



MERIDIAN CHURCH

December 2018 Meridian Life Letter

by Josh King

Meridian Church,

Our God has been very good to us in recent months. I pray we are experiencing something of what Luke recorded in Acts 6:7, “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly...”. Perhaps we have been more obedient to Christ’s demand to make disciples, I pray that is so, but beyond and in this, there is no reason for our recent growth other than God’s Word accomplishing His sovereign ends according to His time. Concerning the Reformation, Luther said,

“Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.”

Here we stand. God’s Word will not return to Him void. Let us pray we see it continue to increase among us so that disciples are multiplied and that glory may redound to the name of Christ.

Membership

Byron and Dana Lohrer, David Owen, Peyton and Kaley Presgrove, and Cody and JoDee Stapp desire to covenant as members of this body. You can find their testimonies attached. Concerning them:

The elders recommend that Byron and Dana Lohrer, David Owen, Peyton and Kaley Presgrove, and Cody and JoDee Stapp be welcomed into full fellowship with this body.

Eldership

When David Burks came to our fellowship he expressed his desire to be an elder and to plant a church in Blair. He wanted to be tested and affirmed by the kind of church he wanted to see. He wanted to learn in hope that he might replicate. Yet, he also said that if we should not affirm him, then he and Tracy would move to be near the fellowship. While we are not yet confirming David’s desire to plant in Blair, the elders do believe that David has been doing the work of a shepherd amongst this flock. Many of the sheep are healthier because of David’s concern for their souls. Because he desires the work, is doing the work, and fits the qualifications:

The elders recommend that David Burks be an elder of Meridian Church.

A questionnaire has been made available to the body to aid in your assessment. If you have any concerns or know of any reason why David isn't qualified, please first speak with David and then let one of the elders know.

Finances

The 2019 Proposed Budget has been made available for your review. I'll run through the major changes to it by heading.

Under "Missions and Ministries" little has changed. We increased "Discretionary Missions" because the Lingles will likely visit us on sabbatical next year and we will need to provide lodging and meals for them while they are with us. Also, unused funds from the deacon's fund will roll over into next year.

There are many changes in "Staff" expenses, most of them related to the salary package increase the elders are recommending. Staff substitution expenses are being decreased because we have decided to no longer compensate those within our own fellowship who fill in.

"Administration" increases include office expenses to purchase a new computer. While substantially decreasing advertising costs, we wanted to keep some funds for running occasional ads online, in which we saw good results this year.

The biggest change in the budget concerns "Building and Grounds." Regarding our facilities there are a number of items we need to address, the biggest being the soffit and fascia being in poor shape and the need to paint the exterior of the building. Also, early next fall, we will need to have the parking lot repaired, resealed, and striped. A large number of other repairs and improvements are also planned such as removing the chandeliers in the foyers, fixing the exhaust fans in the attic, fixing the leak between the education and assembly hall buildings, and repairing the termite damage in the fellowship hall.

If you want more details or have any questions concerning the budget please let one of the elders know. That said,

The elders recommend that the 2019 Proposed Budget be approved as presented.

Grace and Peace,

Josh

Byron Lohrer's Testimony of Faith

I was raised in a very traditional Baptist home, and for that I'm very thankful. It did however present some problems as I grew up. My mom still claims I was saved at four years old, meaning I recited some sort of a prayer. My grandpa was the pastor of my church in my early years and he baptized me when I was ten. I was a pretty good kid and I dominated Sunday school with the most gold stars on the board. I was a pretty good kid through high school. I did pretty well at school, did good at sports, and didn't do the "big" sins. I however was far from saved. I never read my Bible—like never! Nor was I ever challenged to. I never prayed. I was just good enough to the older people and church people that I was around, and I overall gave my family a pretty good name. However, I didn't love Jesus.

For my first few years after high school it was much of the same, still didn't love Jesus, but still didn't do the "big" sins. But, when I was 21 and many of my more responsible friends were getting married, or might as well have been, I sought out new friends to hang out with. I didn't want to go to the bars because I had been scared to death at what alcohol might do to me by my parents. I was sure one sip would either kill me or condemn me to hell. After a few months these friends convinced me to go out with them and shoot some pool. Under peer pressure I tried my first beer. I didn't die and had a pretty responsible night and actually kind of liked it. In a matter of months, I went from one or two beers a night, to many many more. I'm the type of person who tries to be the best at everything he does, so drinking and partying would be no different. It was my goal every night to outdo everyone at the bar, house, or party. This led to about a year and a half of complete recklessness, drunkenness, sleeping around, and heaven only knows what else. It's only by the grace of God that I'm alive today to talk about it. God allowed me to be brought low by both the law and by being deep in debt because of it all. I was extremely broken, preferring to die, But God!

But God. The two most beautiful words in a sinner's life! The two words that brought me from death to life. The words that I had heard all my life now came alive as I was pushed by the Spirit to read my bible. I repented of my sins and truly for the first time believed the gospel, at age 23 Jesus saved me. It was at this time that the Lord brought Dana and I together, and we began to pursue Him together. It has been an incredible journey for these last 15 years, a journey of mercy, grace, and sanctification that I'd love to share with anyone personally. There've been many hurts and pains along the way, but I know that my Savior will keep me through it all. I'm constantly reminded of and thankful for my favorite verse, Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The grace and mercy of God is oh so beautiful. I'm in constant need of it, and I can never stop praising Him for it. I pray that Meridian Church will come along side me and help me be more Christ like, help me love my wife better, and help me be a better father. I pray I can do the same for you too! God is good, all is grace!

Dana Lohrer's Testimony of Faith

As most people raised in the Bible Belt, I attended church from an early age. I asked Jesus into my heart when I was like six years old and was baptized when I was ten. My parents were elders in the Word of Faith church I was raised in. Jesus was not Lord of my life, though. I "used" Him only as I needed. As long as I prayed before basketball games and before big tests I thought I was good. I didn't understand my wretchedness and rebellion towards Him, my absolute need for Him, or His astonishing grace towards me through Jesus. I'm sure, at this point in my life, I would have argued quite well with you that I was saved because of the things I had done to secure my salvation. As I graduated from high school and moved onto college, I really had no need for God. But, my life was a mess. I gave myself away to guys and to partying. But, I still didn't see my great need for Jesus at this point because I still made awesome grades and my performance on the basketball court was pretty incredible.

After college, I pursued my dream of being a basketball coach. In the Spring of 2003 I was living in Fresno, CA and I was *miserable*. I remember asking God that if I could just get away from the bad work environment and the party friends then I could clean up my life from there. In the summer of 2003, I moved to Huntsville, TX where I knew no one. I had a clean slate. So, a few weeks into my life there, where I was completely incapable of changing myself, God rescued me. It was in a parking lot in Houston, TX after a night of partying, that I surrendered all to Jesus. At that moment, I knew that I was a great sinner and was beyond any repair I could do for myself. I cried out to the Lord saying, "I'm done! I'm yours! Save me!" Jesus in His loving kindness rescued me.

Even though I regret so much of my life and the complete mess that I made of it, I praise God for it, because I would not know His marvelous grace apart from it. From that day forward the Lord has been sanctifying me. I continue to stumble, walk in unbelief, and disobedience, but the Holy Spirit continues to point me to Jesus through the Bible, through the love and care of my wonderful husband who has shown me time and time again the love of Christ, and through faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who have reminded me over and over again of the gospel.

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. I was dead and enslaved to sin, *but God*, being rich in mercy set His love on me through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. All because of Jesus, I am now a child of God. I have been redeemed. My sins have been forgiven. All is grace! I praise God for His faithful and relentless pursuit of me. My prayer is that myself, along with my family, will continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ with our brothers and sisters in Christ here at Meridian!

David Owen's Testimony of Faith

I have been "baptized" twice. Both of those false conversions placed me at Matthew 7:23. In my early twenties I got involved with the Navigators and a "memorize the Word" course. Hundreds of verses stayed with me for years but I still drifted away. At about forty years of age I realized the church I was taking my children to was preaching a lie, but I did not go and seek the truth. I took that time to be selfish and free from the establishment of organized religion.

God actually started drawing me many years before I realized it (perhaps as much as a decade). It began as I watched people's lives at my job. I found myself comparing the projection they wanted the world to see to the reality of who they really were. As a letter carrier, I had opportunity to get an inside glimpse of many lives. I quickly found myself looking at my own reality and the projection I put out to the world I realized how different I was inside the walls of my house than I was with eyes on me.

At this point I knew it was time to start being honest with myself. As I said before, God was drawing me but I had no clue it was he that was putting the questions in my mind. I set out on a mission to prove to myself that I had eternity secure. I began to study the Word. I ran into dead ends. I bought Logos Bible Study Software. I attended a seminar to learn how to use it, and I spent months running into more dead ends. After several weeks studying John 17, I was forced to admit that I was not included in the group Jesus was praying for. So then my mission became learning what it took to be included.

God gave me a *huge* desire to know the truth. I spent more months learning that I must give up my will, my life, and my selfishness and commit to a life of denying myself and putting to death the sinful nature we are all born with. Once I learned that, it took from October 2015 to February 2016 counting the cost before I finally accepted it. The cost is high. The cost is everything I am, and everything I have. But none of it was mine to begin with.

God is a holy God and He demands righteousness. I can't produce righteousness on my own. My only shot at righteousness is the substitutionary death of our Lord Jesus Christ. My life is His now. I am committed to denying myself for God's glory through the Son with the help of the Holy Spirit. I definitely believe in a triune God.

Peyton Presgrove's Testimony of Faith

When I was a freshman in high school, I started going with some friends to church on Wednesdays and very few Sundays depending on if I had a girlfriend that wanted me to go. I had no desire for it. I'm not sure if it was the summer before my freshman year or after but I went to my first Falls Creek trip and walked down the aisle one night to receive the "invitation." I went down because the preacher was describing how awful hell was and how the only way to avoid going there was to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. All I knew is I would give anyone that title if they kept me from that place so I walked down the aisle and joined the Christian family, or so I thought.

Years go by and I don't read my bible, I do not pray. I go to church, but just when my girlfriend wants me to or there will be a free meal after the service. I couldn't stand listening to the preacher, Cody Deevers. Every Sunday he would preach about this Jesus who I have claimed as my Lord and Savior and talk about all the great things he has done and went through so we could repent and turn away from our sins. Only I heard "I need to stop doing all the things I enjoy doing and love because this guy died and doesn't like it". I remember telling my friends and family that I didn't like him at all and he made me angry. Little did I know, it was revealing that my heart was not rejoicing for the Gospel, but cursing and despising it.

Fast forward two or three years and I'm still not reading, praying, attending church faithfully, or repenting of sins. I mean, I wanted to be a good person, just not more than I wanted to be me. I was content with saying I was a Christian and I was not going to Hell all while I was cussing, cheating in class, lying, committing adultery, being angry, hateful, jealous, lazy—you name it. My heart was dead and I was still bound for Hell all while thinking I was ok with Jesus. I was going to live my life thinking I could do what I want as long as I knew the right words to say, then when my life ended when I am face to face with my get out of Hell free card He would say "Depart from me, for I never knew you."

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, saved me for His glory and my joy. One summer day before my senior year I was playing a football game on my Play Station, when randomly, without my own desire, I felt God drawing me to him. I was playing my game when I got a tug on my heart to read my Bible. I didn't know where that feeling was coming from, so I shook it off and continued playing. The urge did not go away. Play after play I remember glancing at where my Bible laid on the floor beside my bed-side table and laughing at the thought of picking it up and reading it. Still He drew me to Him. I remember telling Him "No." I told him I didn't understand any of it and I hate reading. I was going to play my video game and that was that.

I had no idea who I was dealing with until just like a snap of your fingers or the flipping of a light switch my desire to play my video game was gone, like taking candy from a baby. I was dumbfounded. I had no idea what had just happened. I now only had a small desire to read the Word, but I wasn't ready to give in. I took my stereo and went outside to listen to music and play basketball. My music cranked up and my shooting hoops—that desire only lasted a few minutes before God also took that desire away from me and told me to read His Word. Again I fought it.

I tried calling different friends to see if they wanted to hang out and none of them answered their phones. Out of options I relented "Fine, I'll read your book." I opened it up to a random page and read a chapter. I couldn't tell you what I read or what it meant, all I know is the feeling was gone. So I went on with my day. A few days later the urge stirred deep inside me again to read. I gave in right away this time not wanting to see what else God was capable of. This continued for a couple weeks. Around this time my aunt had been in the hospital for a long time and passed away. We were getting ready to leave for her funeral when I decided to take my Bible in case God stirred me to read again. While in the car I was browsing through the Bible and came across the sinner's pray. I remember reading that at Falls Creek several years ago and thinking "I've already done this, but why do I feel so different?" I remember praying in the car that day asking Jesus to save me, still uneducated and undisciplined. I knew that what I needed was God. I didn't know how or why but I knew he was the answer and I had no idea what to do.

I texted my youth pastor and told him and he said he would get with me sometime and we would talk about it, but low and behold, I got a text from someone wanting to come over to chat at my house the next day, but it wasn't my youth pastor, it was Cody Deevers. I don't remember being mad that it was him, just wondering why wasn't it my youth pastor? My friend? Not the guy that I do not like and always makes me angry and want nothing to do with God. Cody shows up and asks me what happened and what do I want to do. I told him "All I know is that Jesus died for my sins. I don't know what all that means and I don't understand the Bible, but I want to learn and I want to follow Him."

Cody said we could meet once a week and we would read through the Bible together. He said he would disciple me and teach me everything he knows. So began the greatest time of my life. Our two-man Bible study spread and began to grow so that before my senior year was done we had around six people coming to Bible study Wednesday night after church to Cody's house to read through the bible and pray together. My true and only friends came from that group some many years ago. The brothers that have kept the faith I still talk to this day; they are Cody Deevers, Tanner Britt, Ty Dulworth, and Corbin Byford. Those four men know every dark and dirty secret about me.

Since we started that Bible study, I've been born again. My life has changed, and most importantly my heart has changed. I still struggle every day and fail too many times. But I love God. I love the gospel and I am so thankful that He acts because I never would have. I'm thankful for people God has saved like Cody Deevers to come into my life and disciple me and love me. To this day, that guy is like my second dad. His sermons no longer lead me to anger, but to repentance. I know longer get frustrated with him because of the gospel but because he is a goofy and stubborn guy that I love with all my heart. I thank God that He placed Cody at Velma Baptist Church so I could be disciplined. God is good and He will receive all the glory forever. Amen.

Kaley Presgrove's Testimony of Faith

I was one of those kids who grew up in church. One of my very first memories is visiting churches with my parents, and when I was three or four years old they joined Immanuel Baptist Church in Duncan. We were there every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, and of course Wednesday nights. My parents both served in the church, teaching Sunday school and driving the van to pick up kids on Sunday morning. I remember hearing the gospel taught and I see now how fortunate I was to have that in my life starting at such a young age. That being said, nothing really clicked until I was nine years old.

One night, I was lying in bed and all of a sudden I just thought, "Oh my goodness, I need Jesus." I was suddenly aware of how sinful I was and knew I needed salvation. I remember calling for my mom from my bed and totally catching her off guard. I told her "I need to be saved". She said she would get in touch with the children's minister, Barb Spradlin, in the morning and see if she could come talk to me about what that meant.

A couple days later, our church was having a revival, and at the end of the service there was an altar call. I looked up at my mom and said, "I think I should go talk to that pastor about being saved." I was extremely shy, and did not know this pastor, so this was something so out of character for me, but God was definitely calling. My mom said that Barb was coming over to our house in a few days and we could discuss it then.

Finally, later that week, Barb came over and talked to me about it really meant to follow Jesus, and that night I committed my life to Him. It was a month or so later that I was baptized. I was excited to start really living for Jesus and wanted to learn more about Him.

Through my parent's divorce, only a couple years later, and remarriage on both sides, I remember really relying on God. He got me through it. I was young when God saved me, but I really believe it was because He knew I would need Him more than anything during that time. I can always look back to that time and see God in that situation.

I hate to say that after being saved, I felt alone in my faith. The church kind of left me hanging. I was not discipled and really didn't know what that looked like until much much later. It was my junior year of high school that I began to really get serious about God. Myself and three other friends started to meet every week with our Sunday school teacher at the time, Kara Taliaferro, and study the Bible. Kara had a big impact on my life. We continued this up until we all moved away for college and life took us separate ways.

I am so thankful God chose to save me. It was because of nothing I did or could have done. I have messed up time and time again, and have fallen away at different points in my life, but He always draws me back to himself.

Cody Stapp's Testimony of Faith

At the outset, my prayer is that this testimony is to the glory of God alone in the salvation of such a wretched man as myself. My conversion has brought truth to the words of Jonathan Edwards, "You contributed nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary."

I was in church at an early age and attended church camps regularly. I was young when I walked down the aisle and said the sinner's prayer then accepted Jesus into my heart, or that's what I was taught at least. Growing up I was saturated in this false ideology of the god that American culture had created. I was a Christian in talk only and the worst of hypocrites. It wasn't until I came home from the war in Afghanistan that I started asking questions for myself. One day I came across the preaching of David Platt while I was at work and could not get enough! Then I started going to God's Word in the Old Testament and when I came across the standards and procedures for the Tabernacle, God had mercy on me. I realized that nothing I could ever do would cleanse me of my sin and before God I would receive the just punishment of hell on the day prepared. At that moment the gospel, and the reigning, righteous Champion and King Jesus Christ made sense. I have repented and believe that Jesus Christ alone paid the full price of God's justice that I deserved. Since then God has transformed every aspect of my life and I put my trust in him. I want the true God! I want others to want the true God too! Praise God!

JoDee Stapp's Testimony of Faith

As a child I attended church a few times with my parents, and few times alone, but never went regularly. I was first "saved" at a revival at Fair Baptist Church when I was in the second grade but did not truly understand the gospel until way later in life. I did attend a youth group for several years through Jr. High and HS but attended more so for friends and fellowship rather than a desire for God. After high school I was the farthest from Christ that I had ever been. I was lost and depressed and truly struggled with life for a while.

I traveled a long, dark, and lonely road for several years and made many mistakes until I met my husband. We quickly married and started a family and together, made the decision to raise our girls in church. We began attending church with my dad at Immanuel Baptist in Duncan for a short time, but we struggled to find to a church home for a while until Cody found Meridian.

Although I wanted to follow my husband I was not convinced that it was the place for me due to the belief of predestination. It was not what I was taught growing up, so it was not what I believed. My marriage suffered for a while because of this and I prayed and prayed for God to help us. One day Cody brought home a book called, *What is the Gospel?* and asked me to read it. I told him I would, but it sat on my nightstand for weeks before curiosity got the best of me. The thought of predestination is scary when you don't understand it. When I finished that book I finally felt I had learned the true meaning of the gospel, for the first time in 29 years.

I felt angry and overwhelmed at first thinking of all the years I spent believing things that were not biblical truth, believing that my salvation was in my hands. But I also felt liberated and humbled, knowing that Christ died for *my* salvation. And I felt relief to know that nothing I did or didn't do could change that, because my salvation was not based on works but by the grace of Jesus Christ and His grace alone. I am comforted knowing that God is just, that He is sovereign, and that He has made my heart new. I am in awe of His mercy and grace every day and I know that I am underserving but I am thankful. I am blessed. Christ has helped me to feel content and helped me to focus on the people and things that I have rather than the things I do not. Understanding the depravity of man helped me to understand and strive for a life of belief and repentance. I desire to live for Christ and to dwell in His Word with my family. I want to serve my church and community. But most importantly, I wish to know God and to serve Him so that His glory may be witnessed.