. Again, the stranger says, "Good morning," and hands him a \$100 bill and walks away. It happens again on the third day. By the fourth day, the man is waiting at his front door and looks up the street and sees the stranger stopping at his neighbors' doors, as well, before coming to his home. This visit and the \$100 gift are repeated each day until a month later when the stranger does not come. The man gets impatient and wonders where the stranger is. But at the usual time the following day, when the man looks up the street and sees the stranger stop at each of his neighbor's homes but not his, he gets angry. He wants his \$100 bill.

That man felt a sense of entitlement. He expected that gift to continue, and he was angry when it did not. It's easy for us to feel entitled to the many gifts that God gives us—even the little ones we receive on a daily basis. Every breath we take is a gift from God. Our health, our families, our food and shelter, when and where we were born and where we currently live, our jobs, our church—everything we are and all that we have comes from God. Yet, are we entitled to any of them?

How many of us, like Job, can say, as he did in Chapter 1:21-22 when after losing all he had—including his health—he fell down and worshipped God, saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised"? If even one of those disasters that happened to Job happened to you, would you be angry at God?

So many people refuse to come to Christ because they are mad at God for some tragedy in their lives. Maybe they lost a loved one, lost a job, or their marriage broke up. Maybe it's a fractured relationship with a child or a parent, and they don't know how to reconcile it. Maybe it's a child who has gone down the wrong path and now suffers from addiction or even committed suicide. For these people—and there are many of them—Christmas is not a time to celebrate; it's not a time to be joyful, and yet because they feel entitled, they miss out on the greatest gift God has ever bestowed on mankind.

Many of us have been through personal tragedies, and yet, like Job, we can still praise God. Paul

went through some horrendous times, being beaten and stoned repeatedly, harassed and thrown into prison, yet he tells the Philippian church in Chapter 4:12-13, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." The writer of Hebrews, in Chapter 13:5-6 says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So, we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"

Christ came into a broken and hurting world to redeem the lost, to comfort those who mourn, and to bring peace that goes beyond understanding. It is pride that nurtures a sense of entitlement and drives a wedge between us and our Savior. All that we are and all that we have are gifts from a loving God. He decides how long we have each of the gifts he brings us. And whether we have them for a day, a month, or a lifetime, we can praise him for his abounding goodness and love because he is always with us.



GET INVOLVED!

Mark Your Calendar:

- November 2: Communion Sunday—Pot Luck Luncheon after church.
- November 15: Church Bazaar 9am-2pm. Fliers are on the table in the lobby or see Terry Bolduc.
- November 23: Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes due at the church.

Ongoing Small Groups:

It's never too late to join a small group. You are always welcome!

Angie Stephens' evening Ladies' Bible Study meets every other Tuesday evening in the church at 6 pm. This month the group will meet on the 4th and 18th. Join them for a new study: *12 Extraordinary Women*, by John MacArthur. See Angie about details and a book.

Carol Rataj & Betsy Wotton co-lead a Ladies' Bible Study at the church every Wednesday morning at 10 am. Currently, the group is studying *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackabee. For more information, speak to Carol or Betsy or email Carol at carolrataj3@gmail.com.

Roger & Betsy Wotton's evening Bible Study is open to all adults and meets each Thursday evening at 6:30 pm and rotates locations to different homes. Come at 6 pm for light refreshments. The group is studying the Gospel of John. Speak with Roger or Betsy about meeting locations.

Rick & Anne Pinilla's Thursday night Bible Study meets at their home in Newport, NH and is open to all adults. Come for an in-depth study of the book of Romans.

Pastor Ryan's Millennial group is open to all millennials and meets each Thursday evening at the church from 5-7 pm, with dinner from 5-6 pm and study from 6-7 pm. The group is currently studying the book of Romans.

Betsy Wotton leads a Monday evening Prayer Group that meets in the sanctuary each Monday at 6:30 pm to pray for requests from the prayer box in the lobby and for any personal, community, or world events. All are welcome. Bring your prayers!

ATTENTION! Betsy Wotton has begun a new email-based prayer group for those unexpected concerns that come up during the week that cannot wait until the regular Monday night Prayer Group meets. These requests will remain confidential unless you wish Pastor Ryan be notified, as well. Please email Betsy at b_wotton@yahoo.com with your requests.

Ministries:

Community Dinners—Deb Girdwood and Mike Barragan restarted this ministry over the summer, and it is looking to grow. This is a great opportunity to fill a need in the community and to share God’s love with our neighbors. Dinners are served from 5-6:15 pm on the 3rd Sunday of the month to take out or enjoy in the lobby. Come help serve or just hang out and spread God’s love.

Food Pantry—Catherine Souza reports that from January through September 2025 the food Pantry has given out 258 bags of groceries. The Food Pantry is open on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month from 10-11 am. Additional help packing grocery bags or handing them out is always welcome. This is a great way to interact with people in our community.

October 11th
Food Pantry



Aubrey Hetzel is all smiles and ready to help.



Isla Ramsey and Tamara Fairbank on standby packing groceries.

Opportunities to Serve:

Want to get involved? Want to plug in somewhere and help out? Here are some suggestions:

- Do you love kids? The Children’s Sunday School is looking for teachers and helpers. Children’s Sunday School operates during the worship service. Contact Catherine Souza or Deb Girdwood if you’d like to volunteer.
- The church cleaning crew is a behind-the-scenes way to serve the church, and they are always looking for help. The crew has a rotating schedule for cleaning the church, so you won’t be committing to every week. Speak to Terry Bolduc if you’d like to help.

- The Community Dinners are an outreach ministry of the church and a great way to serve our neighbors and spread God’s love in the community. Currently, a dinner is held on the 3rd Sunday of each month and hopes to add more dinners as it grows. See the Ministries section above for more details, or speak with Deb Girdwood or Mike Barragan.

- The Food Pantry is another outreach ministry of the church and a way to serve others in the community. The pantry is open from 10-11 am on the 2nd and 4th Saturday morning of each month. See the Ministries section above or speak to Catherine Souza for more details.

- The Worship Team is looking to expand. If you love to sing or play an instrument and would like to use your gift to worship God, speak to Dan Merritt about auditioning for the Worship Team. Practice is on Wednesday evenings and Sundays before the service.

Focus on Mission:

Our Raven Box and Food Pantry ministry serves a huge need in our community. Mainly serving older adults and younger families with children, our Food Pantry has been around since the days of our old church. Dropping off non-perishable food items in our Raven Box is a way to remember those who have food insecurity. You can get a list of the kinds of items needed from Catherine Souza, the leader of our Raven Box and Food Pantry team. Please consider adding a “Raven Box” donation to your weekly grocery list. You may also donate funds directly by placing your donation in the marked basket in the back of the sanctuary. Make checks out to First Baptist Church and note “Food Pantry” on the memo line.

Catherine reports that as of the end of September, the food pantry has given out 258 bags of groceries that served 413 people, with 13 new people coming since the beginning of the year. The average value per bag is \$41. See the Food Pantry write-up under the Ministries section above for more information.

Catherine also reported that the annual Church World Service CROP walk will donate 25% of the proceeds from October’s CROP walk to our Food Pantry and Community Dinner outreach ministries.

From the Fall Family Fun Festival on October 19—what a great afternoon to be outdoors in the park! Lots of activities for all ages and some good treats. The event was very well attended by our local community. Kudos to Deb Girdwood and all who volunteered their time and talents. Here are a few pics.

Mike
Barragan &
Tamara
Fairbank
hollow out
pumpkins.



Bobby Souza
helps stuff a
scarecrow. What
fun!

Valerie Davio and
Shelby Hawks
work the food
stand.



Shepherds' Report:

Bobby Souza has contacted the City of Lebanon about extending our temporary Certificate of Occupancy. He and Keith Davio are currently working in the basement to prepare it for occupancy. He has received a proposal from ARC for completing the plumbing work and is awaiting a response from MEI for the electrical work. Sunday morning announcements are still in flux as a transition to having them on the monitors is still being worked out. For now, people will still be able to make announcements from the floor on Sunday mornings. Catherine Souza has begun a junior high Sunday school

class that meets the 2nd & 4th Sunday each month. She has several people to help out. Catherine has also provided a Y-T-D report on the Food Pantry. If you haven't noticed, the church now has 3 round tables for use in church functions. The Hospitality Team is looking to begin hosting a pot luck luncheon after church on Communion Sundays. Finally, the Shepherds discussed ways to utilize our other pastors—more on this in upcoming issues.

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

“When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” That’s a good question. The quote comes from Psalm 11. A friend of David, the king of Israel, saw the state of society and advised David to run and hide. If you read the Psalm, you will see that it is surprisingly relevant to our day. The “wicked” were lying in wait to assassinate the righteous. Sound familiar?

No one can deny that the foundations of our culture have been destroyed. Western civilization, the U.S. included, was built on the covenant view of life. People generally believed that we were accountable to God for living according to his will in the Bible. If we did, life would go well for us. If we didn't, it would lead to disaster. Even unbelievers generally held that following Christian morality would lead to a good life for themselves and society. What held us together until the mid-1960's was this moral consensus. Now this consensus is gone. In its place we have a culture built on self-expression. The only limits accepted on our behavior now are the consent of our sex partners and not breaking the law. Even this latter is being frayed under the weight of ideology.

People still care about virtue and being good; but now these are defined, not by a common commitment to moral rules, but by whether we support the ideology of our chosen peer group and political party and hate those who disagree. The internet and social media

enable us to avoid any contrary opinion, so we live in airtight echo chambers which reinforce our commitments—and our hate. The situation has become toxic and hostile. Vilification of people who disagree is not just tolerated by our group, it is celebrated and expected. Is it any surprise that in such a society unhinged people will turn to violence to protect themselves from “literal fascists,” or “Hitler,” or “people who are destroying our democracy,” or “stealing our country,” or the like?

In this setting, many people think Churches and Christians are haters and dangerous, so attacks and even assassinations have happened. It is like Isaiah complained, “Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey,” (59:15).

In the Psalm, David agreed with his friend’s assessment of the situation, but he thought the advice was bad. The foundations of society were destroyed, but David saw the eternal unchangeable foundations based on God’s rule and God’s love for his people that are more important than society’s commitments. But the question is still a good one. “When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” I plan to try to answer that question for our day in the next few essays in this series.

The first thing we should do is accept the fact that we are part of the problem in our culture. The Bible is clear: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23). It not only teaches universal sin, it tells us that every part of us is twisted by sin (Romans 3:9-20).

But Rick, Christians are saved! Amen! Thanks be to God, but the Bible is clear about that, too. 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” When John uses “we” in 1 John, it always refers to Christians. Having sin means that it is a present and ongoing reality in our lives. Paul was honest about his own struggle with sin and said sin won the struggle a lot of the time, (Romans 7:14-25).

The virtue signaling for ourselves and putdown of those who disagree, which is so prevalent today, should be no part of the Christian response to a divided country or to attacks on our faith or our behavior. The doctrine of universal sin should inform our interactions. Think of responding to a common insult: “You Christians are haters,” with “Guilty as charged, but let’s face it, hate is a common fault of human beings. We all fall into it. Even you. That’s why we need to be careful how we treat each other and need to help each other.”

Accepting the truth about ourselves, that we have sin, ongoing sin, will lead to embracing three interrelated virtues. The first one is humility. If I know I am a sinner, I know I have no right to judge others. I may not have their particular sins, but my own are just as bad or worse. It should be easy to forgive, since I need forgiveness, even from those I love most dearly. Since it still affects my whole being, I could be wrong and not know it! Plus, since I am a sinner, I need help and forgiveness from God, my brothers and sisters in Christ, and even from people who aren’t Christians.

*If I know I
am a sinner,
I know I have
no right to
judge others.*

The second virtue is vigilance—always being on guard against sin. Jesus said, “If your eye offends you, pluck it out. If your hand offends you, cut it off. If your foot offends you, cut it off,” (Matthew 5:29-30, 18:8-9). He was using hyperbole. He meant we needed to have a radically harsh approach to our sin. You know where you should not go or with whom you should not associate and what you should not do and places you should avoid. If we know we still have sin inside us, we will be on guard against falling into it in deeds.

Another virtue is dependence. I need God’s help to stay right, so I keep reading his Word and keep praying, “Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one,” and “Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my anxious thoughts and see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the

everlasting way.” I also need my brothers and sisters in Christ to hold me accountable. “The kisses of an enemy may be profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend,” (Proverbs 27:6), and “Whoever loves discipline (from others), loves knowledge, but whoever hates reproof is stupid,” (Proverbs 12:1), and “The way of a fool is wise in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice,” (Proverbs 12:15), and on and on.

Loving your enemy and forgiving him, as Jesus taught us, is a lot easier when you know that you share the same nature and are subject to the same faults. Plus, no one wants to listen to a virtue signaling, arrogant, self-righteous person. Christians, of all people, should not be subject to these pervasive faults, because “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,” (we are lying to ourselves), “and the truth is not in us.” The Bible’s truth has no place in our mind and heart. We can’t help seeing the world falling into evil, and we know from Scripture, (for example, Romans 1:18-32) and our own history, that rejecting the knowledge of God is the root of this. Nevertheless, the Bible and plain honesty teach us that we are part of the problem. So, repairing the foundations needs to start with us.

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.