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DECEMBER 2023



I know this newsletter article is going out before Christmas, but I am focused on the New Year.

Soon, it will be 2024, and I lift a prayer that it will be a good year. I'll admit that when I lift that prayer, I think a good year is when things go how I want. That's not how John Wesley, the founder of the United Methodist Church, prayed for in the new year. He wrote and prayed a prayer known as the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer. I have had the privilege of praying this prayer a couple of times in the room where he wrote it. My goal in 2024 is to live out this prayer.

**The Covenant Prayer:**

*"I am no longer my own, but yours.  
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;  
put me to doing, put me to suffering;  
let me be employed for you or laid aside for you,  
exalted for you or brought low for you.  
Let me be full, let me be empty,  
let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things  
to your pleasure and disposal.  
And now, glorious and blessed God,*

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine, and I am yours. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."*

**1. Surrendering Self:**

*"I am no longer my own, but yours."*  
In these simple yet profound words, Wesley encourages us to relinquish the illusion of self-sufficiency. As we stand at the threshold of the new year, let us surrender our plans, ambitions, and desires to God. May we let God guide us. May we enter this year with open hands, allowing God to shape our paths and use us for His divine purpose.

**2. Embracing God's Will:**

*"Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;  
put me to doing, put me to suffering."*  
In acknowledging God's sovereignty, we accept that God's plans may differ from our own. May we find the strength to joyfully accept both the tasks God assigns us and the trials God allows to come our way. Whether our role is visible or hidden, may our hearts be willing, trusting that God's wisdom surpasses our understanding.

**3. Contentment in Christ:**

*"Let me be full, let me be empty,  
let me have all things, let me have nothing."*  
In a world that often measures success

by material wealth, let us find contentment in the knowledge that our true fulfillment comes from our relationship with Christ. Whether we experience abundance or lack, may our focus remain on the eternal riches found in our Savior. (Boy this is the tough one for me.)

**4. A Prayer Sealed in Heaven:**

*"And now, glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine, and I am yours. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.  
Amen."*

As we close this covenant prayer, let us do so with confidence and assurance. The covenant we make on earth is not a fleeting resolution but a pledge sealed by the God of the universe. May our commitment to God's will be steadfast, and may His covenant with us be ratified in heaven, guiding and sustaining us throughout the coming year.

We step into the unknown of the new year, but let us step with the spirit of John Wesley's Covenant Prayer as a guiding light.

Wishing you a year filled with the abundant blessings of God's grace!

Grace and Peace,  
Scott



Christmas Eve



Three Services on December 24

10am Sunday Morning Worship – 4th Sunday of Advent  
4pm Traditional Christmas Eve & 6pm Acoustic Christmas Eve

## Sign Up Now for new Bible studies starting in January

STARTS JAN 14 for 6 weeks

### **BIBLE STORIES FOR GROWN UPS –**

Reading Scripture with new Eyes.

Join us for a new 6 week study. We'll take a look at some familiar Bible stories and examine details and interpretations you may not have considered before. Specifically, Noah's Ark, the binding of Isaac, Jonah and the big fish, Jesus and Zacchaeus, Jesus healing a blind man, and the parable of the talents. Deepen your understanding and your faith!

STARTS JAN 11

From 9:30 – 10:30 – Room 3

### **“FAITHFULLY PRESENT: Embracing the Limits of Where and When God Has You.”**

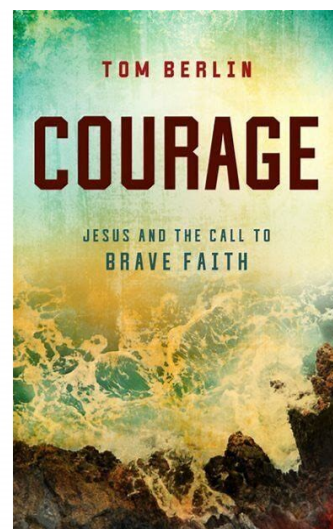
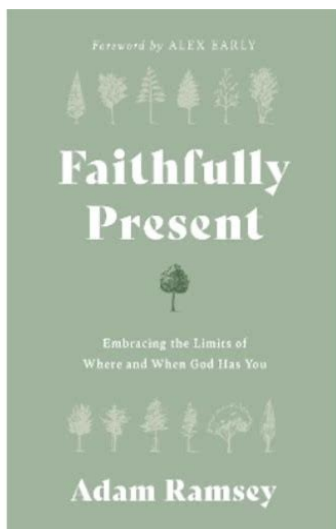
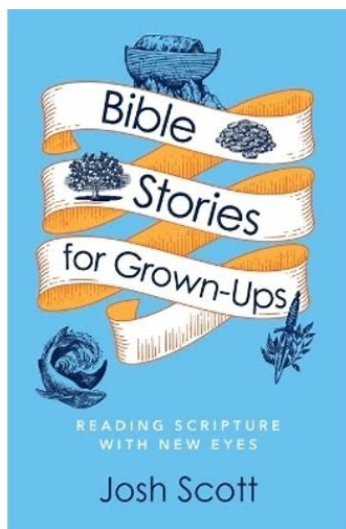
Do you feel like life is rushing past? Often we're so busy thinking about the next thing that we're at risk of missing the main thing...the people and places God has put in front of us, right here, right now. Together we'll consider a different way to live. We'll embrace the time and place we are in and seek to live faithfully present with God and others. Together we'll discover fresh joy in the little things, freedom from the tyranny of time and contentment with every season of life.

STARTS JAN 7 for 6 weeks

SUNDAY AT 10:10 – Room 3

### **COURAGE – Jesus and the call to Brave Faith, by our Bishop Tom Berlin.**

As Christians, we do our best to live our lives as Jesus lived. One virtue that is often overlooked is courage. Throughout Jesus' life, he was called upon to be brave: in the face of his enemies, when being tempted, and certainly at the time of his death. By examining the life of Christ, we can begin to understand what true courage is and how God works in our lives when we exhibit a brave faith, and begin to find the remarkable life Jesus offers us.



### **THE EIGHT DECADES CLUB**

We are highlighting those wonderful seniors in our church that have reached that young age of 80 or over. Send them a card, or if you see them, wish them a Happy Birthday.

- Dec 25—Sam Cromartie—236 John Anderson Dr, Ormond Beach FL 32176
- Dec 28—Stu Oleson—111 Brown Crane Ct, South Daytona FL 32119-8725
- Dec 28—Nancy Town—202 Bear Foot Trail, Ormond Beach Trail FL 32174
- Dec 30—Carolyn Greene—1115 Northside Dr, Ormond Beach FL 32174
- Jan 1—Bob Reid—659 Southlake Dr, Ormond Beach FL 32174-1515
- Jan 6—Martha Jacobs—1 John Anderson Dr. Apt 116, Ormond Beach FL 32176

- Jan 8—Rick Banker—64 Country Club Dr, Ormond Beach FL 32176-5414
- Jan 14—Charlie Unger—6 Kingsley Circle, Ormond Beach FL 32176
- Jan 18—Pam Banker—64 Country Club Dr, Ormond Beach FL 32176-5414
- Jan 19—Frank Farmer—1 John Anderson Dr, Apt 101, Ormond Beach FL 32176
- Jan 19—Brigitte Love—22 Ellsworth Dr, Palm Coast FL 32164-6275
- Jan 20—Carol Brewer—4 Silver Lake Way, Ormond Beach FL 32174-6733
- Jan 26—Marilyn Sweet—142 River Beach Dr, Ormond Beach FL 32176
- Jan 30—Jack Swarm—17 Koala Bear Path, Ormond Beach FL 32174-2958

If you know of a name that should be on the list, or if a correction is needed, please let Frank Johnston know at :

[fjohnston@firstunited.org](mailto:fjohnston@firstunited.org)





More than 100 children from Beachside Elementary School were the recipients of your gifts.



Nursing home residents will have a Merry Christmas this year as a result of your gifts.



Over 75 people from The Gathering Place ate empanadas and sang Christmas carols at Tango's in Ormond Beach.



The Cantata, titled "The Gift," was sung by the combined choirs of Tomoka and First UMC. Linda Dares directed, Jo Traywick accompanied, and Macon and Amy Armistead provided the narration. Connor Ballock, of Winter Springs, a fifth grade student of Linda Dares, thrilled us with his solos during the Cantata.



## The Farmer and the Geese in a Snowstorm

*Editor's Note: Pastor Scott recently used this story to illustrate his sermon.*

There was once a man who did not believe in either the virgin birth of Christ or the spiritual meaning behind it and was skeptical even about God. He and his family lived in a farm community. His wife was a devout believer and diligently raised her children in the faith. He sometimes gave her a hard time about her belief and mocked her religious observances.

"It's all nonsense -- why would God lower himself and become a human like us? It's such a ridiculous story," he said.

One snowy day, she and the children left for church while he stayed home. After they had departed, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax before the fire for the evening.



Then he heard a loud thump, something hitting against the window. And, still another thud. He looked outside but could not see anything. So he ventured outside for a better view. In the field near his house, he saw, of all the strangest things, a flock of geese. They were apparently flying to look for a warmer area down south, but they had been caught in the snowstorm. The storm had become too blinding and violent for the geese to fly or see their way. They were stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter, unable to do more than flutter their wings and fly in aimless circles. He had compassion for them and wanted to help them. He thought to himself; the barn would be an excellent place for them to stay. It is warm and safe; surely they could spend the night and wait out the storm. So he opened the barn doors for them.

He waited, watching them, hoping they would notice the open barn and go inside. Nevertheless, they did not notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them. He moved closer toward them to

get their attention, but they just moved away from him out of fear.

He went into the house and came back with some bread, broke it up, and made a bread trail to the barn. They still did not catch on.

Starting to get frustrated, he went over and tried to shoo them toward the barn. They panicked and scattered in every direction except toward the barn. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where there was warmth, safety, and shelter.

Feeling totally frustrated, he exclaimed, "Why don't they follow me? Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm? How can I possibly get them into the one place to save them?"

He thought for a moment and realized that they would not follow a human. He said to himself, "How can I possibly save them? The only way would be for me to become like those geese. If only I could become like one of them. Then I could save them. They would follow me, and I would lead them to safety."

At that moment, he stopped and considered what he had said. The words reverberated in his mind: *only I could become like one of them, then I could save them.*

Then, at last, he understood God's heart towards mankind and he fell on his knees in the snow.

### John 3:16

**"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."**

Scott Smith, Senior Pastor

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**We need your help** in providing suggestions for our newsletter. We will be publishing it each month and we need your help in writing articles and news stories. Contact Will McLaughlin, <willmcla@gmail.com>