



FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH  
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# First Word

A CHURCH FAMILY PUBLICATION OF FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH  
JANUARY 2024

## *Are You Busy Chasing Wind?* BY JOEL SUTTON

The author of Ecclesiastes decided to find his purpose in life, so he started where most people begin—by accumulating a vast sum of wealth—only to discover that it didn't provide the meaning he was hoping for. Next he tried power—but it too failed to satisfy. Then was the pursuit of pleasure, quickly followed by fame.

Finally, after all of these pursuits ended in emptiness, he uttered these famous words: "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity." Or as another translation puts it, "All of this is like chasing the wind."

You and I were not created to chase wind. The Bible tells us we were created to join God on a mission. Not only has God created us with a God-shaped vacuum but also a purpose-shaped vacuum in our lives. The desire to make a significant difference is planted in the heart of every human being.

Whenever we wonder if the daily grind of the eight-to-five is all there is in life, this divine desire nudges us. Whenever we feel restless and unsatisfied, the yearning whispers in our soul.

God is in the business of calling people to Himself and transforming their lives so that they reflect Him. And He has called us to roll up our sleeves and join Him with our talents, money, time, and passions. He wants His mission to become ours. It is as though God says, "If you're into chasing wind, you can keep right on doing that. Or you can join me and together we will transform this hurting planet."

At First Free, our Velocity student ministry is showing us the way. On a

Saturday, this past November they sponsored a Serve Day. Eighty-one people from the church, students and families, partnered with both Source Ministry and CRU Inner City. They help pack CRU's Boxes of Love—to be distributed at Thanksgiving to needy families. At Source they repackaged bulk onions and potatoes for a food shelf, worked on hanging a mural in the neighborhood, did some yard work for people in need, and packed 200 gift bags to give out to the homeless. It was a great day of them rolling up their sleeves and doing good together.



In Ephesians 2:8-9, the apostle Paul tells us how we are saved, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no can boast."

Then in the very next verse, Eph. 2:10, Paul tells us why God saved us, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Every person who has experienced Ephesians 2:8-9 (that is, they have been saved by grace through faith) should, by definition, also be experiencing Ephesians 2:10—the good works God has prepared for him or her to do.

God has designed us to be his hands and feet and voice in our world, and every major resource he gives us is given not just for personal benefit but to make a difference in our world. A worthy goal for everyone who is Christ-follower is to be living out the good works God has created for us to do.

God has sent us into the world, like Jesus, to serve. As John Stott said, "This is the natural expression of our love for our neighbors. We love. We go. We serve. And in this we have (or should have) no ulterior motive. True, the gospel lacks visibility if we merely preach it, and lacks credibility if we who preach it are interested only in souls and have no concern about the welfare of people's bodies, situations and communities. Yet the reason for our acceptance of social responsibility is not primarily in order to give the gospel either a visibility or a credibility it would otherwise lack, but rather simple uncomplicated compassion. Love has no need to justify itself. It merely expresses itself in service where it sees need."

This January and February we will be starting a new sermon series "Doing Good" which will be challenging us all to not chase wind, but instead to love people by serving them and doing good. Good deeds get people's attention as few words can.

As we move into this new year of 2024, I wonder about you. Are you busy chasing the wind? Or are you ready to roll up your sleeves and partner with God?

## Creekside Advent Festival



Thank you to everyone who joined us to celebrate Christmas at our annual Creekside Advent Festival!

We decorated cookies, played Christmas bingo, made wreathes, and simmer spice. There was a manger scene photo op, a church-wide scavenger hunt, and hot cocoa, and snacks!



**OUR MISSION:  
TO HELP  
INDIVIDUALS  
BECOME  
CHRIST-CENTERED  
& CHRIST-SENT  
TOGETHER**

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**FAREWELL!**



With mixed emotions, our staff said goodbye to Sarah Olson, our in-house graphic designer for the past five years. We are grateful to Sarah for her years of partnership with us in ministry, often using her skills and talents behind the scenes to make much of what we do at First Free better. In her time on staff, Sarah has become a valuable team member and friend to all of us. And while we are sad to lose her from the staff and office (but not from the church!), we are excited to see what God has for her in the next stage of her life and career. Be sure to join us in thanking Sarah when you see her.

**CHURCH FAMILY NEWS**

- Our condolences to the family of Marie Kingstom who passed away at the age of 97.

**SUNDAY MORNING MARRIAGE ELECTIVE**

by Jay Pound

“And they lived happily ever after.” Many of the movies, stories and tales aimed at children end with this famous refrain. And it isn't hard to see why—it's a nice, happy way to simply and happily wrap up the story. The implicit lesson, communicated over and over and over again, is that finding your spouse is a journey full of challenges, trials and the inevitable misunderstandings. And once you find that special someone—all the hard work is done, the rest is just the smooth and easy trip to your happily ever after. Of course, real life seldom works this way. In real life, both sides of the wedding require work, both sides contain their share of heartbreak, and both sides can be full of satisfaction and joy.

I'm not opposed to these stories, they have their place, and they have remained popular for a reason. But I have started to wonder if we—as families, parents, as a church or a society—have fallen short in our responsibility to correct these rather silly expectations. After all, while those stories can be fun, they do suggest a worldview that is hard to square with the picture of marriage we see in scripture. If you think that the wedding is the end of all the stress and

struggle, just read about the marriages in Genesis: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah...and Rachel. Nothing is easy or automatic—either before or after the wedding.



And yet scripture also ascribes a dignity to marriage that remains without equal. Scripture tells us that marriage is a divinely ordained institution, a lifelong covenant of radical unity and equality, of deep love and rewarding partnership. It is a vision that often exposes our own cultural vision for marriage as a sad and disappointing substitute. For those God calls to marriage, marriage is a unique and wonderful blessing—but a blessing that comes with the expectation of hard work, ready forgiveness and mutual submission to God.

As a church, we want to be faithful to our own responsibility in at least two ways. First, for those called to marriage, we want to foster expectations for marriage that are both honest about our own experiences and faithful to scripture. Second, for those already married, we want to provide encouragement and support and to spur one another on to love, forgiveness and faithfulness. With that in mind, we have decided this year to host a special Marriage Elective in January and February. This is a two week Elective that we will be offering twice in order to make it available to as many as possible.

Jan 21: Session 1	Feb. 04: Session 1
Jan. 28: Session 2	Feb. 11: Session 2

The Elective will be led by Torrey & Sue Robinson. Torrey and Sue are approaching their 40th anniversary this Fall, and have recently retired after four

decades together in ministry. In their years of marriage, parenting, pastoring and studying the Bible, they've learned some important insights for building a successful marriage. As the insurance slogan puts it, "They know a thing or two because they've seen a thing or two." Torrey and Sue are excited to share with the couples of First Free a "thing or two" about building a better marriage. We hope you'll plan to be part of this two week class.



**SAVE THESE DATES!**

**March 1-3** MEN'S RETREAT  
Camp Shamineau

**March 9** TERRACE ON CHICAGO  
Velocity Student Fundraiser



Thank you to all who submitted art to the Advent gallery!

Left to Right:  
1 & 2: Karen Manos  
3: Marlene Maloney  
4 & 5: Created to Create Class

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