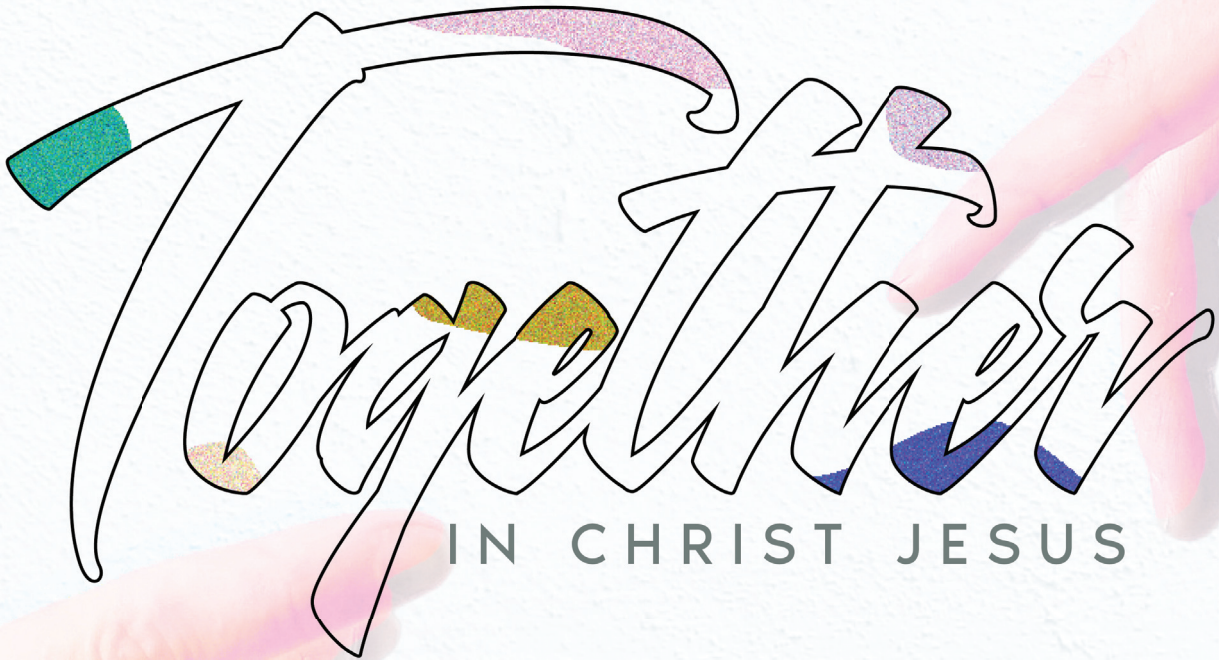


FIRST BAPTIST ARLINGTON

The word "Together" is written in a large, white, cursive script with a black outline. A cross is integrated into the top of the letter 't'. The text is set against a background of hands reaching towards each other, with a soft, colorful glow. The word "Together" is positioned above the words "IN CHRIST JESUS".

Together

IN CHRIST JESUS

We are excited to offer a digital version of this book at [FBCA.org/WordAndDeed](https://www.fbcabooks.org/WordAndDeed), which can be easily searched, bookmarked, and downloaded, making it convenient to take with you wherever you go.

**[FBCA.org/WordAndDeed](https://www.fbcabooks.org/WordAndDeed)**

# WINTER 2024

## *Together . . . in Christ Jesus*

Welcome to 2024! We are truly excited about what lies before us as a church family in this new year. Our theme for the year is Together. Here we go!

This devotional guide is designed to assist you in your journey of spiritual formation. You will notice that we have not assigned the daily Bible readings as has been our custom for over a decade now here at First Baptist Arlington. This year, we are asking our church members to focus on a passage of Scripture for the entire week. This will allow us all to take the time needed to truly digest the meaning of God's Word and engage these truths more deeply.

We are not interested in just gaining information from the Scripture. We are challenging our church family to engage in actions of discipleship that are directly connected to the truths of the Biblical passage each week. This is the path toward formation and transformation. We are to focus on the message from God in the text and then put it into action as we follow Jesus each day.

And we want us to do this together! So, the Worship Services on Sunday will be focused on a specific passage of Scripture. Then, we will provide a companion Biblical text that connects to what we have learned together on Sunday. The entire church family will be encouraged to explore the same passage of Scripture each week. And, we will provide suggestions for applying the truths of the text in our lives as both individuals and as church members in community with one another.

The material will be divided into two sections: **Together in Word** and **Together in Deed**. The devotional material is designed to assist you in exploring the Word of God more deeply each week. Then, the application section will offer you suggestions as to how you may put the insights you have gained into action!

I am praying for you all. I'm excited to see what God is going to do both in us and through us as we follow The Jesus Way . . . together!

**Blessings from your Pastor!**



Dennis R. Wiles

# TOGETHER IN CHRIST!

## **Sermon Text: Ephesians 1:1-3**

We begin the year with a message that introduces the overall theme for the year: Together. The focus of this particular message will center on the meaning of Paul's use of "in Christ" (a phrase) that he uses some 164 times in his 13 New Testament epistles and 36 times in Ephesians. The heart of what it means theologically for God's people to be "together" is connected to the Christological idea of our "union with Christ."

## **Together in Word: Ephesians 1:3-14**

Our text for this week is this incredible masterpiece of a sentence from the Apostle Paul. That's right - this is one sentence in the original Greek of the New Testament! It is the second longest sentence in the Greek New Testament. As you read this text and reflect on it this week, spend some time praying through these deep truths:

- You have been blessed by God and called to live a holy and blameless life.
- You have been adopted by God the Father and embraced into the Family of God.
- You have been forgiven by God's grace.
- You have been chosen by God to reflect His glory in His world.
- You have been sealed by His Spirit until the final day of redemption.

## **Parent Spotlight**

*Parents, the concept of God choosing us before the foundation of the world is amazing and confusing. Even professionals argue over how to interpret this passage. Emphasize the ideas in the passage that your child can understand, e.g. God planned on bringing you into his family from the very beginning of time, and He planned to do this through Jesus Christ, His Son. Jesus was not God's "Plan B." Jesus is "Plan A."*

*Lead your child through a prayer that expresses gratitude to God for creating us and calling us into His family. Thank God for sending Jesus to make it all possible.*

## Together in Deed

As you reflect on this passage, use this week to dedicate the new year to the Lord. How will God use your relationship with Him to deepen your sense of what it means to be together with fellow believers?

### Choose a Practice

- Take some time this week to write a note of response to God as you have learned from this text about all He has done for you.
- Share a meal with another household in our church. You can invite someone to join you for lunch after church, grab a coffee, come over for dessert, or meet in a park with snacks. As you do, ask the following questions of each other:
  - How did God move in your life or your family's life in 2023?
  - What do you think God is leading you or your family to do in 2024?
- Sit down, either as an individual or a family, and write or talk about your plan for spiritual growth this year. For example, how will you (or your family) make a habit out of using Together in Word/ Together in Deed every week? Share that plan with another person or family, and commit to asking them how they're engaging with Together in Word/ Together in Deed.
- Commit to a sit-down meal with others this week without screens. If a family dinner isn't your normal habit, do it this week! If you normally eat alone, find someone else to eat with you. Talk about why you go to church and how God is usving it in your life.



# ONE BODY..TOGETHER!

## **Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:1-6**

Jesus revealed in Matthew 16 that He would establish His Church on earth. After His ascension, the Church is now the Body of Christ on earth. As fellow believers we are joined together in this body through the local expression of the Church. We are a part of the Body of Christ. We have responsibilities to live in a manner worthy of our membership in this spiritual communion.

## **Together in Word: Ephesians 3:1-13**

This week's text gives testimony to the miraculous work of Christ to bring Gentiles and Israel together through the Church. This was a historical and theological necessity and reality in Paul's day. For us, this text reflects on the incredible beauty of the Church. Through the miraculous work of Christ, God is now revealing His wisdom through the Church (3:10). Take some time to reflect this week on the unique role played by the Church. Ask God to speak to you about how He is using our church directly in your life.

## **Parent Spotlight**



*Parents, this is a good week to emphasize that the Church is not a building, nor is it programs, nor activities. The Church is the people. God has not called us to an activities center or a country club. God has called us into relationship, both with Him and with others. Take time this week to talk to your children about the difference between going to church and belonging to a church. For your teenagers, ask them to share about the opportunities they have to serve within the church and the relationships that has allowed them to build with the people in our church.*

*Lead your child through a prayer that expresses gratitude to God for the people in our church body. Be specific. Name names. "Lord, thank you for \_\_\_\_\_ because they \_\_\_\_\_."*

## Together in Deed

Our text this week is challenging us to reflect upon the beauty of the Church. Individual churches actually live out the calling of God to display His wisdom on earth. Our church matters to God! How you participate in and through our church makes a difference.

## Choose a Practice

- Are you part of a Bible study or Table Group at our church? If not, join a Bible study or Table Group this week (Sunday, January 14th is the first Equipping Night of the year!).
- Do you know someone who goes to our church but is not a part of a Bible study or Table Group? Invite them to your group, and take ownership for their belonging.  
- Do you normally attend the Classic Service? Are you a committed contemporary worshipper? Consider putting your preferences aside for a few weeks and attend the other service. You'll discover there's a whole group of people you never knew were here, and they're wonderful. Switch services for a few weeks with the goal of getting to know others in the church.
- Get together with another church member or church family and talk about how First Baptist has been meaningful in your life. What are your hopes for First Baptist, and how do you hope to see us grow?



# COMPETENT..TOGETHER!

## **Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:7-16**

The ministry of Jesus gave evidence to both His character and His competencies. He was completely perfect in both Person and Work. He embodied all that was needed for Him to fulfill God's plan for the redemption of humanity. He has placed the Church on earth, and it now functions as His Body. It stands to reason that He has fully equipped His Body to develop both the character that reflects His Person and the competencies to accomplish His Work. In this Sunday's message, Dr. Wiles will address the competencies of the gifted people Christ uses to provide leadership for His Church.

## **Together in Word: Ephesians 4:7-16**

The text for this week is jam-packed with deep truths. As the passage opens, we are reminded that we all are recipients of God's grace for both salvation and good works. Paul uses the Incarnation of Jesus as a reminder that He became like us and now He has ascended and gifted us so that we might be like Him! As you reflect on this passage, give consideration to how you have been gifted (graced) by God for serving others. You may want to consult other passages like Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12 for further context. Further, reflect upon how you are using the giftedness provided by God's Spirit in the life of our church. Where are you utilizing your giftedness through First Baptist Arlington?

## **Parent Spotlight**

*Parents, this is a good week to recognize and talk about your child's uniqueness. God did not use a cookie cutter pattern when He made them. Their personality, talents, likes, dislikes, particularities, skills, all of them is a gift from God. Some of your children are justice minded; they want everyone to be treated fairly. Some of your children are rule followers; they want everyone to do what's right. Some have an adventurous spirit; they want to run around the neighborhood with their friends. Take time this week to talk about how God has gifted them. This is a wonderful opportunity to remind your teenager of God's intentionality in how he crafted them; they often need to be reminded of this. Teach them that it's not an accident. He gifted them so that they can partner with Him in reconciling to world to Himself through the work of the church. Consider also reading 1 Corinthians 12 with them.*



**Lead your child in a listening prayer this week with this prompt: “Lord, what gifts have you given me to help in the work of the church?” Allow them to ponder this question in silence and then let them voice those gifts. They may need a little help from you to name them. Express gratitude to God for them.**

## **Together in Deed**

As you have reflected on this text this week, how do you sense God leading you to serve at our church? How is God leading you? Also, how supportive are you of others who are serving in our church? How are you supporting and blessing the leaders of our church? Is God using you to assist others in finding paths of service at our church?

## **Choose a Practice**

- Do you serve at First Baptist? There are many areas open for serving, and in many of those you can choose how frequently you would like to serve. If you're part of a family, find an age-appropriate way to serve as a family (greeting at doors can be done with preschoolers, serving in the preschool ministry can be a great way to involve your teens, etc.). If you're single, find friends to join you in serving, and do it together!
- Write thank you cards to people who serve in our church. Are Sunday School teachers making a difference in your child's life? Sit down with your kids and help them write thank you cards to their teachers; their scribbles make for great signatures. Are you grateful for high-quality streaming and well-timed slides? Thank the AV team for their great work.
- Genuine encouragement can be a rarity in our culture. If you notice that God has been using someone to accomplish ministry, make it a point to speak to them in person or call them on the phone to tell them how you see God working through them.



# RAISED WITH CHRIST... TOGETHER!

## **Sermon Text: Ephesians 2:1-10**

Our text for Sunday's message is one of the most comprehensive and exquisite explanations of our salvation in Christ. We have been redeemed from our sins by the grace of God. Paul's image is that we have been raised with Christ—and introduced to the miraculous splendor of the spiritual realities of the heavenly realm! God is present with us and within us. We are no longer dead in our sin. We have been saved! We are now God's masterpieces on display in a broken world! The local church is filled with masterpieces! God's people are graced and gifted so that the beautiful story of redemption can be incarnated through us.

## **Together in Word: Ephesians 2:1-10**

This text offers us a clear explanation of the power of the saving grace of Jesus Christ in the life of every believer. As Christians, we have been saved by His grace. We have been delivered from our sinful state and our redemption is secure in Christ. This week, take time to reflect upon your own salvation experience. You may want to record your remembrances of your salvation story in your journal. Thank God for His saving work in your life!

## **Parent Spotlight**

*Parents, this is a good week to walk through the gospel with your child. The text for this week is Ephesians 2:1-10. Read the passage with your child in a version they can comprehend (New International Reader's Version or International Children's Bible; for your teenagers, try the New Living Translation or The Message). As you read, take time to pause and explain what it is that Christ has done for us. Especially emphasize that salvation is not something we can achieve, it's something we receive. The only reason we can be in a relationship with God is due to His kindness through Christ. Consider walking your child through the Roman Road (Romans 3:23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9, and 10:13). Reading those in order will give you a lot of talking points about salvation in a way a child can understand. If you've not done so lately, take time to share your about spiritual journey with your children.*

*Lead your child in a prayer that expresses gratitude to the Lord that His mercy and grace does not depend on anything that we can do. Thank Him for the goodness He extends to us even though we are undeserving. If your child has not been baptized or chosen to become a follower of Jesus, gently ask, "Is that something you want to talk more about?" If so, set up a meeting with our Youth Minister (Kurt Krodle), Children's Minister (David Butts) or Preschool Minister (Kasey Fagan).*

## **Together in Deed**

This week we have all taken time to reflect upon our own salvation experience. God has done so much for all of us, and each one of us has a story to share about the ways that we have experienced God's goodness and love.

## **Choose a Practice**

- Get together with another church member or church family. Ask each other how you've seen God's goodness in your lives. If children are present and are old enough to answer, encourage them to do so.
- Ask God to bring an unchurched friend, neighbor, or coworker to your mind. Make a point to share with them how God has been at work in your life. It could be the story of how you came to know Jesus as Lord, how God brought you through a challenging time, or how you have experienced God's direction in your life. Not sure how to turn a conversation into a spiritual conversation? A great conversation starter is "Tell me about your spiritual background."
- Do you struggle to connect with unchurched people, or feel like you don't know any? Start with meeting your neighbors. Make it your mission to learn the names of every home or apartment adjacent to yours. You can involve your kids, too. Make cookies together and deliver them to neighbors together. While you're making the cookies, take the time to have a conversation about how God tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves.



The week of February 4, 2024

# CARING & FEEDING... TOGETHER!

## **Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:11-13**

Christ has given His Church just what it needs to fulfill His mission. He has provided gifted people to lead churches as they engage in His work throughout the world. In this text, Paul mentions pastors and teachers as two examples of those leaders. This Sunday morning, we explore how these gifted people serve the church through caring and feeding God's people.

## **Together in Word: Ephesians 1:15-23**

This week, our text is the beautiful prayer from the opening chapter of Ephesians. In this prayer, Paul intercedes for the Ephesians and asks God to provide His wisdom and revelation so they may know Him more deeply. He also prays that they will come to a deeper understanding of the glorious riches of their inheritance and His great power. Take some time to reflect upon these requests. Accept this as a prayer that is prayed over you! Ask God to guide you in accepting these petitions and lead you to embrace these realities in your own spiritual life.

## **Parent Spotlight**

*Parents, this is a good week to remind your child that salvation means power! Emphasize Ephesians 1:19-20 with them. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is the power that dwells in us when we give our life to Christ. Talk about what that means exactly (e.g. the power to overcome sin, the power to love others even when they're unlovable, especially the power that brought Christ back to life is the same power that will bring us back to life one day). This may be a good week to talk about death with your child. Most kids fear dying. If they have been concerned about that, remind them that death is not the end for us. Those who have given their life to Christ receive the gift of eternal life in Heaven.*

*Pray this passage over your child using a version they can understand (New International Reader's Version, International Children's Bible, or New Living Translation). Start in verse 17b and personalize it using their name as much as possible (e.g. "God, will you give \_\_\_\_\_ a spirit that will make him/her wise in knowledge – the knowledge to know You!")*



## **Together in Deed**

On Sunday, Dr. Wiles preached about shepherds/pastors and teachers from Ephesians 4:11-13 and their roles in the church. This week, we want you to practice and reflect on shepherding and teaching.

### **Choose a Practice**

- Who do you know in your life that needs prayer? Pray the prayer from Ephesians 1:15-23 over them, and let them know that you've done that.
- Has someone joined our church? Has someone visited your Bible study for the first time? Have you met someone who is new to FBCA? Help them feel loved, connected, and established. Take them (and their family if applicable) out to lunch or have them over for dinner. If you have kids and they have kids, involve them in the process and encourage your kids to help their kids feel welcome.
- What are some things that you are learning from Ephesians over the course of this series? Explain to someone else something that you've learned, and invite them to share what they have learned with you.
- There are so many wonderful resources to help you engage and grow in your understanding of Scripture. Some of these resources are from our church, like the podcast Tell Me More. Some are from other ministries, like the Bible Project or Right Now Media (accessible from our church website), which provide helpful and clear videos on understanding Scripture. This week, explore those resources.

# ONWARD & UPWARD... TOGETHER!

## **Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:11-13**

Christ has given His Church just what it needs! Last week, we explored how pastors and teachers serve the church family. Today we take some time to learn more about apostles, prophets, and evangelists. These people are often at the “edges” of the church, leading the church onward and upward in ministry and mission. We will seek to learn how better to utilize the giftedness of these leaders.

## **Together in Word: Ephesians 3:14-21**

This prayer is a powerful text for our reflection this week. Just like last week, let the words of this prayer wash over your soul. Take time this week to pray through this rich text. Personalize the prayer and let God minister to you in your life with Him.

## **Parent Spotlight**

*Parents, this is a good week to emphasize God's love for your child. Take time to explain the biblical concept of love to your child. Love is a choice, not a feeling. Explain that if love depended only how we felt toward one another, then we would be in trouble. Ask them if they always feel loving toward brother, sister, mom, or dad. Probably not! God's love does not depend on feeling. He chose us before we chose Him. It is greater than anything in all the world! Regardless the age of your child, each of us needs to be reminded of God's love for us – maybe more so as we get older!*

*Like last week, pray this passage over your child using a version they can understand (New International Reader's Version, International Children's Bible, or New Living). Start in verse 16 and personalize it using their name as much as possible (e.g. "Father, I ask in Your great glory to give \_\_\_\_\_ the power to be strong in spirit.").*

## Together in Deed

This week, Dr. Wiles taught on the roles of apostles, prophets, and evangelists in the life of the church. These are the people who help lead us “onward and upward” and are often at the edges of ministry, helping lead us to new territories to reach new people, proclaim the good news of Jesus and to bring people into the church, and help attune us to the heart of God.

## Choose a Practice

- Pray the prayer from Ephesians 3:14-21 over our church and its ministry, and pray for the apostles, prophets, and evangelists in our church. Pray for the boldness of these leaders to lead our church into new frontiers of mission and ministry. If you recognize that someone in our church functions in one of these ways, make it a point this week to encourage them to live out their calling in our church.
- Apostles help the church recognize and live into its ‘sent’ identity. This week, spend time asking God if there are places where He wants to send you or your family in our community to reach new people. If you have children, invite them into this process of praying, and ask the question, “God, where are you sending us, and how can we join the work you are doing there?”
- Evangelists boldly share the good news of Jesus and bring people into the family of God. Ask God to reveal people to you who need to be brought into the family of God, and invite them to join you at church on Sunday. If your friend belongs to another religion, share a Jesus story with them instead.
- Prophets help attune us to the heart of God. How do you sense that God is at work in our church? Spend time in prayer and reflect on what God is doing. Share what you discern with a trusted friend.

