

# The First Epistle

Volume 54 / Issue 4 / August 2021

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY. — LUKE 11:1

## BEFORE THE THRONE

BECOMING A

PRAYING CHURCH

*Read about our 2021-2022 churchwide teaching theme, Before the Throne, in this edition!*

*VBS Director, Cassie Graves, tells how God's faithfulness made 2021 a great year for Backyard Bible School.*

# Before the Throne

## Becoming a Praying Church

*Churchwide teaching theme for 2021-2022*

*Rev. Dr. T.A. David Strain*

The hymn writer James Montgomery wrote that “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, the Christian’s native air.” And yet, an honest evaluation of our prayer lives might demand that we confess our inconsistency in prayer. Prayer, we feel, is hardly “vital” or “native” to us. We struggle to pray for long, or to pray deeply, or even to know what to pray or how to pray. Too often we fall into a rut, repeating thoughtlessly the same stock phrases in prayer. Prayer becomes a cursory duty performed by rote to which we feel driven by guilt and obligation. We are often uncomfortable praying together and when we do, we tend to stick to prayer for the sick only.

And yet, God has suspended the fulfillment of His promises, and the outpouring of His Spirit upon the faithful prayers of His people. Revivals always feature a renewal of the spirit of prayer. Movements of prayer—often spontaneous, fervent—have preceded and sustained all the great awakenings of history. It is

not an exaggeration to say that spiritual vitality is best measured by the fervency and fidelity of the prayer life of the people of God.

If we are to enjoy His blessing upon our lives, and on our ministry as a church, it is vital that we learn how and for what to pray. Jesus taught His disciples a great deal about prayer, and the Bible is filled with instruction and examples of prayer. The resources of heaven are accessed by people who pray. Satan is defeated when we are on our knees in prayer. Conversions happen under preaching in praying churches. Prayer moves mountains.

God is calling First Presbyterian Church before His throne to become a people of prayer. Join us this year as we center our teaching and church life around becoming a praying church.

**“Prayer is  
the Christian’s vital breath,  
the Christian’s native air.”  
— James Montgomery**

### ***Before the Throne Sermon Series***

August 15	Before the Throne: Lord Teach us to Pray	Luke 11:1
August 22	Before the Throne: When You Pray	Matthew 6:5-8
August 29	Before the Throne: Our Father	Matthew 6:9-13
September 5	Before the Throne: Your Kingdom Come	Matthew 6:9-13
September 12	Before the Throne: Feed Us	Matthew 6:9-13
September 19	Before the Throne: Forgive Us	Matthew 6:9-13
September 26	Before the Throne: Lead Us	Matthew 6:9-13
October 3	Before the Throne: Yours the Glory	Matthew 6:9-13
October 10	Before the Throne: When You Fast	Matthew 6:16-18
October 17	Before the Throne: Ask, Seek, Knock	Matthew 7:7-11
October 31	Before the Throne: Pray for Mission	Matthew 9:35-38
November 7	Before the Throne: Prayer for Justice	Luke 18:1-8
November 21	Before the Throne: Prayer for Forgiveness	Luke 18:9-14

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# BEFORE THE THRONE

BECOMING A PRAYING CHURCH



## VBS 2021

### *Blessings Aboard at Backyard Bible School*

When FPC Children's Director Kimberly Wilkins and VBS Director Cassie Graves started planning for VBS 2020, they did not know, of course, that their plans would be thwarted by the outbreak of a global pandemic. Still, after two years of planning and re-planning the largest collective effort of our church community, Wilkins and Graves both say they can see clearly God's blessings and provision.

"The whole experience revealed provision after provision from the Lord," says Graves. "Any time I was discouraged, there was a church member who said 'yes' or was encouraging. It was Him the entire way—answering prayer and being faithful."

Vacation Bible School is not only an annual week of fun and gospel education for the children of FPC. It is also the one time of year that members from every corner of our church body come together to accomplish some-

thing for the glory of God. VBS 2021 was no different, though it ended up looking much different than any other FPC VBS.

When COVID-19 pandemic caused the church to cancel VBS 2020, Wilkins and Graves planned to transfer all the 2020 plans to VBS 2021. But, in early 2021, when the time came to make important logistical preparations for VBS 2021, things at church were still not "back to normal." With so many questions remaining about COVID safety and protocols, Graves was unable to provide volunteers with details about what the week would look like.

"I was completely dumbfounded about how this was going happen," Graves remembers. "I was recruiting volunteers but didn't know exactly what I was recruiting for. I felt like we needed to come up with another direction."

Wilkins and Graves began praying and asking for His will to be done. That's when the idea for a Backyard Bible School emerged.

After that "we had a direction that we could get excited about—One where we could fix our energy on having fun, building church family, and proclaiming the gospel rather than on all the details of COVID prevention and what-ifs," Graves explains.

Just as they do in a normal VBS year, FPC members rallied together to make this new vision for Backyard Bible School work. Church members around the Jackson metropolitan area opened their back yards so that FPC children could be together to learn about Jesus. Teachers took time to prepare and film Bible lessons that were used not only at BBS but also in homes of many who wanted a virtual-only option. The skit team transformed a play set for stage into something that could be recorded and delivered on screen. Dozens of church members and teen helpers volunteered to be greeters and facilitators at packet pick up day and in host homes across the city. Most importantly, the children of our church were able to learn about how Jesus seeks and saves the lost.

The smaller backyard setting led to a more intimate experience for BBS children and volunteers. After a year in which we had been forced to isolate from our church community, the Lord provided a beautiful way for many church members to connect with one another and the children we have committed to shepherd.

Wilkins sums up the BBS success, saying "Our 'Plan B' is always God's 'Plan A'."

Though we are looking forward to hosting VBS 2022 in our building again, we are thankful for the ways God provided for Backyard Bible School this summer.



# Summer 2021



**Women's Ministry**  
*Mother/Daughter/Sister/Friend Picnic*

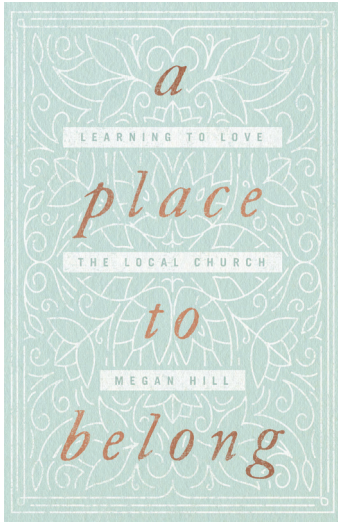


**Student Ministry**  
*Senior High RYM Trip*



# Book Review

## *A Place to Belong: Learning to Love the Local Church* by Megan Hill



Each summer the Women's Ministry sponsors a book club gathering. After a bite of supper and time of brief fellowship, we enjoy some lively discussion centered on our reading. Subject matter is generally one of current issues, interests or concerns.

After a year of such upheaval, it seemed particularly timely to

consider church membership and life within the covenant family. Therefore, our book selection was "A Place to Belong: Learning to Love the Local Church" by Megan Hill. Perhaps you remember Megan as she and pastor husband Rob Hill worshiped and served with us while Rob was a student at RTS and an FPCJ intern. A godly woman and gifted writer, the introduction alone is worth the price of the book.

The thesis of her book is "...we are the most privileged people on earth, that there is nothing to be compared with being a Christian and a member of the mystical body of Christ." We need to see the church as God sees the church and embrace the privilege of being a part of it.

Our gathered group smiled, laughed, and was sobered by the titles the author used to describe the local church: Beloved, Called, Flock, Body, Gospel Partners. Each chapter reminded us of both the solemn duties and eternal delights attendant to membership in Christ's church. "When we take seriously what God says about His church, it will shape our experience of belonging there...and I am absolutely convinced that I am more of Christian in the church than I could ever be alone."

If you're interested in finding more than a cultural, emotional, or experiential engagement with the local church, you'll be given the tools to move in that direction. You'll be beautifully pointed to "a place to belong." This book and others by Megan Hill are available in our church bookstore.



**Young Adults Ministry**  
*Summer Cookouts & Bibles Studies*

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# VISION NIGHT

*August 11, 2021 | Miller Hall*

5:00 Dinner | 5:15–6:10 Ministry Fair | 6:15 Vision Night Presentation