



Grace 2 U Newsletter

A Quarterly Publication of
Grace Presbyterian Church

Dawsonville, GA

JANUARY 2024
Volume 19 Issue 1



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Do these look familiar?

“YOUR ACCOUNT WILL BE SUSPENDED.”

“We have been attempting to reach you about a package we are trying to deliver.”

“We’ve received 41 complaints about your email account.”

“You’ve won a free iPad in our sweepstakes drawing!”

Every few weeks I scan my Junk Email folder to make sure something legit hasn't been diverted there by mistake. I have to pay close attention because I occasionally miss something important when my junk filter gets a little over-zealous. It amazes me how much spam I receive that has the same message. If I were gullible enough, I might actually think I had not paid my most recent bill to Netflix, Prime Video, Hulu, iCloud, and lots of other services I don't even use. Somehow, I'm expected to think that UPS, FedEx, and DHL have all attempted to deliver hundreds of packages to me, and have been unsuccessful with each attempt until I can contact them with further instructions and information. And if I were to add up all the iPhones, iPads, and casino jackpots that I have won (without even trying), I would be the luckiest person alive. Thankfully, my spam filter is pretty effective because I receive hundreds of these phony messages every week.

I've received one particular email often, and strikes me as especially noteworthy. A few years ago I started getting messages from one of our church members. Well, not really. Someone's password had been compromised and false emails began to appear in my junk folder with

the church member's name attached to them. It was obvious that this person wasn't really sending me these messages, and my filter was correctly trashing them for me. The general gist of each message was some form of: "Hey- do you remember these photos?" or "I guess this doesn't need any explanation," and "Is this you?" There is always a link to click, which is the surest giveaway that I'm receiving spam.

I continue to receive regular messages with this Grace member's name even though they are no longer sending anyone any emails at all, legitimate or fake. Long past the day I preached their funeral, I am still being reminded of them just by seeing a name listed at the top of a bogus message. It makes me wonder: what would these messages say if they actually contained communication from our beloved and departed friend? What descriptions of heavenly glory and eternal joy with the creator of the universe might be contained therein?

I feel like we might read something along the lines of, "This is even better than we hoped. The peace, the joy, and the love of God in eternity is beyond earthly imagining." Or maybe, "On Earth we were far too concerned about things with no eternal value, and not focused enough on what matters most to God." What about, "You know that idea from the book of Hebrews about the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before you? Every one of them is cheering you on- wishing you all the best, sending you love, and praying to God for blessings on your behalf."

Wouldn't it be nice to get an email like that? Especially from a much-loved and greatly missed friend? In a sense, this is what it is like for us when we open the scriptures and read the Word of God. This is why we study the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, to learn from the one who actually knew what heaven and

eternity are like, who could describe the joy of the presence of God from first-hand knowledge.

Let me encourage you to spend time in God's Word in 2024. Allow me to inspire you to commune with God in prayer this year. Don't let the messages God has for you get filtered out. Our heavenly Father is reaching out to us in every moment, urgently and compassionately communicating forgiveness, restoration, and love, if only we will take the time to hear it.

Grace to you,
David



DISCIPLESHIP TEAM

Christian Education Opportunities for Winter:

- Sunday mornings with Bob Thornton starting back up in January: continuing Adam Hamilton's study of the Gospel of John
- Women's Bible study, Tuesday mornings at 10:00am starting January 9th:
 - Max Lucado – God Never Gives Up On You
- Lenten study, TBD Sunday mornings at 9:30 2/18 - 3/31, in Fellowship Hall

It's Time to be Spiritual and Religious!

A recent New York magazine article, Where Will 'Spiritual, Not Religious' Americans Lead Us? (<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2023/12/where-will-spiritual-not-religious-americans-lead-us/>)

re-will-spiritual-not-religious-americans-lead-us.html), notes that “One of the big recent meta-trends in American life has been the rapid growth of the so-called religious “nones” — the people who are not affiliated with any religious tradition. It’s a trend most notable among young people, so it bids fair to unravel the American exceptionalist claim that unlike other wealthy countries, the U.S. remains quite religious.” This trend bothers me a lot.

While both religion and spirituality offer frameworks for understanding our place in the universe and guiding our lives, they differ in their approach and structure. Christianity provides a set of beliefs and practices, grounded in what we know to be true about our God and His saving grace through Jesus as foretold in the Old Testament and witnessed in the New Testament. This structure offers a sense of community, belonging, and clear guidance. Our religious rituals and practices can provide a framework, comfort, and a sense of connection to something larger than ourselves. Additionally, our religious community offers support and opportunities for service, fostering a sense of purpose and belonging. This sense of belonging can be invaluable in times of difficulty or doubt.

Spirituality, on the other hand, is more personal and individualistic. It focuses on the inner experience and the search for meaning and connection, rather than adhering to a specific set of doctrines or practices. This allows for greater flexibility and exploration, catering to individual needs and experiences.

I suppose that it’s the focus on looking inward for meaning, the individual, rather than the community that gnaws at me. Jesus called us in Matthew 28 to “go and make disciples of all nations” not to sit in our rooms alone and

ponder how we fit into the universe. In Hebrews 10, we are encouraged to “...consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” While an individual’s spiritual wellbeing is important, community is essential to being prepared for the “Day approaching.”

Ultimately, the choice between religion and spirituality is a personal one. Spirituality is a great first step, but it’s not the last one. Invite your spiritual friends to join you – just once – to come try out the community of faith at Grace. See if they don’t enjoy the sense of belonging, the support, the connection, the friendship and maybe even some of the structure, moral discipline, and ritual of the church.

Peace,

Church



FELLOWSHIP TEAM

During this Advent season as we reflect on our many blessings, we know that Grace is truly blessed. We are a Church of generous hearts and loving spirits.

Think of the special meals we enjoy, the beautiful flowers in the sanctuary each Sunday, the delightful refreshments shared in the parlor. This happens because

our congregation cares.

I have been asked to head up the Fellowship Team, and a TEAM it takes. I am asking for volunteers to help with this important ministry. Among the responsibilities of the Fellowship Team is providing meals and decorating the Fellowship Hall for special events such as Souper Sunday, Easter Breakfast, Kirking Sunday, and more. We also try to be available to help with driving to doctor's appointments, taking meals to shut-ins, running errands, and helping in any way needed. All a ministry of love for each other.

So, who can I count on to join me? You will feel blessed in more ways than you can imagine. My heartfelt thanks to each of you who has served before. Can I count on you again? Just say yes when you see me.

The 2024 sign up calendars for flowers and refreshments are posted on the hall bulletin board. Go ahead and sign up. It will make you feel good, and others happy.

Blessings, with every good wish for health and happiness in the coming year.

Betty Powell



GRACE NOTES

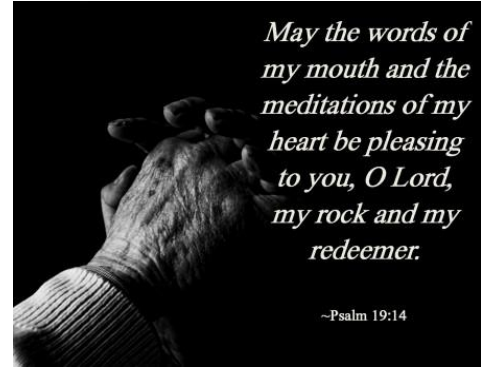
Another Advent passes by, yet the wonder of this season never ceases to amaze. The story has been told time and again and we eagerly listen and wait for the Christ child! It's always

our privilege to help tell this story through song every year and we're blessed with a wonderful crowd Christmas Eve to hear the story once more.

Also blessing us are our interns, both past and present. We welcome Christopher Yarbrough, Jacey Hudson & Sydney Godbey as our current interns. We also welcomed back Sarah & Anna Grace for joining us during their time off from college! The impact you have on these young people is immense and we thank you for continuing to support them and the choir!

Enjoy the time with family and friends and we look forward to walking with you into the coming season of Lent.





Early in December, the Ladies of Grace enjoyed a festive Christmas luncheon hosted by Kristie Meyers. We had a wonderful time of fellowship as we admired Kristie's beautifully decorated home. Kristie also served a delicious lunch. Thank you so much for hosting us, Kristie, and getting us all in the Christmas spirit. You have such a kind and generous spirit.

The Ladies Bible Study resumes Tuesday, January 9th at 10:00. We will be studying God Never Gives Up On You: What Jacob's Story Teaches Us About Grace, Mercy, and God's Relentless Love by Max Lucado.

Our next luncheon will be a potluck soup, salad, and dessert luncheon on Tuesday, January 16th at 12:15, in the church fellowship hall. Pat Tracht will have a fun craft activity for us to enjoy after lunch. This should really brighten a winter day.

I wish you a happy and healthy new year.
Peggy Thornton

In Our Prayers: John and Susan Adams (Marsha Loftin), Connie Alford (Shirley), Frank Ball, Ruth Ann Ball, Frank Banks, Gretchen Blackwell, Tyler Chadwick, Frank Duke (Kay Parrish), Mike Eason (Joey), Maxine Edwards, Grace (Chuck), Margaret Hunt (Jim Hambright), Doug Jones (Margie O'Byrne), Bill Keller, Judy Manke, Tracy Martin (Chris Seese), Vanessa Seese, Suellen and Skyler, Steve Thompson (Shirley), Burt and Milton Wells (Peggy Thornton)

Assisted Living: Sandy Grimes, Marian Hopkins, Zoe Putnam

Sympathy: The family of Gene Honn



January 7: Annual Congregational Meeting

February 11: Souper Sunday

February 14: Ash Wednesday

March 24: Palm Sunday

March 28: Maundy Thursday Service 7pm

March 29: Good Friday Service 12 noon

March 31: Easter Breakfast 9:30am, Easter Service 11:00 am, One Great Hour of Sharing

USHER /LITURGIST SCHEDULE

Liturgists:

January

1/7 Christy Jordan
1/14 Joey Homans
1/21 Logan Collins
1/28 Margie O'Byrne

Ushers:

January

Bill & Joann Keller, Betty Powell
Marsha Loftin, Nancy McCue, Chris Seese
Jim Hambricht, Margie O'Byrne, Priscilla Taylor
Elaine Coker, Joey & Kristie Homans

Liturgists:

February

2/4 Kristie Homans
2/11 Grace Walden
2/18 Chris Seese
2/25 Katie Schumacher

Ushers:

February

Betty Powell, Barbara Quintrell, Chris Seese
Joann Keller, Dan & Jane Miller
Susan Atkins, Gordon & Jeannette Brand
Kristie Homans, Bob & Peggy Thornton

Liturgists:

March

3/3 Joyce Ball
3/10 Chuck Achuff
3/17 Susan Atkins
3/24 Peggy Thornton
3/31 Chuck Achuff

Ushers:

March

Dan & Jane Miller, Priscilla Taylor
Mike & Joyce Ball, Barbara Quintrell
Ron & Elaine Coker, Marsha Loftin
Jerry & Susan Atkins, Bob Thornton
Nancy McCue, Margie O'Byrne, Peggy Thornton



January Birthdays

- 3rd – John Joh
- 12th – Linda Clemons
- 15th – Andrew Permenter
- 18th – Penny Kelley
- 24th – Nancy McCue
- 30th – Tom Quintrell

February Birthdays

- 1st – Barb Ritcheson
- 9th – Rebecca Rainey
- 15th – Marsha Loftin
- 15th – Priscilla Taylor
- 16th – Fran Dimick
- 16th – Judy Manke
- 17th – Margie O’Byrne
- 20th – Chris Seese
- 21st – Rachael Lorenz

March Birthdays

- 1st – Richard Smith
- 7th – Joyce Ball
- 9th – Joe Fortune
- 10th – Ron Coker
- 12th – Kay Parrish
- 18th – Kathy Westra
- 18th – Marian Hopkins
- 20th – Jim Hambright
- 21st – Scott Vickery
- 22nd – Gloriana Wilson
- 25th – Reed Maurer
- 30th – Jane Miller



March

20th – Sherry & Bill Weeks