

# The First Epistle

Volume 57 / Issue 1 / Spring 2023



*meet* *your*  
**MINISTERS**

Introducing the first in a series of articles  
that will feature each of our ministers!



**FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH**  
*Jackson, Mississippi*

## What's Inside:

- Twin Lakes Fellowship Recap
- 2023 High School Graduates Dinner
- Missions Conference Overview
- Missions in May
- Meet Your Minister: David Strain

## Welcome to Our World

### Joseph Harrison Kruger

born October 12, 2022  
to Baxter and Emily  
Grandparents: Joe and Anne Wilkins  
and C. Baxter and Beth Kruger

### Brice Layson Denney

born October 27, 2022  
to William and Layson  
Grandparents: Ed and Susan Lawler

### Sophie Shannon Magee

born November 3, 2022  
to Bill and Katelyn Magee  
Grandmother: Fran Armstrong

### Louis Kirk Hood

born December 29, 2022  
to Alex and Anne Morgan  
Grandparents: Jimmy and Paula Hood

### Samuel Allen Thorne

born January 24, 2023  
to Lee and Martha Ann  
Grandparents: Shelia Thorne  
and Carolyn and David Allen

### Jane Frances Jones

born February 9, 2023  
to Andrew and Laura Katherine Jones  
Grandparents: Rob and Gail Jones

### Margaret "Margot" Houston Nicholas

born March 16, 2023  
to Jamey and Mary Hampton  
Grandparents: Mark and Alice Nicholas  
and Wayne and Angie Morrison

Please send First Pres information  
on new additions to your family to  
Emily Eastman at 601-326-9243 or  
[emilye@fpcjackson.org](mailto:emilye@fpcjackson.org).

## Twin Lakes Fellowship Recap



### The Pastoral Epistles: The Man of God and His Ministry

In the pastoral setting of Twin Lakes Camp and Conference Center, a fraternal of 240 pastors gathered after Easter for a time of spiritual refreshment, mutual encouragement, corporate worship, and gospel education.

For over 20 years First Presbyterian has sponsored this three-day conference for pastors and church planters. Dr. Ligon Duncan brought the messages each evening with breakout sessions from pastors and teaching elders including Jason Helopoulos, Jonathan Master, Jonathan Cruse, and Jordan Stone.

Please join us in praying for each of these ministers and the churches they represent. That the gospel would spread throughout their communities and that this time at Twin Lakes Fellowship might provide each minister with lasting relationships and joy in the service of the Lord.





## 2023 High School Graduates Dinner



At the beginning of April, the youth staff gathered together for a sweet night celebrating our 2023 graduates. These students have been part of FPCYM for the past six years. From retreats to small group Bible studies to Midweek fellowship to Sunday School, we are grateful for their involvement and their faithfulness. We are excited for their next steps and are praying for them. Many thanks to Deborah Oakley and her volunteers for coordinating this year's dinner!



The Youth Department gifted each senior with four books to accompany them on their post high school journeys:

- **ESV Bible**
- ***Surviving Religion 101*** by Michael J. Kruger
- ***Rejoice and Tremble*** by Michael Reeves
- ***New Morning Mercies*** by Paul David Tripp

If you would like copies of any of these books for your own collection, you can purchase them at the FPC Bookstore.

## Class of 2023

Stephens Ball  
Nathan Biggs  
Matt Blaylock  
Vanndel Chinchén  
Wilson Cotten  
Thomas Dale  
Ava Dear  
Peter Downing  
Jordan Eduardo  
Mary Elisabeth Greaves  
Emma Greaves  
Paul Gregg  
Alexis Renee Heath  
Emma Hogue  
Olivia Hosey  
Harrison Jones  
Callie Knotts  
William McKelvey  
Romney McLeod  
Margaret Oliver  
Jonathan Pittman  
Rachel Rutledge  
Kimmons Sheppard  
Will Skipper  
Flannery Grace Smith  
Henry Smith  
Joel Strain  
Mary Will Sykes

# MISSIONS RECAP ...

## MISSIONS CONFERENCE 2023

**LORD,**  
extend YOUR  
**KINGDOM.**

Every year, our missions conference is an opportunity for reconnecting with missionaries, recommitting ourselves to our missional stewardship, and having our eyes refocused on God's great plan for saving His people and the great need for laborers in the field. This year was no different. At the end of February, we at First Presbyterian Church Jackson began a week-long celebration of the spread of the gospel throughout the world.

Our 2023 theme called on the Mighty Lord to Extend His Kingdom, and God gave us many examples of how He is doing that very thing. The Lord is using His people to do the work of evangelism and discipleship around the world.

Cory Brock, one of our own now serving in Edinburgh, Scotland, opened the conference, preaching morning and evening on Sunday, February 26. Throughout the following week, we hosted a diverse crowd of

supported missionaries: Mary Baldwin serving in Greece; the Bidwells serving in England; Martin Antoon, Ro Taylor, and Way Rutherford serving with RUF; Aaron Halbert serving in Honduras; and a host of others. We heard story after story of how the Holy Spirit is opening blind eyes and softening hard hearts. Sunday school classes gathered, fellowshiped, sang, and ate with individual missionaries. The classes got to know the individual missionaries we support and hear about their work in the field. They learned how to better support them through the long seasons of service in dark places.

Another of our former ministers, Derek Thomas, taught two lessons on Saturday morning on extending the kingdom, drawing from Acts, and closed the 2023 Missions Conference the next day preaching two glorious sermons.

One thing that made this year particularly special was that it was the first Missions Conference under the shepherding of our new Minister of Missions, Jamie Peipon. Jamie has been to Ukraine twice and Moldova once in the last 12 months; he is bringing his characteristic devotion to the furthest bounds. But Jamie is not content to go; he is bringing our hearts along to better love our partners in the Lord's work.

Reflecting on this year's conference, it's difficult not to see God working in history through His Church, through His church, First Pres Jackson, and through His sent missionaries all over the world. The Lord is extending His kingdom, and we are privileged to play even a small part in it. Already, we look forward to our next missions conference.



*Sunday School classes hosted dinners for our missionaries in homes around the area. This group of ladies from Salt and Light posed for a picture with Mary Baldwin from Athens, Greece.*



*FPC children helped prepare items to ship to Ukraine. They created decorations for the crates that included Bible verses and encouragement.*



# MISSIONS HAPPENING NOW ...

## DISASTER RESPONSE - SILVER CITY & ROLLING FORK

On March 24, 2023, multiple tornadoes ripped through parts of the Mississippi Delta destroying towns like Rolling Fork and Silver City. Members of First Presbyterian Church and families at the Day School quickly took action to volunteer and donate supplies.

### Sheds of Hope – Silver City, MS

Sheds of Hope is a program that Mission to North American Disaster Response uses to expedite relief to individual disaster-disrupted families immediately after a disaster event. A team of 15 from FPC went to Silver City the week following the March tornado and helped build five sheds. The following week, church members traveled to Silver City again and built five more sheds to provide a safe place for community members to store recovered household items.

### Donations

Church members and Day School families collected several truckloads of specific supplies needed in the tornado ravaged areas. Jo Lynn Mayfield and others coordinated and led deliveries of these supplies to both



Rolling Fork and Silver City. In Silver City, these donations along with literal tons of other donated supplies and food were in great disarray. Our members spent the day organizing the distribution center to aid workers and community members in accessing the needed items.

In all of these situations, God provided plenty of FPC volunteers and additional volunteers from organizations like the Coast Guard and Delta State University. We are grateful that FPC can represent our church and our savior in disaster relief situations.

**Missions in May**

Wednesdays | 6 p.m.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
Jackson, Mississippi

**Adults & Youth**

**3** **Reformed University Fellowship**  
Anthony Forrest  
Jackson State University

**10** **Mission to North America**  
Ben Shaw  
Christ Community Church  
St. Francisville, LA  
Harris Bond  
Ouachita Presbyterian Church  
Monroe, LA

**17** **Local Ministries**  
Ken and Mary Ball, Jackson Water Crisis  
Hugh Trussell, Disaster Relief  
Danny Story, Short-Term Missions

**Children** 3-Year-Old Class through 5th grade

**3** **Jamie Peipon**  
Why We Do Missions

**10** **Internationals Class**  
Loving Our Neighbors  
from Around the World

**17** **Daniel and Katie Brink**  
Sharing the Good News  
in Belgium

**Youth** 6th-12th grade  
Junior High & Senior High D Groups



# meet *your* MINISTERS

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You see them behind the pulpit on Sundays and speak to them in the hallways of the church, but how well do you really know the ministers who have been called to serve at FPC?

Join us over the next months as we take some time to profile each of our ministers. We will hear their testimonies, learn about their backgrounds, meet their families, and discover some little-known facts along the way.

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We kick the series off with a profile of Senior Minister

**Dr. David Strain**





# Q&A

## Have more questions?

Submit your questions to [meetyourministers@fpcjackson.org](mailto:meetyourministers@fpcjackson.org) and we will try to get answers.

If you would like to meet with Dr. Strain, please contact his assistant Beth Threadgill at [betht@fpcjackson.org](mailto:betht@fpcjackson.org) (601) 973-9100. He would love to hear from you!

**Q: Do you have a favorite sport?**

**A:** I grew up playing rugby and football (soccer).

**Q: Do you have any hobbies?**

**A:** I cook. I grill a lot.

**Q: Do you ever use your art skills?**

**A:** I occasionally still paint and draw. I've been doing watercolors lately but it's very unsatisfying. When I was in art school I was doing art all day, every day. Now I've got a couple of hours here or there. If you don't use your skills they get rusty. I remember what I could do and now I can't do it. So instead of it being relaxing, it's frustrating. I do think, though, that a lot of what I learned in art school I use in ministry. I like words and I find writing sermons to be very creative.

**Q: Who is your favorite author?**

**A:** PG Wodehouse. I think he's very funny. I like Arthur Conan Doyle. There is an early Scottish psychological novelist named James Hogg who wrote a book called "The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner." It's fascinating. I love Tolkein. I'm a Tolkein nerd.

**Q: Do you have a hidden "talent"?**

**A:** I can move each eye independently.

**Q: What is your favorite thing about Mississippi?**

**A:** The generosity of the people. The kindness and generosity of the people is really extraordinary.

**Q: What do you miss most about Scotland?**

**A:** Two things: I miss the hills and I miss some of the food – pudding, fish and chips, and really good Indian food.

**Q: How can we pray for you?**

**A:** Certainly you can pray for my wife's health. Pray for a work-life balance. Also, I'm constantly burdened by a concern to see people become Christians. The single deepest prayer of mine is that people would get converted through my preaching and I rarely ever see it. It's a constant source of grief to me.

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# SCOTSMAN by Birth, MISSISSIPPIAN by Design

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Anyone who visits FPC Jackson will immediately notice our Senior Minister's strong accent. Though a heavy drawl is common in our area of the world, the accent we hear from our pulpit on Sundays is decidedly not Southern. The Scottish brogue coming from our pulpit can come as a bit of a surprise and lead to questions like, "how did a Scotsman end up leading a church in Mississippi?" In tracing the story of David Strain's conversion, call to the ministry, and call to FPC Jackson, one thing is clear – he did not end up in Mississippi by accident. The God who is working all things together for His glory and our good planned all along that this Glasgow native would one day preach the gospel and become the Senior Minister of FPC Jackson.



## The Fruit of Faithful Gospel Witness

David grew up in a middle-class family that was very loving but largely secular. He remembers going to Sunday School at the Church of Scotland when he was young, but says that when he entered secondary school at age 12, he did not know what he believed or if he believed in God at all. However, God had a plan to use a Pentecostal friend to open David's eyes to the truth of the gospel. Over the course of two years and dozens of lunch-time walks to the fish-and-chips shop, that young friend boldly and consistently witnessed to David, explaining to him the truths of the Christian faith.





David explains his friend's surprise when, one day before school, David said that he wanted to become a Christian. "His jaw kind of hit the floor," David recalls. "As far as he knew, after two years of telling me the gospel, I was a lost cause. He had no idea what was going on with me."

The lesson there for all of us, David says, is to "keep sowing the seed. There are no lost causes. Keep telling them about Jesus. That was certainly the case for me."

The two prayed together that day in the school yard as soccer balls were flying and children were running into their classrooms.



## From Pentecostal to Presbyterian

Today, sitting in the pews at First Presbyterian Church, it is clear that David is a staunch Reformed Presbyterian, not a Pentecostal. The story of how he was introduced to Reformed theology is also a picture of God's handiwork. In God's perfect plan, David's parents would not allow him to attend his friend's Pentecostal church. They were happy for him to attend the Church of Scotland, but David had learned from his friend that the denomination was not healthy. So, though it was a difficult way to begin a life in Christianity, David did not attend any church for the first two years after his conversion. Even in that "no man's land" stage of his faith, though, it is clear that God was paving the way for David to end up in ministry at FPC Jackson.

David had moved to Dundee, Scotland, to study Fine Art in the university there, and during one trip home for summer vacation, he visited the local Christian bookstore looking for something to help him have a dramatic "Christian experience" he had heard about from his Pentecostal friends. There, he stumbled across J.I. Packer's *Knowing God* and, as David remembers, thought, "well that sounds like a real experience."

While reading the book, David was struck by the fact that Packer writes about the Christian faith using categories that clearly reflect 2000 years of Christian thought, not just something that he had come up with on his own.

"I thought, 'I need to read some history.' I wanted to understand how we get from the teaching of the Bible to these categories [Packer] was using – that are clearly really helpful in summing up Bible teaching and are not things he has plucked out of thin air," David recounts.

David went back to the Christian bookshop and found a book called *The History of Christian Doctrine* by Louis Berkhof. He admits he was drawn to it because it was



David met Sheena McLeod while studying art in Dundee, Scotland. They were married in 1998.

short and he thought he could read it pretty quickly to get an overview. He was not expecting the effect it would have on his perspective of the faith.

"I devoured it," remembers David. "I went into *The History of Christian Doctrine* a baptistic, dispensational, 'left-behind', Pentecostal guy and came out of it a Calvinist Presbyterian, believing in infant baptism."

At the time, David had no idea that Berkhof was a leader in Reformed teaching or that *Knowing God* comprised one

of the most classic statements of Christian conviction. In his kindness, the Lord placed those particular books in David's path to direct and develop his faith.

"The Lord was really gracious to me," David recalls. "One of my best friends in art school was a Reformed Baptist. We met together, prayed together, read the scriptures together, read the Westminster Confession of Faith together. The Lord was using that time to shape me, hone me theologically, direct me."



## Years of Studies and Struggles

The Lord was not only strengthening David's faith but also setting him on a path that would one day lead him to ministry at FPC Jackson.

While in university, David became a student leader for Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF) and was ultimately invited to work with UCCF in student ministry. David remembers his friends in UCCF telling him he should go into ministry vocationally. However, at the time, it was his plan to attend the Royal College of Art in London, get his master's degree in fine art, and become an artist.

God had other plans, though, and by the time David was finishing his degree in art, he knew that God was calling him to gospel ministry.

Following graduation, David began seminary in the Church of Scotland, where he studied for three years. However, in his last year of seminary, his conservative convictions came into conflict with the liberal ideology of the church. David insisted on preaching the Bible as God's inerrant word.

David remembers it as an "excruciating" and "very painful" experience in which he was ultimately forced to leave the Church of Scotland: "It was a brutal experience but in the providence of God it pushed me to figure out, are there credible reasons for believing that the Bible is the word of God? If I'm going to believe it, I have to be able to answer all this stuff I'm hearing."

"I refused to resign," says David, "so they had to kick me out."

Providentially, however, this trying experience opened the door for David to complete his studies in the Free Church of Scotland. In those final years of study, David became

friends with members of the Presbyterian Church in America, who were also pursuing theological degrees in Scotland.

Even during seminary, God was pointing David to Mississippi. One of those seminary friendships led him on his first trip to the United States – to Jackson, Mississippi, no less.

"In the Lord's providence and wisdom, my first ever trip to the United States was for a wedding at First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi. I was in the wedding, and Ligon Duncan led the singing" explains David.

His first experience in vocational ministry, as senior pastor at a church in London, was difficult. Though he loved the congregation, David remembers the strain of pastoring a small congregation in an urban setting like London. "We nearly burned out," David remembers. But even in recalling that difficult time, David can see God's hand. "I believe God often makes pastors in really painful ways," he says. "He shapes shepherds through suffering, not in seminaries."

During that wearying time in ministry, David attended Twin Lakes Fellowship (TLF), which he had learned of through his friends from seminary. His congregation sent him annually for a while, and David found it to be a respite and source of encouragement in his ministry. Through his experiences at TLF, he met many ministers in the US and learned even more about the PCA.

Even so, it was a surprise when he received a call from a search committee from First Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Mississippi. The committee had learned of him through friends of friends, but David had no idea where the small town of Columbus was.

"When the search committee reached out to me out of the blue, they had been listening to my sermons for months and had assumed that there was no way this guy in London was ever going to come to Columbus, Mississippi – which was the same assumption I made at first," David says with a laugh.

It was because of the connections he had made through TLF that David was open to the idea of moving from London to a small town in Mississippi. And he and his family did make the move.



**Interesting Fact: The thistle has been the national emblem of Scotland since the reign of King Alexander III. In Celtic cultural tradition, thistle represents nobility and graciousness.**





## At Home

David remembers his family's years in Columbus as happy ones. They loved the congregation there and were able to heal from the very hard season of ministry in London that had preceded their move. That is why, when Mark Windham called to ask David if he would consider interviewing for a position at FPC Jackson, David was not immediately interested.

Still, a call from FPC Jackson was hard to ignore. After all, the church was the primary sponsor of TLF, which had been such a blessing and had such a significant impact on David's ministry.

As we all know, David did take the position at our church. Here he has moved from Assistant Minister of Teaching and Mission to Senior Minister. He is not only a leader for our congregation but also in our denomination through the Gospel Reformation Network and his work with the PCA General Assembly. The Lord has blessed us and so many others through David's faith, convictions, and ministry.

From before the foundation of the earth, the Lord had a magnificent plan for this native of Glasgow, born to an unbelieving family. That plan has placed him in Jackson, Mississippi, as minister of the gospel and citizen of the United States. But his true citizenship is neither in Scotland nor the US. It is in Heaven. As he does for all Christians, the Lord laid out a miraculous plan that would bring David to faith and ultimately, one day to live with Him.



David and Sheena have two sons, Euan (21) and Joel (18). Sheena is an accomplished cook, writer, and photographer.

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# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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**CHILDREN'S  
Ministry**  
"rooted and built up in Him"  
- Colossians 2:7

HE WILL REVIVE US, HE WILL RAISE US UP, THAT WE MAY LIVE BEFORE HIM. — HOSEA 6:2