



# The Connection

We are called to share Jesus in creative and intentional ways, through:  
*Connecting* with God and His Church, *Growing* in Faith and Love,  
and *Serving* Our Community and World.

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## Dear Church... from Pastor Matt

The two weeks I spent in Tennessee taking classes was fantastic, but it was also pretty intense. I was in class for eight hours each day, basically drinking from a fire hose. The first week was on the Book of Romans, and the second was on Christian leadership. To be honest, I am still unpacking everything that I learned. Add to that the fact that VBS (which was AWESOME!) was the very next week, and the fact is that my brain is still mush. I wanted to have some strategic topic planned for this article, but my brain's just not there yet. So instead I'm going to share something simple and meaningful that stuck with me in my Romans class.

I was assigned to present on Romans 4, in which Paul talks about the faith of Abraham. For the Jews, Abraham was the founder of their people—he set the pattern that they were all supposed to follow. The Jewish leaders of the time claimed that God approved of Abraham because Abraham was “faithful”—he obeyed God’s commands, especially when God told him to circumcise the men in his family (Genesis 17), or when God told him to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22). If God approved of Abraham because he followed commands, then we have to follow commands before God will approve of us.

In Romans 4, Paul argues that the Jewish leaders have misunderstood the story. He points out that God approved of Abraham back in Genesis 15—years before the events of Gen. 17 and 22. But why did God approve of Abraham? Paul says that it was because Abraham had faith (which is the same word as faithful), meaning that he believed God. But the point wasn't that Abraham believed in just anything—Paul isn't talking about the power of positive thinking. Specifically, Abraham believed God's promise to make him a father of many nations. This was a big deal because Abraham was not exactly a great candidate for the father of any nations: “his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and... [his wife] Sarah's womb was also dead.” (Romans 4:19) Abraham believed that God would keep his promise even though it seemed physically impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have children.

Why did Abraham believe in God's promise, in spite of the obstacles? I think this is really important. Our culture—even church culture—teaches us that there is power in belief: “All you have to do is believe,” we're told. To be clear, the Bible does not say that. Faith has no power by itself, and putting your faith in the wrong thing will get you nowhere. The lesson of Abraham is not about the power of faith, but about the power of the One that Abraham put his faith in: Paul tells us that Abraham believed in “the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.” (4:17) Abraham understood that God was the creator of everything, with the power to create life where none existed—including in Sarah's womb. More than that, he believed in God's faithfulness—he believed that God would create life by resurrecting Sarah's womb, simply because God promised to.

It turns out, faith is all that God needs from us. God can do anything and everything he wants—but if we are going to participate, we have to believe that God can and will do the things he's promised to do. Abraham didn't have a degree in theology, he had never read a word of scripture—in fact, Abraham probably didn't know that God was the only god at this point. The only thing Abraham knew was that the God who created everything could be trusted to keep his promises, no matter how impossible they may seem.

God asks the same thing of us: no degrees, no abilities or gifts, only our faith in his power and his promises. As you look around, you may see a lot of deadness—a lot of lost causes. Maybe the dark headlines in the news seem overwhelming. Maybe the circumstances of your life, your job, your relationships, seem to be “dead already.” God doesn't ask you to pretend that they aren't, and he doesn't ask you to fix them yourself. He asks you to believe that he can “give life to the dead and calls into being things that were not,” and to continue living the kind of life he has called his people to live. After all, “The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” (4:23–24)

# *I've been thinking...* "About Change"

*From Pastor Rachel*

Today I am working from home because my cat, Jasper, has taken an umbrage to my new roommate. It seems silly—he's a cat, and she's a very nice human who likes cats. But change is hard, and that's really what Jasper is objecting to.

I have a vet-approved plan for helping Jasper with the transition, and I will be back at the office tomorrow, but Jasper's difficulties have been making me think about how I react to change.

At first, Jasper was doing a really great job. He was a little standoffish, but welcomed Leann into our apartment. There were small signs of distress—being less cuddly, being more talkative than usual. Then today, he bit and scratched Leann.

I've been thinking lately about how I respond to change. I used to think I had the right approach—keep your head down and keep moving. But God has been showing me the distress that it has caused in the past to my person (and to those around me). While, fortunately, I am not known for biting or scratching people, I too have my tells. There are things that I do when my internal world is not reacting well to change. I can become withdrawn, snappy, and less compassionate. I tend to work harder, but not necessarily well.

In a recent ministry thread on social media, individuals were listing off small changes in their churches that had led to upheaval. These changes included things like trimming a bush, moving some chairs, and painting the area around the baptistery. The consequences ranged from a family leaving the church, to passive-aggressive comments being brought up about the changes years later. While we might be saddened to hear about these reactions, most of us can probably think of moments when we reacted poorly to change and had behaviors not very far off from these individuals.

Like Jasper, we do not respond well to change. And while a vet may be able to help him with his issues, we need something bigger and more powerful to intercede in our distress. The Great Physician, God himself, is who we rely on to succeed through change. This is the God that had enough mercy on the grumbling Israelites to faithfully feed them manna each day. This is the God who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (Psalm 147:3). This is the God who gets that our internal worlds are often not at peace, and that we struggle.

He knows us—our every anxious thought, our every selfish motive, and our love for Him and desire to serve and please Him. He knows it all. And He also knows that when we don't allow Him to deal with what's going on internally (thoughts and feelings) it often can bleed out in negative ways on those around us (our beloved neighbors that God has called us to love!).

Next month, I will write more about change, and how God can lovingly transform us in those times. But today, I'd love you to think about the way that God knows you. The way that He sees and cares about what you're experiencing. Without suppressing the thoughts and emotions you wish you didn't have, can you lay it all before Him? He knows of your imperfections (and mine!) before we say them, so we might as well lay it all out before the Great Physician himself.

*Lord, I pray that as each of us come before you, seeking your peace in all circumstances, that you would help us to be honest about where we're at. Help us pour out ourselves completely before you, humbly, trusting that some of your best work in us happens when we have the courage to be vulnerable. Amen.*

With  
*Sympathy*

**Glenn Boyle**

passed away and went home to the Lord on July 28th. There will be a Celebration of Life at TCC on August 17th at 2:00 pm. Please continue to keep the family in your prayers.

**Little Lamb Christian Preschool  
Open House**

**Wednesday, August 7th • 4:00-7:00 pm**

Discover Learning Experiences  
Meet Preschool Staff  
Tour the Classroom and Playground

## Sunday School Schedules

9:00 – 10:00 am

### Summer Term Sunday School Schedule

July 28-September 1:

*(No Childcare or Children's Programs)*

"31 Days of Praise" with Carol George

Prayer Gathering with Gary Tiffin

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### Fall Term Sunday School Schedule

(September 8-November 17)

*(with Childcare/Children's Programs)*

#### **Bible Study For Everyone**

**(Carol George)**

A chapter-by-chapter study of books of the Bible using an accompanying workbook. This class runs continuously throughout the year.

#### **What You Believe Matters**

**(Debbie Loyd)**

Sometimes we are not aware of certain religious beliefs that harm us. This class will look at some of these beliefs, where they came from, why they are harmful, and characteristics that make us more vulnerable to these.

#### **Christian Civics: Following Jesus in a Politically-Divided World (Gary Tiffin)**

This class will use a book by John Whittaker to help participants work out how their personal faith should inform the way they think and act as citizens of their country (This is about how to think, not what to think).

#### **Speaking in Church—For Beginners**

**(Pastor Matt)**

This class is for anyone who is interested in taking on speaking roles in our church services. We will learn about the basics of public speaking, as well as the specifics of leading confession, prayers of the church, communion and offering meditations, and other speaking roles.

A vibrant yellow poster for an end-of-summer event. At the top, a bright sun is flanked by two large, stylized green leaves. The text "End of SUMMER Hullabaloo" is written in a mix of fonts: "End of" in cursive, "SUMMER" in large, colorful, block letters, and "Hullabaloo" in a flowing script. Below the text, a cartoon hot dog character with a face, arms, and legs is shown running and giving a thumbs up. To the left and right of the hot dog are slices of watermelon. At the bottom, the event details are listed: "Friday August 23rd" and "5:30 — 7:30 pm".

**Friday August 23rd**  
**5:30 — 7:30 pm**

Get ready for an end-of-summer Hulabaloo! We will have fan favorites like 9-square, froggy ball and a dunk tank—and the basketball court will be open. The little ones can get in on the fun too with an open playground, and a wading pool. Dinner is served—come hungry for hot dogs and sides. All ages welcome!

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### **Seniors Bowling Trip**

**Friday, August 23rd**

Strike, Spare, or Gutter, all bowlers are welcome and if you don't want to bowl come and be a cheerleader. The cost is \$5.00 for bowlers. We will leave the church parking lot at 1:00 pm or you can meet us at Northgate Bowl (2380 Northgate Ave, Salem).

### **Seniors Swan Island Dahlia Trip**

**Thursday, August 29th**

Flowers are blooming and the Seniors are planning a fieldtrip to Swan Island Dahlia Gardens in Canby, Oregon, on August 29, 2024. The bus will leave the Church at 9:30 and return by 3:30. The Gardens are beautiful and the fellowship is delightful. A picnic lunch will be provided. There is no cost for this trip. Please sign up or call Virginia Musgrave at 503-743-1500 or 509-254-3657.

## Operation Christmas Child Packing Day — August 18th

**Please Come Join Us** (and bring a friend) as we fill and prepare 1200 Shoebox gifts for children around the world. The Operation Christmas Child Salem Area Team of year round volunteers is hosting the 4th Annual Community Packing Party on Sunday, August 18 at 2:00 p.m. All of the fun and excitement will take place in the Salem Evangelical Church gymnasium located at 455 Locust Street NE.

We are especially collecting school supplies to place in Shoeboxes on Packing Day. Some of the items we still need are: Pencils. Pens. Cap erasers. Pink erasers. Kids scissors, 6-in rulers, Pencil sharpeners, Index cards, Colored pencils, 24 pks of crayons, Markers, OR you can designate an offering for Shoeboxes (Operation Christmas Child), and we will do the shopping for you!

These and other items will bless children in need around the world. Each shoebox also contains a gospel message “The Greatest Journey” that local leaders use to teach children and families about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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### Cascade School Supply Drive

Our goal is to fill backpacks with basic school supplies and distribute them to our students on August 29. Last year we were able to provide 150 backpacks to students and families in need. With your help we just might be able to surpass that amount this year. **A School Bus will be picking up items collected by various organizations on August 8th.** The goal is to “Fill the Bus!”

Suggested items: Composition Notebooks, 3-ring binders (hard-sided, 2" & 3"), Elmer's Purple Disappearing Glue Sticks, Black Expo Markers, Notebook Paper, Notebook Dividers, Fiskar scissors (kids and 7"), Backpacks, 12-inch rulers, Zipper pencil pouches for binders, Highlighters. Bring to church by August 4th.



**Saturday, August 10th  
9:30 am — 12:00 pm**

We have lots of projects to prep and ready the church for fall programming! Come help us! Projects available for all ages and mobility levels.

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### Family Camp at Camp Winema August 30 — September 2

***THEME: BACK TO OUR FIRST LOVE  
Matthew Holmes is the Keynote Speaker***

Are you looking for a time where you can get away with the whole family? How about a time where you and your family can grow in your faith and worship with other families? What about a sandy beach and a glassy lake? If all of these sound great, then Family Camp is for you! For four days, families come together for a camp experience for all ages!

2024 finds us in the heat of another national election. Yet, for us, the Church, our “first love” is to love God. A big part of this is realized through loving others, others defined as our neighbors around us and fellow Christians within our church. Loving God requires us to put Him above our loyalties to parties, cultures, movements, etc. Loving neighbors requires us to love the members of other parties and seek the good of everyone, not just the people we like. Loving Jesus requires us to create communities where people can disagree, yet be united in love.

*For more information,  
including prices and registration:  
<https://www.winema.org/family-camp.html>*