

CROSS & SPIRE

July-August 2026

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From the Pastor's Desk

Hey FBC Family,

I hope you are doing well. Last month we started our “Mission Statement” article. Our mission statement is: “God’s everlasting love creates our fellowship, and from that love we equip one another to serve our community in love.” Last month we looked at John 3:16–21, which showed us how God loves us. He sent his Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. This month we will look at 1 John 4:7–21 (I’m not going to put the text in here to save space, so please open your Bible). 1 John 4 explains how the life of a Christ follower is rooted in his love.

John addresses his readers with the title beloved (the Greek *agapetos*). From the start, John is addressing his readers by their identity as “ones who are loved.” In verses 7–8, John makes it clear that whoever loves is born of God and knows God, and whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. A quick note: the world has adopted this phrase, “God is love,” but it has subtly changed it to “Love is god.” There are many problems with this, the main one being that God is the author of love, and the thing created cannot be put above the one who created it.

Up to this point, this seems very inclusive. If you love, then you know God. Well, most people love in a general sense, but John clarifies what this love looks like. Verses 9–10 expound on the love that John is talking about. God’s love is shown to us in the sending of his Son, so that we might live through him, and God did not wait for us to love him first to send his Son. We see two major clarifying qualities of the love that is to mark a follower of Christ. First, our love must be sacrificial. Second, our ability to love cannot wait on the other person loving us first. John ends v. 10 with the statement, “sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Propitiation means appeasement necessitated by sin. In other words, we are sinful, and there is a price for that sin. Either we pay that price eternally, or we allow Christ’s redeeming blood to cover the price for our sin. This is something our love, no matter how Christlike, cannot accomplish. However, our sacrificial love that does not wait on the other person to love us first can help ease the vast majority of the mental, emotional, and physical pain that we feel. In a way, our love can help appease the affliction we face in our daily lives.

Verses 11–13 feel complicated, so I want to make these verses as simple as I can. Our motivation for loving in this way is the reality that God loved us first, in such a grand way. We have never seen God, but we can see his love reflected when we love one another. This call for us to love, which is radical when we look at the “love” the world espouses, is not something that we will hit the ground running and do perfectly. Notice John’s words in v. 12: “...and his love is perfected in us.” Having your life marked by Christlike love is a process that all followers of Christ go through. None of us have, are, or will ever be perfect in our ability to love like God first loved us. Our ability to love will continually be refined until we step into eternity.

John then adds some credibility to the claims he is making. In v. 12, John says that no one has seen God, and while that is true, John testifies that they have seen the incarnate Christ. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God belongs to God, and God abides in that person. Verse 17 is really important. The process of perfecting love has purpose. Yes, we will love better, with less condition, and that is an amazing reality. But that process of refining our love is a sign that should give us confidence when the Lord returns.

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” What a powerful and so often misused quote from Scripture. This statement is true: there is no fear in love because perfect love casts out fear. Why do we fear? Because we face punishment. We must remember what kind of love we are talking about here: there is no fear in love because this love is that of Christ being the propitiation for our sin. We do not need to fear punishment because the price has been paid through Christ’s work on the cross and empty tomb.

John reminds us in v. 19 that the reason we are able to love like this is not because of us but because God loved us first. John ends this section with one more clarifying statement and a command. If we claim to love God but we have hate in our hearts for a brother or sister, then we do not love God. It’s a simple but bold statement. You cannot love God and hate your brother or sister. The command is clear: “Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

This Christlike love, preemptive and sacrificial, is not a suggestion for followers of Christ but something that marks us and distinguishes us as followers of Christ. If loving people in this way is a struggle for you—and it is, in some way, shape, or form—search Scripture for teachings and examples of God’s love, and pray fervently for God to increase your ability to love in the way we are commanded.



GET INVOLVED!

Mark Your Calendar:

July 10-11 Vacation Bible School from 5-7 p.m.

See Deb Girdwood.

July 25 Church Yard Sale from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. See

Terry Bolduc.

August 14-16 Church Camping Weekend.

August 19 Family Fun Night in the Colburn Park from 5-7 p.m.

September 13 Gathering Day: Sunday School begins.

Ongoing Groups:

Although some of our small groups are on hiatus over the summer months, we have a number of groups that continue to meet. If a group you typically attend is on hiatus, or if you would like to join any of the groups meeting this summer, all are designed to help you grow spiritually and provide opportunities for fellowship.

Monday Evening Prayer Meeting at 6:30 p.m. in the sanctuary. Led by Betsy Wotton, the group lifts prayer requests for individuals, from the prayer box in the lobby, and prayers for our community and beyond. Just come or see Betsy for details.

Wednesday Morning Women’s Small Group meets at 10 a.m. in the sanctuary and is co-led by Carol Rataj and Betsy Wotton. They are studying *Life Without Lack*, by Dallas Willard, a fascinating look at Psalm 23. For more information, see Carol or Betsy.

Thursday Evening Millennial Group meets from 5-7 p.m. in the church. Dinner is provided from 5-6 p.m. and a study of the book of Isaiah begins 6-7 p.m. led by Pastor Ryan. Child care is provided. See Pastor Ryan for more information.

Thursday Evening Bible Study led by Roger & Betsy Wotton meets at various homes at 6:30 p.m. The group is studying I & II Peter. See Roger or Betsy for more information and where to meet.

Saturday Morning Men's Group meets the 2nd and 4th Saturday morning of each month at 8:30 a.m. Roger Wotton leads the group on topics of men's roles in the church and family from a biblical perspective. No breakfast, but coffee and sometimes donuts are provided.

Want to be Baptized?
Not yet a member of First
Baptist Church?
What are you waiting for?
Speak to Pastor Ryan!

Ministries:

Summer can be tough on people in our community—especially the elderly. Our in-house ministries, the Raven Box Food Pantry and the Community Dinner help alleviate some of the stress and uncertainty of the summer months. The Food Pantry is open from 10-11 a.m. on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month to provide a bag of non-perishable food to anyone who stops by. Catherine Souza's team of volunteers run a well-organized and efficient ministry. If you'd like to volunteer to help, see Catherine Souza. Monetary donations are always welcome. There is a basket in the back of the sanctuary for donations. If you'd like to donate non-perishable food items, please see Catherine for the menu of items needed. The Community Dinner is put on from 5-6:15 p.m. on the 3rd Sunday of each month. Deb Girdwood and Mike Barragan co-lead the dinner in the 1st floor lobby where anyone can come and enjoy a free home-cooked, nutritious

dinner in our lobby or take a dinner home. Church members and church groups can host a dinner and experience the joy of serving others, or just come and join in the fellowship. See Deb or Mike for more information.

Opportunities to Serve:

- The Raven Box Food Pantry and Community Dinner outreach ministries are looking to grow and help even more people in need. See the Ministries section above for details on them and how you can get involved. Make a difference!
- Children's Sunday School resumes on Gathering Day, September 13, and both the young children's classes and the middle school class are looking for teachers and helpers. Summer is a great time to be trained and get up to speed on the curriculum and be prepared for the beginning of classes in September. If you feel called to serve young people, please contact Deb Girdwood or Catherine Souza for more information.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH SUMMER YARD SALE

SATURDAY, JULY 25th

from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**It's time to clean out your closets,
basements, and sheds for our annual
summer yard sale.**

**ALL items donated must be clean and
in working order.**

**Bring donations to church beginning Sunday,
July 19 after church and M-W from 9 a.m. -
12:30 p.m.**

**See your church bulletin for details on items
needed and what NOT to bring.**

Shepherds' Report:

At the June 8, 2026 Shepherds' meeting, Bobby Souza reported that the basement walls have been sanded and cleanup has begun. The basement will be ready for painting by mid-June. Deb Girdwood reported that Sunday School children will still have class over the summer but will not be using the regular curriculum. She also reported that 4 camp scholarships have been given out. Also, Vacation Bible school will be held the evenings of July 10-11 from 5:50 -7 p.m. and include dinner. Deb also reported that 15 people ate at the May Community Dinner (9 had seconds) and 3 to-go meals were served. The Shepherds voted to authorize Deb to purchase 2 warming trays at \$40 each for the dinners. Bobby reported that year-to-date the Food Pantry has given out 142 bags of groceries to 231 people with 7 new people coming for food this year. The average cost of a bag of groceries is \$41. On May 30, 20 bags were given out. The pantry plans to add personal care items to the bags by the end of summer. Betsy reported that a new ministry of knitting and needlework is starting. Tamara Fairbank and Jeanne Lang are heading up the team, making items to give away and teaching knitting and needlework skills to others. Kevin Schwamb reported that the Hospitality Team is all set for next week's Open House.

"God's Light for Dark Times"

by Rick Pinilla, Pastor Emeritus

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was famous for his critique of the Soviet Union. The center of his criticism was his analysis of ideology. He viewed it as a dangerous, Utopian vision that absolves individuals of their conscience. By that he meant people consider themselves good because they support a certain social vision and consider those who disagree with them as evil, therefore they can bend or break moral rules in advancing their vision or opposing those who resist. When I read his books as a young man, I was impressed with his Christian faith and

courage in standing up against what I saw as an evil regime. What I did not see was that his work was a salutary warning to our country. As most of you know, in our country we have abandoned the Christian consensus that was the foundation of Western Civilization. We no longer believe in biblical moral teaching, or any moral absolutes, or think we are accountable to God. Now people think they are good people because of their political opinions and consider those who disagree evil. This, of course, justifies hatred and insult and exclusion.

Since those days, I have recognized that Solzhenitsyn was a kind of prophet for our days, and that the Bible anticipated him by 2,000 years. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul lays out what happens to a Society when it abandons the knowledge of God:

people follow their passions into all kinds of degrading behavior, sexual license multiplies, social fabric breaks down, and people support one another in their flight from God's commands. Paul talks elsewhere about the spiritual and mental aspects of this decline (Ephesians 2:1-

3, 4:17-19). He says that we embrace the world's philosophies and fads and sear our consciences in the process. His critiques read like a contemporary description of our national experience. Solzhenitsyn was just modernizing the Bible. When we abandon God's ways, we invent our own system of virtue to support our sense of self and quell the voice of conscience. Of course this has also led to our division, each "side" hating the other and feeling justified in doing so. It also explains the growing hatred of Christianity and the Bible.

He (Paul) says, that we embrace the world's philosophies and fads and sear our consciences in the process.

In this series we are asking the question from Psalm 11, "If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?" Today we can feel the weight of such a question. The whole society seems arranged against God and the Bible and considers Christians hopelessly backward and evil for their faith. What is to be done? Pray.

I want to share with you a biblical pattern that contains its own lesson. Israel was in bondage in Egypt until "the people groaned because of their slavery and cried for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning." Of course, God sent Moses and rescued them from Egypt and took them into the promised land.

In the book Judges, we learn that when people turned away from God they suffered greatly, until they cried out to God. Then God sent heroes who rescued them out of their troubles, until they turned away again. This happened again and again. This is the story of Samuel and Kings and Chronicles.

In Isaiah we have a particularly poignant example of the pattern with its lesson. Israel and Judah had so deeply corrupted their ways that God sent the Assyrians as "the rod of my anger," (Isaiah 10:5). Hezekiah was a great king that returned to God with his whole heart during Isaiah's ministry. But when the Assyrians came, he made alliances, recruited soldiers, collected weapons, strengthened the wall around Jerusalem and even dug a tunnel to supply water to Jerusalem; but the Scripture says, "But you did not look to him, (God) who did it or look to him who planned it long ago." When the Assyrians came and conquered Israel and invaded and ravaged all of Judah, Hezekiah tried something radical. He went into the temple and prayed for deliverance. Isaiah's message to Hezekiah announcing the rescue God was bringing began, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because you prayed..." All the

best efforts of human ingenuity, work and wisdom availed them nothing, but prayer led to a rescue that, to this day, confounds the historians of ancient Near Eastern History: how did the tiny nation of Judah escape the Assyrian war machine?

Nehemiah rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem in 52 days, reestablished regular worship in the temple and repopulated Jerusalem and organized its life on God's law despite the opposition of all the powerful enemies surrounding Judah. When you read his book, it becomes obvious that prayer was the impetus and power behind all of his success.

I could go on with Old Testament examples, but you get the idea. In the New Testament, when the Church first faced organized political opposition, they had a prayer meeting, (Acts 4), and asked for boldness

and power in the face of the civil authority's threats. Luke, the author of Acts writes, "When they had prayed the place in which they were meeting was shaken

and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and kept speaking the Word of God with boldness." The world-wide mission of the Church was begun in a prayer meeting, (Acts 13:1-4).

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There are two visions of the throne room of God, the control center of the universe in the book of Revelation, (Revelation 4, 5). The lesson is obvious: the Eternal, Holy God and the Lamb who was slain are accomplishing their purpose in the events of history. In the second picture, an essential part of the image is, "the prayers of the saints," (5:8). This is a pretty clear picture of the place of prayer in the outcomes in our world. But God isn't done with this lesson. In the action-packed blur of visions in the book, there is one pause of a half an hour in the

visions. Why? To draw attention to the next vision: the prayers of the saints coming up to God's throne with divine help and causing God to shake the world in response, (8:1-5).

Pray. It works like nothing else. In the late 1700s, the moral and spiritual condition of the United States and the United Kingdom was almost as bad as it is today. Then came the Second Great Awakening. J. Wesley Bready, a secular historian, wrote a book entitled, *England Before and After Wesley*. His research for the book forced him to conclude, "the nursing-mother of the spirit and character values that have created and sustained Free Institutions throughout the English-speaking world, indeed "the moral watershed of Anglo-Saxon history" was "the much neglected and oft-lampooned Evangelical Revival." In his book, he describes the moral squalor of life before the revival and the radical change for good after and says that the simple revival of practical Evangelical (that is biblical) faith and practice was what caused it. Much credit goes to John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield who preached so powerfully and inspired many others to carry the message everywhere, but the root cause must be sought elsewhere. It was discovered in the spiritual records of many churches on both sides of the Atlantic that before the revival ordinary Christian people felt moved in numbers to seek God in prayer for their communities and countries. Prayer.

God said to his people after they dedicated the temple, "If my people who are called by name humble themselves, and seek my face and pray and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land, (2 Chronicles 7:14). I think we should give it a try.

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