

WELCOME TO HOUSTON'S FIRST!

We're glad you've gathered with us to celebrate the risen Savior today. When you stop to think about the meaning of Easter — God's only Son coming to earth to pay for our sins with His life and then coming back from the dead — well, it's the kind of stuff movies are made of, isn't it?

But as followers of Jesus Christ, we rest in the Bible's truth and its timeless message that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is still at work making a difference in the lives of God's children today. Take a look at the stories of a few Houston's First members who have experienced God's unmistakable power firsthand. Better than a movie script, true accounts like these showcase God's activity and relevance in the everyday lives of those who follow Him.

If you're a guest today and have questions about the church, the Christian faith, or anything else on your mind, I encourage you to come forward at the end of the worship service. Volunteers and staff members are available to answer questions, pray with you, or simply listen.

And, if today happens to be the first time you've heard about Jesus' love for you and how He can make a life-changing difference in your own life — great! We encourage you to come forward, too, and to come back to Houston's First to discover more. That's what being a relevant biblical community is all about!

Pastor Gregg
Pastor Gregg Matte



BEING DIFFERENCEMAKERS

Leading up to our 175th anniversary on Sun, Apr 10, the Houston's First family is looking at what it means to be Difference-makers wherever God places us. We've been encouraged to live out the Difference-makers Declaration in our daily lives, and we've recognized local organizations — faith-based and secular — who are making a difference in our community just as we've had the honor of doing since 1841. How can you make a difference today?



A Children's Life Bible Study thanks Houston Fire Station 13 for making a difference in our city.

DIFFERENCEMAKERS DECLARATION

I was made for more than watching.
I have a history-changing, difference-making, life-giving, Spirit-empowered legacy to leave.
Jesus, I ask You to work deeply in me and clearly through me as I pray, give and go in Your love.
I am a Difference-maker.
In Jesus' name, Amen!

LIFE BIBLE STUDIES

Life Bible Studies are the primary way to connect with others and grow in your faith at Houston's First. In fact, Pastor Gregg has said that if you only have one hour to spend on Sundays, go to a Life Bible Study instead of the worship service! Ask a Welcome Team member or staff member at your campus for assistance or visit HoustonFirst.org for a full list of options.

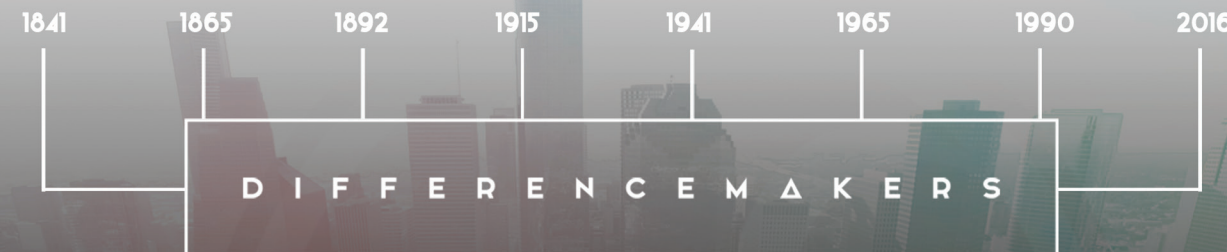


LIFE BIBLE STUDIES RESUME AT EACH CAMPUS ON SUN, APR 3.

MORE FROM PASTOR GREGG

Pastor Gregg's Sunday messages are available at HoustonFirst.org, on the Houston's First podcast on iTunes, and on CDs from CornerBooks.

Also, find *Real Life, Real People: The Podcast* on iTunes where Pastor Gregg shares insights to challenge us to live more deeply authentic lives, and to give us tools, tips, and insights for living as a relevant biblical community.



One Seventy-Five

GATHER WITH HOUSTON'S FIRST ON SUNDAY, APRIL 10, TO CELEBRATE 175 YEARS
THE LOOP • CYPRESS • DOWNTOWN • SIENNA • SPANISH

OUR CAMPUSES

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 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

Easter Weekend • Mar 26–27, 2016

GOD'S POWER IN THE LIVES OF HIS CHILDREN

The Christian faith is built upon the Savior who overcame death and the grave. For His followers, Jesus Christ's resurrection power is still available for the challenges and heartaches we face. These stories show how Jesus is the ultimate Difference-maker in the lives of those who have placed their faith in Him — not only giving them eternal life, but also providing for them today.

THE TRUE GOD

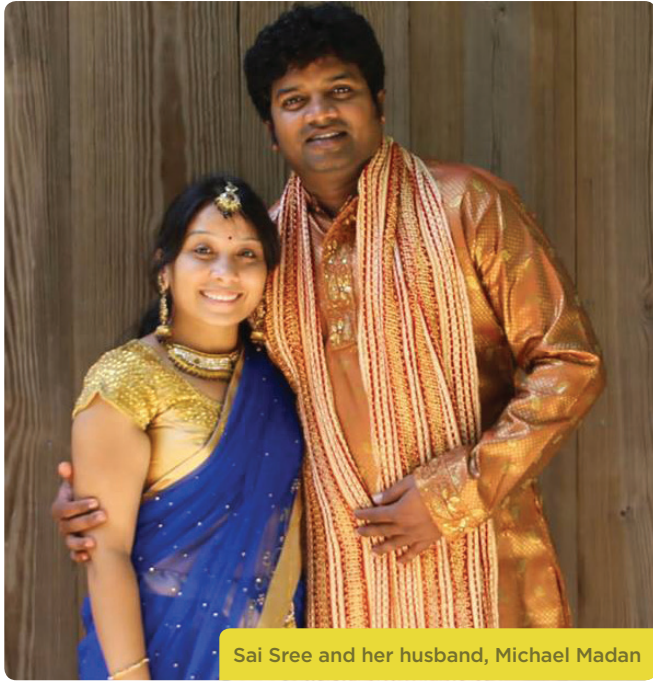
God went to great lengths to woo a young Hindu woman out of darkness and into the light of Christ. His power was on full display both in her calling and in a crisis of health.

The only Christian Sai Sree, a member at the Downtown Campus of Houston's First, knew growing up in southern India was a great aunt. "Why would anyone want to go down a (caste) level?" she wondered. Sai fought the idea of becoming a Christian for years, but found that in times of greatest uncertainty, Christ provided direction and healing.

Sai went from arguing about Christianity with "strange" people handing out tracts to reading the Bible — only if a friend would stop trying to convert her. She read two pages, but that was enough to understand there is only one God. The next time she went to her temple, something — someone — told her not to worship the man-made statue at the entrance.

"I thought it was possible I was going crazy, but I couldn't worship that statue anymore," said Sai.

She traveled to Auburn University in Alabama to do her doctoral work. After the incident with the statue and an invitation to go to church by Michael, her only acquaintance in the United States, her unspoken prayer was "I want to worship the true God — whoever that is."



Sai Sree and her husband, Michael Madan

Sai began attending Bible studies and asking lots of questions. For 11 months Michael and others answered her questions about God and the Bible. She became a believer — accepted Jesus Christ's gift of salvation — and was baptized, but was afraid to tell her parents. "They would be heartbroken," she explained. "It would be a betrayal."

Six months after she was baptized, she had an opportunity to go back to India to present some of her research. A sore throat and nagging cough would follow her to India and back again. She went to the student infirmary for a blood test, and her white count was so high they thought the machine had malfunctioned.

Michael drove her to visit an oncologist and the results were ten times higher than a normal blood count. Sai and the doctor had to console Michael, who had fallen apart at the news that she had chronic myeloid leukemia.

On the same Sunday, two people at her church in unrelated circles gave her Isaiah 41:10: "Do not fear, for I am with you...I will strengthen and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." The pastor's sermon that day was also from Isaiah 41:10.

"I knew God was talking to me," said Sai. Though her white count was even higher after a second blood test, she knew God was up to something. She didn't study the websites as the doctor had advised; instead, she studied the Word of God.

After 21 days of chemotherapy pills, her blood count was back to normal. And as she and her friends had prayed, she had zero side effects from chemo. She didn't even have to take time away from her PhD studies, graduating earlier than some of her healthy colleagues.

To follow up, Sai had to take one pill each day at the cost of \$3,000 per month. "Who would want to marry me now?" she wondered. A nice Hindu guy was interested, and she considered marrying him. It would make her parents happy, but he wasn't a Christian. She made an appointment with her pastor to ask his advice even though she already knew the answer.

Upon graduation, job offers flooded in, and Sai took a job at Oregon State University. Not long after she began work, she got a call from Michael. "He said he missed me and asked if I saw us getting married in the future," said Sai. For three years she asked her parents while Michael waited patiently for the day they might relent and let her marry a Christian.

After six months of writing, the professor she worked for at OSU decided he would not publish her work. Then he laid her off. Her job was ending in 15 days, and her work visa was expiring. She didn't want marriage to Michael to be Plan B, but all their friends told them it was God's plan to get them in the same city and to make the marriage happen.

Sai moved to Texas, and in three days God provided a job for Sai, and their friends arranged the perfect wedding ceremony. She says God took care of every detail, the venue, flowers, the cake, and even friends who were led to help pay for the wedding. A ready-made gown fell into her lap that perfectly fit her five-foot stature. The ceremony was "secret," but her sister was able to come from India, along with many friends from the States they had made over the years.

"I knew I loved this man," she said. "My parents weren't happy we got married, but they came to the wedding we had in India the following December. It went much better than we anticipated."

Sai's Hindu oncologist still can't understand how she got over chronic myelogenous leukemia in 21 days, always brushing off Sai's explanation of a miracle. But then, Sai had the same attitude toward Christ little more than a decade ago. "I hadn't wanted to be a Christian," said Sai, "but the one true God had other plans."

HEALING HANDS

When a sudden onset of pain put an end to her mobility, one Houston's First member found that healing and ministry to others went hand-in-hand.

It was scary for Suzan Mayoli, a member at The Loop Campus, when unexplained pains in her elbow and back progressed in one day to an inability to stand or walk. Whispering MRI technicians in the ER told her that the prognosis must not be good. After a short convalescence at a place she had previously volunteered, God showed up with healing hands.

"You're very sick," a neurologist told me," said Suzan. "A multiple sclerosis misdiagnosis turned out to be neuromyelitis optica (NMO), an autoimmune disease with no known treatment or cure."

The disease progressed rapidly and Suzan became confined to a wheelchair as doctors scrambled to slow the deterioration. Meanwhile, the insurance company refused to pay for acute rehabilitation therapy. Being single, Suzan had no one to care for her at home, so she was released to The Forum, next door to The Loop Campus, to convalesce and for physical and occupational therapy.

"I had visited patients there as a volunteer through my Life Bible Study," she said.

Suzan initially struggled with depression at being in a nursing home, but her room at The Forum quickly became a prayer center. Visitors could come and go anytime, which would not have been the case at a rehab hospital. Nurses, technicians, other residents, and visitors from Houston's First and the Pastoral Care team came regularly. God was tangibly answering prayer in the lives of those with whom Suzan prayed.



"Believers carry life, and the Gospel," she said. "He is the hope of glory no matter where you are."

After three-and-a-half weeks, benefits dried up at The Forum, but the insurance company conceded on her last day there and provided benefits for acute therapy at a rehab hospital.

A friend picked her up from The Forum and took her to a healing service at a church she had been attending when illness struck. "As they prayed over me, I could feel healing come to my hand and legs. I was able to stand on my own — and even walked across the room," she said.

She traded the wheelchair for a walker and had to relearn most everything, including walking steadily. In the weeks following rehabilitation Suzan was able to start working — with a cane in tow. "The doctor said it should have taken more than a year to get to that point," she said.

Suzan began working out again and now months later, she's in the best shape ever. She also began taking seminary classes.

"When you can't do anything for yourself, God sends 'family' to be around you," said Suzan. "You find out who your friends are, and what your faith is."

MIRACLE BABY

Many parents of children with special needs agree that prayer makes all the difference in keeping hope alive. One adoptive couple at Houston's First believes God for all the good He has in store for their young son.



Justice Camp was the size of a water bottle when he came into the world at just 23 weeks into his birth mother's pregnancy. When Justice's forever parents Ty and Amanda Camp, members at The Loop Campus, took him home after a three-month stay in the NICU, he topped the scale at a hefty four pounds. Neither the doctors nor the Camps had any idea what the baby's future would hold.

"The fact that Justice is alive shocked a whole lot of people," said Amanda. "He didn't have a brain bleed and never had to have a trachea tube or a feeding tube, but the day before we brought him home the MRI showed his cerebellum was damaged. They didn't know if he'd just be a little clumsy or if he would ever walk again."

The Camps continued praying for Justice, and recognized that having a big brother to keep up with was turning out to be just the right kind of therapy. "Zachary (two years older) always pushed him to be more physical," said Amanda, "Justice wants to be just like Zachary. He's a patient older brother."

When Justice was two-and-a-half, he took four steps. "It brought his therapist to tears," said Mom. The next year, he took solid, independent steps across the room. "We're seeing a miracle happen," she said. "He's the most focused, determined person I've ever seen."

The doctors say Justice is cognitively fine, and that his brain is rewiring itself, forming pathways across the damage. "He should not be able to do the things he does," said Amanda. Though he's keeping up intellectually with his Mothers' Day Out classmates, Justice's doctors say he will need therapy for the first 20 years of his life.

"Modern medicine can't predict anything with certainty," she said. "Justice has far surpassed anything anyone expected he could do. We can't understand the vastness of God. We're praying for Justice to be all God created him to be."

PILLARS AROUND US

Porn, betrayal and devastating losses threatened to undo one young couple at Houston's First. They prayed for God's help, sought godly counsel, and committed to forgive in order to save their marriage.

Just a couple of years into their marriage, the bottom fell out of Ureal and Traci Lucky's lives. He lost his job a month after they purchased their first home. The following day, Traci miscarried their first child after 16 weeks. A few months later, she discovered Ureal had been unfaithful and was addicted to porn. The following year, Traci also lost her job. How does any marriage survive that level of heartache?

The Luckys were graduates of the Newlywed or Close Life Bible Study (LBS) and had been attending another LBS when their lives began unraveling. "The first couple of years of our marriage were just fluff," said Ureal. "We looked like a happy couple. Thankfully, God had put pillars around us — people in our lives who had been tested and tried in their marriages. When we reached out, we felt no judgment from anyone. The church showed up for us when we needed them most."

Porn was first a coping mechanism for Ureal, and he admits the escape was easier than investing in the relationship when things got difficult. Once he began counseling, he realized he lacked the tools to live out biblical manhood. "I needed to walk in integrity, to have a deeper relationship with the Lord," he said. "I had to be a godly man before I could be a godly husband."

The couple began counseling, together and separately, to come to a place where Traci could forgive. "Once Ureal got into a program, he seemed to be open to doing anything to help me trust him again," she said.

God's grace overcame fleeting thoughts of suicide as Ureal kept his hope in God, and after learning that his failures did not define him. "I caused the hurt; I had to take responsibility," he said.

The Lord began healing their hurts and restoring some of what they lost. God provided during times of unemployment so that they never had to take money out of savings to pay their bills. Ureal and Traci both eventually found jobs in their fields, but one more loss would devastate the couple just as their marriage was on the road to recovery. They lost another child at 20 weeks, due in March 2014. The following March they conceived their daughter Laurel, who was born healthy in December last year.

The couple is still working on their marriage, but after a year and a half, they can say they are truly best friends as well as partners in marriage. "We've been through a lot. I realized what a great woman Traci is, and wondered how I could have done this to her," said Ureal. "We've experienced God's healing — individually and as a couple."



PASS IT ON

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

HANDMADE HOPE

Young sisters Macie and Alex Gunn from our **Cypress Campus** dedicated between 60-70 hours one month making handmade crafts in their effort to raise funds for a cherished ministry. Their hard work resulted in \$1,000 for the purchase of 50 radios so South Sudanese villagers can hear the Gospel.

A FAMILIAR VOICE

Bill Hughes listened to a particular church service each Sunday as an inmate. After his release, he visited our **Downtown Campus** and recognized Pastor Gregg's voice — the pastor from his favorite radio broadcast! Bill now serves on the Welcome Team and is an active member of a Life Bible Study.

GOD'S PERFECT TIMING

A Type-A engineer, life changed for Dave Wethington, a member at our **Sienna Campus**, when he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. He discovered his ministry as his dread of hospitals became his first love. Now, Dave's in school to become a hospital chaplain and volunteers at a large hospital in Sugar Land.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

As a young girl, Karina Bazaldua and her family received help with necessities when they came from Mexico. Now, she and her husband Victor, members at our **Spanish Campus**, are helping residents living in apartment communities in the Spring Branch area as Faith Center volunteers.

READ THESE DIFFERENCE-MAKERS' FULL STORIES AND MORE AT [HOUSTONSFIRST.ORG/MYSTORY](https://HoustonFirst.org/MyStory).