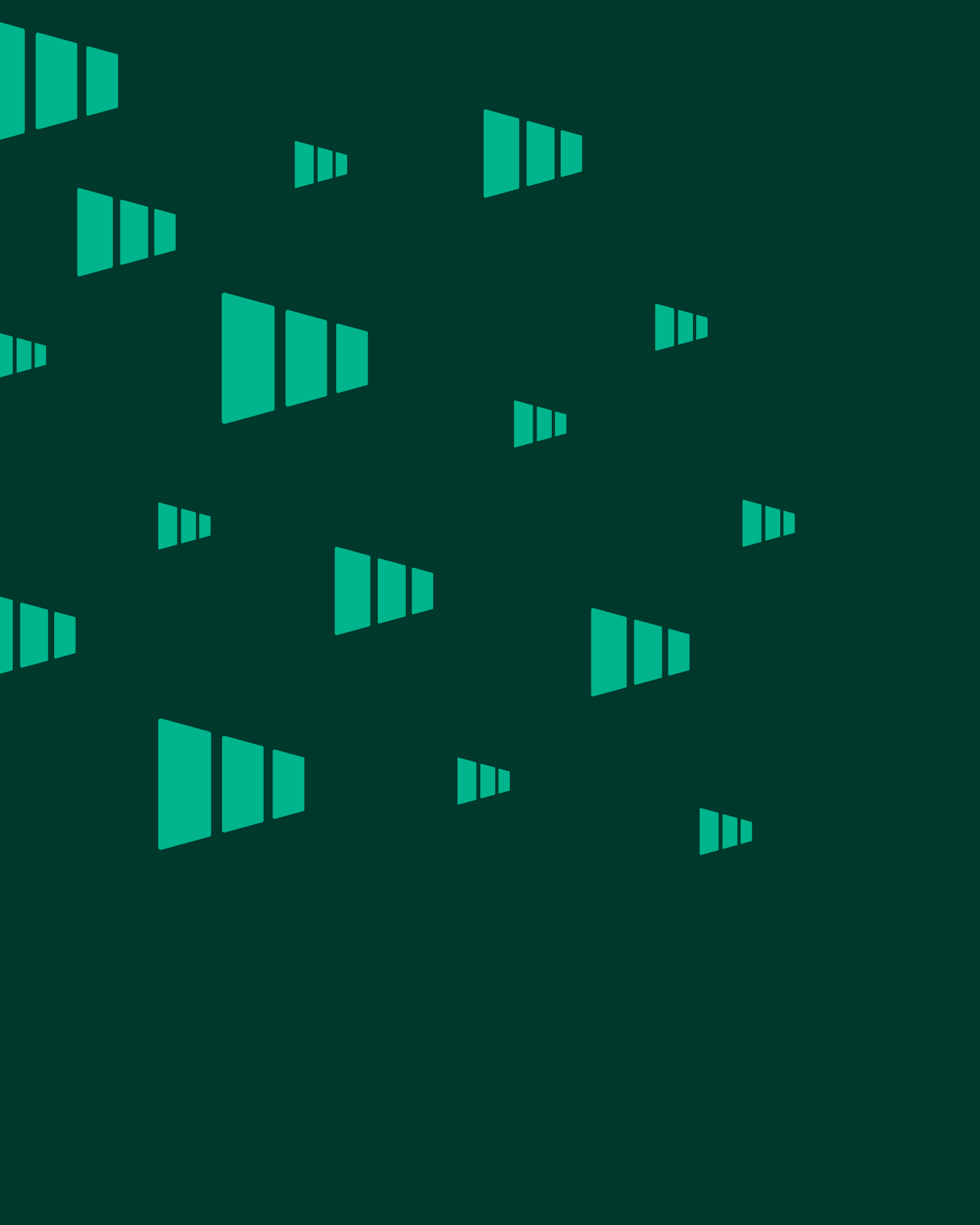

HEARING FROM GOD

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



Beyond these Walls

LIFTING MISSIONS
BY LOWERING DEBT



CONTENTS

Letter from Our Pastor / 3

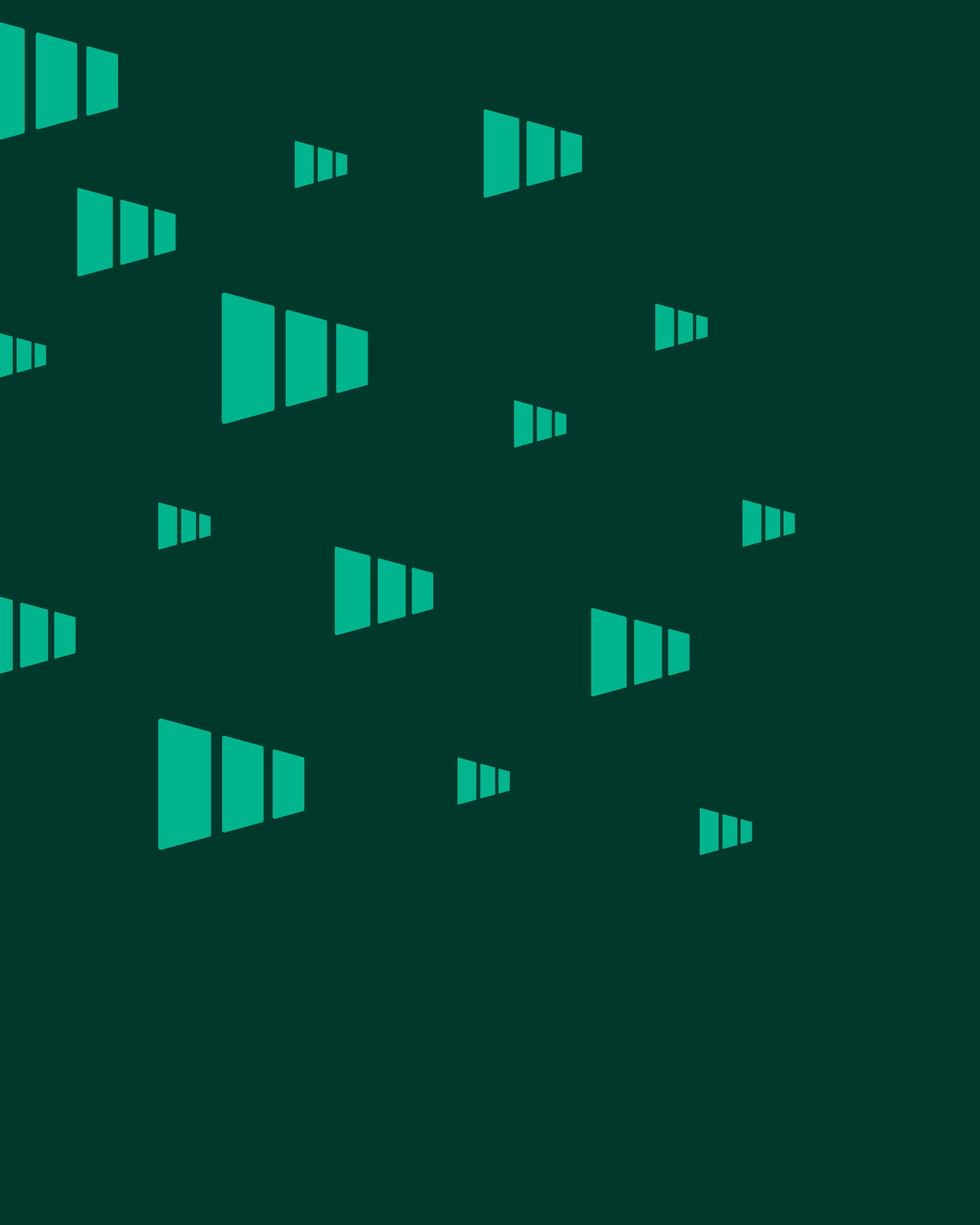
Week 1: Our Mission / 5

Week 2: Every Member a Minister / 18

Week 3: Our Worship Through Giving / 34

Week 4: The Body of Believers / 54

Closing Prayer & Thoughts / 64



Dear Church Family,

I want to invite you to join in a journey of faith together. It is always thrilling to anticipate a special trip. We find it refreshing to break away from the daily routines of life and get away with the people we love. That is what we want to do spiritually over the next four weeks.

The purpose of this journey is to hear from God. I have always been captivated by the Lord's call in 1 Samuel 3. When God first spoke to young Samuel, he was confused and thought it was Eli calling him. But Eli realized that it was God speaking to Samuel, and he told the young boy to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Samuel did as he was told and God clearly revealed His will to him. Those words have reverberated in my mind quite often through the years: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." God spoke to Samuel then, and He is still speaking to His people today. We need to cultivate the ability to listen to God.

Over the next four weeks, you will read testimonies that show how God is at work in and through the lives of the people of Weems Creek. These personal accounts will encourage us all as we read about the changed lives of those we know.

As you set aside some time each day to listen to God, remember that you are not alone. Many in your church family are on the same journey. Open your heart to the Lord. Consider the testimonies; read the verses of Scripture; ask God to speak through His Word; reaffirm your commitment to His will and guidance in your life; and then take time to listen.

We have a great vision for what God has called us to do in this community. It is a comprehensive vision that includes a significant increase in resources dedicated to meeting needs and funding ministries to impact our local community with the gospel of Christ. We are committed to do our part in order to lead many to the Savior.

Yes, as we look Beyond these Walls to serve our community and raise the financial resources required to pursue the vision God has given us, *we will ultimately deal with the question of what God is calling each of us to give. But first we listen to God as He speaks into each heart, and we trust He will lead us to accomplish His vision.*

Think for a moment, isn't it exciting to anticipate hearing from God? So let this journey of faith begin! We are in this together as a body of believers and the family of God. Life really is better together. To God be the glory.

Praying with you and for you,
Pastor David

WEEK 1

Our Vision

More and More Lives Transformed by Jesus

Church life is about people. Every time we gather for worship, Bible study, dinner, service, etc., we gather with people who have experienced the life-changing power of Jesus. It is our common love and commitment to Jesus our Redeemer that draws us together. More than anything, we long to see more people come to know the salvation, forgiveness, and new life we have discovered through Christ.

There is so much brokenness in this world; but Jesus is merciful and powerful to save. The gospel of Christ is still “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). And when God saves, God works transformation in the person’s life. There is a new joy, peace, and contentment in the midst of the struggles of life.

But if a picture is worth a thousand words, a changed life is worth even more! This week you will read several stories of normal people whose lives have been radically changed by the mercy and grace of God. This is what church is all about—saved sinners helping others find new life through Christ, building them up in faith and understanding, and then sending them out to serve the mission of Jesus in the community and wherever God might lead them.

When Jesus came to this earth, He made visible and understandable the selfless love of God for sinners. May He continue to show His love and mercy through the Weems Creek family and may many more come to faith in Christ. To God be the glory!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. [John 10:10](#)

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. [1 Corinthians 15:57–58](#)

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

[Ephesians 3:20–21](#)

Day One

from Alex Swaim

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. *Philippians 4: 6–7*

This verse has helped me navigate through my teenage years and adult life so far. It has put me at ease whether I'm nervous about something trivial or I'm going through something life changing. It's a reminder that, while a situation can easily overwhelm us, we will make it through with God's help and guidance.

Growing up, I was in church every Sunday—sometimes in multiple services. Not because I was a responsible, pious Christian, but because my mother was a church organist. While I believe this constant exposure to church for as long as I can remember helped lay the groundwork for my faith, it was still just a weekly chore I had to endure when I was young: church was a place I had to go. I didn't understand the basic ideals that are fundamental to being a Christian; that changed when I started attending Weems Creek.

In middle school, I was invited by a good friend to come to an all-night bowling event with the youth group. We began the night with worship, which I thought was a little strange (I was used to singing the same five hymns every Sunday morning, and guitars were never a part of worship). Afterwards, we bowled all night and I had a blast. I couldn't wait to come back.

I returned again and again for various youth events and as I was becoming more interested in the youth group, I started to attend Wednesday night Bible study, Sunday evening youth group and Sunday morning services. Before long, I was at Weems Creek every Wednesday and twice on Sundays: playing games, learning about the Bible and building important relationships.

One Sunday morning, after I had been attending Weems Creek for a couple of years, Phyllis Orr (shout-out) was giving me a ride to church and asked me a simple question: "How come you haven't gone to the front of the church to profess your faith?" "I don't know," I said, and she explained to me that I should probably get a move on if I was ready. I knew I was ready, but I just needed that little nudge.

So, that very Sunday I shuffled up to the front of the old sanctuary and professed my faith. I was so nervous that I got a nosebleed. Fun fact: my now-wife Caitlin would also come up to the front to profess her faith that same day. We would start dating just a few months later.

My life started changing the moment I began attending Weems Creek and that profession of faith was a huge steppingstone to the ever-continuing mission to please God and be more like Him. This is also when I really started to comprehend what it means to be Christian and when I began to understand that the “church” is not a building, but the people in the building—a foundational idea that I’ve come to love and appreciate and that has helped me through challenging times in my life.

When I was a senior in high school my mother became very sick. She was in and out of hospitals for a while and eventually landed at the Georgetown University Hospital. As her health was deteriorating and it became clear that she would soon pass away, I leaned on the people around me for support. My mother would pass away in March of 2007, and my dad, girlfriend at the time (now my wife), friends and my church family were what helped me get through that seemingly overwhelming situation. God placed the right people in my life to help me. Since then, through the ups and downs of life, my relationship with God and my connection to the people that He has put in my life are things I can consistently fall back on.

My wife, Caitlin, and I have two boys—during each of their dedication services, we read Philippians 4: 6–7 on stage. My greatest hope for them is that they can find the comfort and solace promised in that verse through a relationship with God and that they can think of that verse when they’re going through the difficult situations in life that we all inevitably experience.

Day Two

from Mark Green

My journey of faith started as a young child. However, throughout a somewhat circuitous path through life, I have seen the faithfulness of God time and time again in various contexts. I was born into a Christian home with parents who loved the Lord, who took me to church for as far back as I can remember, and who introduced me to God and stories of His faithfulness. Growing up with like-minded friends and mentors at church was a blessing. Church was a place of encouragement and of good memories bolstered by the interwoven relationships of multi-generational families and teachers who invested in me. By modeling a trust in the Lord and being diligent to tell of His works through the ages, my childhood church family showed me various facets of God's truth through Sunday school classes, Royal Ambassadors missions groups, children's choir, Boy Scouts, and youth group.

Despite my decision to follow after the Lord at age five, life for me with Jesus—just as for so many other Christians—has not guaranteed a life free of obstacles or hardship. As much as I would like for it to be so, God does not promise us an easy life. On the contrary, Jesus spoke directly when he said, "In this world, you will have trouble" (John 16:33a, NIV). The particular hardships in life that Christians must endure are as diverse and varied as the body of Christ itself. Some of those hardships may involve physical injury or sickness, the death of loved ones, financial hardship, mental health challenges, addiction, or the constant searching for purpose in life, among others.

For me, one of these key challenges came at the intersection of fear and anxiety and my body's response to them. Upon graduating college, I entered the U.S. Navy's flight school to become a Navy pilot. In addition to battling the normal anxieties of performing in such a dynamic environment, it also eventually became apparent that I experienced night vision complications in very low-light night flying scenarios. Coupling that combination of anxiety with the inability to see sufficiently during certain nighttime flight regimes only served to exacerbate my nerves. The situation eventually became untenable one night during a flight over the Atlantic Ocean when I had an out-of-body experience while I was at the controls of an F/A-18 Super Hornet whereby my conscious mind seemingly became detached

from my body. I subsequently became aware of myself flying the airplane—yet only from a third-person bird’s-eye-view several feet above the plane. In psychology, this type of out-of-body experience is often referred to as dissociation. During this particular instance, although I knew for those few moments that I was not effectively in control of the aircraft, I was still coherent enough to know that I was not in a good situation. By God’s providence, for that flight, my particular aircraft had a control stick in the back seat with which the instructor was eventually able to land the plane.

Although the Lord miraculously spared my life that night, I knew that my professional life would be forever changed as I could no longer continue as a Naval Aviator given my night vision limitations. Although I eventually made a lateral career change to healthcare administration within the Navy, the aftermath of the terror I experienced that night continued to haunt me with anxiety for months and years to come. One of the most pointed manifestations of the anxiety was selective mutism which is the inability to speak in certain professional or public situations. Needless to say, experiencing episodes of selective mutism came with its own challenges, frustrations, and embarrassment. Despite asking the Lord to alleviate my condition, I continued to experience similar episodes on multiple occasions for years to come. Even with this constant thorn in my side, I continued to ask God for relief from this ailment. Thankfully, one night several years after that fateful night flight, I had a very vivid dream during which I suddenly became aware that I was in a terrifying wrestling match with a strange creature. I don’t know if it was a demon or not, but it seemed like a life or death struggle in my dream’s consciousness. As I wrestled with this creature in the dream, I eventually cried out in Jesus’ name, “In the name of Jesus, depart from me! In the name of Jesus, depart from me!” I then cried out a third time, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, depart from me!” I then suddenly heard a loud shrieking, saw a bright white light emanating up into the dark sky above, and witnessed the disappearance of the being with whom I was wrestling. Instantly, I felt a release from the plague of my selective mutism. As a result, an overwhelming sense of relief poured over me!

Since that time, life has not been perfect, and I still do occasionally struggle with the psychosomatic manifestations of my body’s reaction to stress and anxiety from those years. However, the Lord delivered me from the chronically crippling hold that those situations held over me for so long, and for that, I am incredibly grateful!

Flash forward to 2020 and this new reality of our COVID-19 world that has infused a level of fear and anxiety over our society that is palpable. Despite the circumstances that I faced those several years ago or the incredible challenges that our country faces today, it is a tremendous encouragement to remember that the greatest gift that God gives us is the ability to be in relationship with Him through the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ. The trials of this life come in many varieties, some more acutely than others. Yet, through all those trials, let us be encouraged, and let us encourage one another that we serve a God who saves!

**In the midst the trouble that we are bound to face, Jesus commands us,
"Take heart! I have overcome the world!" John 16:33b**

Day Three

from Darrell Poe

I am fifty-two years old and have been blessed by the Lord in so many ways. I accepted Jesus Christ into my life at the age of sixteen. I have a wonderful wife and daughter and loving parents. About one year ago, on Saturday, August 10th, 2019 I had a heart attack.

I'd like to share with you: that I believe our greatest difficulties can be our greatest gifts. I have recently been able to thank the Lord for the heart attack and for the love, grace and salvation He has shown me. So, let me share my testimony with you.

God gave me the vision and strength to leave the small town I grew up in at the age of 18 when I entered the military. God worked in my life in those years and gave me strength. There were times I went my own way and made some bad decisions but Jesus never gave up on me.

I am and have been an avid cyclist for most of my life. I average about three thousand miles on my bike per year. I often use this gift to participate in a charity race to help raise money for Wounded Warriors. In August of 2019, after a routine ride, I got off the bike and did not feel well. Over the course of that weekend I felt like I had the flu. I had muscle aches and felt very lethargic. I told my wife about how I felt and she made an appointment for me to see the doctor on Monday morning. Within minutes of arriving at my doctor's office I was in an ambulance headed to the hospital. A paramedic in the ambulance explained to me that I was having a widow maker heart attack.

At the hospital I remember the sense of urgency of those around me and I was sent straight to surgery. To be brief, the doctor discovered a 100% blockage and I received a stent in my LAD artery. I had damage to my heart with reduced heart function and I also had life threatening blood clots around my heart. My doctor was unsure of the potential outcomes and he told me that genetics was likely the cause. The only thing the doctor could say for certain was that my overall health and physical conditioning had helped in my survival. I felt the power of Jesus's love for me when my doctor told me that my good health had helped me to survive the heart attack. In that moment I knew something that I had not ever shared with anyone.

During all my years I would have days when I just wanted to be lazy and did not feel like getting on a bike and riding many miles. Whenever that happened, a clear and forceful voice in my head would say to me, "You can't NOT do this." The voice inside was strong enough that I always listened and found a way to get out and ride and stay in shape regardless of the circumstances. God knew all of this was going to happen even before I was born and He prepared me for it.

In late September I began to struggle with severe and crippling depression and anxiety. Apparently, this is common after a heart attack. I did not understand it at the time, but the depression became a lesson in patience. I began seeking spiritual counseling and it was at that time that I met Pastor David Orr. I had been away from attending church regularly for some time. I got to know Pastor David very well through weekly meetings. My wife and I began attending Sunday worship service at Weems Creek and I began attending the weekly men's Bible study group. Both Pastor David and Pastor BJ were delivering messages important to healing and reconnecting with Christ. I began reading the Bible and praying every day and learned I had not matured in Christ over the years. As an adult, I learned how to surrender to the Lord and when I did that, life began to take on a different meaning; my depression and anxiety faded away.

In November 2019, three months after the heart attack, my doctor told me that the blood clots around my heart were completely gone and that my heart function was almost back to normal. He said he was treating me as he would any other patient who had a heart attack but he was unable to medically explain exactly what happened to me.

Jesus's love for me was always present even when He wasn't in the front and center of my life. We do not have to understand what God is doing, we only need to trust Him. We all need to show each other the love and kindness the Lord shows us. Now with the Lord in control of my life, I am surrendered to Him and I hope to be a better husband, father, son, brother, uncle, and friend.

And as for my bike, on March 9th of this year the Lord gave me the strength and courage to get back on the road. I have since ridden over one thousand miles but I no longer ride trying to be the one in control. Now, every time I go out for a ride I celebrate a victory in Christ. It is with prayer that all victory goes to my Savior, Jesus Christ.

But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hand.

Psalm 31:14–15

Day Four

from Ronald Shockley

I grew up in a church family. My grandparents on my mother's side were strong believers. My mom was a strong believer. She made sure that we were in church and Sunday School. When the time came, my brother and I took the class and became members of the church. I memorized some key scriptures and confessions and I became a church member of an old main line church. I joined because it seemed like the right thing to do and because friends from Sunday School were also becoming members. I attended church but never really thought deeply about it.

In ninth grade that all changed. My father died during open heart surgery. I felt very lost and alone. My church membership and friends weren't helping me. I didn't have a relationship that solved my emptiness. My grandfather walked me through the book of Romans and explained to me that my emptiness was separation from my father and spiritual separation from Jesus. My separation with my father couldn't be fixed but my separation from Jesus could. He explained that knowing the Bible wasn't the same thing as knowing Jesus as my Savior. I knew I was missing that relationship with Jesus. We prayed together and I prayed and accepted Jesus as my Savior.

Throughout high school I had an assurance of my salvation but I became very self-reliant and focused on getting into the US Naval Academy. I focused on academics and sports and was proud of my performance. I became a good tennis player and was ranked in the state and the region. While in the Naval Academy and in the Navy, this pattern continued despite injury to my knee and no longer being able to play tennis. I could summarize it by saying that Jesus had my eternal life but I was in charge of my daily life and career. That seemed to be working really well.

I met and married Georgia, the love of my life, and my career was going really well as I was a top performer and on the "fast track." But things really started changing when she was pregnant while we were stationed in Washington state. Her Lamaze teacher, who was the assistant pastor's wife at the local church, became her friend and mentor. Georgia became a believer during an Amy Grant concert and we were surrounded by new friends who had a meaningful daily walk with Jesus. That had a profound impact on me. I realized that, while I had been trusting in myself, I had

been missing the love and peace of a daily trusting relationship with Jesus. I began spending daily time in prayer and reading the scriptures. I felt like a different person at home and especially on my ship with shipmates and ship yard workers. Not long after, I failed the Engineer Exam. This was a major milestone in my career path and I chose to leave the Navy and my dream career. Almost immediately a pending new job opportunity fell through and we found ourselves unemployed for five months.

It had become obvious that the Lord was pulling away the sources of pride and self-worth in my life that prevented me from fully relying on Him. He had gotten my attention and I was now listening. I now knew I needed to nurture that relationship with Him, and I did. I spent daily time in His presence, in the Word and in prayer. I wanted to know everything possible about this God who seemed so much to want to have a relationship with me even though for many years I had put Him in a corner. Thank God, He is a God of second chances. Although my plans changed dramatically, the Lord had better plans for me. I was able to be closer to Georgia than if I had spent a career at sea focusing on me. I was able to be there when she was sick and needed me. I also was able to see our daughter, Christy, grow up every day. She loved sports and I think I enjoyed watching her play softball and basketball more than I loved playing myself. Now, I am so thankful that Jesus stepped in to change my plans; He did a much better job than I could ever have done. Acts 4:12–13 is my favorite Scripture passage because it notes the necessity of being saved by our relationship with Jesus and shows how spending time with Jesus can make astonishing changes to our lives.

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Acts 4:12–13

Day Five

from Phillip Zonn

Growing up in church, I always thought my story was boring. I was raised in a Christian home, but my childhood was a bit rough. My parents divorced when I was young and there was always a lot of family tension. God helped me cope with all the problems though; He provided friends at church and other activities that revolved around Christ. Throughout high school I was a good kid. I ran track, cross country and did the best I could to be a Christ-like individual. I often attended mission trips with my church and kept very active. I grew up with my amazing wife; she was my best friend's little sister. She, too, grew up in the church so we had a common bond. We started dating and eventually got married. Now we have two beautiful children, Grant and Madison.

I worked construction for about 10 years before joining a Police Department. With any job that I worked, I kept my faith in Christ and tried to be a positive Christian man. I still felt as if I lived a semi-boring Christian life: I had my unrelenting faith and love for Christ and plans for my future seemed promising. Little did I know, God had a very different plan for my life. When my daughter was just about three months old, my life turned upside-down. I was driving my motorcycle into work as a police officer during the midnight shift. A vehicle committed quite a few illegal maneuvers, did not see me driving on the roadway and blind side collided with me. The highway speeds flipped their car and threw me 33 feet down a small hill into a ravine. Once my body stopped, with collapsed lungs, both my arms, clavicle, and foot broken, there I was unconscious, face first in a drainage ditch.

The vehicle that was directly behind me stopped to assist. From what he told me later he said he felt like he "just had to stop because of my training." He was a 2-tour combat medic in Iraq. He flipped me out of the water and started CPR on me. He stated that my breathing had stopped, and he could not feel a heartbeat. He told me my body reminded him of the results of an IED explosion he had seen so many times before. He continued CPR and eventually revived me. The second person on scene was a 20-year emergency room nurse and she assisted as well. I was flown to Shock trauma where I spent the next 2 days in surgery. My heart was extremely weak so my surgeries were spread out hours apart. The doctors kept

a close eye on my brain activity; the impact from the accident had caused part of my brain to hemorrhage resulting in a brain injury. All in all, the doctors had placed 4 metal plates, 3 metal rods, 57 bone screws and about 30 sutures in my body.

The team working the Shock Trauma floor that night just happened to be the top doctors of the entire Emergency Department. They spent the next few weeks treating me and I was then transferred to a rehab facility where I would be treated for my brain injury. During follow up visits with the 4 lead doctors that had physically put me back together, they discussed how they have never seen recovery as rapid as mine and given the severity of the accident, such a rapid recovery seemed crazy to them. One doctor referred to me as Logan from X-men—as if I was built of steel and had rapid healing abilities. The best part of these doctor appointments is that while they were amazed and unbelieving, I could only give them one reason why I was able to heal so fast: CHRIST. He held me in his hands, guided the doctors' hands and guided the on-scene trauma staff hands. They explained that I had died twice while on the scene of the accident and was revived each time. Even the paramedics joked with me months later that they were certain I wasn't going to survive. My police department had turned in my radio and firearm because they were not sure of my results. God, only God made all of this possible and I thank Him every single day for being my Savior.

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. Job 1:21

WEEK 2

Every Member a Minister

More and More Lives Transformed by Jesus

Every believer isn't a pastor, but every believer is called into ministry. Whatever your job or career, you are called to full-time Christian service. One reason why you need to be connected to a church family is to fulfill your calling to serve other believers. Jesus said, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

The world defines greatness in terms of power, possessions, prestige, and position. However, Jesus measures greatness in terms of service, not status. God determines greatness by how many people you serve. Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles Lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25–28). Consider the following thoughts related to service:

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS CREATED FOR MINISTRY

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. [Ephesians 2:10](#)

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS CALLED TO MINISTER

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [1 Peter 2:9](#)

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS TO BE PREPARED FOR MINISTRY

...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up... [Ephesians 4:12](#)

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS GIFTED FOR MINISTRY

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. [1 Peter 4:10](#)

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS NEEDED FOR MINISTRY

God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be...The eye cannot say to the hand,'I don't need you!'And the head cannot say to the feet,'I don't need you!'On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. [1 Corinthians 12:18, 21-22](#)

EVERY CHRISTIAN WILL BE REWARDED FOR MINISTRY

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. [Colossians 3:23-24](#)

Many write books on leadership. Few write books on servanthood. Everyone wants to lead; no one wants to be a servant. But to be like Jesus is to be a servant. Jesus instructed his disciples saying:

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. [John 13:14-17](#)

As you work through the following testimonies of some people you may know, consider how God may be calling you to serve.

Day One

from Fred Bedell

I was born and raised in Baltimore City. My mother was of the local Catholic church and my father was of no denomination. I have five brothers and two sisters—2 brothers and 1 sister are still living. My mother was a stay at home mom and my father worked at a laundromat and later as a truck driver. He cursed like a sailor and was an alcoholic, although he would say he had no problems. My father had a Jekyll and Hyde personality. When he had been drinking, we, the children would hide from him because he would beat us and our mother.

Growing up, my older brother and I worked part time. We started working at age 10 and we would give our earnings to our mother to help pay the bills because dad would drink away most of his pay. We attended a Catholic school and were very active in the church and followed its teachings. But when I was about 17 years old, I started questioning, “Why should I confess my sins to an earthly intercessor that I have witnessed drinking, smoking and cursing?” I came to the conclusion that these “intercessors” were no different than anyone else, so I stopped attending church services.

Soon after high school, I met a girl. We started dating and three years later we were engaged and then married. We got along great—so I thought—but after eighteen months of marriage we separated; she was seeing someone else.

Later, I met my now wife Peggy. She invited me to church and upon returning to the church setting I was a little afraid and did not pay attention to the services. But the more events and activities I attended, I could see that these people were different. One Sunday Pastor Smith was preaching on the assurance of salvation; I was not at the service, but a tape was made and given to me. I thought I would listen when I had the time. That night as I lay in bed trying to sleep and I kept thinking, “Is this all there is to life? Do we just stop existing?” I then remembered the tape. I listened to the sermon and it was as if the Pastor was speaking only to me. He spoke of life after death and the assurance that one can have by accepting Christ in their heart as their Savior. I prayed that night and turned my life over to Christ. It felt like a heavy burden was lifted from my shoulders. My foul mouth completely vanished because if I were truly His I could not talk with such language.

My heart was filled with joy beyond anything I had ever experienced. I was bursting to tell someone, but it was late at night! I can't remember who I called first, but it was probably Peggy and then her mother—both had been praying for me.

Since that time, I have served the Lord as best I can—serving in the music ministry, as a deacon and with other ministries in the church. The thing that gives me the most joy is going on mission trips. On these various trips you can see God's hand at work. God uses us to plant seeds of Christ in hearts that need forgiveness. I am so thankful for my trips to China where we have encouraged fellow believers and where I have been able to present my testimony. In Romania, I worked with a team who provided food and comfort to poor families in the countryside. In Africa and Honduras, I worked with teams to build roofs on community churches and I shared my testimony and my love for Christ. With each of these missions trips Christ was shared. We were able to meet a physical need and then a spiritual one as well. I thank God every day that He gives me the health and physical strength to do His work here and around the world!

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Romans 1:16

Day Two

from Alex and Jenna DiPrima

Emmanuel Church of Winston-Salem

When I, Jenna DiPrima, was twelve years old, Ashley Francis invited me to Weems Creek Baptist Church and I will be eternally grateful! After several months of coming to Weems Creek, getting involved in the youth group, and hearing the gospel preached regularly, I was converted. I continued to grow and mature as a Christian under the ministry at Weems Creek throughout middle school and high school. I went to Clemson for college and thereafter completed a Master of Divinity degree at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. During my years after leaving WCBC, Weems Creek continued to support me prayerfully and financially as I went on several mission trips and participated in various ministry endeavors.

After meeting and marrying my husband Alex, we began prayerfully making plans to plant a church. The story of our church plant began long before Alex and I met though! Alex and three other young men (two being his brothers) began praying and thinking about planting a church when they were in college. Separately, I (Jenna) began prayerfully considering working on the mission field or joining a church plant when I was in college. After getting married in 2014, Alex and I were trained and mentored for two years at our sending church, Grace Reformed Baptist Church in Mebane, NC. In the Spring of 2016, Grace Reformed announced their intention to send us out as church planters to Winston-Salem, NC later on in the year. Over time, a few other families from our sending church volunteered to join the church planting team and relocate to Winston-Salem. At that time, Alex and I also raised funds among several churches in order to have the ability to financially support a new church plant. Weems Creek generously gave to our church plant as one of our first partnering churches.

Our group began to meet as a small group Bible study in September of 2016 in the home of a family local to Winston who had been praying for God to raise up a new church plant in the area. Little by little this group started to grow and in January of 2017, they began meeting for worship on Sunday evenings in the sanctuary of Northwest Baptist Church. The group continued to grow in this new context and to experience God's blessing. By May 2017 they started meeting on Sunday mornings

for worship. Finally, the church officially constituted on August 5, 2017 with seventeen charter members. Shortly thereafter, Alex was installed as the church's first pastor.

Since then the church has continued to steadily grow. In April 2019, the church added two more elders as well as the church's first deacon. Also in that same year, the church was given the facilities and property of Northwest Baptist Church as a legacy gift. The facilities include many classrooms as well as a beautiful sanctuary that seats about 350 people. The church building is situated on about twelve acres of land right across from Mount Tabor High School and just a couple of miles away from Wake Forest University.

We are continually thankful to God for his many kindnesses to our church. One of those kindnesses being Weems Creek Baptist Church's initial generous financial support given to us as well as continued prayer support and encouragement. We are only in the beginning chapters of our church's history. If it would please God, we hope to be a church that faithfully ministers for generations until the return of Christ.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

Psalm 127:1

Day Three

from James Wuestman

I shared my testimony for the first time in a public setting at Weems Creek Church on May 3, 2020 because Pastor Orr reached out to me and asked me if I might be willing to share “my story”. I must admit, at first I was quite apprehensive about sharing my testimony.

I used to have this image in my mind that I had to be this “squeaky clean” and perfect Christian before I could stand up in front of a group of Christians and lead a Bible study or share my faith with an unbeliever. I thought I had to have read the Bible from front to back and know it perfectly. I was under the assumption that if I did not, then I might show I did not have the knowledge to back up my faith; to say the least I felt very inadequate!

As I read the text message from Pastor Orr asking me to share my testimony, all those thoughts came rushing back into my mind. I thought to myself “Why me? What makes my story special?” I quickly came to the stark realization...nothing! Absolutely nothing makes “my story” special, because it’s not “my story” that is special, but it is “His Story” that is special. The story of how Jesus has and continues to work in my life is what I want to share with you and if it only helps just one person to come to know Him, then that is enough!

My beautiful mother Donna Dorre gave birth to me on October 2, 1981 on Long Island, NY. I was given the name James Joseph Dorre after my grandfather, a paraplegic and Korean veteran. I was given the name of my grandfather for two reasons. First, he was a great and wonderful man, who loved his family, his country and his God. The second reason was that my biological father was not around, and I would know nothing about him for over thirty-seven years.

I was four years old when my mother married Arthur Wuestman, my stepfather. Times were good for a while but alcoholism and rampant bouts of physical abuse of my mother and me became somewhat of the norm. Around 1988, my mother and I actually left him for almost a full year. My stepfather later quit drinking and somehow reconciled with my mother. They had my half-brother John in 1989 and we moved to North Carolina in July of 1992. In July 1994, my mother tragically passed away at the age of 33 due to pneumonia and complications of Chicken Pox.

I was 12 years old and absolutely heartbroken! With the loss of our mother, my brother and I were left to live with our still physically and mentally abusive “father.” Before my mother’s death, she raised me to go to church. As a young child, I took my first communion and went to church on all major holidays. However, something seemed amiss. I knew I believed in God, but I really did not know his son Jesus Christ and what it really meant to be a Christian. I had this warped illusion that if I were just “good enough” I would be covered.

Without a strong example at home, I began my adolescent years struggling with many different things common to a young man with little to no spiritual guidance. By age 15 I had struggled with anger, pain, emptiness, sexual immorality, lust and alcohol. While support was not often found at home, it was thankfully found at school with my inspirational teachers, on the sports fields with my coaches, and with three of my uncles who were my mother’s brothers. My Uncle Jim lived nearby and was a Marine Master Sergeant. I tried to spend as much time with him and his family as possible. My Uncle Gerald was also in the Marine Corps and My Uncle John was a New York City Fireman. These men were profoundly influential in my adolescence following my mother’s death. They taught me what it meant to be a man of character, to be a man of service, and most importantly what it meant to be a man of God.

The summer before my sophomore year was spent with my Uncle Gerald, my aunt Theresa, and my five cousins who I absolutely adored. My Uncle was not only a Marine Major, but he had found Jesus and had become a Youth Pastor at his Church. That summer he and his church family took the youth to a Bible Camp called “Super Summer” at William and Jewell University, in Liberty Missouri. There were hundreds of kids in attendance. We were divided into small groups of about 12–14 kids with two counselors. We did everything together from sunrise to sunset. The first two days I felt as if I was completely out of place, but then something happened! One of the kids shared their testimony and then another and another. What I quickly realized was they were broken just like me! However, they had something that I did not have—they had Jesus! On the third morning, my Uncle Gerald came and took me to breakfast before everyone else. Although I did not yet realize it, he could see that a change was happening inside my heart. That morning my Uncle Gerald witnessed to me and I made a profession that Jesus was my Lord and Savior. I vividly remember feeling all my fear and pain

going away and I felt so much love surrounding me in that moment. I also remember not wanting that week or that summer to end; I knew there would be new challenges to face at home now as a Christian.

The summer ended and I went back home. I found myself attending church and hanging around a new crowd of kids at school. However, with no change in my situation at home with my stepfather I began to slip back into my old ways. By my senior year I had reverted back to my life before becoming a Christian: angry, empty, and in lust not love with my girlfriend. I could not wait to get out of my predicament at home. I felt trapped. I felt alone. Despite being a good student in school, I had no resources to afford college. I continued to work my dead-end job after graduation, but in September of 2000 I had had enough and I joined the Marine Corps to get away from it all and to make a way of my own.

While I quickly excelled in the Marine Corps and was very successful, I still found myself trying to do it all on my own and without Christ. In 2001, I married my high school sweetheart at the age of 20. By the age of 21 and after two combat deployments to the Middle East she became pregnant, but with someone else's child. I was devastated! I spent the next few months in a state of self-pity and shame. I thought to myself, "how could I let this happen, how could He let this happen?" I spent that summer in a drunken stupor, going from one bar to another searching for something or someone that might show me the love I thought I deserved. What I found was nothing but more emptiness and more pain. Eventually my good friend Brent Marsingill, who was a fellow Marine and Christian, tried to talk some sense into me and I slowly began to get my life together. But I was still actively pushing God away. I seemed to only want to include Him in my life when I needed something. Why? I do not know, but this is what I was doing.

I would eventually meet Caroline in the Fall of 2003 in a local bookstore where she was working. There was something different about her. There was this kindness, this gentleness about her that I had never before experienced in a person. Her family immediately welcomed me and treated me like one of their own. I was so thankful that Caroline and her family were now part of my life. A few months into our courtship, I received orders back to the Middle East, this time to Afghanistan; this was my third combat deployment in three years. I thought to myself about Caroline, "It is over, and she will be gone by the time I get back!" I decided to prepare myself for the inevitable and I also devised a plan to test her (which looking back now was extremely immature and just plain shameful). Nevertheless, I had been hurt before, so I decided to test her (and maybe in my

subconscious, I was even testing God). The plan was simple: I decided not to write or speak to Caroline even if given the opportunity for the first 40 days of the deployment. I told myself if she is still around after that then maybe, just maybe I could have another relationship with a woman. She wrote to me almost every single day for those first six weeks! I proposed shortly after returning home and we were married following my fourth combat deployment in the Spring of 2006.

Things were great in our marriage, but the Lord was not there. The years rolled on and on but still I pushed the Lord away. I guess I had gotten to the point where I believed that all my sins were unredeemable. So, I did the worst thing that a Christian could do: I walked away and I lived my life the way I saw fit. In 2014 and after my fifth combat deployment, I met a Second Lieutenant named Jeff Hill. Jeff was about 22 years old at the time and was put under my charge.

I immediately liked Jeff. He was personable, intelligent, and was great with the Marines. I thought to myself, "this kid has a lot of potential and I have a lot of good knowledge that I can impart on him." Caroline and I had him over to the house a couple of times for dinner but eventually it seemed he was over every weekend. The kids loved playing with him, Caroline loved cooking for him and his big appetite, and I enjoyed having him to hang out with—and he always seemed to be helping me work on projects around the house! We had become very unlikely friends. I knew Jeff was a Christian, but we never really talked about it until one evening after dinner when he brought up Christ. At first I was a little taken aback. He asked me if I believed in Christ. I said, "Yes I believe in Christ and I am Christian!" He then asked me, "Then why don't you pray or go to church?"

We then began to talk about the shame I felt and that I believed my sins were just "too much." I told him I had gone astray for way too long and I felt the Lord would not want me back. I told him I did not know where or how to renew my relationship with the Lord. That evening, that young man who I thought I was going to teach, taught me something. He spoke to me about God's forgiveness and His redeeming power. He reminded me of Christ's endless love for me no matter the circumstances. He gave me a book called the Prodigal God, and as the title implies, it shares the story of the Prodigal Son. I had allowed myself to be influenced by the world however, from that day forward I began to attend church and seek out the Lord. Eventually I had the courage to witness to Caroline and she came to accept Christ as her Lord and Savior. We joined our first church together in 2015 when we moved to Arizona. We began attending Bible study and Caroline worked in the youth ministry. Upon arriving in Annapolis in 2018 we were immediately welcomed

with open arms by our Weems Creek family. We became members and now actively participate in Bible study groups. Our oldest son Brady made a profession of faith and was baptized after attending programs like AWANA and VBS. Caroline has worked as a VBS volunteer and participates in MOPs. For me, one of the greatest personal blessings has been the other men of Weems Creek Church; they have shared their testimonies, their joys, their own struggles and they have encouraged me to continue in my faith and my walk with Christ.

While I tell of how I found Christ when I was 15, pushed him away in my 20s and part of my 30s, it is clear He never left me. Through it all, He was still working in my life; He was knocking on the door of my heart. I look back at all the successes and even the struggles that I have had along the way and I see now they are incredible blessings in His beautiful design. He has blessed me with other believers, my uncles, my friends Brent and John, and my Church family! He has blessed me with a wonderful career, in which I provide for my family and where I am able to share Christ in my daily interactions by leading my Marines and Midshipmen through His example. He has blessed me with my beautiful, loving and caring wife with whom I share my life. He has blessed us with four beautiful and healthy children. He also recently blessed me with the gift of finding my biological father's family and having a relationship with them!

My hope for sharing is not that my words give you faith but that my words point you to "His Word" and that "His Story" may draw you closer to Him, His power, and His unending love. I still struggle and fail every day, but I am so thankful for the grace the Lord has shown me!

As I wrestled with the idea of how to share my testimony, I found encouragement and wisdom through the following Scripture. I truly believe as a body of believers and followers of Christ, it is vitally important for each of us to be vulnerable with one another and share with unbelievers how the Lord has worked and continues to work in our lives.

And so it was with brothers, sisters and me. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5

Day Four

from Casey Goebel

I thank God for Christian parents and for placing me in Weems Creek as my home church. My parents taught and modeled what it meant to love the Lord and love the local church. Weems Creek reinforced what I learned at home and was so easy to love.

First and foremost, Weems Creek is a church dedicated to teaching God's Word, helping people grow in their relationship with the Lord, living in community and doing the Great Commission. Growing up I loved VBS, had great teachers, accepted Christ when I was 8 years old, and learned to talk about Jesus with others. I especially remember Mr. Ron & Mrs. Edie (Sams). I loved everything about their class. They were such an encouragement to me.

The youth group then built on that foundation, teaching me to study and understand the Bible, own my faith, daily live it out, and share the gospel with non-believing friends. Weekly gatherings on Sundays and Wednesdays, weekend events, FUGE camps, and winter retreats were huge catalysts for my personal growth. Andy and Micelle Hallmark led the youth when I started middle school and then Justin took over after them. God kept me growing in Him.

While in college at UMBC, I began to serve in the youth ministry. I grew to love teaching, and went on missions trips to Boston, Hungary, and Brazil. Even so, my faith was severely tested during my college years but God had prepared me to stand firm in my convictions and He proved His faithfulness each time.

It was during my junior year that the Lord called me to ministry. I discarded my 10-year plan and went to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary where I graduated with a Masters in Christian Studies and met my husband, Kevin Goebel. We were married in 2017, and we are committed to serving the Lord together. On August 1, 2019, Kevin began his ministry as College & Young Adult Pastor at Lynwood Baptist Church in Cape Girardeau, MO. On August 31, 2019 our daughter Claire was born. We have absolutely loved serving where we are now and I know that growing up in a healthy, Christ-centered, and mission-minded church helped prepare me for this.

Second, Weems Creek is a family. Growing up, we didn't live near any extended family so the congregation at Weems became my family. To this day I still love to visit. I always feel at home and welcomed by people I love. God used many people from Weems to make a lasting impact on my life. I love them and thank God for them. Our neighbors Mr. and Mrs. Booth are wonderful; Mrs. Jean Guth taught me so much; Mrs. Thelma Haupt was always so kind and made me feel loved; Mr. Charles Haupt, Miss Brenda Dillon, Mrs. Pat Cavanaugh, Ashley Francis, Mrs. Teresa Bohanan, Mr. and Mrs. Finnegan, and more! I am forever grateful for how Weems Creek loved and disciplined me.

In sixth grade, I selected *Matthew 6:33–34* as my life verse, **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”** These verses have been a constant reminder to put the Lord first, cast anxiety aside, and fully trust Him in every area of my life.

Lord, thank you for who you are and what you have done for us. Thank you for your faithfulness in leading me to saving faith, providing a beautiful picture of the family of God through Weems Creek, and placing examples of godly men and women in my life. Please keep me focused on you and use my family to advance your kingdom. I pray that you continue to bless Weems Creek to be a blessing to Annapolis and the nations. Grant your people wisdom, unity, boldness, and your power to fulfill your will for Weems Creek. Amen.

Day Five

from Barbara Tibbs

I was born in New Haven, Connecticut to loving parents. I attended church regularly with my family and received religious instruction each week. As a child, I had many concerns and questions about God and eternal life. I thought that I could earn eternal life by obeying church rules, by being a good person and by doing good deeds. But never knowing if I was good enough or if my good deeds would outnumber my wrongful actions, I had no assurance that I had “earned” eternal life with God. The thought of dying frightened me. I felt that God was unapproachable and unknowable. Though I wanted to have a personal faith in Him, I did not know how to achieve this. These concerns followed me into my high school and college years. I had many questions but could find no answers. As a result, at the end of my freshman year, I rejected the church and God and put all thoughts about God totally aside. I completed my college education and became an elementary school teacher.

Some years later, a new friend shared some Bible verses with me about God. He said that the way to know God and to have eternal life with Him is through His Son, Jesus Christ. As he led me through Scripture verses, I began to understand some important Biblical truths. I knew that I had done many things that hurt God and broke His laws and that I deserved to be eternally separated from God (Romans 3:23 and 6:23). But then, my friend told me that in spite of this, God offers eternal life as a free gift by believing in His Son...that God loved me and demonstrated His love by sending His Son to die on the cross (Romans 5:8).

For the first time, I understood that Christ died on the cross for ME personally and forgave all the things I had done wrong. He resurrected and is alive today in heaven. I understood that eternal life is attained through believing in Jesus Christ as my Savior. It was as if Jesus Christ was standing at the door of my heart; if I believed, all I had to do was open it and let Him in (Revelation 3:20). And I did just that. I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Savior and Lord.

I soon experienced the peace and assurance of having an eternal future with God. I knew that when I died, God would receive me in heaven because of my faith in Christ and not because of anything I did or earned. I began meeting weekly with my friend’s mom who helped me to grow in my relationship with Christ.

As I started to set aside time for a daily Bible quiet time, prayer, and weekly Bible study I began to know God. My faith deepened and I began to apply Biblical principles to my daily life. I also went back to church.

Through the years, I've continued to develop my relationship with Christ, trusting Him for guidance, strength and wisdom to face the struggles of daily life. He has given me a desire to live in a way that is pleasing to Him, to share the truths of the Bible with those who don't know Him and to help those who do know Him to grow in their relationship with Him. Most of all I know that when I die I have an eternal future with Him.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10:17

WEEK 3

Our Worship Through Giving

Biblical Basis for Christian Giving

A salesman trying to sell a home freezer to a housewife said, “You can save enough on your food bills to pay for the freezer.” The woman replied, “Yes, I know, but you see we’re paying for our new furnace on the utility bills we save, and we’re paying for the house on the rent we’re saving. We just can’t afford to save any more right now.”

The financial pressures today are tremendous, and somebody is always asking us for more money. Even when we come to church, we do not escape the appeal. With all the financial demands on our lives, why should we be asked to give to God’s work?

Some Christians have already settled that question. They are about giving to the church like W. C. Fields was about loaning money. To a man who made a request to him, Fields said he would have to confer with his lawyer. And if his lawyer said yes, he’d have to get another lawyer. Some have already decided to lock God out of the financial realm of their lives.

However, most Christians simply need someone to tell them in a clear and caring way from the Bible why they should be faithful in returning to the Lord at least a tithe of all that God has blessed them with. That is the purpose of this section—to encourage each Christian to consider the teachings of God’s Word and then give accordingly.

GOD IS THE OWNER

The psalmist acknowledged that God owns the world (Psalm 24:1–2). The first sentence in the Bible reads, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The possessions of this earth pass from one generation to the next. Yet God has never surrendered His claim as owner of all possessions in the entire universe.

Speaking of Jesus, the Bible says, “by him all things were created,” and in the next verse, “in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16–17). God is not only the Creator but also the Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God reigns with providential care over His universe and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. God’s ownership of all things is as eternal as God Himself.

WE ARE STEWARDS

If God owns everything, how do we relate to material possessions? Jesus taught that man is a steward. A steward is one who manages the possessions of another. Generally, he was given freedom to decide and act without the direct intervention of the owner. It was an office of trust. Faithfulness to the owner was imperative.

God has blessed us with the use of His world. In Genesis 1:28, we are instructed to “fill the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over ...every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Jesus spoke often of how we are to use that which God has entrusted to us. The parable of the talents illustrates this. Read Matthew 25:14–30. Note that the servants were entrusted with the management of someone else’s goods. Also, note that each was held accountable for how he managed the goods entrusted to him.

In the same way, we are stewards of God. All that we have and are (time, talent, possessions, influence, etc.) belong to Him. The Bible says that the chief requirement of a steward is that he/she be found faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2). We participate in a relationship of trust, combining freedom and accountability. God will not intervene and force us to give our time, talent, or money. He is looking for faithful stewards; stewards He can trust to manage His resources well. And one day we will answer to the Owner for how we managed His possessions.

WE LEARN GIVING FROM GOD

God is the supreme giver. Giving is not something God requires of man in order to exact revenue from him, like a tax. Giving is the nature of God. He has the capacity to give beyond our greatest imagination. God gives “to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). Paul asked the Corinthians, “What have you that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). James reminds us, “Do not be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:16–17).

Christ is God’s supreme gift. Christian giving does not spring from the Old Testament law of giving but from the supreme self-giving of God through Jesus Christ. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). God takes the initiative by first giving, then challenges the believer to a similar lifestyle of self-giving for the sake of the gospel and thus, the blessing of people (Luke 9:23). The cross is God giving Himself for our blessing and salvation.

God gives and we respond. God gives His love and we respond by returning His love. We learn giving from God. We must learn this secret of relationship to God. We do not earn our way into God’s goodness. God freely gives His love.

God freely gives, and what He asks of us is that we too freely give. God starts the great giving principle, and His people are to continue it. One place we see this is 2 Corinthians 9:8–11.

Our giving reflects how well we grasp what God has done for us. Giving flows from the individual's understanding of what God has done for him/her in Christ. Christ explains this spirit of response as He describes the woman who came to Simon's house and anointed His feet with oil. "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). The woman saw herself in great need and recognized how much God had done for her. "She loved much" tells how she responded to God. She loved much and her gift demonstrated it. Our giving reveals what God means to us.

Christian giving is a love response to God. It is acknowledging that the supreme purpose of all material things is to glorify God and to serve people.

SUMMARY OF BIBLE TEACHING ON THE TITHE

The tithe in the Old Testament involved a system of giving livestock, grain, and oil (agricultural products), not just a simple 10 percent of one's income.

It is not possible to determine with finality all that the tithing system involved or how much of the individual's income it required.

Tithing began in the Old Testament as a spontaneous act of worship. Abraham, long before God commanded us to do so, gave tithes of all he possessed to Melchizedek, the priest of God (Genesis 14:18–20). He did it not because he had to, but because he wanted to. It was apparently a voluntary expression of his gratitude to God for his goodness and grace.

Jacob, after a night of wrestling with God, freely made a vow to God, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God ...and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth" (Genesis 28:20–22). He did it not out of obligation, but out of adoration and appreciation.

At first glance, the concept of tithing seems simple. Leviticus 27:30–33 says: "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. If a man redeems any of his tithe, he must add a fifth of the value to it. The entire tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod—will be holy to the Lord. He must not pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution." Ten percent of everything the land produced was to be set aside, to be used as God commanded.

Several passages help us understand the practice of tithing as set forth in the Old Testament. Numbers 18:21–32 makes clear that tithes were to be used for the support of the Levites. The tribe of Levi was set apart to serve God and was not given an inheritance of land when Israel possessed the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 12:5–14 and 14:22–26 indicate that the tithes were to be brought to the central sanctuary, later established at Jerusalem. Deuteronomy 14:27–29 and 26:12–15 introduce another tithe, which was collected every third year for local distribution to the poor. Some argue for as many as three separate tithes. There were at least two: the annual 10 percent for the support of the Levites, and the third-year tithe for the support of the poor.

Tithing was part of a much larger concept of giving that included offerings (both specified and freewill), first fruits, and sacrifices.

People abused the tithe frequently by neglecting to give it and by using many loopholes to avoid it (Malachi 3:7–10). Leaders also abused it by making unreasonable demands.

By the time Jesus came, the Jewish rabbis had harmonized the Old Testament tithing instructions into a clearly defined system. It called for three tithes: (1) an annual tithe based on Numbers 18:21–24 which was given for the Levites; (2) a celebration tithe based on Deuteronomy 12:5–19; 14:22–23 in which the worshiper, along with his family, ate his own tithe at Jerusalem; (3) a charity tithe based on Deuteronomy 14:28–29 was to be given in one's town for the needs of the poor.

The rabbis also developed extreme interpretations of the tithing law and sought to impose them on the people. For example, they gave very detailed instructions on how to tithe seeds and plants. It was this seed tithing to which Jesus refers in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42. Their legal detail reached the ridiculous. For example, they specified that grain found in an ant hole was subject to the tithe if the hole was close to the farmer's storage. No one can say with certainty, but some suggest that as many as twelve different kinds of gifts, including the tithes, were called for during this time, amounting to about 40 percent of one's income. In any case, history affirms that tithing was a widely accepted practice at this time.

The New Testament does not affirm a specific position on the tithe for the Christian. Jesus commended the Pharisees for tithing their garden herbs. He gave no instructions to his followers on this practice. This does not mean, however, that Jesus was silent on the subject of giving for his followers.

The Christian should learn from the principle of the tithe. The tithe should be considered a minimum standard of Christian giving. If Christ's kind of giving is adopted as the pattern and the tithe is then adopted as a guide to promote growth, then tithing can be helpful. But always the goal is growth in the grace of Christian giving.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON THE TITHE

Giving can degenerate into meeting a legal requirement rather than giving out of a loving, willing heart.

Tithing can hinder our growth in giving by making you think you are done. Some may believe they have reached the ultimate goal God has for them in the area of giving. Such is not the teaching in the Bible.

There can be a mistaken notion that the tithe is God's and the rest is ours. Jesus taught that we are stewards. All we have and are belongs to God. He has entrusted it to us to manage for His glory. We will be accountable to God for how we exercise our stewardship.

JESUS ON GIVING

Jesus condemned wrong attitudes in giving:

- He said we are not to give to be seen of men like the hypocrites do. Such giving is not rewarded by our Father in heaven (Matthew 6:1–4).
- He rebuked the giving of the religious leaders who would follow the detail of the law but ignore justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23).
- He condemned the arrogant boasting of the Pharisee (Luke 18:12).
- He rebuked those who sought to avoid their responsibility to their family by claiming that their possessions were "devoted to God" (corban) (Matthew 15:5–9).

Giving that is pleasing to God must reflect a love response. We learn giving from God (John 3:16). Jesus wants us to give on the basis of love. The cause of Christ needs support. Christians are to be good stewards and give the needed support. However, it is not an appeal for money without regard for attitude and motive. Jesus sharply rebuked those who gave for the wrong reasons. He calls us to give out of love.

Jesus commends the practice of giving:

- We are to give as one who is right with fellow Christians (Matthew 5:23–24).
- We are to give in the second-mile spirit of doing more than is required (Matthew 5:40–42).

- We are to give in order to lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19–20).
- Having freely received, we need to freely give (Matthew 10:8).
- Jesus commends the selfless and very expensive gift of the woman who anointed his feet with oil (Matthew 26:10–13).
- We are to give away those possessions that are barriers to faith in God (Mark 10:17–31).
- Jesus lavished praise on the widow who gave “all she had.” This was the highest commendation He gave to anyone (Mark 12:41–44).
- We are to give to support the ministry of the gospel (Luke 10:7–8).
- In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus suggests the importance He placed on unselfish giving (Luke 10:30–37).

INSIGHTS FROM PAUL’S APPEAL TO THE CORINTHIANS

Second Corinthians 8 and 9 represent the longest, most extensive discussion of the principles and practice of giving in the New Testament. Paul and the Gentile churches were raising a relief offering to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. This was not a new subject to the church in Corinth. They had previously helped to initiate the idea and had expressed a commitment to it. Some problems had arisen since that time and the follow-through had not taken place as originally planned. Paul now writes to share with them the phenomenal response of their sister churches in Macedonia and to challenge them to complete that which they had begun. In so doing, he lays out what might be called a philosophy of Christian giving. Listed below are some principles of Christian giving he shared with the Corinthians.

1. We are first to consecrate ourselves, and all that we have to the Lord (8:5).
2. We are to seek to grow and excel in giving as in other Christian graces (8:7).
3. Our giving should be a concrete proof of the sincerity of our love (8:8).
4. Christ’s selfless and complete giving of Himself is to be our guide (8:9).
5. Good intentions concerning giving need to be acted upon. We need to follow through (8:10–11).
6. God is not concerned with what we do not have. He wants us to be faithful stewards of what we do have (8:12).
7. We are to give generously (9:5–6). We do not have to be rich to be generous; we just have to be generous.

8. We are to give purposefully, cheerfully, and joyfully (9:7).
9. We are to give anticipating that God will use the gifts to serve His purposes. This is illustrated in the relief offering sponsored by Paul for the needy Christians of Jerusalem (9:12–13). Three points: (1) God was glorified; (2) the Corinthians' giving helped their own spiritual growth; (3) their giving served the needs of others.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I GIVE?

The giving which Jesus taught and practiced was free, generous, and sacrificial. He praised the sacrificial gifts of His followers. He expected much, yet He did not give detailed instructions as to how much to give. Paul reflected the spirit of Jesus in his writings. He underscored proportionate giving in keeping with earnings (1 Corinthians 16:2). His instructions on how much are best defined in his statement, “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

How much do we give? Since the New Testament did not specify a percentage, the Christian must prayerfully decide for himself. There is no fixed measure that determines greatness in giving. The gift that is great for one may only be a token gift for another. For one to tithe may require a spirit of great giving while others could give half their income at no great sacrifice. Following are four guidelines that will prove helpful in determining how much to give:

The gift must reflect commitment. The Christian who asks, “How much must I give?”—as well as the one who gives as little as he can get by with—has completely missed the idea of the Christian life. The Christian way is not how little but how much is possible. Commitment seeks a way to serve, not a way out. The Christian will seek a giving pattern that reflects a personal commitment. His “how much” represents a sense of self-giving. The size of his gift will be measured by his financial ability and by his love.

The gift will call for a sacrificial spirit. Great giving, Christlike giving, always has included the giving of oneself. Giving that demands no inconvenience to the giver falls short of Christlike giving. The Christian life is self-giving. The same principle applies to our financial giving. This is simply one way by which we give of ourselves.

The term “sacrificial giving” is not found in the Scriptures. However, without question the idea is biblical. The dictionary states that to sacrifice is to surrender something prized or desirable for the sake of something having a higher or more pressing claim. This definition may not say it all, but it does single out the major point, a “higher claim.” The “higher claim” is the key to sacrificial giving.

The higher claim of Christ leads the Christian to let his love for Jesus cost him something. He adjusts his way of life in order to do more for Christ. To grow in giving requires a willingness to submit to the higher claims of Christ. When God’s call possesses our lives, giving up personal luxuries in order to answer that call produces a new joy and a deep contentment of heart. It is the joy of Christ-like giving.

The gift will be measured by how much is left. Jesus commended the widow’s gift (Mark 12:41–44). It was a great gift in His sight, not because of its value but because of what she had left. She kept back nothing. By contrast, the larger gifts of others seemed much smaller when measured by what they had left. The more one has, the more one can give. A tithe given by a family making \$40,000 may be a much greater gift than a tithe from a family making \$400,000.

The gift will reflect growth. The Christian life is never static. One does not attain Christian maturity and from that day on need no further growth. The Christian life is a continuous striving to grow into the likeness of Christ. This is spiritual growth. And it results in growth in the grace of giving as well as other areas (2 Corinthians 8:7).

Jerry Horner wrote: “We should bear in mind that the New Testament nowhere tells us to give less than a tenth, and while taking care to avoid a legalistic system, we should beware lest we fall into a reckless and haphazard system. Some are so fearful of establishing a definite amount and a fine point that they wind up with no point at all. They speak of our stewardship under grace as though being under grace means we can give more cheaply than those under law. Christ did not die on the cross to enable us to give two percent instead of ten percent, and the word grace is not a cloak of covetousness to do less instead of more.”

CONCLUSION

Every Christian needs to give to support the work of Christ if at all possible. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Jesus said that our treasure and our heart are inseparable. This is an irrefutable truth. What we do with our treasure is evidence of what is most important to us. A person's heart, who we are before God, and the direction and interests of our life cannot be separated from our treasure. That is why it is so important that every believer share in the fellowship and mission of the church through giving. God's call is to start where you are and begin to grow in the grace of giving.

Day One

from Nate Lewnes

I have seen firsthand how God has used faithful giving to further His kingdom through missions, community outreach, and the growth of His church. I've always tried to say "yes" to every opportunity God has drawn me to over the years and to budget my finances in a way that allowed me to say "yes" when those opportunities arose. It has been a joy and a blessing to financially support others as they have been called to serve. I have also been blessed by supporting children in need throughout the world through child sponsorships. Finally, I've seen our church building and family grow so much over the years through the faithful giving of the body of Christ.

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. *Philippians 4:19*

Day Two

from James Robins

As a child growing up in a Christian home, I was given a shiny dime each Sunday morning as my church offering (dimes were real silver in those bygone days; none of this modern cupro-nickel alloy). I learned about tithing in Sunday School—giving one-tenth of ones income to the Lord’s work. But, since I had no job producing income I figured that it did not apply to me. My parents did tithe and I vividly remember seeing my father writing a check as part of his worship preparation.

My first significant job was as a newly married member of the United States Air Force. With my new income producing job I figured that tithing now applied to me. I remember standing next to my bride holding my initial paycheck and wondering how to handle the money that the check represented. Immediately there came into my mind an idea so clear and correct that it had to be providential: “Hand it to Betty.” So, I did (establishing a precedent followed forever thereafter).

She had also been reared in a tithing family and so it was a natural progression for us to follow suite in this regard. Good things resulted. First, we were forced to budget our money. This oft overlooked practice is absolutely required to obtain overall financial control. It also aides in determining the Bible directed amount of ones weekly offering. Second, it helped us resist materialism—the preoccupation with possessions. I like to think of tithing as a God given antidote to the poison of materialism. We continued tithing as the years went by, although it was tempting to divert from the practice during lean financial times. By God’s grace there was never a time when any of our real needs went unmet.

I became acquainted with Malachi 3: 10 regarding the tithe: “‘Test me in this’, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.’” I have performed this test. It works. It continues to work in my life for I receive many blessings: health, family, employment, financial stability, spiritual growth, and marriage to a superb money manager.

Finally, in my latter years I have realized that the Creator of the universe does not need my money; He can accomplish His purposes independent of my contributions. What He does need is my faith-fueled love and worship. It pleases me to give according to Biblical direction as an act of that worship.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:6–7

Day Three

from Vernon Warnecke

I started attending Accokeek Baptist church in 1967 and was involved with the youth program. It was there one night that Rev. Strother pulled me aside for a serious talk and prayer about the Lord. He explained the sacrifice that was made for me: Jesus shedding his blood so my sins could be washed away, the crucifixion and the promise of eternal life and forgiveness of my sins. That night I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior

I gradually increased my participation at church and started attending Sunday school and training union. Yes, training union. It took several years for me to get fully engaged in church. My wife was very instrumental in this: she was always praying for me and encouraging me. We wanted a family with Christian values and godly principles. At the time, we did not have any children, but if God would bless us with children, we wanted to raise them in a Christian home.

God blessed us with two children who were indeed raised in a Christian home. They attended Weems Creek Church until they left for college. My wife was a stay at home mom who dedicated her life to God and family; she was my rock. My family and I have gone through trials during which God walked with us. It has made me stronger in my faith and in my walk with the Lord. There was: loss of employment, my wife's cancer and loss of a son. God walked with me through these times of trials and tribulations; they were not easy. God was there for me providing encouragement and Biblical direction.

One of my biggest stumbling blocks was committing to a tithe. I had a fear as a young married man that I would not be able to provide for my wife and family. We purchased a new home; I had all these additional bills that I did not have with apartment living. Two months later we found out we were going to have our first child. I had financial fear of not being able to meet my obligations. I felt that it was not necessary for me to tithe—I believed I was already doing what I should be doing to be a good servant. When I looked to the Bible about tithing; I came across a couple of verses that impacted my heart.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7

And all the tithe of the land, [whether] of the seed of the land, [or] of the fruit of the tree, [is] the Lord's: [it is] holy unto the Lord. Leviticus 27:30

I realized that everything I have is provided to me and my family by our Lord. He opens the doors for us and provides. I started slowly making contributions until I was able to commit to a tithe. God was patient with me. It took a while for me to attain the goal of tithing but He showed me the way. Then I learned about sacrificial giving to Annie Armstrong, Lottie Moon and others. I have participated in the previous Building Fund Campaigns and found it to be such a blessing. I look forward to praying Gods direction in this new campaign to reduce debt from the new facilities God has allowed. I never miss what we return to the Lord sacrificially. He always provides for my family more than we need; the first bill we pay each month is to our Lord.

I would like to share a story with you about the prophet Elijah. When he met the widow at Zarephath in Zidon Elijah asks for bread and water. The widow says:

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die." Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says:'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'" She went away and did as Elijah had told her, so there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah. 1 Kings 17:12–16

In closing, I have participated in the past capital campaigns in addition to tithing and I have never felt a need financially—God provides all that myself and my family has needed.

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35

God provides for my family. He keeps my jars of oil and flour at a level that meets all my family's needs. Thank you for allowing me to share this with you!

Day Four

from Ashley Francis

Weems Creek Church has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. My grandmother, Theresa Francois, started bringing me to the church when I was just an infant and since then, Weems has been my church home and my family. Lying in bed one night at my grandmother's home, I prayed that Jesus would be Lord of my heart and my life. Even at the young age of 7, I remember understanding Jesus's love for me and knowing that I wanted to be with Christ one day when I died. As a young Christian, it was many of you—my church family—who, through prayer and teaching, guided me in my spiritual journey and helped my faith to grow. Mrs. Bryant read me Bible stories; Fred Fogler sparked my interest in worship through music; Ms. Karin taught me the books of the Bible; Ms. Phyllis coached me to memorize Scripture through song; Mr. Gracie challenged me to think deeply about Scripture through youth Bible study; Justin gave me confidence in leadership positions in children's and youth ministries; Andy and Micelle Hallmark gave me spiritual guidance and accountability; Jean Guth mentored me and lead me to a deeper understanding of the Gospel; Many of you committed to pray for me through dental school and even now as I work in private practice. I know the blessings of the Lord because I know each of you!

I always knew the blessing of a church family, but it is now—as a wife and mother—that I truly value what the Lord has given me through Weems. When I was a youth at Weems, our group was very unique—something purely crafted by God. We didn't just go to church together, but we did everything together! Our youth group was my friend group. We went to school, church, birthday parties, sleepovers— together! We even married one another—three couples from my time as a youth were dating then and are now married with children—how often does that happen? I find that this is my prayer for my children: that the Lord will craft their friend group and lead them to salvation, that they will have the love and support that I had, and that God will bless them with a close group Christian friends and loving church family.

Through Weems I have had the opportunity to serve the Lord through various ministries and participate with missions both in Annapolis and around the world. In 2005 I traveled to Ecuador under the leadership of Andy and Micelle Hallmark.

It was during this trip that the Lord opened my eyes to some plans He had for me. Ecuador is where God put in my heart a desire to pursue a career in dentistry and also a desire for Biblical stewardship. During worship one evening, pastor Will Snipes urged us to pray over and over again until we received a direct answer from the Lord. He encouraged us to pray this prayer: Lord show me something in my life that I can change for You. I remember thinking that maybe God would show me something small and perhaps speak a new meaning of Scripture into my heart. I sat down while everyone else was singing and I started praying that prayer over and over again—asking God to be direct with me. I didn't hear a voice from heaven call down to me; I didn't get a nudge on the shoulder or even a still, small whisper—so I stood up and started singing with everyone else. But then, the first words I saw on the projector screen while singing the song Blessed Be Your Name was God's obvious answer to my prayer: "Though there's pain in the offering, Blessed be Your Name." As I read those words, I was certain the Lord had spoken and answered my prayer.

You see, growing up I had always been good with money. I started working at a young age and always saved my earnings. Through high school I worked three jobs and was proud that I could purchase my first car and build my savings account. But my working and my saving was for me—it wasn't for the Lord. Being raised in the church, I knew that my gifts and my possessions did not belong to me but it wasn't until that moment in Ecuador, gazing at a song I had sung and played on the piano a million times, when I realized that my heart was selfish. That night I recommitted my life to Christ with a new promise to give as directed by the Bible. Since then, tithing and Biblical giving has become a part of my life and spiritual growth. It has not always been easy for me to give cheerfully—especially during recent times when earnings were cut as a result of COVID-19—but the Holy Spirit has continued to implore me to give and to do so beyond just a tithe. I am overjoyed and so thankful that God has provided all that we have needed and in our greatest times of dependence we have still lived in abundance. I praise God too, for my husband Jon who was raised in an extremely generous and hospitable family. His dedication to sacrificial giving and his spiritual leadership is so encouraging to me; he reminds me of God's truths when I do not feel financial peace. As a couple we have participated with the previous capital campaigns for the new building and we will continue to give to help lower the church's debt so that mission work can be increased, and more lives can be saved for Christ!

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8

Day Five

from Daniel Long

My name is Daniel Long. My wife Beverly and I have been attending Weems Creek Baptist Church for about 10 years. I remember the very first time that we visited and when the church was still worshipping in the old upstairs sanctuary. I remember the service when members of the church who had just returned from mission trips gave reports to the congregation on those trips that they had personally conducted. Afterwards, Pastor David Orr preached the Gospel. We weren't looking for a church with a big auditorium; we were looking for an active Southern Baptist church with a strong missions program. We have been attending Weems Creek ever since that first visit. There wasn't a need to visit any other churches.

For about 18 years, we had traveled and lived overseas. We directly benefited by being able to attend churches that were supported by the Southern Baptist International Missions Board. The preaching and teaching of these churches were consistent with Scripture—telling of a Savior who loved us so much that He left His home in glory to come and live among us, die for us, and who rose again on the third day, freeing us from the penalty of eternal death and sin. We were able to attend churches in areas that were openly hostile to the Gospel; Southern Baptist missionaries were there reaching out to those who would hear.

Weems Creek has initiated a program to reduce the amount of debt we owe in order to increase the amount of money we are able to give to missions. The program is very timely and focused with a clear goal in mind—reduce the debt in order to help those so desperately in need on the mission field both here and overseas. That is the opportunity before us: reduce the debt in order to give more money to missions. If we need any convincing, the letter that the church recently received from the Wade Akins ministry in July 2020 is a very powerful persuader. Rev. Akins wrote to the church expressing thanks for the contributions that the church had made to that ministry. He included a letter from one of the indigenous pastors whose church was a recipient of some of the money. There were details about the ministry which provided food packages to people who were literally expecting to starve to death. They were so thankful for the food and as a result listened to a presentation of the Gospel. According to the Southern Baptist International Mission Board almost

750 million people live in unreached, unengaged people groups, where they have “no access to the gospel message and few can find portions of Scripture in their own language.”

We have participated in each of the building campaigns since we started attending Weems Creek. One of the things that has impressed us about the building programs is that the church presents the opportunity to the congregation and leaves it up to the congregation about how to respond: whatever the Lord impresses upon your heart to give. I believe that this is a great opportunity for the church to ultimately increase its mission giving and the spreading of the Gospel!

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? *Psalm 27:1*

WEEK 4

The Body of Believers

Biblical Basis for Christian Giving

Build Your kingdom here;
Let the darkness fear.
Show Your mighty hand;
Heal our streets and land.
Set Your church on fire;
Win this nation back.
Change the atmosphere;
Build Your kingdom here
We pray!

LYRICS FROM *BUILD YOUR KINGDOM HERE*,
REND COLLECTIVE

What comes to mind when you think of “church?” A building? A place of worship? An institution? A family? The Church is the Body of Believers—followers of Christ who have given their hearts, souls and minds to Jesus and who are dedicated to serving Him. At Weems Creek, it is our prayer that we be a multi-generational church committed to authentic, healthy relationships that connect people with God and each other. Church can certainly be a place to worship, build relationships and fellowship. We sing songs together; We eat and drink together; We encourage one another, pray for one another and enjoy friendships. But above all, we are called to share Christ’s love with others—to speak His Word and plant the seed of salvation to build His Kingdom.

Christ gave himself up for us and as The Church, we are to walk in love and live our lives as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2). Jesus promised such a task will not be easy. The Body of Believers will face persecution now and always but we will be resilient! Christ is our cornerstone. Praise the Lord that the gates of hell cannot prevail against us (Matthew 16:18). His power is in us and the Spirit encourages us to obey Jesus’s words: Seek First the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Day One

from Michael Gardner

I grew up in the church and have always been involved in church activities: Sunday school, youth group, Bible camps, and more. Reflecting upon those times though, it is clear that I never really knew what it meant to be a Christian and lead a Christ-like life. I was immature in my faith and I never knew how to mature even though I went through Lutheran Catechism, spent every summer at a Young Life camp, went to church multiple times a week and attended a weekly Bible study.

I carried this immature Christian view with me for most of my young adult life. Those who know me know I struggled mightily during that time. I experienced some of the most tragic and darkest pains on the battlefield and came home to feelings of frustration and failure as a husband and father. Throughout all of this, God never gave up on me; He has always had a plan for me.

Arriving at Weems Creek four years ago was no coincidence; it was all a part of His plan. My wife and I had just moved to the area with our family of three young, wonderful children. We had never been a part of a Baptist Church, but the loving community and family outreach drew us in through the "front door." We had found a home! For me, God's plan and ultimate gift was just around the corner. Experiencing and being consumed by a community that was (and is) centered on Christ brought a whole new way of thinking to my life. Through Weems Creek, I finally met God where I was at in my life. After a little over a year at Weems Creek, I was ready to stop holding on to my immature Christian views and start living a Christ-like life. I was baptized in the church and God gave me new life in Him.

Now, my kids are learning to truly love God each day, my wife is flourishing in her own walk with the Lord, and I see life through the lens of a Christ-like life. Weems Creek will always be home for me and my family; we are blessed abundantly by the riches of God. To Live is Christ!

Jesus answered, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." John 14:6

Day Two

from Gracyn Bryant

Growing up, I regularly attended church and Sunday School. At a young age, I learned about God and all the wonderful miracles He performed and how He always accepted people just the way they were. The first time I saw a baptism, I was in awe. We learned about baptism in Sunday school and I enjoyed learning about its true meaning. I wanted to accept Christ as my Savior. But sports began to interrupt my time going to church. I started playing soccer and would travel to go to tournaments or play games on the weekends and as a result was unable to go to church. Despite this, I continued to read my Bible and pray to God before I went to bed every night. Even though I was not attending church God was still at work in my life. God was still guiding me down the path that he had planned for me and was blessing beyond belief with soccer opportunities.

Then something happened in my life that left me at a standstill and left me very angry with God: my parents got divorced. I could not understand why God was letting this happen to my family. My dad and brother moved away, and my mom and I stayed together. During this time, I was so angry and turned away from God. One night, I was sitting in my bed and realized that God was not the reason for my parents' divorce. I picked up my Bible before bed and began reading His Word again. It was in that moment that I decided that God was my Savior and that I wanted to continue to read His Word and learn more and more about Him.

When I came home from college, my mom and I tried out many different churches in the Annapolis area; we really enjoyed the welcoming feel at Weems Creek. It took a little while for me to get involved in the church and all that it offers to people my age. I remember sitting in the sanctuary one Sunday and two young adults came up to me and invited me to attend their Sunday School group. At first, I was a little shy but then decided to attend. I found that I really enjoyed reading His Word with people my age and discussing how to apply what we learned in our everyday lives. I then started to serve at the Welcome Center by welcoming newcomers into our church and helping them connect with a Sunday school class. I also became a VBS volunteer; I loved seeing the joy on the children's' faces as they learned about God through videos, dancing, and stories.

After being provided all these opportunities at Weems Creek, I decided that I wanted to publicly declare my faith through baptism. Getting baptized was the best day of my life. Through baptism I was able to share that God had helped me bury my old life of sin and begin my new life in Jesus Christ. After being baptized, I felt as though I could still do more to help serve. That is when the position opened up to be a Sunday School teacher. Teaching children Bible stories and helping them become closer with God every Sunday feels like part of God's plan at work in my life! Weems Creek has helped me continue to grow in my faith through all these opportunities and I cannot wait to help more children grow in their faith!

She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.

Proverbs 31:25

Day Three

from Vanessa Rivera

“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 a hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

This is what I would call my life verse. This simple verse is packed with so much truth and comfort. It helps me stay grounded, it gives me strength in times of trials, it gives me hope.

Growing up, life was not easy. I grew up in a broken home where abuse and domestic violence was prevalent. As a child I grew up hearing “you are unworthy,” “you are alive because of me,” “you are not enough.” I felt alone and abandoned. The more alone I felt the more I sought the approval of others to fill the empty void in my heart. I became very consumed with what people thought of me and was living for acceptance of the world. At my lowest point when I was alone and afraid, God drew me to Himself. At the age of 12 I experienced church for the first time. I heard about a Savior. I heard about a father who loved me dearly and wanted to have a personal relationship with me. The concept that someone loved me enough to die and that someone cared for me was so inspiring but also so difficult to understand. Why would someone care for me? As I started to attend youth group and got involved in church, I came across this verse during a devotional. At 13 years old, this verse left me with so many questions. If God is who He says He is and has plans to prosper me and not harm me, then why would I be placed in this home environment? I struggled with this question for many years. As a teenager and young adult, I walked through life always seeking approval of others and working hard to gain acceptance. Now I look back and can see His promises fulfilled. Being a Christian didn’t mean that my life just became perfect. No matter what the struggle was I now see God’s hand at work and His purposes for me. There are so many examples of God’s love in my life: the stepfather who loved me dearly and cared for me, the second stepfather who took me to church for the first time, the lovely family who always went out of their way to make sure I had a ride to church, the youth pastor who encouraged me to seek the Lord with all my heart, and finally the church family who adopted me and took me into their home. He made it clear that I do not have to earn my salvation or His love (Ephesians 2:8–9). He has given me fulfillment and purpose and joy. Regardless of the trials I face, I know that the Lord will always provide. He has proven day after day to be my rock and my redeemer.

Day Four

from Joseph Grigg

When Amy and I consider our individual testimonies of how we came to know God and where we came from, our lives look almost nothing alike. If our past was painted, I doubt even the same pallet of colors would have been used; the medium would have been different, the emotions of the painter would have been in stark contrast, and once completed, it would likely be impossible to find the same paintings in remotely the same gallery. When we met however, those pictures started to blur into one another and over time have become something much greater. I often forget what life was like before Amy and the boys were in it. While far from finished, the painting of our lives now is something much more pleasing and relevant, and God is at the center of it.

Almost the full extent of our relationship has been while attending Weems Creek. In fact, I first got Amy's phone number while inviting her to our Sunday School hangout after church; I said I would text her the details. If you know me, you will know I am not "smooth," and I am sure she had no doubt that I just liked her! We had actually first met the year prior during Thanksgiving of 2009 when I tagged along with my brother to his girlfriend's family gathering. I had just broken up with my ex-girlfriend weeks before. Amy was there because she is a cousin of the girl my brother was dating (who is now his wife, Meredith—nice girl, has cute kids) and Amy showed up with her boyfriend. We did not talk other than a possible greeting and I just ate a ton of food and fell asleep on the couch—a tradition I hold to this day. The next time we met was the following July 4th, again I was tagging along with my brother to another the family gathering. Lo and behold this time Amy was there not only single, but with a brand-new puppy, Emma, her beloved furry baby. Thus, I used the excuse of my love for puppies to gain a way to chat with her! At the time, I was trying to get back on my feet. I had only been working full time as a massage therapist for two weeks and I had recently moved back into my parents' home. Amy, on the other hand, had been working at NASA for 9 years. Massage therapy was not my last career change; I am now a Software Engineer and have been for the last 5 years. Despite having a drastically more stable career outlook, Amy has always been incredibly supportive of me by showing respect for my financial support of our family.

Fast forwarding to the present, Amy and I share one thing that binds us: our faith (also paint colors—we have never had to exchange much more than a “yeah I like that” when it comes to choosing paint colors). Our marriage has not been extremely rough, but we have had to overcome lots of things—mostly about each other. We have had to learn about what makes each other tick and what buttons should not be pushed. We remain consistent in our love to each other through commitment to always work things out. Even when things have been hard, we know we love God and want Him to remain as our focus in life.

Amy and I not only have remained dedicated to each other, but we’ve also dedicated ourselves to serving others. The Vacation Bible School program at Weems has been the biggest source of our service together. Amy has taken on the role of the VBS director several times and I’ve fulfilled many roles (mostly recreation). We learned a lot about and from one another when we taught the 4th grade class together. At Weems Creek we have made a lot of friends. We have attended Sunday School together and have been a part of marriage strengthening classes. I would be remiss if I did not include the church as part of the reason our marriage remains intact and alive. We see the many ways that God is at work in the church and at work in us through our service. While our story is far from over, we both feel incredibly blessed to have such a wonderful church that we call our family.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17

Day Five

from Melissa Gardner

My husband likes to use the phrase “grow where you’re planted” and as a military family, we’ve certainly been “planted” in a lot of different places. In October 2016 we found ourselves planted here in Annapolis; by far our loneliest duty station and the farthest we had ever been removed from military-life. And then one day a neighbor invited me to MOPS at Weems Creek. I’m pretty sure I haven’t missed a single MOPS in the 4 years since. I was welcomed into that community so completely, invited into those friendships unhesitatingly, and loved unconditionally. All the while we were still searching for a church home, and I suggested we try Weems Creek because I loved the MOPS group so much. At the time, my boys were 5 and Annabel had just turned 1 and we knew we were entering a stage of our family life where our top priorities for church were simple: 1. A church that preached Christ and 2. A church that was centered on the whole family. And we found that in Weems Creek.

Over these past 4 years nothing has brought me greater joy than seeing my boys excited for Sunday School, memorizing verses through AWANA, Annabel asking when she gets to go back to MOPS, and my husband building deeper relationships with fellow Christian men. Since the pandemic closed our preschool rooms, for the first time ever all five of our family members have been in church together on Sunday mornings and somehow the kids have gotten the idea in their heads that we hold hands during the final song. It makes me want to weep every single Sunday, looking down at their hands clasped together in worship; our little row of 5 praising God together. Esther reminds us that perhaps we are here for such a time as this (Esther 4:14) and Ecclesiastes reaffirms that for everything there is a season (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8) and I have to believe God planted our family at Weems Creek for a purpose; that each of us has grown deeper in our relationship with the Lord and with each other through this community. There are not enough words to express my gratefulness that we were planted at Weems Creek Church.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3: 1–8

Closing Prayer and Thoughts

from Jon and Ashley Francis

Lord, we are so thankful to be a part of a church that is committed to action. You command us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only and a doer who acts will be blessed (James 1:22, 25). We thank You for guiding our church leaders to make Biblical based decisions that encourage us towards obedience. We praise You for your work in the members of Weems Creek Church and we thank You that Weems Creek shows love and support for its members and for others—both believers and non-believers—who are beyond its walls. We pray that through this campaign and through the sharing of testimonies of your sons and daughters, your Name will be glorified. We come to You with expectant hearts, that our desires will align with Yours and that as we ask and seek, You will provide. In Your holy Name we pray, Amen.

Thank you for taking the time to read these messages from members of Weems Creek Church. The blessing of the Lord is evident amongst our congregation! We hope that you have been able to see His love, power and provision from these testimonies and that the Lord has encouraged you through these examples. We are excited to see what God has in store for Weems Creek Church and we urge you to commit yourselves to praying for the Body of Believers. Consider what the Lord has shown you during these past weeks and how your life, your talents and your resources can be used to fulfill the Great Commission. We join you in this journey to reach the nations with the Gospel and look forward to the day when the whole earth recognizes and rejoices in His glory!





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