

HAPPY EASTER AND *welcome* TO HOUSTON'S FIRST!

Each gathering of our church family represents countless stories of God's involvement in every life and the journey each person took to get here. Many have grown up knowing nothing other than being at church every time the doors were opened. Others, however, might be attending church—any church—for the very first time! No matter the path that led you to Houston's First today, I'm really glad you're here!

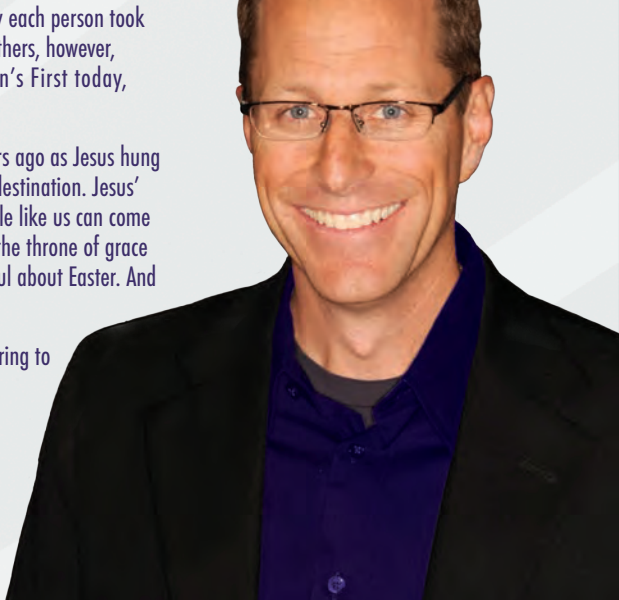
For those of us who follow Jesus, we could say that the first step of our faith journey took place nearly 2,000 years ago as Jesus hung on a cross, at the very moment He drew His last breath on earth. That moment in time forever changed our final destination. Jesus' death, and His resurrection three days later, gave every man, woman and child direct access to God. Regular people like us can come straight to God in prayer with Jesus being the only intermediary necessary. The Bible says we can come boldly to the throne of grace so we can find mercy and grace in time of need. Jesus made that possible! That truth is why Christians are so joyful about Easter. And because He rose again after death, so can we.

I pray that you are feeling the joy of Easter today as we celebrate having direct access to God, and the ability to bring to Him our hurts, brokenness, hopes and dreams. He hears and makes all things new.

He is Risen!

Pastor Gregg

Pastor Gregg Matte



THE CAMPUSES OF HOUSTON'S FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH



JASON SWIGGART
Cypress Campus Pastor



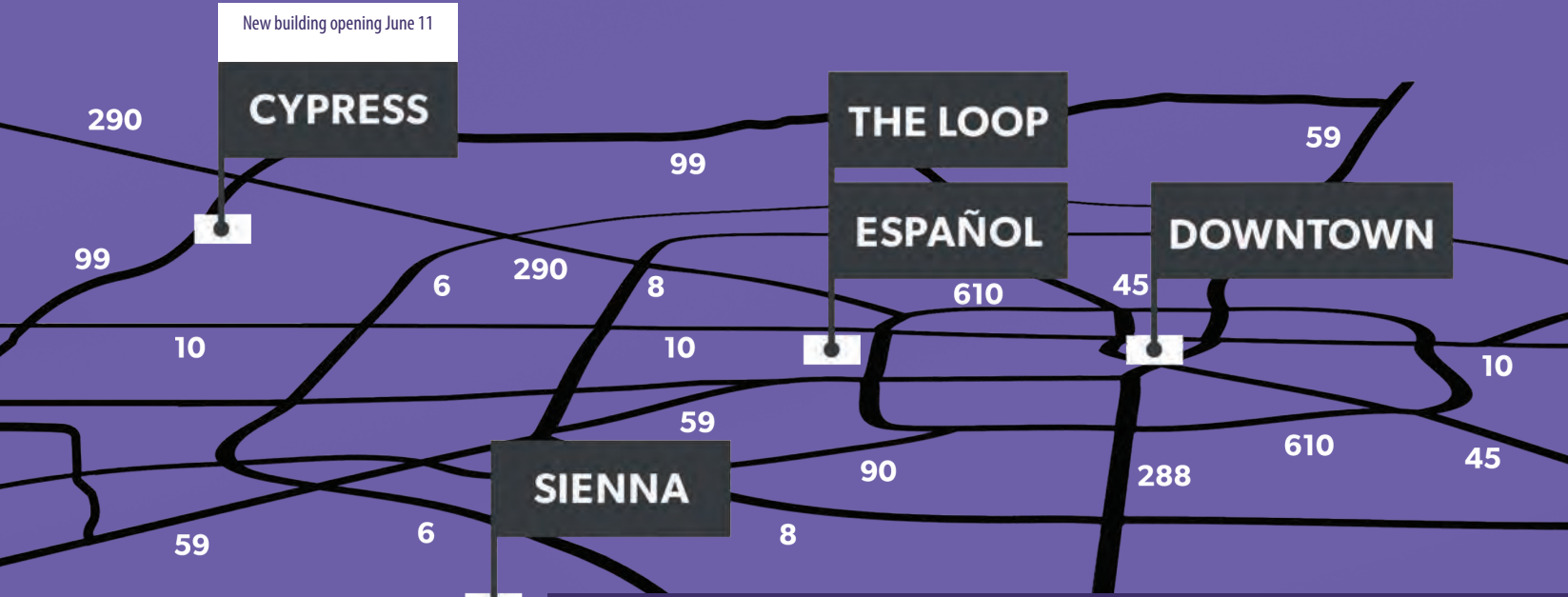
LEE HSIA
Downtown Campus Pastor



JUAN ALANIZ
Español Campus Pastor



MALCOLM MARSHALL
Sienna Campus Pastor



When you cannot gather with us in person on Sundays, find our live worship services online:
Facebook Live (Facebook.com/HoustonsFirst) @ 9:15a, 11a & 5p • Webcast (HoustonsFirst.org) @ 9:15a, 11a & 5p

SEE BACK COVER FOR CAMPUS ADDRESSES AND SUNDAY SCHEDULES.

NEWS + UPDATES

TWEET OF THE WEEK "Powerful morning at the packed house of @HFBCDowntown! Wow! So grateful for our new digs!" — Pastor Gregg Matte, @greggmattte

ALL CAMPUSES

HighPoint Bible Study
Wednesdays @ 11:30a – 1010 Lamar (Tunnel Level)
This weekly downtown Bible study is open to everyone! Minister of Assimilation Jerrell Altic is teaching this Wednesday at 12:10p. Bring your lunch or purchase one there for \$8. Visit HoustonsFirst.org to learn more.
CONTACT Diane.Bagby@HoustonsFirst.org

NEXTGEN MINISTRIES
Camp Intersect
June 11–14 – **Carolina Creek Christian Camp**
Camp Intersect is the place your child (current 3rd–6th graders) can experience God in fun ways at a "two camps, one location" event! FirstKids and The HUB students each have their own summer camp experience with games, worship, small groups, water activities and so much more! There's no better way to start the summer than with Camp Intersect! Register at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Mike.Harvey@HoustonsFirst.org

COLLEGE STUDENTS
College Ministry Spring Retreat
Fri, Apr 28–Sun, Apr 30
SeaSide Church Retreat Center, Galveston
The Houston's First College Ministry is heading to Jamaica Beach in Galveston! Our focus is to gather for a time of fellowship, worship and rest. We will have a weekend filled with teaching, games, beach fun and S'mores. You don't want to miss out, so register by Mon, Apr 24, at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Derek.Nease@HoustonsFirst.org

SINGLE YOUNG ADULTS
Summit Retreat
Fri, May 19–Sun, May 21 – **Pineywoods Camp**
Gather with young single adults of Houston's First to spend time in God's Word and develop relationships through fun activities, conversations and shared experiences. Speaker Nabeel Qureshi provides God's message for a retreat that is not to flee from life's challenges, but to run to God with them! Registration is open now at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Angela.Garcia@HoustonsFirst.org

MEN
Warrior's Heart
Thursdays @ 6:30–7:30a – **The Loop (Garden Rm)**
Warrior's Heart is a weekly morning Bible study for men focusing on clear, biblical teaching followed by real conversations. Youlanda Davis, Director of Quorum Business Solutions is teaching this week in the series, "Faith@Work." Breakfast is available for purchase in the Café. Learn more at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonsFirst.org

THE LOOP
NEXTGEN MINISTRIES
Senior Celebration
Sun, May 7 @ 12:30–2p – **The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)**
Senior Celebration is an event for graduating high school seniors and their immediate families. This is our opportunity as a church to tell them how proud we are and to encourage them and their families as they are launching into after-high school life! Seniors, register by Sun, Apr 23, and submit your photos for a special slide show.
CONTACT Linda.Sproule@HoustonsFirst.org

MARRIED YOUNG ADULTS
MYA Block Party
Sat, May 6 @ 5–7p – **Warrior Field**
This family-friendly event at Warrior Field will feature inflatables and games as well as dinner and treats from Chick-Fil-A and Steel City Pops—and a queso contest! Invite a friend, bring your favorite block party game, and come have fun! Register at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Kristin.Hawkinson@HoustonsFirst.org

CYPRESS WOMEN
The Word with Friends
Tuesdays thru Apr 25 @ 9:30–11:30a
Cypress Ministry Center
Ladies, come expecting great things from God as He teaches us about the Holy Spirit, His purpose and His power in our lives. Hear a word from Teena Haines, Nicole Hufty and Mary Ann Bridgewater. Registration is required and childcare is available at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Andi.Farrell@HoustonsFirst.org

DOWNTOWN
Pursuing Holiness: What, Why, How?
Every Wed, Apr 19–May 17 @ 7–8:30p–1730 Jefferson
For many, the Christian life is lived half-heartedly. We expect and claim cheap grace and have high tolerance for sin. God, however, is holy and expects His people to be holy. With no hint of legalism or drudgery, this five-week study facilitated by Lee Hsia and Peter Lee clearly defines what holiness is, why it's important for every believer, and how to pursue it with God's power and grace. Register for \$11 at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Peter.Lee@HoustonsFirst.org

ESPAÑOL
Multi-Campus Training
Sundays, May 7 & June 4 @ 3p – **The Loop (Rm 143)**
Would you like to be part of the multi-campus vision? Join this series of trainings given by Pastor Juan where he will prepare leaders to go serve the Spanish-speaking community at each of our Houston's First campuses!
CONTACT Douglas.Hernandez@HoustonsFirst.org

SIENNA
NEXTGEN MINISTRIES
Mother-Son Date Night
Fri, Apr 21 @ 6–8p – **Sienna Campus**
All moms and sons are invited for a fun night with dinner, games and a hands-on show from Crocodile Encounter! Register online for \$8 (or \$20 max per family) at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Tyler.Scott@HoustonsFirst.org

MEN
Sienna Men's Retreat
Fri, Apr 28 @ 5p–Sat, Apr 29 @ 3p – **Hunt Retreat**
Men, make plans to attend! The theme of the weekend is "Protect This House," where you will hear from the Sienna Men's staff members as they lead you in God's truths. There will be great food and lots of fun as we fellowship with one another. Register for \$70 at HoustonsFirst.org.
CONTACT Ron.Barkley@HoustonsFirst.org



VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL
GALACTIC STARVEYORS
Mon, June 26–Thu, June 29 @ 9a–12:30p
The Loop Campus
Discover the God of the Universe as a Galactic Starveyor! Kids will search the skies and God's Word to uncover His truth etched in His handiwork. VBS is for kids entering kindergarten through 6th grade in Fall 2017, plus Little Dippers (kids born by Dec 31, 2012). Registration is open now at HoustonsFirst.org!

- Make SPACE in your schedule as a VBS volunteer! Register to serve by Mon, June 5.
- Women – discover all that God has done for us in a Bible study led by Nancy Taylor during VBS hours.



Family Night at Typhoon Texas
Fri, June 2 @ 7–10p – **Typhoon Texas Houston**
Families with preschoolers, children and students (Birth–12th grade) are headed to Typhoon Texas for a fun-filled Friday night to kick-off the summer—and we'll have the park all to ourselves! Invite coworkers, neighbors, or your kids' classmates or teammates to come, too. Discounted tickets are on sale now at HoustonsFirst.org!
CONTACT Hannah.Bush@HoustonsFirst.org



Interested in a Short-term Mission Trip?
Find details about these and other trips—and complete an interest form—at HoustonsFirst.org.

The Loop Campus:

- NYC: June 5–11
- Cambodia: June 8–18
- Kenya: June 23–July 5

Cypress Campus:

- Switzerland: July 5–14
- Costa Rica: July 8–15

Downtown Campus:

- Honduras (Living Water): Apr 29–May 6 (open to any campus)

Español & The Loop Campuses:

- Cuba: June 17–24
- Madrid: June 30–July 8
- Xàtiva, Spain: June 30–July 10

Sienna Campus:

- Guatemala: July 22–29

CONTACT Ameer.Omar@HoustonsFirst.org

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. For information, call 713.681.8000, or visit HoustonsFirst.org.

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
1730 Jefferson St • Houston, TX 77003
Worship 11a
Life Bible Studies 9:30a

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

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



HE IS RISEN!

EASTER WEEKEND • APR 15–16, 2017
HOUSTON'S FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

BARRIERS TO FAITH

Suspended between earth and heaven, Jesus took His last breath, and in an instant all barriers between man and God were torn down. The earth quaked, rocks split, graves opened — and the temple curtain ripped from top to bottom. Christ’s death and resurrection offer power over death — and eternal life. Freedom is waiting for all who put their faith in Him. These Houston’s First members experienced healing, transformation and freedom from barriers between them and God that they once considered insurmountable.

BROKEN HOME

“Children who live absent their biological fathers are, on average, at least two to three times more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems. . . .” —*The Fatherless Generation*

“I had no model of manhood,” said Wiley Moss, whose parents split when he was 10. “My dad was an alcoholic, abusive and angry. My mother moved my sisters and me to East Texas to start over and I became the man of the family.”

Wiley’s new home was near a Baptist church, where his next-door neighbor taught Sunday school and had a son Wiley’s age. He heard a message that resonated in his wounded 10 year-old heart: God could take away the pain he felt from his broken home. He accepted Christ. “Even so, I made bad choices at my young age, and was a troublemaker,” he said.

In spite of a wild youth that lasted through his early 20s, Wiley landed a good-paying job in the oil industry that also paid for his education. It gave him a feeling of accomplishment and offered him a lifestyle he had always hoped for. “My life was about consumption and pleasure,” he said. “Working, partying, sexual immorality and possessions were hidden beneath a façade of ‘having it all.’ I was an addict — depressed and lonely.”

The handwriting was on the wall in the oil industry and he began drinking more to numb the pain of job loss. Non-stop partying and job loss sent Wiley’s life spiraling out of control. “The night of my roommate’s birthday I made really bad choices,” said Wiley. “I’m thankful I didn’t get arrested.”

Wiley had lost 60 pounds and was in poor health when a guy at the gym suggested he go to Alcoholics Anonymous. “I was also having an internal dialogue and remembered what I had learned at church,” said Wiley. “Drinking not only affected my health, but all my relationships.”

He moved back to Houston and began attending church. It took five months to get sober and Wiley was baptized, ironically, on Father’s Day 2015. “My dad had been in prison for years and was released in 2016,” he said. “God is Father to the fatherless, and He loves us, is patient, and He’s full of mercy.”

The Porch Live, a worship gathering for singles meeting at Houston’s First at The Loop Campus, drew Wiley in. He also began attending dinner gatherings for singles and then worship services at Houston’s First. He joined a Life Bible Study and found joy in the community he had found and the building of his faith.

“When oil hit rock bottom, so did I. I lost everything except the time to reflect on what I’d done,” said Wiley. “I knew I didn’t deserve it, but I needed mercy. I’ve grown in compassion, and my relationships are better. I don’t live in darkness anymore; I have a walk with Christ.”



When life hit bottom, Wiley Moss found mercy and a new life.

GOD HATES ME

Where is God when evil breaks our hearts? “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18)
One Houston’s First member is walking again with the Lord after a violent act drove a wedge between her heart and His.

“I was a straightlaced rule follower,” said Laura Rensberger. “I had always gone to church and never doubted God’s existence, but I didn’t have a relationship with Christ.”

When Laura experienced the newfound freedom of college, church attendance began to dwindle. “I had my parents’ faith — not my own,” she said. Laura followed the boy she had dated since the high school youth group to college and they continued dating, though he had become increasingly verbally abusive. She hid the deteriorating relationship from her family and vowed to keep up appearances as the “perfect couple.”

Laura’s boyfriend graduated a year before she did, and she ventured into unfamiliar territory. The long distance relationship grew worse and she found solace and attention at local bars, where college students spent many evenings.

Laura was sexually assaulted during her senior year. “I wondered, how could God have let this happen?” she said. “Feelings of worthlessness overcame me. God hates me, and this was my punishment, I thought.”

Laura decided she would give God a reason to hate her and rebelled by accelerating her party lifestyle. The five-year relationship with her boyfriend ended for good and Laura decided to move to her cousin’s in Indiana. One night at a bar, God spoke audibly to her, when she wasn’t drinking. She had been observing a very intoxicated girl and judging her for her drunkenness.

“I heard, ‘That’s who you’re becoming,’” said Laura. “‘That’s not who I created you to be.’ I looked around to see who had said it. I saw no one, but I knew Who it was.”

Back at her cousin’s apartment, Laura opened the Bible to the Psalms and began reading. She decided to move back to Houston and searched online for a church. At church she found no shame and guilt, but instead, she found a real relationship with Christ, not an extension of her parents’ faith.

A year later, she attended a Saturday night church service and all the seats were filled. The pastor said church members had been praying for a year that their half-filled auditorium would be full of people. A realization hit Laura: “God had people praying for me to come back during the darkest time in my life.”



Laura Rensberger found healing in Christ.

Laura found a kindred soul in a Bible study. She, too, had been assaulted and the young women found friendship and support in freely talking about their experiences and praying through rough spots together.

Volunteering with other single adults at Houston’s First has been a blessing that has aided in the recovery of her self-worth. “Feeling worthy is a daily battle,” said Laura. “I ask myself who I’m going to believe. I choose to believe I’m fearfully and wonderfully made. I’m a daughter of the King.”

NO NEED FOR GOD

One Houston’s First Cypress Campus member had little use for God until he got a glimpse of his own mortality. His heart began opening to the love of God after discovering He had a purpose for his life.

Houston’s First member Jason Odenthal was raised as a Catholic with a God-fearing mother who made sure the family attended church. But at age seven, Jason’s heroin-addicted dad left the family. The boy adopted a rebellious, self-sufficient attitude that set the tone for his life nearly two decades.

“I worshiped myself and felt I didn’t need God for anything,” said Jason. “I was living my own life, making my own money and didn’t feel like rules applied to me.” But God gave him a reprieve in his 20s that drove home the point that maybe all things were not under his control.

Working as a “repo guy,” Jason had planned to ride along with his employer to do a job until his daughter spiked a fever two hours before the trip. He backed out of the job and heard four hours later that the vehicle he would have been riding in was involved in a terrible accident. The guy who took his place was killed — sitting in the seat where he would have been.

That got Jason’s attention. Soon after, his sister invited him to attend a “40 Days of Purpose” class at her church to study *Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren. He began attending the church, and there he met Katie. The two were friends for eight years before dating seriously, and within six months they were married. Not only did Jason find his soul mate there, but he also found Christ. “I recognized what a hard heart I had for 23 years of my life,” he said. “It was no way to live.”

Jason’s sister and her husband had begun attending the Cypress Campus of Houston’s First and invited Jason and Katie to visit. They loved the church and the entire family decided to get baptized together on the same day. “We were baptized in November last year as a family,” said Jason. “I feel more loved than ever in my life. I can’t imagine living without God. Now I feel alive.”



Jason and Katie Odenthal with their girls, Chloe & Madeline

FACING BARRIERS OF YOUR OWN?

Use one of the following ways to let us know how we can pray on your behalf:

- Talk with a staff member at your campus
- Complete a Prayer Request card available in today’s worship service
- Text “PRAYFIRST” to 41411 for link to our online prayer request form
- Call the Prayer Line at 713.335.6456

WHAT BARRIERS FIRST KEPT YOU FROM GOD?

We posted that question to followers of Jesus on social media. Here are a few of the barriers people shared — and that God overcame.

Pride, because I’d been in the church all my life and didn’t want to accept that all my striving to do the right things couldn’t save me.

— Lindsay Blessing,
f lindsaychka

Not attending church regularly as a child, I started attending in college and became a Christian at 24.

— Dorothy Ellis,
southhuntmacy

That it was “I” who had to do things to earn God’s acceptance and love. . . . I finally gave up on “me” and realized Jesus did everything needed. All I had to do was say, “Okay God.... I accept Your gift.”

— Adam Hamza,
redheadadam

Not understanding how to transform head knowledge into heart knowledge. I had heard the message for years, but it seemed so hard to claim it for my own.

— Debra McCall,
dogcatrabbitt

I thought I had to be good enough first. The thought of having to measure up scared me away. I just wanted to live my life my way.

— Shirley Ralston,
texpatfaith

Not having my life straight yet, still dealing with addictions. #unworthy #shame

— Kimberly Poblano,
kimberly.poblano

Fear and anxiety of the unknown and intangible. If only I could have all those wasted years back... But knowing what it feels like to go without for so long makes knowing what I know now that much sweeter.

— Kindra Wessel,
kindra.wessel

Fear of failure.

— Lisa Holcomb,
holcomblisa

Fear that I wasn’t good enough.

— Pam Roper,
pam.e.ropers3

Hopelessness and seeing the atrocities of the world.

— Steve Jimenez,
steve.jimenez.456

For me, it was pride (although I failed to realize then). I believed in our Lord but I also challenged Him to show His presence to me in order to convince me.

— Jacqueline Chee,
chee.jacqueline

Why do I need God? Everything is fine.

— Regan Ray,
rray10