



Christian Challenger

Vol. 68

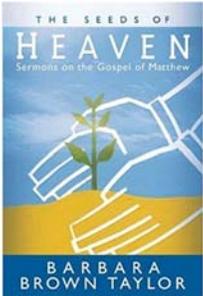
February 3, 2021

No. 3



Lenten Study 2021

The Seeds of Heaven
by Barbara Brown Taylor



The Seeds of Heaven by Barbara Brown Taylor is a wonderful collection of sermons on the Gospel of Matthew. Taylor, with her deep insight and talent for writing, expresses her thoughts on fifteen of the stories found in Matthew. She writes in the Preface that the reader "will find one preacher's attempt to speak of Christian faith in a way that honors both the holiness of Scripture and the holiness of real people's lives on earth."

Join Sheri Sutton in this 8-week study beginning Wednesday, February 17, at 10:15am via Zoom. Meeting sign-on information will be available prior to February 17. Please register with the church office by calling 692-2282 to order your book. Cost of the book is \$15.

Barbara Brown Taylor is a New York *Times* best-selling author, teacher, and Episcopal priest and lives quietly on her farm in northern Georgia. *Time* magazine included her on its annual list of Most Influential People in 2014.



Pull out those bell bottoms and leisure suits
and join the fun!

Be sure and save the date for this
groovy Church wide event!!

Participate in a Ministry of the Church in 2021!

You make a difference! The gifts you bring, combined with the power of Christ at work within us, enable First Christian Church to accomplish more than we can ask or image (Ephesians 3:20). Therefore, each member of the congregation is encouraged to participate in one or more of the ministries that further the church's mission, both on our front doorsteps and to the ends of the earth.

No prior experience is required. All that is needed is a passionate willingness to further the ministry of the church. Indicate where you would like to serve by checking the box beside one or more of the ministries below.

COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY

- Cindy Hernandez, Chair

EVANGELISM

- Chris Showalter & Robert Hastings, Co-Chairs

FAITH FORMATION

- Ashley Burross, Chair

MEMBERSHIP & FELLOWSHIP

- Susan Buckley, Chair

PROPERTY

- Rick Appling, Chair

STEWARDSHIP & FINANCE

- Jerry Johnson & Eddie Tucker, Co-Chairs

WORLD OUTREACH & COMMUNITY SERVICE

- Kim Ballard, Chair

WORSHIP & FINE ARTS

- Stacey Strickland, Chair

NAME _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

PHONE: (Home) _____

(Cell) _____

(Work) _____

If you plan to stay on the same Ministry as you served on in 2020, please still fill out this form and return it so that we may also confirm phone numbers and email addresses, otherwise you may be removed from the 2021 Ministry listing. THANK YOU!!!

Don't forget..Church Board Members are expected to serve on a Ministry and if a form is not received they may be drafted to a Ministry.

Make Your Mark

Dr. Mark R. Bender
Senior Minister



Spiritual Growth - Who is Responsible? (Part One)

If you know anything about us, you know that we love guiding people on a journey from standing on the sidelines to becoming fully devoted followers of Christ. We've designed programs and activities to keep them engaged so that they grow in their relationship with Jesus and find ways to share his love with others (Matthew 22:37-40). From the very beginning in 1975 when our founding pastor and a small band of volunteers started this church, that's been our focus. The fact that our church has grown from a few hundred people in 1975 to more than 25,000 today is humbling, and we've taken it as one indication that our way of doing church is having an impact.

At least that's what we thought.

But when we surveyed our people in 2004, we got one of those wake up calls that you'd rather not get but you know you can't ignore. Our initial interest in conducting the survey was based on our long-held, overarching hypothesis that increased participation in church activities - small groups, weekend worship services, and volunteering - increases a person's love of God and others. Said another way: Church activity = Spiritual growth.

*[After receiving more than 6,000 responses] we learned a shocking fact about our congregation: Increase participation in church activities **barely moved** our people to love God and others more.*

The paragraphs above describe a shocking reality for one of America's largest megachurches roughly fifteen years ago. This church was convinced that if they got a person involved in church activities, the result would be increased spiritual growth. It turns out, that was rarely the case. What they discovered is that:

Increasing church attendance and participation in organized ministry activities do not predict or drive spiritual growth for people who are in the more advanced stages of spiritual development. Church activities have the greatest influence in the early stages of spiritual growth, but things like personal spiritual practices, including prayer and Bible reading, have far more influence later in the spiritual journey.

This came to mind as I prepared for our Elders Orientation this past Saturday. One of topics of discussion for our Elders was how we minister to people who have been worshipping with us online but don't necessarily live in Wichita Falls. Are there things we can do, and ways we can care, for them? To start wrestling with that question, I thought it was good to have the reminder above - *church activity does not equal spiritual growth*. That's true for online options as well.

Two weeks from today, we step into the liturgical season of Lent. The 40 days of Lent are designed to be a time for growing through repentance. It's a time not just for giving something up but for taking upon ourselves the intention and the receptivity to God's grace. That's how we prepare to celebrate Easter together. While much of Lent is focused on individual spiritual growth (and that will be the subject of Part 2), what is the church's responsibility in helping you develop as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Back in the 1960s, when our movement - the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) - referred to themselves as a "brotherhood" rather than a denomination, Samuel Pugh pulled

together a guide book for new members of Disciples churches. It was called the *Primer for New Disciples*. Within this book was a chapter written by one of my childhood ministers, Dudley Strain. This chapter was titled "What You Can Expect of Your Church." In it, Strain wrote:

The church will offer to you what Jesus offered those who followed him. They could know God best, he said, by knowing and following him (Jesus). The church will help you grow in your acceptance of and love for Jesus Christ. He will become the true Lord of your lives as you yield one area of your lives after another to his control. His teachings will become increasingly relevant to your daily lives as you develop in Christian growth.

Strain went on to say there are four privileges which the church offers to its members: the privilege (1) of worship; (2) of study; (3) of fellowship; and (4) of service. Almost 60 years later, those four universal privileges are still a part of our church's strategy. Here at First Christian Church, we believe the church is tasked with "setting the table" so that you can GROW by worshipping weekly, KNOW by studying regularly, GO by serving consistently, and SHOW by sharing the peace of Christ everyday.

In their book, *Move* (Zondervan, 2011), Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson use a wonderful analogy to talk about the church's role in your spiritual growth. They liken the church to a spiritual garden where organized settings allow natural growth to occur. Just as a garden must be properly prepared, tilled, fertilized, weeded, pruned, watered, and staked (supported), so, too, the church must assist you in blooming spiritually. Generally, this includes Sunday worship services, small group meetings, serving within the church, serving those in need through the church, participating in adult education classes focused on spiritual topics, and additional teaching or worship services.



On the other pages of the Christian Challenger, you will find opportunities for worship on Sunday. You'll find small group meetings (e.g. Sunday School, CWF groups). You'll find opportunities to serve the church (e.g. ministry participation, camera operators). You'll find opportunities to serve outside the church (e.g. Souper Bowl Sunday). You'll find adult education topics (e.g. the *Seeds of Heaven* Lenten Study). You'll find additional teaching and worship services (e.g. Ash Wednesday). And this is just a small sample. On the horizon are additional spiritual growth opportunities during Lent, a discussion group for talking about healing division, a gathering for those new to the faith or the church, and more.

Let's be clear. The church is the most significant organized influence on your spiritual growth. We strategically set the table (arrange for these things to happen) but, ultimately, you've got to decide to sit down at the table to eat. It's hard for you to make Jesus Christ a priority in your life without participation in the body of Christ known as the church. How are you doing in GROWING, KNOWING, GOING, and SHOWING?

There is no doubt that the church bears some responsibility for your spiritual growth. But, the church is just one of four factors in your spiritual growth. We'll talk about the other three in Part 2.

Mark

FCC MINISTRY NEWS AND CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS



A new worship series at
The Neighborhood
Wednesdays at 6:00 pm



First Christian Church
Live on [facebook.com/fccwf](https://www.facebook.com/fccwf)
Sunday at 10:45 am





Celebrate
"Souper" Bowl
Sunday
by filling a special bag with cans of soup
to feed the
clients at Interfaith! Soup makes a great
nutritious meal for families in need.
Pick up bags in the church office, and in the collection box on
the porch outside the Chapel entrance.
Return filled bags to the church office or to the collection box
by Sunday, **February 7th**!



What's Your Favorite Hymn?

Debbie Watson, our organist would like to include your favorite hymn in the worship service on Sunday mornings. Please give us your name, hymn title, and then in 50 words or less, tell us why this hymn is special to you.

You can email your hymn information to susan@firstchristianwf.com, you can leave it in the pew on Sunday morning, or you can bring it to the church office.

The **Challenger** is biweekly, with the next publication on Feb. 17! FCC Ministry News is sent by email every Tuesday.

Camera Help Wanted – The Evangelism Ministry still has need for two or three additional "camera" operators for our online services. There is minimal time required and with enough volunteers, will be on an "occasional" basis. Please contact Jerry Johnson (940) 704-1471 or the church office (940-692-2282) to let us know you are interested and we will fill you in on the details.

Member News:

♥**Hospitalized**: no one. Released and back home is Jane Long.

♥**Congratulations** to Clay Roach, son of Kerry & Sharon Roach, and the former Aneke Schmittner, who were married on Thursday, January 21, in Seattle. Kerry Roach performed the wedding via Zoom.



Join us on the East Parking lot Sunday mornings at 8:40 am for a Drive-In Communion service! This short service features hymns, prayers, a message, and communion. Come start your Sunday with this Onsite Worship Experience.

STEWARDSHIP 2021 CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Cards received as of 2/1/21	118 = \$715,717
Previous Estimates still out	19 = \$42,900
2020 Campaign Final Numbers	135 = \$775,831

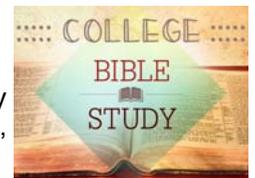


The fact that we have weathered the ups and downs of 2020 so well as a church is a testament to your generosity. Let's make what we do in 2021 speak even louder to the fact that God has resourced us and equipped us *to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine* (Eph. 3:20)!

If you have not had the chance to turn in your 2021 Estimate of Giving card, we hope you will take a few minutes to do so. Tina Williams or Cheryl Appling will be happy to help you confidentially fill out your card over the phone.

Calling All College Students!

Join Josh at 7:30 pm on Thursday evenings at Rapid Fire Pizza for food, fellowship, and Bible study!



FOR THE RECORD . . .

CGRM: (Tues., Jan. 26)	29
Neighborhood (Wed., Jan. 27)	24
Sunday School (Sun. Jan. 31)	61
Worship (Jan. 31): 8:40am Drive In Worship Service . . .	21
10:45am Worship Service	238
Total Worship	283
Sunday Receipts Needed Per Week	\$18,362.35
Sunday Receipts for 1/31/21	\$4,650.00
Through Feb. 1: Income \$80,752.26	Expenses \$100,472.88

This Sunday:

"Broken Down"
Ephesians 2:11-22
Dr. Mark R. Bender

OPPORTUNITIES

Saturday, February 6, 2021

10:00-5:00 Young Disciples Day Camp (Rm 402)

Sunday, February 7, 2021

Pantry "SOUPer Bowl" Sunday

8:40 Drive In Worship Service (East Parking Lot)

9:30 Sunday School (In Person & Zoom)

10:45 Worship (Sanctuary or Watch the Livestream on YouTube or Facebook.com/FCCWF)

5:00 Youth (Grades 6-12) (Rm 403/Gym)

6:00 Young Disciples (Grades K-5) (Rm 402)

Monday, February 8, 2021

7:30-6:00 Children Come First "CCF" (M-F)

8:55-10:30 CCF Music (Rm 300)

9:00-9:30 CCF Chapel (Chapel)

9:00-12:00 Young Ages School "YAS" (M-F)

7:30 Boy Scouts Troop 15 (Fellowship Hall)

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

9:30 FCC Staff Meeting / Worship Planning (Rm 310)

10:00-11:00 YAS Music (Tu/Wed) (Rm 300)

6:00 Membership & Fellowship Ministry Meeting (Zoom)

6:00 Property Ministry Meeting (Zoom)

6:00 Outreach & Community Service Ministry Meeting (Zoom)

6:30 Common Ground Recovery Ministries "CGRM" Support Groups (Rm 304-308)

7:00 Worship & Fine Arts Ministry Meeting (Zoom)

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

7:00 Elders' Breakfast (Fellowship Hall)

8:55-10:30 CCF Chapel (Chapel)

5:30 Brown Bag Fellowship (Fellowship Hall)

6:00 Neighborhood Worship (Fellowship Hall)

6:00 First Kidz (PreK-5th) (Rm 402)

7:00 Youth (Grades 6-12) (Rm 403/Gym)

7:00 Chancel Ringers (High School-Adults) (Stratten Hall)

Thursday, February 11, 2021

9:00-9:30 CCF Music (Rm 300)

7:30 College Bible Study (Rapid Fire Pizza)

Friday, February 12, 2021

8:55-10:30 CCF Music (Rm 300)

10:00 Mary K. Carroll-Biggs Internment (Crestview Cemetary)

Saturday, February 13, 2021

6:00 am Winter in the Pines - Grades 1-12 (Athens TX)

2:00 pm Mary K. Carroll Memorial Service (Sanctuary)

Sunday, February 14, 2021

Happy Valentine's Day

8:40 Drive In Worship Service (East Parking Lot)

9:30 Sunday School (In Person & Zoom)

10:45 Worship (Sanctuary or Watch the Livestream on YouTube or Facebook.com/FCCWF)

5:00 Youth (Grades 6-12) (Rm 403/Gym)

6:00 Young Disciples (Grades K-5) (Rm 402)

Monday, February 15, 2021

President's Day

Children Come First & Young Ages Preschool Closed

7:30 Boy Scouts Troop 15 (Fellowship Hall)

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

7:30-6:00 Children Come First "CCF" (Tu-F)

9:00-12:00 Young Ages School "YAS" (Tu-F)

9:30 FCC Staff Meeting / Worship Planning (Rm 310/Zoom)

10:00-11:00 YAS Music (Tu/Wed) (Rm 300)

6:00 Faith Formation Ministry Meeting (Zoom)

6:00 Stewardship & Finance Ministry Meeting (Zoom)

6:30 CGRM Support Groups (Rm 304-308)

7:00 Evangelism Ministry and Communication & Technology Ministry Combined Meeting (Zoom)

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Ash Wednesday

7:00 Elders' Breakfast (Fellowship Hall)

8:55-10:30 CCF Chapel (Chapel)

9:00-9:30 CCF Music (Rm 300)

10:15 Sheri Sutton's Lenten Bible Study (Zoom)

12:00 YAS Staff Meeting (Rm 310)

7:00 Ash Wednesday Service (Fellowship Hall)

Thursday, February 18, 2021

9:00-9:30 CCF Music (Rm 300)

7:30 College Bible Study (Rapid Fire Pizza)

Friday, February 19, 2021

8:55-10:30 CCF Music (Rm 220)

Saturday, February 20, 2021

8:00-5:00 Pinewood Derby (Gym)

SERVING SUNDAY

ELDERS

2/7: Cheryl Smiley, Dr. Larry Spradley; Linda C. Carr, Presiding

2/14: Linda Cook, John Buckley; Cindy Hernandez, Presiding

FEBRUARY DIACONATE SERVERS

THE CHURCH STAFF...

Church Number 940-692-2282

FAX Number 940-696-3085

Web Page: www.firstchristianwf.com Church e-mail: susan@firstchristianwf.com

Dr. Mark Bender, Senior Minister 692-2282

Rev. Josh deSteiguer, Minister of Youth Ministries 692-2282

Claire Baer, Director of Children's Ministries 692-2282

Jeanette Showalter, Director of Music Ministries 763-8515

Cheryl Appling, Business Administrator 691-7265

Heather Dickerson, Director of Children Come First 687-2231

Alisa Gardner, Director of Young Ages School 692-3640

Rev. Margaret Scales, Common Ground Recovery Ministries 337-1712

Susan Marrs, Executive Secretary Tina Williams, Financial Secretary

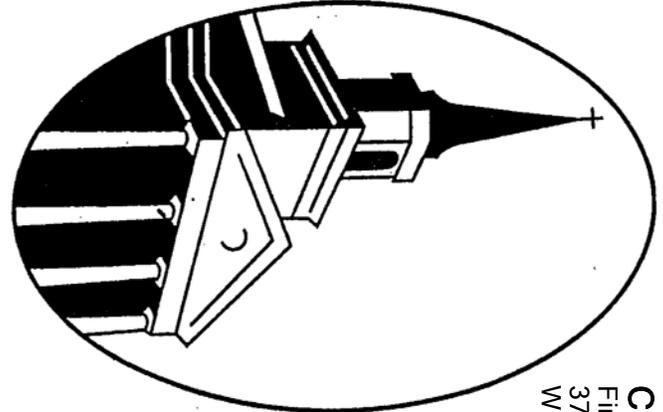
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Tim Williamson, Director of Digital Media

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