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# First Word

A CHURCH FAMILY PUBLICATION OF FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

MAY 2025

## *The Slow but Remarkable Work of Transformation* BY JAY POUND

One of the most dramatic stories of the New Testament is the transformation of Saul into the apostle Paul. And I use transformation advisedly. Paul does have a conversion, almost the epitome of a conversion while on the road to Damascus. But the conversion, powerful and interesting as it is, is only the beginning—and in many ways, the least remarkable part of the story.

I know why the conversion gets all of the attention—it is a genuinely remarkable event, and one full of pathos. It reads almost like a movie script. Saul of Tarsus had made himself the nemesis of the nascent church, ruthlessly persecuting those who dared to profess allegiance to Jesus as their Lord and Messiah. Saul had supervised with approval the stoning to death of Stephen (Acts 8:1). He had worked strategically to destroy the church, going house to house in Jerusalem, dragging off those who professed faith in Jesus and throwing them in prison (Acts 8:3). He was making “murderous threats” to any who identified themselves with the church (Acts 9:1).

And then, as this zealous persecutor of Jesus and his followers was on the road to Damascus, for the express purpose of rooting out the church in that city, he is confronted face-to-face with the risen Jesus. And Saul of Tarsus, destroyer of

the church of Jesus, recognizes in that moment, I am sure with grief and horror, that he has been gravely mistaken. In a moment, Saul realizes that he is wrong, and those he has been persecuting are right: Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. It is a dramatic moment, and one which alters the course of Saul’s life dramatically and permanently.

But while Saul’s conversion is exciting, I think that in a way it is the less surprising, what I find more impressive, and more incredible, is the gradual, ongoing transformation. Yes, we can and should celebrate that in a moment, Saul went from opposing Jesus to proclaiming him. But the power of the gospel is made clear not so much in that one moment, in that new commitment, but in the life-long process that turned Saul from someone who dragged people out of their houses into someone who was willing to stick out his own neck to see a runaway slave reconciled with his former owner (Philemon). This transformation does not rob Paul of his uniqueness or personality, but it does—slowly and gradually—reshape his character and priorities after the example of Jesus.

Today, especially in our stream of the faith, we put a great deal of emphasis on conversion—as well we should. Without conversion, there is no life-long journey of

transformation. But the journey deserves emphasis too—the journey is where we spend most of our lives. And I know the journey is less dramatic, less exciting. Sometimes it can be hard to tell if we are making any progress from one day or one week to the next. But it is amazing what slow daily change can accomplish over five years—or fifty (just look at a picture of yourself from 20 years ago). And, of course, the whole point of conversion is that we are now free to live as God in Christ has called us to live.

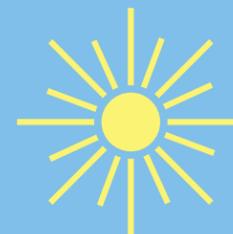
With that in mind, we are beginning a new sermon series focused on the journey and the life-long work of transformation. Each Sunday, we will explore together one of the many time-tested, biblical tools God has provided to help us follow in the way of Jesus. We have chosen to call these practices because these are all things that we can do that do things to us (think practicing the piano, practicing your forehand, or making a practice to wait at least an hour before responding to any post on social media). These practices (prayer, fasting, worship, confession) have their roots in scripture, and have centuries of successful use by the church. Our hope is that as we explore these together, we will all discover tools to help us as we strive to live lives of increasing obedience and faithfulness to Jesus.

# Grad Night

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21

6:30–8:30 P.M.

Join us as we celebrate our high school seniors!



## SUMMER SCHEDULE BEGINS SUNDAY, JUNE 1

Services begin @ 10:00 a.m. with fellowship time to follow  
No Velocity youth group  
No community hour



## Our Mission:

TO HELP INDIVIDUALS BECOME CHRIST-CENTERED & CHRIST-SENT TOGETHER

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# PRESCHOOL & NURSERY SUMMER PLAN

## I SEE GOD IN NATURE

Summer 2025

### What We'll Learn

#### The Wonder of Creation

Beginning on May 25, we'll deep dive into each day of creation and how we can see God's love represented in everything around us.

Lessons will be inspired by faith-building scientific facts and biblical truths from the devotionals *Indescribable* by Louie Giglio, *God is in Nature* by Jessica Doebler, and other age appropriate picture books.

#### God Made Me to Worship

In August, we'll explore different ways to worship and praise God for his creation; from chalk art & watercolors to dance & song!

Finally, during an upcoming Fall Sunday, children will have the opportunity to lead the congregation in song by joining the Worship Team during the service - you won't want to miss it!

### Purpose

Through this summer curriculum, toddlers and preschoolers will learn how to see the glory and power of God in nature and how this leads our hearts to worship Him!

### Important Dates

#### MAY

25

Summer 1 Service: I See God in Nature begins!

#### AUG

31

Last Summer Service: I See God in Nature final wrap up lesson

### Questions?

Stacey Urbanz  
Children's Ministry Associate  
stacey.urbanz@firstfreechurch.org

# ANNUAL CELEBRATION

## and BUSINESS MEETING

**MAY 18 after the service**

## THANKS FOR JOINING US AT GUYS' NIGHT OUT!



At this year's Guys' Night Out event, we enjoyed a great turn out from all ages. Men with their sons (and even some daughters!) enjoyed food, fun, and prizes.

We look forward to this time of fellowship again next year!

# VACATION BIBLE CAMP IS COMING!

## JUNE 16-20, 2025 FROM 9 A.M. - 12 NOON

### By Carrie Boyum

Children's Ministry Director

Kids will be led on the ultimate Alaskan adventure experiencing worship, watching skits, diving into Bible stories, doing crafts, playing games, and learning scripture. As kids trek the tundra, they'll explore how easy it is to lose sight of what's true in our wild world today. At True North VBC kids will learn that Jesus is our faithful friend whom we can always trust. **He is our True North!**

VBC is for kids entering Preschool - entering 6th grade. VBC is free and friends are welcome and invited to join!

Lots of volunteers are needed to help make True North VBC an awesome week for the kids. Volunteers can be youth entering 7th grade - adults. Nursery is available for kids of volunteers.

Register kids and to volunteer at [firstfreechurch.org/vbc](http://firstfreechurch.org/vbc) or by using this QR code



### Questions?

Reach out to Carrie at [carrie.boyum@firstfreechurch.org](mailto:carrie.boyum@firstfreechurch.org)



## We hope to see YOU at Vacation Bible Camp!