

Generosity

AT HOUSTON'S FIRST

A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

The story of the widow's mite offers an insight into God's heart for givers; it isn't so much about the amount given as much as it is the giver's passion for the Lord and His work. Old or young, God loves a cheerful giver.

"Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." — Mark 12:43-44

Passionate hearts come in all shapes and sizes. Five year-old Ryan Jackson was recently moved to generosity after hearing lessons on giving at his Preschool Life Bible Study at the Houston's First Cypress Campus.

Ryan is no stranger to generosity as his parents, Lyndle and Jessica Jackson, give regularly of their time. John leads the Men's Serve team at the Cypress Campus, where Mom, Jessica, is also Co-coordinator for Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS). "Ryan adores going to Men's Serve with his daddy," said Jessica. "One time he tried to run one of the meetings."

Last February, Ryan began posing questions about asking Jesus into his heart, and has since brought up the subject again, telling his mom with teary eyes, "I have to tell people about Jesus."

One Sunday, Ryan's Life Bible Study co-teachers Eddie and Camille Vitulli, a.k.a., Mr. Eddie and Ms. Camille, guided the young children to make offering envelopes to teach them how the church helps others. A few days later after naptime, Ryan approached his mom with some coins from his piggy bank and few "paper dollars" tucked carefully inside the envelope he had made.



Jessica quizzed her son as to why he would take money out of his piggy bank. "I have so much money, and some people don't have any!" he cried. She wondered about the paper she found along with the coins and had to ask. "I didn't have any dollars, so I made some," he said.

Lyndle and Jessica are thankful for Ryan's teachers, the Vitullis and John and Amy Robertson, who introduce and reinforce the concepts of generosity and trusting Christ with the children. "Ryan's learning that God provides for all of us, and that we can help others as we trust Him enough to give," said Jessica.

WHAT IS YOUR GENEROSITY STORY?

Share it at HoustonFirst.org/MyStory.

THERE ARE MORE WAYS THAN ONE TO EXPRESS YOUR WORSHIP THROUGH GENEROSITY:

| ONSITE | ON MOBILE |
|---|---|
| Collection Plates and Boxes | Text your campus code to 77977 for a link |
| ONLINE | |
| HoustonFirst.org/Generosity | HFBCLoop • HFBC Cypress HFBCDowntown • HFBCSienna HFBCSpanish |

MINISTRY IMPACT YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS FROM JAN 1 TO JAN 31, 2016

DECISIONS

132 New Church Members
15 Joined By Baptism

11% OF NEW MEMBERS
WERE BAPTIZED

ATTENDANCE

26,177 in Life Bible Studies
(5,235 weekly average)
29,256 in Worship Services
(5,851 weekly average)
5,711 on Webcast
(1,142 weekly average)

MISSIONS

Pray for the many trips the
Houston's First family is taking
in 2016 to share the Good News
of Jesus across our nation
and world!

GENEROSITY

3,128 Givers to Great Commission Giving
180 were First-Time Givers

6% OF GIVING WAS A
FIRST TIME GIFT

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: "As you become more mature IN your faith, you begin to become more unstoppable FOR your faith. @GreggMatte" — @Dear_Tabitha

ALL CAMPUSES

HighPoint Bible Study
Wednesdays @ 11:30a — 1010 Lamar (Tunnel Level)
This weekly downtown Bible study is open to everybody! This week, Dr. David Self will be teaching. Bring your lunch, or purchase one there for \$8. The lesson begins at 12:10p. Visit HoustonFirst.org/HighPoint to learn more.
CONTACT Diane.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org

CanHope
Mon, Feb 8 @ 6:45p — The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)
CanHope ministers to families touched by cancer and those who love and care about them. With Rick Jones, free of pancreatic cancer for 25 years, speaking we will share a meal together; an entree is provided, so please bring a salad, vegetable or dessert. Come enjoy this time of testimony, prayer and fellowship! RSVP to 713.957.6764.
CONTACT Sherry.Oradat@HoustonFirst.org

NEXTGEN MINISTRIES

Rush Week
July 22-28 — Panama City Beach, FL
Wait no longer to make your plans for summer 2016 at Rush Week in Panama City Beach! The Student Ministry from all campuses will return to serve the churches and people of PCB another year. Join other students (6th-12th grade) for this unique mission and camp experience. You don't want to miss it! Learn more and register at HoustonFirst.org/RushWeek.
CONTACT Susan.Newman@HoustonFirst.org

WOMEN

The Table
Tuesdays through Mar 8 @ 6:30-8p
The Loop (Worship Ctr)
Come, experience the presence of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit as women from across Houston join together to embrace the hope and provision found in the Word. Teachers Kay Altic, Kelly Matte, and Star Smith will lead us as we see how Jesus is MORE than enough! Invite others at HoustonFirst.org/Events.
CONTACT Meredith.Cann@HoustonFirst.org

MEN

Warrior's Heart
Thursdays @ 6:30-7:30a — The Loop (Garden Rm)
This spring we will continue our *Great Men of Faith* series as we look at men who show faith in all types of situations. We are in a seven-week session led by Russell Minick. Breakfast is available for \$5. Registration at HoustonFirst.org/Men is encouraged, but not required.
CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonFirst.org

Men: Serve
Sat, Feb 27 @ 8a-1p — The Loop (Oasis Rm)
Men will gather at The Loop Campus then head out in teams around the city to serve the widows of our church family. Yard work, home repairs, car maintenance, and other tasks — there is a place for you to serve! Register by Fri, Feb 19, at HoustonFirst.org/Events. If you are a widow in need of assistance, contact Sherry Oradat at 713.957.6764.
CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonFirst.org

THE LOOP

SINGLE ADULTS
Guys Serve the Gals
Sat, Feb 13 @ 5:30p — The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)
Single adult ladies, come enjoy dinner, a movie, and other special surprises planned by the men of Impact! You do not want to miss this special event! There is no cost for the ladies, but we do need you to register. Sign up soon so we can make sure we have everything ready just for you. Men — register for \$20 at HoustonFirst.org/Events.
CONTACT Chris.Heitman@HoustonFirst.org

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

Birthday Bash
Today @ 12:45-1:30p — The Loop (Oasis Rm)
Single parent families are getting together to celebrate parents and children with February 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

CYPRESS

Mission Trip Opportunities
The mission experience creates an opportunity for you to develop spiritual disciplines and ministry skills while partaking in the Great Commission. The Cypress Campus offers opportunities to serve in our city, our nation and our world year round. Some of the serving opportunities for 2016 include Spain, Cambodia, and New York. If you are prayerfully considering a mission project or trip this year, please visit HoustonFirst.org/Missions.
CONTACT Toby.Thomas@HoustonFirst.org

DOWNTOWN

WOMEN
Women's Bible Study: Engaging in His Word
Every Mon in Feb @ 7-8:30p
Baptist Student Ministries at UH (4801 Calhoun)
Walk alongside fellow women as we journey through God's Word together. We will observe the correct context, syntax, and interpretation of Scripture in order to apply it more meaningfully to our lives. Learn more at HoustonFirst.org/Downtown and RSVP to Erin Krafft.
CONTACT Erin.Krafft@gmail.com

SIENNA

MARRIED YOUNG ADULTS
3-Day Marriage Clinic
Feb 8-9 @ 12-6p — Sienna Campus (NextGen Ste 220B)
Though couples experience different symptoms such as anger, resentments, and withdrawal, the root problem is usually the same: violating one or more of 25 Essential Marriage Skills Dr. Karl Elkins has identified in the Bible. Elkins will lead a three-day marriage clinic to explore these essential marriage skills, providing the equivalent of 18 weeks of counseling in just three days! Register for just \$75 per couple at HoustonFirst.org/Sienna.
CONTACT Cara.Buis@HoustonFirst.org

WOMEN

Women's Bible Studies
Tuesdays beginning Feb 9
Sienna Campus (Worship Ctr)
Ladies, starting this Tuesday choose from two Bible study opportunities! Gather with other women for a time that suits you at either 10a-12p (childcare provided) or at 6:30-8:30p. Find the study topic that's right for you and register online at HoustonFirst.org/Sienna for \$20. Childcare is only provided at 10a-12p for \$5 per child.
CONTACT Cherry.Sears@HoustonFirst.org

SPANISH

NEXTGEN MINISTRIES
Career & Education Day
Sat, Feb 13 @ 9a-3p
George R. Brown Convention Center
Middle and high school students and parents are invited to join us in a day full of college and financial aid information provided by the Houston Hispanic Forum. This event is free but requires registration at HoustonFirst.org/Spanish. Group transportation will be available.
CONTACT Karina.Bazaldua@HoustonFirst.org



XEE ONE-DAY WORKSHOP

Sat, Feb 13 @ 9a-3p — The Loop (Rm 143)
Xee equips Jesus-followers to share the Gospel effectively in everyday encounters. In this one-day workshop, you will learn and put into practice relevant, biblical, and relational evangelism skills for our postmodern times.
CONTACT Jonathan.Huegel@HoustonFirst.org

For more information on Giving Life Away,
contact Charlotte.Nease@HoustonFirst.org

MAKE IT YOUR CHURCH ORIENTATION

Discover what it means to be a member of Houston's First! You'll meet staff members, hear about our mission, vision, and ministries, and learn how you can make Houston's First your church. RSVP and learn more about membership at HoustonFirst.org/Membership.

The Loop — Sun, Feb 21 @ 12:30p
The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)

Cypress — Sun, Feb 28 @ 12:30p
Bridgeland's Lakeland Activity Center

Downtown — Sun, Feb 21 @ 12:30p — 1010 Lamar

Sienna — Sun, Feb 21 @ 12:30p — NextGen Ste 220D

Spanish — Sun, Feb 21 @ 6:30p — The Loop (Harbor Rm)

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 9:30a-11a
Life Bible Studies 9:30a-11a

Downtown Campus
1010 Lamar • Houston, TX 77002
Worship 11a
Life Bible Studies 9:30a

Sienna Campus
4309 Sienna Pkwy • Missouri City, TX 77059
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

RELATIONSHIP Rx



MORE STORIES:

MODERN DAY SLAVERY

GOD'S PERFECT TIMING

A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

FEB 7, 2016

RELATIONSHIP Rx

Flowers, candy, a romantic candlelight dinner for two — those are the elements of romance for many couples this time of year. But after the candles have been extinguished, the petals fall and the heart shaped box is full of empty liners, what's the state of the relationship? A few difference-making couples from Houston's First have created a pastoral setting where life's most important relationships are being celebrated, revitalized and restored.

What could be better than getting back to nature, spending a weekend in the great outdoors to relax, reconnect and gain an added measure of trust and appreciation for a loved one? Houston's First members Joe and Lisa Calvert's invitation to spend a week at a wilderness experience in northern California more than 15 years ago turned out to be a blessing not only for their own marriage, but one that is also making a difference in the lives of couples, parents and teens in the Houston area and around the world.

"We had our eyes opened that week," said Joe. "It was a time of real transformation in relationships. We saw God performing miracles and thought a weekend version should be developed and held in other cities."

When the couple returned home, Joe and a few other men began praying about starting a local group. A few years later, Joe and Lisa traveled to Alabama where Outback America, the weekend model of JH Ranch, was held. In partnership with Outback America, the Calverts and a handful of other Houston's First couples stepped up to start Outback Texas.

Houston's First members Fred and Susan Caldwell began opening up their Brenham ranch twice each year beginning in November of 2011 as hosts of Outback Texas. Today, more than 100 volunteers plan, prepare and serve couples as well as parents and teens in April and November each year. Outback features outside speakers, specialized programs and activities for couples and families as well as time to gather around a blazing campfire — and enjoy some good ol' chuckwagon-style cooking!

Frank and Debbie Blackwood attended the weeklong JH Ranch in 2002 as newlyweds. Years went by and their marriage was on solid ground, but two children plus a child who had undergone three open-heart surgeries after his birth caused Frank and Debbie to feel as though they were living worlds apart. Debbie spent the first year of baby Jake's life at Texas Children's Hospital. Frank remembers the day they almost lost him.

"One Sunday morning I looked up at Jake's monitor and he was flatlining," said Frank. "I learned that Pastor Gregg had stopped the worship service to pray for Jake. It was about the time Jake's heart began beating again."

Life takes a toll on marriages, and sometimes relationships need a refresh, if only for a weekend. "We needed to let a little steam out of the kettle," said Frank. "The weekend

brought us closer together, so we decided to become volunteers. As volunteers, we found that we get every bit as much out of it as the guests."

A trusted friend recommended Outback Texas to Kevin and Amy Cain, who were struggling in their marriage. Amy's first husband had passed away when their boys were five and one. She had known Kevin in college, and though in his 40s, he had never married. Putting their family together was more challenging than they imagined.

"We were crazy about one another," said Amy of Kevin. "Whatever we could have done wrong, we did. But our flags were planted so firmly in the soil of God's kingdom that we couldn't get away from Him. We tried our hardest to ruin the thing, but the God of the universe kept putting it all back together."

The weekend at Outback Texas was a turning point in Amy and Kevin's relationship. The barrier Kevin raised between them as the weekend began dissolved during an intense and tearful discussion on the green next to 'Golden Pond.' As Kevin opened up, Amy says the Holy Spirit opened her heart and her ears to his pain. "In the secret places of my husband's heart, this wife had inflicted the worst kind of wounds, wounds that said 'You're not enough,' 'You don't have what it takes'... I had for a long time, though unintentionally, enjoyed my ride as 'the good one' in the marriage," said Amy.

Kevin says his cloak of shame was removed that day. "She accepted me," he said, "God identified Himself to us there on the green. It was a new beginning."

After returning from Outback Texas weekends, those who wish to continue cultivating the groundwork laid in Brenham are invited to Tuesday night meetings held in City Centre near I-10 and the Sam Houston Tollway.

Outback Texas is not only for couples. The biannual weekends also host parents and teens to open lines of communication and establish trust with kids as they navigate the teenage years. Wide-open spaces, specialized activities and speakers that address relationship challenges of every kind are elements of the family sessions.

"Personal values, life purpose, forgiveness and communication — those are the important issues to address in building solid relationships," said Joe. "Outback aims to transform one family at a time."

MODERN DAY SLAVERY

Houston is a major hub for sex trafficking, and the I-10 corridor in front of The Loop Campus is a main artery of transit. The \$99 billion industry lures, imprisons and commercially trades the bodies of (primarily) women and girls as young as one year old. Here's a member who is bringing churches together to fight trafficking in our city, and one young woman who escaped it.

Nearly three years ago, Houston's First member Leigh Kohler saw a documentary on sex trafficking, which prompted a small prayer movement that began in her home. Prayer gave birth to Freedom Church Alliance (FCA), a non-profit organization that mobilizes local churches and assists anti-trafficking organizations and law enforcement in rescuing victims, restoring their dignity, and imparting the hope of Christ.

"Sometimes I would wake up and he would be raping me in my sleep," said Veronica, of a pimp who drugged and kidnapped her outside a brothel near Telephone Road on Houston's east side. Though raised in a Christian home in northwest Houston, Veronica's youthful infatuation with a "bad boy," who later became her husband, led her down a path to drug addiction, poverty and prostitution.

Veronica had a baby girl at 16 and, at 18, married the baby's heroin-addicted father. Children's Protective Services eventually intervened and their three-year-old daughter was sent to live with Veronica's parents.

"Acts 12 taught me the power of prayer over the evil, dark places that exist in our city," said Leigh. "As our prayer group talked, we asked ourselves: 'What is the church doing about this?' We wanted to help, but like many people, we felt paralyzed by the magnitude of the problem."

As they sought God, He began opening doors to meet with others who had a similar vision for helping vulnerable trafficking victims.

Veronica had had enough of prostitution and wanted to go home. "It was a world I had never seen," she said. "I could feel oppression there — demonic spirits," she said. "I felt so sick being there."

Veronica phoned to say she was coming home, but refused her mother's appeal to give her a ride. It would be more than three months before Veronica's parents and young daughter would hear from her again.

Leigh joined with others who were intent on doing something about trafficking at a local church. A vision was cast: what if churches came together as the body of Christ, combining resources to tackle what seemed an insurmountable problem. Leigh, three other visionaries and a small army of volunteers from several churches across Houston formed Freedom Church Alliance. They purposed to work alongside anti-trafficking organizations to bring freedom, hope and healing to victims in our city.

To get back to her parents' home, Veronica accepted a ride from a couple in a Cadillac and shared a beer with the woman. Within a few minutes Veronica couldn't feel her legs and was semiconscious. The man carried her to an apartment, and for the next three months Veronica was forced to trade sex for money, pimped by her kidnapper.

To comfort rescued women, the Freedom Church Alliance provides "Go Bags," containing helpful supplies, which are distributed by various agencies, including the FBI and local law enforcement. FCA also partners with the City of Houston to raise

awareness, provide education and after care for rescued women. FCA also provides lunch for those who are testifying against former captors in court.

"Amos 5:24 says, 'Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!' and Psalm 82:4 says 'Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.'" said Leigh. "I'm blown away at God's heart of justice for the oppressed."

It had been more than three months since Veronica's call to her parents and nearly six months since she had seen her daughter. "I desperately wanted to go home for Christmas," said Veronica. "Since I had done everything I was told, he (the pimp) decided to trust me. He drove me to my home with instructions that he would pick me up first thing the next morning."

Veronica's family was overjoyed to see her on Christmas day. Her parents had filed a missing person's report when she never showed up after her call. "My mother said that my daughter had been praying to see me on Christmas — and she believed she would," said Veronica. At home, she learned her younger brother had become a Constable in Precinct 4, the area where she had been kidnapped and held the past few months. He begged her not to return, but she was afraid for her family's safety if she didn't. "I felt trapped," she said. "The pimp knew where my family lived."

Within minutes of returning to the pimp's apartment, a Precinct 4 Constable knocked at the door, questioned him, and took her downstairs to his patrol car for questioning. The officer explained they had been looking for her for months and wanted to give her the opportunity to be free. She chose to leave. The police officer cuffed her and told her pimp she had felony warrants. The officer put her in another car, where her brother was waiting.

Veronica was free, but learned that she was pregnant with the son of her captor. She met with counselors at Redeemed Ministries, a faith-based organization that provided her holistic care. "Redeemed is amazing," she said. "They nurtured the calling in me to be a woman of God." Veronica's sister adopted the son she conceived as a result of her imprisonment. Veronica and her young daughter have started over in another town and are doing well. "God is so good," said Veronica. "His grace is overwhelming. He's the reason I no longer suffer with anxiety."

Leigh says the first two years of FCA were spent laying a foundation. "This is the year of growth," she said. "We are praying for more volunteers." The Super Bowl, being held in Houston in 2017, is the single largest human trafficking event in the United States. To address the demand for trafficking, Freedom Church Alliance is appealing to men to take a stand for purity, to encourage accountability, and to be defenders of women and children. "God is causing a movement in this city," said Leigh, "and we are saying yes to the work He has for us to do."

GOD'S PERFECT TIMING

'God takes our misery and makes it your ministry,' was a key theme in one of Pastor Gregg's messages in August last year. It's a reality in the lives of at least one couple at the Sienna Campus at Houston's First — and they are trusting Jesus to make suffering count for the kingdom.

Like most of us, David Wethington hated hospitals. But since Dave's eight-hour surgery to remove a baseball-size tumor from his brain the week after Thanksgiving in 2012, making weekly hospital visits each Monday has become one of his favorite days of the week.

"How could a Type-A person find peace when diagnosed with a brain tumor?" asked Dave. "It's peace that only comes from God."

Stress was a given in Dave's high performing lifestyle. Trained as a chemical engineer at a prestigious university, Dave was later recruited right out of college by a top-tier corporation. If anyone imagined he had his life under control, it was Dave.

Though benign, it was impossible to remove the entire tumor. Doctors advised Dave and Allison that radiation would be necessary to shrink and control the residual tumor. It would be at least six months before they could resume their family-building efforts. But in God's providence, Allison became pregnant the day before Dave started radiation. What a difference a year makes: just before Thanksgiving, a year after brain surgery, the Wethingtons welcomed baby girl Avery into their home.

Instead of running away from hospitals, Dave embraced the people in them. Though very tough to land a volunteer position as a chaplain at Sugar Land Methodist Hospital, the door opened for him to visit and pray for patients and their families. "I began to see people as God sees them," said Dave. "I was there to serve patients and their families and comfort them as God had comforted me during my illness and recovery."

Dave also enrolled full-time in the Houston extension of Dallas Theological Seminary after initially attending seminary in Atlanta, where they lived before moving to Houston. Allison's parents live in Houston and her job as Clinical Team Leader at Pfizer offers the flexibility of working from home, providing the best of all worlds to be close to family and for Dave to pursue his goals for ministry. Beginning in January this year, Dave joined the Sienna Campus at Houston's First as a staff intern, an unexpected holiday blessing God opened to him soon after having surgery to remove a benign tumor behind his eye.

"I've tried to lean into God's leading, being open and taking a 'Thy will be done' approach to life and ministry," said Dave. "My brain tumor has given me a new perspective: I have greater empathy as I talk and pray with hospital patients. God has a purpose and plan for our lives. He is in control, and He gives peace."

HE COMFORTS US IN ALL OUR TROUBLES SO THAT WE CAN COMFORT OTHERS. WHEN THEY ARE TROUBLED, WE WILL BE ABLE TO GIVE THEM THE SAME COMFORT GOD HAS GIVEN US. — 2 CORINTHIANS 1:4

In 2006, he married Allison, the love of his life and the one person who explained the Gospel to Dave in a way he had never before understood. With career and marriage on track, after nearly seven years together the Wethingtons decided to start a family. Within two weeks of making that decision, Dave learned he had a brain tumor— right before Thanksgiving.

Putting their family plans on hold, the couple committed Dave's medical condition to prayer and felt God's peace carry them through the surgery. Recovery was difficult. Dave had to learn again to walk, talk and eat. Tests revealed Dave had low cognitive skills and the doctors advised that it would be at least a year before he could do even the most basic type of work. But God is good. Dave was able to return to his job as an engineer within five months after surgery.



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