

Generosity

AT HOUSTON'S FIRST

PLAN FOR LIVING — AND GIVING

Walking their talk characterizes one couple at The Loop Campus: shedding some of the “stuff” allows a streamlined approach to living a life of freedom and generosity.

Houston's First members Walter and Julia Wright tied the knot 11 years ago when they were about 40, in established careers — and debt free. That, however, didn't keep them from sharpening their financial skills in Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University (FPU). The principles they gleaned continued to positively affect their generosity, the lives of extended family and the young couples they teach in the Newlywed and Close (NWC) Life Bible Study.

After completing FPU in 2007, Walter was compelled to pass on to others what he and Julia had learned. So in addition to being a faithful choir member, he led 13 sessions of FPU over the next five years at Houston's First. Avoiding consumer debt is a key FPU precept the Wrights had adopted early and continue to practice. “We both drive older cars,” said Walter. “We're driving the ones we've had since before we married — 1997 and 2000 year models.”



“We called the condo our MISSION 1:8 house,” said Julia. “We loved the loft and the lifestyle, but it was just stuff! Streamlining our lives gave us more flexibility to be generous. It was worth the trade off.”

Recently, Walter felt an urgency to invite Julia's parents, who had retired to Florida, back to Texas. “Walter initiated the idea of finding a home where we could live together,” Julia explained. They found the perfect home to accommodate two generations in Humble. “It is perfect for us,” said Julia. “My parents feel honored and have peace of mind about the future.”

Making intentional choices about living simply — building financial margin into their lives — allows the Wrights the luxury of being a blessing to church, to family and beyond the walls of the church. As they closed on the home they now share with Julia's parents they think about the steps of faith it took to get to this point in their lives. “God knew more than we could ever dream,” said Walter, “far more than we could ask or imagine.”

WHAT IS YOUR GENEROSITY STORY?

Share it at HoustonFirst.org/MyStory.

NEWS + UPDATES

Houston's First Baptist Church is a relevant, biblical community where we gather our hearts, grow our souls and give our lives as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

TWEET OF THE WEEK: “One of the things I'm going to miss the most when I leave to Austin for college is my church (Houston's First Baptist Church)” — Josue Rivera, @Josue_rivera03

ALL CAMPUSES

HighPoint Bible Study

Wednesdays @ 11:30a
This weekly downtown Bible study will return July 29 in the Wells Fargo Plaza auditorium (1000 Louisiana) with Dr. David Self speaking. Bring your lunch and be ready for the lesson at 12:10p. Visit HoustonFirst.org/HighPoint to learn more.
CONTACT Diane.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org

Deacon & Minister Ordination

Sun, Jul 19 @ 8a — The Loop (Chapel)
Pastor Gregg Matte and Houston's First invite our church family to observe and celebrate the ordination of three new deacons and two ministers of the Gospel. We will also recognize two previously ordained deacons. For details, visit HoustonFirst.org/Events.

Biblical Principles of Estate Planning

Sun, Jul 26 @ 12:15-2:30p — The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)
Over lunch, learn about the biblical and practical aspects related to having a will, life insurance, and legal documents. Incapacitation and health information with an emphasis on families with minor children are major topics covered. The event is free and childcare is available for babies through fifth grade. Registration is required at HoustonFirst.org/Events.
CONTACT Sara.Johnson@HoustonFirst.org

Stephen Ministry Training Class

Applications due Sun, Aug 16
Stephen Ministry training equips members through 50 hours of classes to come alongside individuals who are experiencing loneliness, relationship difficulties, loss, divorce, grief or spiritual crises in their lives. To become a Stephen Minister, apply at HoustonFirst.org/PastoralCare. Classes begin in the fall on Wednesday nights.
CONTACT Denise.Munton@HoustonFirst.org

NEXTGEN MINISTRIES

Rush Week Rally
Wed, Jul 15 @ 6:30-8:30p — The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)
Parents, students and leaders of Rush Week are invited to the Rush Week Rally! Students will meet their leaders and hear about the ministry/church they will be working with. Parents will hear information about what to bring and be encouraged with a special prayer time. Come ready to get pumped and prepared for the biggest Rush Week ever!
CONTACT Susan.Newman@HoustonFirst.org

Family Mission Trip

Fri, Jul 24 @ 8a-4p
Great things happen when families serve together, putting their attention on the needs of others and using their gifts along the way. On this one-day mission trip, kids in 1st-5th grades and their families will work together helping a local church in Houston. The cost is \$30 per family member, with a maximum cost of \$120 per family. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Events.
CONTACT Derek.Nease@HoustonFirst.org

SINGLES/COLLEGE/MARRIED

MetroLIVE
Thursdays @ 7:13p — The Loop (Worship Center)
People in their 20s/30s from across Houston will gather on Thursday nights this summer for Bible teaching and worship. This week, teaching is by Jonathan (JP) Pokluda with worship led by Josh Price. Visit MetroLIVE.org for more about what's ahead this summer!
CONTACT Joshua.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org

MARRIED YOUNG ADULTS

Re|Create Date Night
Fri, Aug 14 @ 6-10p — The Loop
Plan ahead to enjoy a night out with your spouse! We'll provide “date kits” for download from HoustonFirst.org designed to help you be intentional about the time you spend together. Registration for childcare at The Loop (birth through Kindergarten) opens on Tue, Jul 14, at HoustonFirst.org/Events. Space is limited!
CONTACT Melanie.Russell@HoustonFirst.org

THE LOOP

NEXTGEN MINISTRIES
Summer Rush 2015
Now thru Aug 3
Students entering 6th-12th grades this fall — come beat the heat and hang out with The HUB this summer for Amp and Wired Unplugged, HUB Nights, Schlitterbahn, Rush Week, and so much more! Find a full list of details and campus information at HoustonFirst.org/SummerRush or on The HUB Students app.
CONTACT Susan.Newman@HoustonFirst.org

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

Birthday Bash
Sun, Jul 19 @ 12:15-1:30p — Oasis Room
Single parent families are getting together to celebrate parents and children with July birthdays. We provide a complimentary lunch and gift cards to everyone who has a birthday this month! The party is free and no RSVP is required.
CONTACT Amber.Willet@HoustonFirst.org

WOMEN

The Beauty of Perseverance
Tue, Aug 11 @ 7-8:30p — Fellowship Ctr
Sometimes the Christian life feels like a fight and sometimes it feels like a race loaded with obstacles. Gather with us for a night with Kelly Matte as we fix our eyes on Jesus and learn from His perseverance. This event is free and includes light refreshments. RSVP and register for childcare (for a fee) at HoustonFirst.org/Events.
CONTACT Haylee.Nelson@HoustonFirst.org

SHUTTLE PARKING

Do you attend The Loop on Sunday mornings? Use shuttle parking to make room for others! It's a simple way to expand the ministry of our church. Get details on the five garages at HoustonFirst.org/ShuttleParking.

CYPRESS

Bible 101
Wednesdays, Jul 15 & Aug 12 @ 6-8p
Cypress Ministry Center
Helping families of all stages, this interactive class for children ages Kindergarten-5th grade and their parents will help them grow and discover spiritual truths together. Dinner and childcare (birth through preschool) is provided for attending families. RSVP to Cindy Wineman.
CONTACT Cindy.Wineman@HoustonFirst.org

DOWNTOWN

If God is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering & Evil
Every Mon, Jul 20-Sep 14 @ 6:30-8p
Vine Street Studios
Why would an all-good and all-powerful God create a world full of evil and suffering? In this eight-session study, author Randy Alcorn challenges the logic of disbelief and brings a fresh, realistic, and thoroughly biblical insight to the issues raised by these important questions. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Downtown. (Vine Street Studios are located at 1113 Vine Street, Ste. 117, 77002).
CONTACT Lee.Hsia@HoustonFirst.org

SIENNA

WOMEN
Women's Summer Nights
Tuesdays, Jul 21 & Aug 18 6:30-9p — Worship Center
Ladies are invited to summer evenings of Bible study at the Sienna Campus. We'll gather together to worship God and create community through authentic relationships. Childcare is not available. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Sienna.
CONTACT Amy.Rowzee@me.com

SPANISH

Worship & Life Bible Studies
Sundays @ 5p & 6:30p
We are excited to see what the Lord is doing at the Spanish Campus! We invite you to come worship with us in Spanish in the Chapel and hear Pastor Gregg's message in English or Spanish! After the service, join us in a Life Bible Study — Seguridad en Cristo and Creciendo en la Vida Cristiana.
CONTACT Karina.Bazaldua@HoustonFirst.org



LEGACY 685 ANNUAL POOL PARTY
Sat, Aug 1 @ 5-8p — 149 Quail Creek Ct.
Adoptive and Foster families are gathering for our annual pool party! It will be a great night for families to connect, laugh and enjoy friendship. RSVP to Legacy685@HoustonFirst.org.

Financial Peace University is offered this fall at The Loop Campus on Wednesday evenings at 6:30-8p from Sep 2-Nov 18 (12 weeks). The class is open to members and guests from all campuses. Registration opens in August.

Walter and Julia's intentional planning and personal purchasing decisions are rooted in deeply held convictions of stewardship and a commitment to building the Kingdom of God. Three years ago, they heard Pastor Gregg preach on MISSION 1:8, the two-year generosity initiative at Houston's First, and decided to make a change in their living arrangements. They gave up the lease on their luxury downtown loft, located within walking distance of Minute Maid Park. The 850 square foot condo they moved to is both lovely and in a beautiful part of Houston — but less expensive than the downtown lifestyle.

MINISTRY IMPACT YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS FROM JAN 1 TO JUL 5, 2015

DECISIONS

585 New Church Members
100 Joined By Baptism



ATTENDANCE

121,721 in Life Bible Studies
(4,508 weekly average)

148,665 in Worship Services
(5,506 weekly average)

15,192 on Webcast
(563 weekly average)

MISSIONS

21 Mission Trips with
270 Team Members



GENEROSITY

4,885 Givers to Great Commission Giving
1,224 were First-Time Givers



SUNDAYS AT HOUSTON'S FIRST

The Loop Campus

7401 Katy Fwy • Houston, TX 77024
Worship 9:15a-11a-5p
Life Bible Studies 8a-9:15a-10:45a-6:30p

Cypress Campus

10300 Warner Smith Blvd • Cypress, TX 77433
Worship 11a
Life Bible Studies 9:30a

Downtown Campus

1300 Lamar St • Houston, TX 77010
Worship 11a
Life Bible Studies 9:30a

Sienna Campus

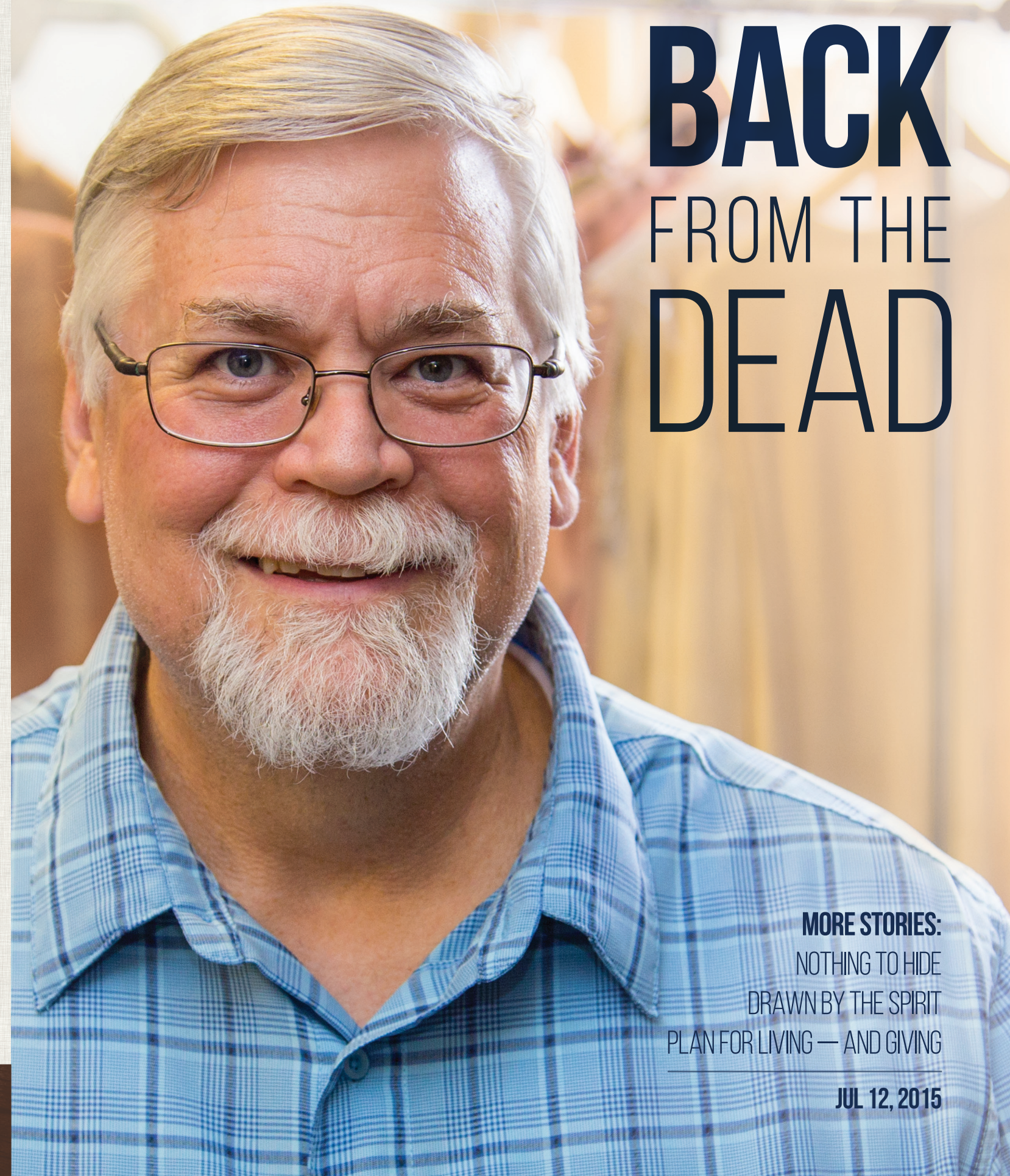
4309 Sienna Pkwy • Missouri City, TX 77459
Worship 9:30a-11a
Life Bible Studies 9:30a-11a

Spanish Campus

7401 Katy Fwy • Houston, TX 77024
Worship 5p
Life Bible Studies 6:30p



HOUSTON'S FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH
PASTOR GREGG MATTE



BACK FROM THE DEAD

MORE STORIES:

NOTHING TO HIDE

DRAWN BY THE SPIRIT

PLAN FOR LIVING — AND GIVING

JUL 12, 2015

TELLING HIS STORY BY SHARING YOURS

Moments from our past can have a profound effect on how we view ourselves — and God. In the stories shared here, church members tell how events that transpired years ago influenced their decisions and behaviors, as well as their relationship with Him. Each one illustrates the truth that, whether an event draws us closer or pushes us away, the story God is telling through our lives is never over.



PASS IT ON!

Stories are meant to be told. Visit HoustonsFirst.org/MyStory to share these stories via social media or email.

BACK FROM THE DEAD

Playing a role in *Celebration* reminded a member at the Cypress Campus that nothing is impossible with God.

David Funk heard the buzz about *Celebration*, the musical Christmas presentation at Houston's First, soon after joining the church. As he began discovering all the ministries the church had to offer, he was taken with the mission-mindedness of the church. With that in mind, as David anticipated his first viewing of *Celebration*, and having heard that Santa and his reindeer would be part of the show, he wondered how Santa, Rudolph and Jesus could peacefully coexist in an evangelistic endeavor.

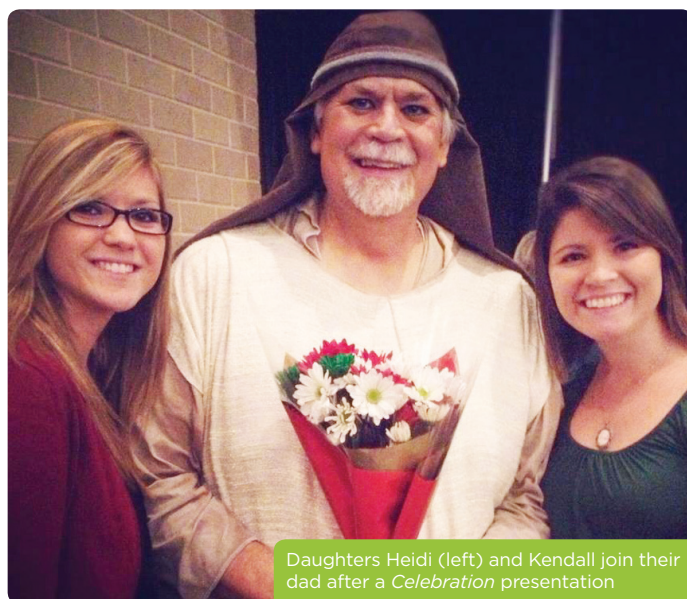
Blown away by what he saw, David signed up the following season to be part of the *Celebration* cast. God had already chosen the perfect part for him to play — a part he had already lived 24 years earlier.

"*Celebration* was mind-boggling!" said David. "It was not like anything I'd ever seen before." David had never considered himself an actor, though he had done musical theater in the past. But he signed up and was willing to take any role handed to him, whether it meant being part of the cast or taking care of animals.

As it turned out, David had 12 different parts that first year. The most memorable, and the hardest to get through, was the part loosely based on Jairus, who approached Jesus about coming to his home to heal his daughter. They returned to Jairus' home to find his daughter had already died. In his role in *Celebration*, David picked up the girl to give her to Jesus. That scene prompted David to shed real tears.

The scene transported David back 24 years to when his daughter Kendall was only a few months old. She had been fed, changed and put to bed. David and his wife were about to drift off when, without warning, she jumped out of bed and ran to their daughter's crib. The baby had stopped breathing. David's wife performed CPR while he called 911. They told him to head to the hospital, and police and an ambulance would meet them en route. "I ran out of the house carrying the lifeless body of our baby girl in my arms, not knowing if we would ever bring her back home again," said David.

During *Celebration*, memories came flooding back each time David picked up the little girl to give her to Jesus. He hadn't told anyone about his experience



Daughters Heidi (left) and Kendall join their dad after a *Celebration* presentation

until right before the show was scheduled to begin. John Bolin, Minister of Worship & Arts, shared his story at a cast meeting, so the next time they performed the scene, tears were streaming down the faces of cast members as Jesus received the girl in his arms.

"Marsha Taylor, director of the cast, told me that a lot of prayer goes into choosing the characters in *Celebration*," said David. "When she chose me for the part she had no idea what had happened to our daughter."

Like Jairus' daughter, David's baby girl, Kendall, survived. Now 24 years later, she is working toward a PhD in medical research. "Somewhere in all the frenzied activity a miracle occurred and her heart started beating again," said David. "I know Jairus' anguish; I've felt his agony and hopelessness. I know the tremendous miracle our Lord and Savior gave his family that day."

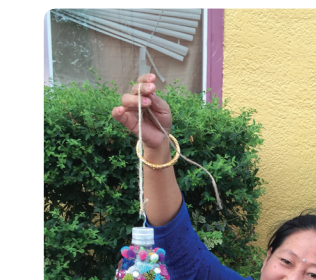
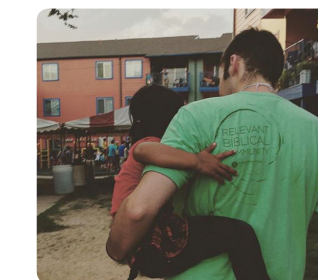
Celebration brings God's Word to life in a spectacular way, and David is committed to sharing the Gospel through drama and music. He reminds us, "*Celebration* is not just entertainment. It's a ministry."



WHAT'S YOUR HOUSTON 1:8 STORY?

From crafts to sno-cones, prayer walks to Bible studies, and countless conversations and connections — Houston 1:8 reached thousands of people around the city this past week through the efforts of missionaries from Houston's First who turned out to share Christ's love with Houston.

If you served during Houston 1:8, we want to hear your story. Visit HoustonsFirst.org/MyStory and let us know about the encounters you had with those you served and how you saw God at work!



DRAWN BY THE SPIRIT

Lust and the party life took a back seat to peace after a mountain biking 'bad boy' experienced a real connection with God at MetroLIVE.

Growing up in a Christian home and attending a faith-based school didn't keep Marcus Gillaspia from getting caught up in drugs, alcohol, and women — his life — he says, before coming to know Jesus. As he approached age 30, Marcus visited MetroLIVE, a gathering of college students, singles and married young adults for Bible study and worship at Houston's First. There, the Spirit of God drew him in and changed his heart and mind about the party life, and church in general.

"I was force-fed religion at the Christian school my parents made me attend," said Marcus. "The judgmental attitude I felt there had the opposite effect of what my parents intended." After being enrolled in a public high school as a teenager, Marcus' rebellion fully bloomed. "I went crazy," he said. "That began my struggle with lust and desire."

In his mid-20s, Marcus began checking out the Christian lifestyle and he attended MetroLIVE, originally as a way to meet women. But when he saw "the kids" worshipping God and felt the Spirit moving there, Marcus' heart began to change. "I felt a warm, cozy peace," he said. "I knew who God was, but I didn't have a relationship with Jesus until I began attending MetroLIVE."



Marcus, a mountain biker, is wired for all things extreme and lives life at full throttle, including his sports experiences. A wakeboarding incident led to a supernatural healing. Marcus had blown out his knee, and being self-employed with no medical insurance, his mom suggested he attend a church service being held in Texas City. Someone there prayed for healing in his knee and during the prayer he felt something happening. The following week he attended MetroLIVE and walked in on crutches, unable to put pressure on the knee. Afterward, in the church parking lot, he was able to stand on his own. Suddenly no longer in pain as he had been for months, he even jumped up and down and jogged. Within days, he was able to completely shed the crutches and walk unassisted.

While not all his struggles faded as quickly, Marcus experiences the freedom God gives to those who seek Him. "Everyone's battles are different," said Marcus, "but through them I've felt the tangible presence of God."

He visited several churches and became a member of a nearby congregation for a period of time, but he came back to Houston's First after meeting and marrying his wife, Ashley. "Once we attended together we knew we were home," said Marcus. "The Spirit of God is so strong here, and the leadership is sincere. The Spirit draws us."

NOTHING TO HIDE

Abuse may have robbed a Houston's First staff member of the innocence of childhood, but Jesus redeemed the pain and helped her to like the person she has become.

Lori Smith was "close to being an atheist," she says, when her friend and co-worker Rachel learned about a single adult Life Bible Study, The Shed, at Houston's First more than a decade ago. Were it not for Rachel's encouragement to attend, Lori would have missed the blessing of salvation, self-forgiveness and deliverance from a hate-filled inner struggle stemming from more than 10 years of childhood sexual abuse.



Lori's first worship service at Houston's First was the day Gregg Matte stepped into the pulpit as the new pastor. She and Rachel had already been attending intramurals and The Shed when she had a "wow moment" during a lesson she heard one Sunday.

The subject was forgiveness, a commodity that, in Lori's life, ran in short supply. Christians had been telling Lori for years that she needed to forgive her abuser, but Jerrell Altic, one of her Life Bible Study teachers, counseled her that God was calling her to forgive herself. He explained that only a relationship with Jesus would give her His strength to forgive. "My great-uncle victimized generations of girls in my family, beginning with my mother." Lori's earliest memories of being molested began at age three.

Many emotions and fears plagued her stemming from the abuse. "I never slept well," said Lori. "My parents were hippies who had people partying in the house all the time. My great-uncle wasn't the only man who abused me. I didn't feel safe, so I rarely slept more than an hour or two at a time."

Lori thought much about what Jerrell had said about forgiveness and one night in October 2004 decided to ask Jesus to come into her heart and give her peace. "I slept six hours that night," said Lori, "longer than ever before."

Today, Lori serves as the Business Manager in Culinary Services at The Loop Campus. A self-proclaimed wallflower before trusting Christ, she now is an extrovert. She is comfortable talking to — and in front of — other people, giving her testimony and talking to those who have been through similar circumstances. And unlike those in her extended family, Lori has adopted a joyful attitude. She has also figured out how to set boundaries and has learned to feel comfortable in her own skin.

"Jesus changed how I see the world," she says. "I'm no longer fearful, and I have nothing to hide."



Celebration returns this December with eight presentations Dec 9-13. Visit TheFirstChristmas.org to join this Christmas ministry in a role before or during the show, on stage or behind the scenes.



MetroLIVE takes place on Thursdays at 7:13p at The Loop Campus through Jul 30, with a special final gathering on Wed, Aug 5. Visit MetroLIVE.org for a list of upcoming speakers and worship leaders.

Life Bible Studies are the primary method for connecting with others and growing together at Houston's First. For help finding one, ask a Welcome Team or staff member at your campus or visit HoustonsFirst.org/LifeBibleStudies.