



MERIDIAN CHURCH

March 2024 Meridian Life Letter

by Josh King

Precious flock,

Oh how kind the Good Shepherd is to us. Let us return thanksgiving unto Him. As He continues to add sheep to this flock, the elders ask that you join us in prayer, seeking that He would continue to build the house, adding shepherd-teachers (elders) and servants (deacons) as He would see fit. At this point the elders are simply looking to our Lord and trusting that He will make His will clear in due time. Ask our heavenly Father to save our earthly children. Ask that He would pour out His Spirit and save and sanctify to the glory of His name. Plead that He would send revival and reformation. Pray with thanksgiving for His great mercy, longing to see more of His grace and glory.

Membership

With great joy the elders bring the following recommendations for membership before the body.

The elders recommend that Phillip Brennan be welcomed into full fellowship with this body.

The elders recommend that Colt and Cassie Elam be welcomed into full fellowship with this body.

The elders recommend that Kyle and Cassie Hill be welcomed into full fellowship with this body.

You will find their testimonies attached for all these recommendations.

Financial

Our December and January financial reports looked very healthy. God has been kind to us. While there was still a deficit for January, this is due to the study remodel and a few large one time expenditures. Giving was right at where we need

it to meet in full our 2024 budget. Related to this, know that the study remodel is expected to be completed soon and will be removed from the financial reports once all expenditures have been reported.

Member's Manners

Each year I want to use our March letter and meeting to address “members manners.” I want us to reflect about how we steward our grounds, facilities, and gatherings, especially in regard to being hospitable and kind to our guests as well as to one another. So here are just a few ways I believe we can grow:

- *Consider sitting next to our guests.* So many of you do an excellent job of seeking to make our guests welcome. If you notice someone new, don't just introduce yourself, consider sitting next or near to them and introducing them to others.
- *Invite any guests to further explore the church.* You may not always sense that the time is ripe when guests first visit, but return visits are an excellent opportunity to invite them to your life group, Women in the Word, or a fellowship. Have them over for dinner. Take them out to lunch.
- *Don't crowd the foyers or doorways.* I love that we love one another and want to talk, but lets take our conversations further into the building. When a guest first arrives, it can be intimidating or overwhelming to come into a crowded foyer where so many conversations are already happening. Also, we don't want to block doorways they may be trying to get through.
- *Don't “move in.”* There is nothing wrong with sitting in the same spot, but stay flexible. We'd encourage you not to keep stuff in your seats. It keeps everything looking nicer, makes it easier to clean, and avoids awkwardness should you have to grab your stuff when a guest has unknowingly taken that seat.
- *Use the assembly hall trash cans for communion cups only.* We added the small trash cans for just that purpose. When used for other trash, they fill up quickly and do not look as nice.
- *Remind your children not to run through or play in the pea gravel outside the assembly hall exit going toward the assembly hall.* When the gravel is on the walkway, it is unsightly and a nuisance, and the more of it there is in the grass, the greater the danger of a mower breaking a window with a rock.
- *Please don't wear glitter.* It not only easily shows up on our dark chairs, it is very difficult to vacuum out of the fabric too.

Preaching Plans

It was a joy to study with you the book of Daniel. While some of what we studied may remain unclear, I believe God used this study to develop in all of us this basic political theology: “Babylon will fall. Jerusalem will endure.” The kingdoms of this world are used by our God for the purpose of demonstrating the supremacy of His Son in the salvation of His people. Though they rage, our God rules.

We will next begin a study of the book of James. Wisdom literature is the one genre of Scripture we have yet to cover in our effort to put before the flock a balanced diet. We would encourage you to read this short letter in whole several times in the months ahead.

Future Films

In May we will gather on a Sunday evening to watch the film *Cessationist*. We will release the date and time later in the spring.

On behalf of the elders,

Grace and peace,

Josh

Phillip Brennan's Testimony

To the church of Meridian in Oklahoma, grace and peace be with you. Long ago, in a place far from here, as a small boy, I was in a terrible accident that has clouded my memory even still, therefore my accounts will not be precise, however, you may be confident that they are done to the best of my ability as unto the Lord.

I was saved at an altar call as a young boy and after giving testimony, was baptized shortly after. My mom faithfully continued bringing me to church in Moline, IL until I lost interest as a teenager, convincing myself that merely believing and having faith in Jesus was enough.

What followed in my highschool years was near total depravity, with a sprinkling of some morsels of His truths scattered throughout until I married a woman without much thought if she was a believer under the guise of 1 Corinthians 7:9.

What followed in my married life was what I can only summarize as a hard lesson on 2 Corinthians 6:14 that ended with her infidelity. That ended 18 years of my life devoted to her and my children, with limited growth on my part and failure as a father and husband. I did conduct Bible studies at home from time to time, but kept them to a minimum as they irritated my wife. Obviously this covers a long time and much more could be told, but I now realize while writing this that throughout my marriage there was growth. Even then God was working on and in me. Praise God!

What followed between the spring of 2019 and the fall of 2023 were my best attempts to run from Him with a heart full of sadness, anger, and resentment. I turned to my own utter determination to make my own way, with pride, arrogance, and the ways to the world, to fill the void inside me. With every bit of strength I fought Him, but even then, He would not let me go. He still spoke to me in a still small voice, that brings forth tears and praise even now as I write this, that slowly echoed and convalesced inside me to a thunderous, resounding roar from Him, the Lion of Judah. Praise be to Him!

What followed between the fall of 2023 and now? He has laid me low before Himself, shown me my pride, my arrogance, and my earthly wisdom in comparison to His almighty glory (1 Corinthians 3:18–20). At 42 years of age, He has cause me to submit as a babe to Him. And so my understanding, knowledge, and belief is ever deepening and sometimes even changing in the face of His revelation of the truth from the inerrant Word of God that is our Holy Bible. Yet I remain as a beast before Him (Psalm 73:22), so as He wills, I continue to seek Him at a fervent, almost alarming pace in this season of my life wherein He has see fit to remove distractions and place before me trials to test and prove my faith (1 Peter 1:2–7). As Josh King put it, I have a great zeal for God. As my mom, Sherry Raney put it, I hunger and I thirst for His righteousness, but I would be remiss if not to say as Romans 9:16 does, “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”

What follows now, only God knows, but I stand before you now still not fully sanctified but humbled (2 Corinthians 12:7). Justified by Christ Jesus alone, now more than ever, I seek to act as is proper among saints, doing everything as unto Him, honoring my father and mother submitting where He calls me to do so, loving my neighbor as myself, and most importantly, loving the Lord my God. But lest we forget, Ephesians tells us that we are saved not by works but by faith and equally that James 2:26 tells us that faith apart from works is dead. Therefore, I do not promise perfection in service, but service from a sinner redeemed by Christ as unto the Lord.

So I humbly ask that you, the local church, representing the body of Christ Jesus our Lord, accept this unworthy man, and prepare me a seat at His table that I may partake of His supper as He commands me. May this testimony, a confession of faith, bless whosoever reads it, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Colt Elam's Testimony

My name is Colt Elam. I am a sinner and have fallen short of the glory of God. I believe that salvation is granted by God through election. I believe that along with salvation, we are also blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit to work within our hearts and help us to repent from sin and seek God's glory in all that we do. I know that no matter how good my works, I will never be worthy of the mercy of God. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again three days later so that our sin debt could be paid for and we as sinners may be made righteous in the eyes of the Lord. I am forever grateful for the forgiveness I have been granted by the grace of God and pray that I would live out my life in a way that will glorify God and lead others to seek His word.

Cassie Elam's Testimony

It seems impossible to separate my life experiences from how I truly came to Christ. My childhood is one that most are fortunate enough not to understand. Both of my parents struggled with drug and alcohol addictions, which riddled my childhood with every form of abuse and neglect one could imagine. I spent most of my life believing that I was saved because I had said the "sinner's prayer" and responded to altar calls over the years, but struggled with understanding how a loving God could permit a child to go through such atrocities. It wasn't until my mother was murdered that God used a horrible tragedy to draw me to Him. My mother's murderer was her husband, who was also the associate pastor of the church we attended. For years we were abused by him and watched him get up on Sunday and preach a sermon. It caused me to truly resent attending church. Then after losing my mother the way I did, I never wanted anything to do with a church again.

Around a year after my mom died I searched for "christian podcasts" one morning and the first one that popped up happened to be a Reformed pastor. The first episode I listened to talked about election, something I had never heard of. This pastor also talked about how illiterate Americans are when it comes to the Bible. He shared a chronological reading plan and encouraged listeners to start reading the Bible, so I did just that. It had been years since I had sat down and read my Bible consistently. It didn't take long for my eyes to be opened to my absolute need of a Savior and how depraved I am as a sinner. It was a slow process, but God truly changed my heart through simply reading scripture. The Holy Spirit began convicting me of all the sin that I needed to repent of and I came to the realization that I was not saved and never had been. It was also evident that I had never heard or understood a clear representation of the gospel. In my mind the gospel was simply that Jesus had come to die for our sins.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit I came to the realization that all mankind is separated from God. A result of the fall of mankind is that man cannot seek God on his own. We have no hope of reconciliation, except through the power of God who sent a substitute, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty of our sins. Jesus Christ, our Savior, lived a sinless life on Earth, was crucified on a cross, buried, and resurrected on our behalf. Through the power of our merciful God, those who believe and put their faith in Christ are saved from damnation and given a new nature with a changed heart. We are resurrected with Christ to a new life. The Holy Spirit works in believers to sanctify us throughout our earthly life, which is evident in our changed desires and fruit. Good works are not what brings one to salvation; instead, they are the proof of it.

I cannot begin to grasp the mercy and grace that I, a depraved sinner, was shown. I know now that although I do not understand why things happen the way they do, God uses everything to bring Glory to himself. The means that God used to draw me to himself is a testimony to that. I rest in the fact that one day I will be in heaven with my Savior freed from the corruption and sin of my earthly life.

Kyle Hill's Testimony

I was living my life and doing what I wanted. God started working on my heart and changing my desires about six weeks before an evangelist came to our church for a revival. He was preaching about the heart and the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. God used that sermon to give me a new heart. Since God saved me, when I do sin and mess up, I feel conviction from the Holy Spirit.

Cassie Hill's Testimony

I've been in church my entire life and always judged myself against other sinners in this fallen world. I was doing much better than most of the people I knew, so I was fine.

During Covid, we were able to spend a ton of time home together as a family. I listened to some sermons after watching almost every show available on Netflix. In July of 2020, our best friends invited us to Immanuel Baptist Church. It was one of the only churches we knew about that was fully opening back up and they said their preacher was great. We decided to go. In September of 2020, there was a revival with a guest speaker. He talked long and hard about the heart and how some people had always been in church but didn't know or have a relationship with Christ. Looking back now, this is when God slowly began getting my attention more. After that revival, we made church a priority for our family. We were there every time the doors were opened. I was still having a lot of struggles within myself because I heard so many sermons by the pastor about sin, God's omnipresence, His omnipotence, just how holy God is. We did a study on the attributes of God and I really began understanding what a wretched sinner I am.

Fast forward to the fall of 2021 and God saved me one day on the work. I had tried saving myself; I had made the decision to be a better person. I finally realized I could not do any of that. Only God was able to save me. God gave me a new heart on the way to work that day. The Holy Spirit convicted me of sins and gave me new desires immediately. The music I listened to changed, the television shows I watched changed, my attitude changed, and my speech changed. I was able to fully love my husband and children because I finally knew what love was. I sent a text to the pastor and his wife that morning when I got to work. I asked if he would baptize me the next Sunday. The old me would have had a hard time standing in front of my peers and admitting that although I was teaching a kids class on Wednesday and serving in several areas within the church, I was lost. My new heart didn't care what others thought or said. I knew I had to admit my mistakes and my inability to save myself. I knew I needed to give God the glory for saving my sinful self.

March 2024 Meridian Life Letter Addendum

by Josh King

Membership

With great joy the elders bring the following recommendation for membership before the body.

The elders recommend that JP Johnson be welcomed into full fellowship with this body by baptism.

You will find his testimony attached to this addendum.

JP Johnson's Testimony

Dear reader, it is a privilege to share my testimony with you. This is a testimony of the Lord's work in me—the Lord who is the author and finisher of my faith and all who are in Christ. I was raised attending bible-believing Baptist churches from infancy in Nashville and Oklahoma. I always knew something about God, but never actually knew Him.

In my mind I was a good person, always making straight A's, and working on my grandparents' farms each summer. When I was 15, I made my "decision," answering the altar call at a large summer camp by walking the aisle and saying the sinner's prayer. Looking back now, I know I didn't have a true knowledge of the nature of God or of my sin. Soon after this, my parents divorced. My brothers and I rebelled and basically became autonomous. I did not honor my mother and my father (Exodus 20:12) and used my pain as another excuse to continue to follow my own selfish desires. From senior high school onward I quit attending church. My life began to be marked by patterns of selfishness, immorality, and binge alcohol and drug use. I was dead in my sins and transgressions (Ephesians 2:1–3; John 3:20).

I see now that there was still restraining grace, but I attributed this to my own goodness. After all, I was not as bad as many people, even many that I knew (Luke 18:19; Jeremiah 17:9).

After grad school I began a career in Washington, D.C., all the while continuing my patterns of sin, selfishness, pride, and rebellion against God's will. I anesthetized myself with the clever and the trivial. I was proud, arrogant, and judgmental. Any troubles I experienced were someone else's fault. I had only made some minor mistakes in judgement. I didn't need the world's help in justifying myself, but it always stood by me, ready to conform me to its post-modern, pop psychology, moralistic deism (Romans 12:2).

Eventually, I was blessed with marriage and children. But, not knowing God, I failed in my duties to be head of the family as Christ is head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). Naturally, I did not have us attending any church, studying Scripture, or anything at all relating to God. Put simply, I could not love anyone correctly without loving God first. When Covid came, I doubted that it would affect me, since I rarely ever left the house, even for work. But I saw the fear and suffering in the world and in my own immediate and extended family. It exposed a lot about people, including myself. Although it was many years in the making, I foolishly didn't see it coming, and suddenly I was divorced from my wife of fifteen years. I had failed in one of my lifelong goals. All my gauges of success and self-worth were completely on empty.

It was during the following months that so many truths were revealed to me. A relative of mine told me that I had sinned against God and God alone (Psalm 51:4), which at first did not sound correct at all. He also mentioned that Jesus did not come to save good people, which was somewhat familiar (Matthew 5:3; Luke 5:31–32).

I was even told that the tribulations I was going through could be the hand of divine discipline and actually a good thing. At first, the idea of the complete sovereignty of God was very strange to me. But I learned that He could be nothing other than completely sovereign, otherwise, He would not truly be God, but simply be "a god" who was warm and fuzzy and made in our own image—a sort of cosmic vending machine. Again, I knew that I had not been "born again" in my teen years. There were no "fruits" in my younger and even adult life. My mind and heart were not renewed and my view of the world hadn't changed. I never had the desire to repent and mortify my sins, or to read the scriptures, or to be with God's people, or to make Christ the Lord of my life.

From there, I began reading Gospels, followed by the Old Testament. I was in shock and awe of the God it revealed. I was shown that my entire life's goals and faith had all been wrong and in vain (Ecclesiastes 1:14). Not only was I not "good," but neither was *any* other human—except for One (Roman 3:10–12). He revealed in His own timing that He had worked so many things together for good towards me, despite my own sinful thoughts and actions.

Over the next few years, I listened to sermons and teachings from ministries such as Ligonier and Grace to You. Rather than just feeling sorry for myself, I actually began to know "godly sorrow" (Titus 3:5). I had doubts at first. I continue to struggle against sin. But I keep in mind the reassuring knowledge of God's sovereign preservation (Philippians 1:6). I began to realize that, by the grace of God *alone*, I am forever changed.

The Spirit finally had made me to know what wisdom was (Psalm 110:10). The knowledge that I had unknowingly longed to have since I was four years old was finally given to me. This is the knowledge that our chief purpose here on earth is to glorify God and enjoy him forever (John 5:26).

I am grateful to profess that our Lord Jesus Christ came, lived a perfect life in active obedience, died and rose again, in order to save those that would believe into Him. It's for these reasons that I am eager to be obedient and baptized and commit to this body of believers.