

The Outlook

First Baptist Church Clayton

Show • Tell
Grow • Serve

January 18, 2026

Volume 49 Number 2

Make ready for God's blessings

By Dr. Len Keever
Pastor

Looking out my window, I see my backyard is littered with gum balls from the sweet gum trees. Daffodils are beginning to break from the ground. Together they tell me that I have some work to do before spring arrives.

I need to rake up those prickly spheres that look like giant sand spurs; I need to put some mulch around the Daffodils.

Jesus talked about reading the signs. What do the signs tell us? Today I am thinking that nature is once more reminding us that even in the harshness of winter there is work to be done if we are to reap the reward of an early harvest. Indeed, Epiphany and Lent are seasons of preparation.

In Epiphany we stop to examine the things God is showing us, looking for deeper meaning that feeds our faith and draws us closer to Jesus. In Lent, we push

aside distractions so that we are prepared to receive Easter's blessing. This is not a season to despair; it is a time to prepare for what lies ahead.

I once asked a farmer what he did during the cold winter months when it was difficult to get into the field. He told me he spent the time sharpening his tools and making sure his equipment was running properly. Winter was a time to get ready for spring. By fixing things now, he could be more focused when planting time came.

Do you remember the parable of the man who had a bumper crop and decided to tear down his barns and build new ones so he wouldn't need to work anymore (see Luke 12). It is a parable that speaks of the danger of thinking we have already done enough.

It teaches us not to think pridefully that we don't need to continue trusting in God. There is still much to do. There are things in our lives that need to be cleared away. Let us take advantage of this time by sharpening our tools and making ready for the blessings God will soon provide.



New Lineup for Wednesday night 30/30/30 sessions
See page 2 for details

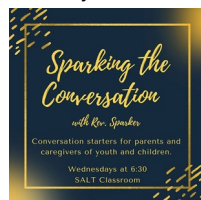
New sessions announced for Wednesday's 30/30/30

Sparking the Conversation: Faith Foundations

What is sin? What is the Bible? Who is Jesus? Who is God? It is normal to ask questions as we grow in faith. How do we explore these questions with our children and youth in ways that foster a foundation that can be built upon as they grow? Each week during the Wednesday night 30/30/30 sessions, join Rev. Stephanie Parker as she leads a series on faith foundation topics – Jesus, baptism, communion, prayer, worship, sin, Holy Spirit, etc. – and consider how we might talk about these topics with our children in age-appropriate ways.

A question I get a lot is, “how do I talk to my child about... (fill in the blank).” What I hope you will see first and foremost is that you are not alone! This is one of the gifts of a faith community – to walk alongside of others who also are dedicated to raising their children and youth in faith and to lean on one another for advice, prayer and grace.

Some topics might be more relevant for younger children, some for older, but we all have something to learn as we grow together. Join Rev. Parker in the SALT classroom (across from the youth room) from 6:30 to 7 p.m. and let's spark the conversation.



The Word Made Flesh: Jesus as Revealed in John's Gospel

Beginning Wednesday, January 21 from 6:30 to 7 p.m. during 30/30/30, Rev. Stephen Nance will offer a Bible study called The Word Made Flesh: Jesus as Revealed in John's Gospel. They will meet in the Basic Sunday School classroom.

The Gospel of John is unique among the four New Testament Gospels in that, unlike the “Synoptic” Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the Gospel of John is structured around seven distinctive “sayings” of Jesus, all beginning with the phrase “I am,” and seven distinctive “signs” of Jesus, seven miraculous works he performs.



These “sayings” and “signs” reveal Jesus’ person, nature, character and mission in keeping with John’s purpose for writing: “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31 CSB).

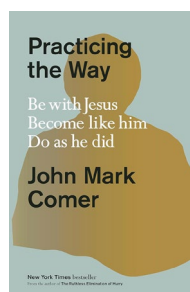
We all need to get to know Jesus better, and what better way than to take a close look at the things he said about himself and the things he did to prove it. Join us on Wednesday nights.

Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become like Jesus, Do as He Did

Rev. Keeley Tarkington will offer a study on the book “Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become like Jesus, Do as He Did” by *New York Times Best Selling* author, John Mark Comer. The study begins Wednesday, January 21 during 30/30/30 from 6:30 to 7 p.m.

In this new year, we become aware of the opportunity to make each day count. This book offers nuggets of wisdom, thought provoking topics, and practical steps that will inspire you to not resign yourself to just growing another year older, but motivate you to take steps to mature and become more like Jesus. Don't stay stuck in a spiritual rut! Join us on Wednesday nights.

The book can be purchased on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Practicing-Way-Jesus-Become-like/dp/0593193822>. If you would like to purchase through the church, please reach out to Rev. Tarkington at ktarkington@fbcclaytonnc.org or call the church office at 919-553-4161.



A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

On January 21, Dr. Keever will begin a study of Eugene Peterson's book *A Long Obedience In the Same Direction*. The class will focus on the Psalms of Accent and the difference in being a pilgrim and a tourist as we journey in faith. We will meet in the conference room at 6:30 p.m. during 30/30/30.

Join us Sunday, January 25 at WLFJ

It's restart time for our With Love From Jesus support ministry. On Sunday, January 25, First Baptist Clayton will take its once-monthly turn to serve those in need of a helping hand.

If you would like to serve, please let Rudy Oliver know as soon as possible and come to the WLFJ house at 4 p.m. for sign-in and instruction. We will distribute food, clothing and share the Gospel until around 7 p.m. You can also bring any items you would like to donate to the ministry.

They are currently in need of nonperishable items. WLFJ often has over 80 guests come for food and clothing items.

The WLFJ house is located at the southeast corner of West 2nd and South Robertson streets. Rudy can be reached at 919-271-1178, or email him at reholston@gmail.com.

Improve balance, health with Bada Bling Ballet

Do you want to improve your balance, your health, experience community, and have fun? Bada Bling Ballet Balance and Beyond Class for female Senior Adults starts Monday, January 19 from 10 - 11 a.m. in the Youth room located on the second floor.

There is no cost and the class is restricted to 10. To register, contact Stacie Moor at Bada Bling Ballet through cell or text at 919-763-5738.

Volunteers sought for communication ministry

The Church Council is currently gauging interest in a potential new team ministry opportunity to help us effectively communicate First Baptist Church Clayton committee activities, upcoming church events and service opportunities. The proposed Communication Ministry Team will also work to improve communication with church members and others via online videos, on-line slides prior to worship services, and scrolling messages on TV monitors around the church.

If this interests you and you want to serve your church and help grow God's Kingdom, please contact Keith Blackley or Stewart McLeod.



Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. – Proverbs 3:5-6

Need to contact a member of the pastoral staff? Here's how:

Rev. Dr. Len Keever
Pastor

919.820.0792

lkeever@fbcclaytonnc.org

Dr. Keever works remotely on Mondays and will be in the church office Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (other times by appointment) and welcomes your calls, requests and visits.

Rev. Stephen Nance
Pastor of Senior Adults

717.262.8400

snance@fbcclaytonnc.org

Rev. Stephanie Parker
Pastor of Children and Families

919.815.0946

sparker@fbcclaytonnc.org

Rev. Keeley Tarkington
Minister of Music

919.649.3155

ktarkington@fbcclaytonnc.org

Memorials and Honorariums

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR GIFTS TO THE

General Fund in Memory of

Helen Ellerbe by Bob and Bet Barber
Helen Ellerbe by Ronald and Mitzu Parrott
Gardner and Dean Temple, and Marie Monsees by Pat Zullo
Gardner Temple by Emory and Jo Howard

Gardner Temple by Judy Wood

General Fund in Honor of

Glenda Toler by Shirley Shires

Youth Ministry Fund in Memory of

Helen Ellerbe by Gail Washington

Baptist Men in Memory of

Gardner Temple by Rudy and Edwina Oliver

Building Fund in Memory of

Gardner Temple by Donna Brown

State Missions Fund in Memory of

Dean Grattidge by Walter and Jill Rasor

Dedicate the flowers in the sanctuary to a loved one

Did you know that the flowers in the sanctuary each Sunday can be dedicated in memory or in honor of a loved one? A \$50 contribution to the General Fund is all it takes and a message in the bulletin indicates the contribution. To reserve a Sunday, please call Terry in the church office at 919-553-4161.



He or someone on his staff prepares two arrangements and places the flowers in the sanctuary prior to the Sunday morning worship service. Afterwards, the flowers are picked up and taken back to the floral shop.

Jody does not charge for this service. We are thankful for this most generous

Please know, however, that your \$50 does not purchase the flowers. It is a donation to the church.

For many years, church member Jody McLeod of Annie V's Florist has provided the flowers every Sunday as a loan.

ongoing gift to First Baptist that brings God's beauty and warmth into His house every Sunday. If you would like to purchase the flowers to take home, please contact Annie V's or Jody. His contact information is listed in Realm.

Weekly Reports

Worship Attendance

Sunday, January 11.....212	Sunday, January 4.....209
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Sunday School Attendance

Sunday, January 11.....140	Sunday, January 4.....144
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General Fund Giving

Sunday, January 11.....N/A	Sunday, January 4.....\$26,639
2026 Weekly Needs.....\$17,470	