

Oakleaves

A note from Pastor Ben

In seminary, I was forced to read leadership books. These books are all about methods for leading organizations and metrics to determine the health of institutions. While some of them offered helpful insights, most of them were influenced more by business tactics than Biblical truth. Ever since, any hint of leadership language makes me feel a little queasy. Yet of all the leadership lessons these books suggest, there is one that I've found to be undeniably true in the church: "It's impossible to lead if you don't know where you're going." So, where are we going?



Celebrating Baptism Sunday

One of my main goals in the second half of 2024 was to think carefully with the elders about this question. Who are we as a church and where do we hope this church is going? What is our heart and what are our hopes? What do we value and what is our vision for the future?

I'd like to put words to some of what's been coming out of those conversations. As you read what follows, I hope you'll see the heart of our church shining through and feel your heart longing for the same:

1. We long to be a church where the gospel permeates deep into our hearts, saturates every part of our lives, and radiates out from us into our community.
2. We long to be a church that seeks to intentionally cultivate biblical literacy. A church where we seek to equip every member to rightly handle the Word of Truth.
3. We long to be a church where the faithful exposition (preaching) of God's Word sets the agenda for our gathered worship, leads us into greater depths of understanding, and produces greater heights of joy.
4. We long to be a church that sees ourselves as members of the historic Christian faith. A church that is self-consciously connected to "the great cloud of witnesses" that came before us.
5. We long to be a church where our gathered worship is focused more on giving God the praise he's due, than giving man the experience he desires.
6. We long to be a church that treats prayer as essential to our mission. A church that treats prayer not as an afterthought, but as a way that we call out in dependence for the Lord to work in all things.
7. We long to be a church where deep community is the natural byproduct of spiritual unity. A church where we grow in both intimacy and responsibility for one another.
8. We long to be a church where wholistic disciples are made. A church where we teach the head to know what's true, equip the hands to do what's good, and stir the heart to delight in what's beautiful.
9. We long to be a church where healthy leaders cultivate healthy community. A church where leaders of all kinds are equipped, empowered, and supported in the work that the Lord has called them to do.
10. We long to be a church where every member knows his place in the mission of God. A church where everyone is equipped and empowered to fulfill the role God has given them in the kingdom.

I can understand if you think this sounds a little idealistic. I'm ok with that. Whether we fulfill these hopes or not, they offer our church a target to aim for. They allow us to set our bearings, pick our course, and prioritize our steps. Yet, I don't think these hopes are unrealistic. In fact, if we take a long view, take small steps, and stay on course, I'm confident that the Lord can do all this and more in the life of our church. Here are four simple ways we will take decisive steps together in the first quarter of 2025:

New Membership – This February, we will offer a new membership class. While this new class will look similar to the old class, we will extend it over three weeks in order to better help new members understand who we are and how the Gospel shapes every element of our community.

Prayer Gatherings – We will continue our monthly prayer gatherings through the Lord's Prayer and are looking forward to a new monthly prayer series coming this summer called "Praying in Exile."

Elder Training – We will begin identifying new elder candidates and start walking with them through an intentional process of discernment and equipping for the task of eldership.

Mission Plan – We will be offering an evangelism class to help our church consider what it looks like to live on "realistic daily mission." We hope this will give us the chance to craft a clearer vision for how we will reach our community with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the end of the day, "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps (Prov. 16:6)." May the Lord take our meager efforts and use them as he sees fit unto his glory.

With love, **Ben**

Youth and Family Ministry

Hello Church Family,

We have a lot of fun things planned for this coming spring for the Youth and Children's Ministry! Starting with the youth, we are in a sermon series through the Gospel of Luke titled, Dear Theophilus. The title of this series comes from Luke 1:3; the Gospel of Luke is written to someone bearing this name. Theophilus means "Loved by God." Many theologians speculate this name wasn't someone's given name, but rather a title. Thus, the Gospel of Luke is written to and for anyone whom God loves. One of the hopes is that the youth recognize: 1) Jesus is a historical person and this is an eyewitness report of His life and ministry and 2) Even though this was written to a specific people at a specific time, this is written for their benefit as well. They are "Theophilus." They are someone whom God loves.

This spring we do have a few fun events planned. One desire that the youth had expressed at the beginning of the year was to go fishing. We don't have a specific day that we are going to go quite yet, but that is something that we are going to try and do this spring. Another thing that the youth love to do is hike. This is something that we did last summer and it was a great time to get out



and enjoy God's creation.

My request to you church is prayer for our youth. They are at the age where they are beginning to either take ownership of their faith or continue to be a bystander. This past year, one of our youth, Jared Reynolds, took a step in his faith and was baptized. We should be praying for more of that. Most of our youth are in their sophomore year and that is such a crucial year in a young person's faith journey. So please join me in praying that God continues to draw these students closer to Him in faith and actions.

Now onto the Children's Ministry. This spring, our Children's Church will be going through the Book of Acts. The curriculum we are using is called The Biggest Story. They have a podcast and youtube channel associated with the curriculum. I highly recommend going on there and seeing for yourself what we are teaching the children each Sunday. It is a great way for you, the parents/guardians, to start having a conversation with your children about faith.

This spring we are also getting together with other churches to put on larger events. One of those events is AWANA. The restart date for that is March 12. That is subject to change so be on the lookout for the spring launch of that. We are also partnering with Redemption again to put on the Easter Eggspllosion! That will be the Saturday before Easter Sunday.

Pastor Jack Jellison



Pastor Jack and Jared Reynolds: Raised to new life in Christ!



Angel Breakfast

Our first FBC Ojai Angel Breakfast was a success thanks to Jan Worsham and all the children's church volunteers. What a special morning of food, crafts, and fun!



Prayer Request

From Rick Scott:

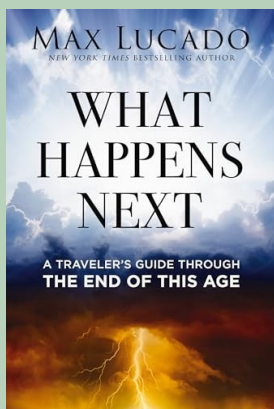
We ask for your prayers for Skyler Hodge, a resident of Ojai and cousin to Bob, a Forest Home Ojai staff member. Skyler, a former doctor and a devoted mother to her 3-year-old son, is courageously battling Jacob-Creutzfeldt disease, an extremely rare and devastating neurological condition that affects approximately one in a million people worldwide each year. This disease has profoundly impacted Skyler's life. She is no longer able to communicate or walk on her own and requires full-time care.

The family is asking for the church to pray for healing. Please also pray for strength, comfort, grace and peace to surround Skyler and her family during this incredibly difficult time. Pray that a great faith would be stirred within her family through this tribulation.

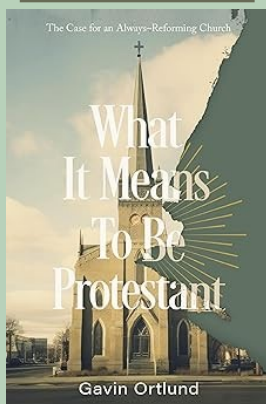
Thank you for keeping Skyler, her son, and her family in your prayers.

Women's Book Club

Our Women's Book Club is always open to new women who enjoy reading and fellowship! They meet on the second Saturday of each month (usually!) at 9:30 AM in Smith Hall. Here are the selections for February and March:



February 8
What Happens Next
by Max Lucado



March 8
What It Means to Be Protestant
by Gavin Ortland

Women's Ministry

Happy New Year Everyone! I pray you had a wonderful Christmas with family and friends. Well, here we go, up and running. We started off with a baby shower for Megan Burris on Saturday, January 18 at 11am in Smith Hall. Approximately 30-35 women attended and showered Megan with love, food and gifts. Thank you all who attended and blessed her.

We started our Women's Bible Study on Wednesday, January 22 at 9:30 am in Smith Hall. We are studying Priscilla Shirer's *I Surrender All*. This

book is a fervent appeal and invitation to surrender everything to Jesus. We will learn how to follow Him not just as our Savior, but as our priority, our first love, our Lord. To move beyond being a believer to becoming His disciple. This is a nine-week study and will end with a scrumptious potluck, as we always do. Child care will be provided.

Jill Adams is overseeing the Women's Book Club and has picked some wonderful books this season. Check them out to the left.

Blessings,

Cyndi & Tina



Above and Below: Our annual Christmas party at Char Hartenstein's house.



The Hassien women put on a baby shower to remember. Can't wait to meet Baby Girl Burris ❤️



Worship Spotlight

Dear Church,

I have been studying the Japanese language on my own for many years now. As I am sure many of you know, it is difficult! Now, of course this is true of most languages that are not our native tongue. At the start of the school year, I tell my music students that

music is a language, so we will learn it the way that humans learn language: teachers make sound, students repeat sound, teacher shows visual representation of sound while repeating the sound, students look at the visual and repeat the sound, etc. As you all might remember from teaching, raising a child, or learning yourself, this process takes time... a lot more if you have no personal drive to learn it.

Now, Japanese has three distinct but intertwined writing systems, a distinctly different phonetic system from English (but easier to understand in my opinion!), and of course the colloquialisms that come with any language. But these are not what I find difficult. For me, the biggest difficulty is that I have not made it a priority to practice Japanese conversation, because there is much you can only learn through speaking.

Through my study, I have learned a lot about Japanese culture and spent time analyzing the language's differences between my native tongue and other languages that I have had to study. What I have discovered is that Japanese is what I call a "listening language." A language like this requires more attentiveness to subtle details of word and speech. Things are assumed from sentence to sentence so more and more words can be omitted as a conversation continues between people. Now, this happens in English, but not to the extent that it happens in Japanese (or in another language that I chose to try in college: ancient Greek). This may be the one thing I have found most non-native Japanese learners bemoan as difficult. Once I recognized this, I felt an intense desire to be more attentive in every language - to really listen. When a friend speaks, my family shares a need, when the Word is spoken... the subtleties in each word yearn for attention. This doesn't mean every conversation is a search for hidden meaning or an exercise in mind reading; just that through the context of a life lived together, we will understand what people need. As Paul (via Pastor Ben) says, "make your brother's problems your own." The only way to do that is to make opportunities to listen well.

The Spirit speaks in a similar fashion (1 Kings 19:9-18, et al.) and the more we spend time with the Spirit, the more the subtle nudges become clearer guides for us to follow. As we are concluding Galatians as a church, Paul's call for us to "sow to the Spirit" (Gal 6:8) must include our laments as much as our joys as it is meant to draw us in to better understanding of God's will for us; for us to move with Him. Our actions will be driven by an understanding of what the Spirit is telling each of us through the subtle voice, visual, or action of a brother or sister. May we learn to listen well.

Agape,

Edward White



Pictures



Davie Ruhl helping Megan Burris with the shower gifts ❤️



Right: Thank you to the Hassiens, the Woodalls, and Rod Owen for a fantastic Christmas feast after our baptism in December.



Left: Philip Woodall and Laura Masonheimer prep for Good News Club. Keep praying for more boys and girls to join the club!

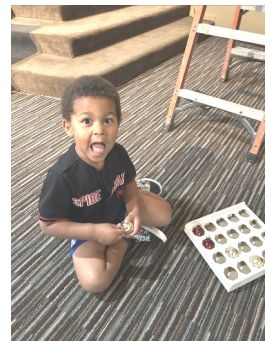


Martha Starkweather

Our beautiful Martha went home to be with the Lord on December 10 at the age of 103. Martha and her husband Sam were faithful members of FBC Ojai who served their church family well. Service information to come.



Decking the Halls
 Above: Cal and Davie Ruhl
 Above Center: Hezekiah White
 Above Right: Langston White
 Right: Our adult Christmas elves



Birthdays

February

Levi Queen	11	Jan Worsham	21
Valerie Freeman	12	Lucille Elrod	24
Claire Mathieu	17	Ben Larner	25
Cal Ruhl	20	Jan Sommer	26
Adah Queen	21		

March

Jill Adams	2	David Abe	25
Krystal Scott	5	Harry Hunt	27
Mike Nordyke	8	Sarah Turner	29
Cyndi Hassien	10	Gerry Hunsaker	31
Ben Ruhl	17		

April

Debbie Mathieu	3	Letty Vaglica	21
Debbie Woodall	4	Hezekiah White	25
Jena Harris	8	Marcia Hall	27
Darrin Vaglica	12	Mike DiGiulio, Sr.	30
Annette Lathrop	17	Flo White	30
Wade Reynolds	21		

“One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” Psalm 27:4

Anniversaries

February

Todd & Tracy Robison	15
Philippe & Debbie Mathieu	19
Mitchell & Megan Burris	24

March

Chris & Tina Abe	4
Ken & Char Hartenstein	17
Rod & Jenny Owen	21

April

Ron & Annette Lathrop	15
Joel & Bonnie Griffin	28



First Baptist Church of
Ojai

Office Hours:

Tuesday—Friday: 9 AM to 1 PM

Phone: 805-633-9055

Email: office@fbcojai.org

Financial Update

Average monthly offering needed to meet budget: \$24,954

YTD as of December 31, 2024:

Actual Giving: **\$356,041**

Actual Expenses: **\$285,443**

Budgeted Giving,: **\$299,449**

Budgeted Expenses: **\$359,576**

GIVING BREAKDOWN for our MISSIONS 2024:

Philip and Corenne Smith: \$2,780

Dan and Sarah Chetti: \$2,780

Wes and Penny Chappell: \$2,780

E&K Northwest Africa: \$2,780

ABCO FLASH: \$2,225

Short-term Missions: \$7,560

Life Choices: \$1,080

Good News Club: \$750

Topa Topa School: \$1,080

Operation Christmas Child: \$100

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PLACE
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