



WELCOME

JOIN US FOR WORSHIP

Pastor Shawn's Message 1
Calendar, Birthdays & Anniv. 2

Reflection and Growth by
Pastor Shawn White.... .3-5

*Bland Ministry
Center
item for January
corn*

*Our January
Series
Letters of
Revelation
begins
January 7th in
the am service*



The Voice

January 2024

*"Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things,
his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him."
Psalm 98:1*

Message from our Pastor Dr. Shawn White

Once the hustle and bustle of Christmas passed as a child, I began to look forward to all the "year in review" shows. Mostly I was interested in the biggest sports plays of the year, and this sometimes spilt over into the biggest songs of the year. I don't see these as much anymore, but growing up I only had the choice between channel 2 and channel 7, so when the biggest plays of the year came on TV, it was watch that or nothing.

It is fun to review the year as a way of closing off one season and then moving on to the next. It is in that spirit that this edition of the Voice is prepared except rather than review the past year, I want to review the past seven years of preaching and ministry themes before launching what, I hope, is the theme we will use for 2024. As we review what we have covered to prepare us for what lies ahead, my hope is that you will see that we live as people of purpose. Our purpose is always to glorify God and His Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. In order to accomplish that, we look at this purpose from a variety of angles, just as you would a piece of fine art, or considering a big life decision. So let's review the angles we have used over the past seven years, and then introduce our new angle for 2024.

Mission and Ministry Opportunities

**Baptist
Women's Day
Circle**

**2nd Thursday at
10:30 am**



**Ruby J.
Louthan
Circle
Meeting
January
9th at
6:00 pm**



**We will meet at
Fincastle
January 27th
11:30am**

January 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 HAPPY NEW YEAR	2	3 Church Supper 5:45pm Prayer Meeting 6:30pm	4	5	6
7 Letters of Revelation I I am TeamKID and Youth 5pm	8 All Teams Meeting 6:30pm	9 Ruby J. Louthan Circle 6pm	10 Church Supper 5:45pm Prayer Meeting 6:30pm	11 Women's Day Circle 10:30am	12	13
14 Letters of Revelation I I am TeamKID and Youth 5pm	15	16	17 Church Supper 5:45pm Prayer Meeting 6:30pm	18	19	20
21 Letters of Revelation I I am TeamKID and Youth 5pm	22 Deacon's Meeting 6:30pm	23	24 Church Supper 5:45pm Quarterly Business Meeting 6:30pm	25	26	27 OASIS at Fincastle 11:30am
28 Letters of Revelation I I am TeamKID and Youth 5pm	29	30	31 Church Supper 5:45 Prayer Meeting 6:30pm			

January Birthdays

Jan. 5	Regina Filer	Jan. 21	Garret Wright
Jan. 13	Patti Ayers	Jan. 22	William Aker
Jan. 15	Ashton Burgess	Jan. 24	Rhonda Rogers
	Alex Ramsey	Jan. 25	Nathan Nichols
	Don White	Jan. 29	Kris Toney
		Jan. 31	Amy Law



Since taking on the role of Pastor in 2017, I have wanted to have a theme that brought some consistency to each of our years together. Sometimes these themes have been a part of our Celebration Dinner in November when not interrupted by COVID or scheduling conflicts. We would use the theme to play a little game, and it would do my spirit good to be humbled when few if any would remember any of the preaching series for the previous 11 months. Though I am so humbled each year, nevertheless I soldier on with these themes.

One of the values of themes is that we can review them and hopefully dust off some cobwebs somewhere in the minds of those who have been present these past seven years to recall, “Yes, I vaguely remember that.” After a brief years-in-review, let me expound on the preaching and hopefully programmatic theme for 2024.

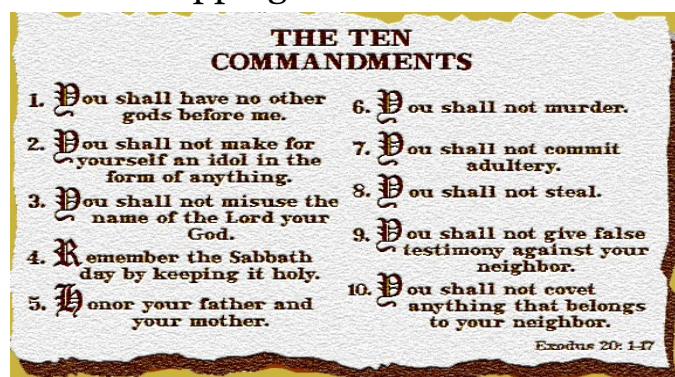
2017

In September of 2017, I began an abbreviated preaching theme through the Fall on what it means to be a Church. Churches do many things, but almost all of them can be categorized under one of five functions of the Church: Evangelism, Service, Education, Worship and Fellowship. Between September and the beginning of

Advent, we considered these five functions of the Church looking at the book of Acts. We even did a survey with the congregation to discover which of those five areas you considered a strength and which of the areas needed improvement. It came as little surprise to me, at least, that the rankings from strongest to least strong were in this order: worship, fellowship, service, education, and evangelism.

Armed with this survey, we embarked on a five-year series of emphases in order from strongest to least strong. In 2018, we considered what it means to be a worshiping Church. We used the elements of our worship service as our guide: being called to worship, the place of confession in worship, praise in worship, the great acts of God as the focus of worship, the symbols of worship, the hymns we sing in worship, the great sermons of the Bible and, finally, being sent from worship into the world. There is value in being thoughtful worshipers.

This led us in 2019 to reflect on what it means to be a fellowshiping Church – a church that loves each other well. We had a number of little series that year, but two of the highlights were the “Welcome Home” series centered around a Thom Rainer resource about becoming a welcoming congregation, and a series on community and the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commands were central to Israel’s understanding of their community, and we looked at how they help us understand more about our own, even if they don’t all apply in the same way.



Do we dare write about 2020? Perhaps that year’s series should have been Continual Obnnoxious Vicious Inescapable Disruptions. There were a great number of recorded messages that year as we tried to emphasize education or, as I called it, Discipleship. The three series we covered come from Jim Putman’s definition of a disciple: someone who makes a decision to follow Jesus (head change), is transformed by Jesus (heart change), and is on mission with Jesus (action change). What does it mean to follow? How are we transformed? What is the mission of Jesus?

As the pandemic continued through 2020 into 2021, we moved into a new theme for 2021: evangelism. Surveys indicated we saw evangelism as the weakest of the five areas of Church life. I am not sure that has changed, but we know that change does not happen quickly and certainly doesn't happen if we ignore it. So we began with a North American Mission Board program called "Who's Your One?" Who is the one person you are praying will come to faith or come back to fellowship at Church? Then, we had a multi-month look at the Book of Acts. The Church went through monumental growth in Acts so we considered the work of the Spirit there to understand how the Spirit works now. We ended the year with a 50-day Spiritual Adventure called "More Than Survivors." It seemed appropriate after 2020!

2021

We rounded out our five-year emphasis in 2022 with the theme of service. This theme was less about the worship and preaching themes, and more about doing something for others. We used the number 22 as the focus: 22 service projects, 220 items per month to Bland Ministry Center, 2200 hours given in service, \$22,000 to missions, and 220,000 pennies collected. I always say, reaching the goal is not the goal but moving toward the goal is the goal. So, we didn't collect 220,000 pennies, but 22,000 pennies was still quite a load to take to the bank! The money from the pennies helped three of our students serve on mission trips in 2023.

With our five-year series of emphases now complete, where would we go in 2023? This past year we decided on the symbol (GC)2. This stood for the Great Commandments – loving God and loving neighbor, and the Great Commission – going and making disciples. Our preaching series focused, then, on Deuteronomy where the command to love God is first found, on John, which emphasizes loving one another more than any other Gospel, and then on the parables in Matthew's Gospel, where we find the Great Commission. Given the centrality of the Great Commandments and the Great Commission, we should never leave that series behind as it is central to who we are as followers of Christ. So, you will see these two central ideas firmly implanted in our theme for 2024.

And for that theme, read on...

Our 2024 theme

It is time for First Baptist Church to consider our GROWTH. There are six letters in growth, and we will have six preaching series over the coming year. GROWTH is an acronym for six elements of sustaining ourselves as a growing congregation. These are:

G stands for    

R stands for         

O stands for     

W stands for     

T stands for     

H stands for     

Kidding, of course! Why would I give away the whole year? I will publish an article in the upcoming Voices when we are beginning the series, but I am going to wait to introduce these six series in worship throughout the year.

There are three aspects of GROWTH we can reveal, however, which will run through all these series. I urge you to consider how you can help FBC grow in one, two, or three of these ways.

First, we need to grow deeper in our love for, understanding of, and service to God our Father. If I was to attach a goal to this, it would be that everyone in the congregation would be part of a study group – a Sunday School class, a Bible Study, a small group.

Second, we need to grow larger. We have completed a number of important renovations to our building – windows, roof, painting, carpet. As I have heard one leader say, “If we don’t grow, we could soon have the most beautiful empty building in Bluefield.” This congregation loves too well not to grow. If I was to attach a goal to this, it would be to reverse engineer what we think growing by 10% per year for the next five years would entail. What do we think would have to be in place for that to be possible?



Third, we need to grow smaller. Now, that might seem the opposite of the aspect above, but it is a different dimension. When a Church grows larger, it also needs to find ways to grow smaller so everyone experiences a meaningful connection to others. We cannot become a series of nameless faces. God designed us for intimacy with Him and with others. If I was to attach a goal to this, it would be that every regular attendee has a meaningful, social connection with at least three other family units in the congregation. I write family units in the broad sense – a single individual can be a family, as can a widow/widower, a couple, those with children or grandchildren. I write “three other family units” because I don’t think it is sufficient for someone to come to FBC and be connected only to my family. There may be six of us, but that is still only one connection point. Can people call on a variety of folks for support, encouragement and also be able to give support and encouragement to a variety of other people?

This is my proposal for 2024. We want to experience GROWTH in three dimensions: deeper, larger, and smaller all at the same time.

And, if any of us feel that after the Christmas holidays we are grown wider, well ... perhaps we can start a healthy eating and healthy activity support group.

May God bless you, your family, your friends, your Church and your community in 2024 as we seek to “grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

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"Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is filling for the upright to praise him." Psalm 33:1



First Baptist Church
of Bluefield