

# Grace Notes



Monthly Publication of the Congregational Activities of Grace Lutheran Church in Newton, NC

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9:30am Sunday School 10:30am Worship Service with Communion

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FEBRUARY 2026

## God's Love For Us: The Ultimate Love Story

*A message from Pastor Doug Hefner*

I have a recommendation for a Valentine's Day movie for you. "The Vow" is the name of a movie that came out a few years ago. The movie is based on the book and love story entitled, "The Vow: The Kim and Krickitt Carpenter Story." Kim (husband) and Krickitt (wife) were very much in love and only after having been married for 2 months, a terrible car accident left Krickitt with a massive head injury and in a coma. When she awoke she did not know her husband nor did she remember that they were married or ever in love. To save his marriage, Kim (husband) takes on the challenge of falling in love with his wife all over again and as he does, she falls back in love with him. Starting all over, they built a new love and dedicated their lives to each other all over again. It sounds like the perfect movie to encourage couples to fall in love all over again. It also reminds us that love and marriage is upheld by a vow or promise: to be there in sickness and in health, good times and bad, for richer or for poorer. This husband took his vows seriously as he fought for his marriage and for the love of his wife. He was there for her through it all, expressing his love and living out his vows. Had he given up he might have lost her forever. But because of his love for her, he persevered and won her back with his faithful love for her.

In God's Story, the Bible, we also see a love story of how God is loving and winning us back in Christ. In our sinfulness we have forgotten and neglected our first love, God. We sometimes live as if God doesn't exist at all as we seek to selfishly exercise our own will and way. The Bible Story is a story of love, how God loves us in Christ to win us back into His family through Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. In January and February we continue to recognize the season of **Epiphany**, which means "*to make known*" or "*to reveal.*" We have focused on Scripture that remind us that God is making

His love and will known to us through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. God has revealed to us the one true light that conquers the darkness of sin and death. As we receive this Epiphany, we are called to make God known as we proclaim the good news in word and deed.

As we move into **the season of Lent starting February 18** with Ash Wednesday, we are reminded of how quickly we forget God's Epiphany in Christ and how our sin leaves us with *spiritual amnesia*. We forget our first love and neglect the relationship that has brought us life, love and grace. In Lent we will recall how our Lord Jesus Christ once again sought us and bought us with His love as he journeyed to the cross for you and me. **Jesus vowed that nothing would stop him from giving his life for us so that we might know beyond any doubt that we are loved and forgiven.** Nothing can change God's love for us and nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ! God's Word calls us to repent (turn around to walk a new path, change of mind that leads to new life), confess our sins, and turn again to God's grace and forgiveness in Christ. Lent is a call to "Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love..." (which is what we sing in Lent for the Gospel acclamation). Turning again to Christ, God renews, restores, and reshapes us to be God's people and disciples in the world today!

As we gather to worship on Sundays and Wednesdays, you will hear again the of the story of God's amazing love and grace for us in Christ. You will experience the incredible vows or promises God makes with us as His people. And I believe that your love for God and for others will be awakened as God restores and renews our hearts in Christ! Mark your calendars now and invite family, friends, neighbors and coworkers!

*In Christ's love, Pastor Doug*

## **Epiphany: February Worship Themes and Scripture**

*9:30am Sunday School; 10:30am Worship Service with Communion*

**February 1, 2026, 4<sup>th</sup> Sun after the Epiphany, Matthew 4:12-25** In our Gospel reading for this Sunday, Jesus proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus then begins to call his disciples to follow him so that they can be fishers of people for the kingdom. These disciples left their nets and family to follow Jesus. Jesus is calling us today to follow him, to take up our cross, and to be fishers of people.

**February 8, 2026, Friendship Sunday Invite a Friend, Family Member, Neighbor, Coworker**

On this Sunday we will focus on the gift of Godly friendship. Abraham was called a

friend of God. God spoke to Moses like a friend. And we see in God's Word Godly friendships that are essential in living one's faith in the world. It is amazing that God in Christ calls us friends (see John 15) and that Jesus lived out fully his definition of friendship "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13) Jesus did just that when He gave His life for us on the cross. As Friends of God, we seek to develop Godly friendships and relationships to share Jesus with the world.

**February 15, 2020, Transfiguration Sunday, Exodus 24:8-18; Psalm 2:6-12; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9** Jesus is transfigured before the disciples and appears with Moses and Elijah. They worship in awe at this glorious vision and epiphany. The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus reminds us that we need those mountain-top experiences that make Christ known to us in a clearer way so that we can go back down the mountain to be an epiphany, to make God known in the living out of our faith in word and deed.

**February 18, 2026 Ash Wednesday 7pm Both services include imposition of ashes and Holy Communion, Joel 2:12-19, Psalm 51:1-13 [14-19], 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21** Our Lenten journey begins with God inviting us to repent of our sins and receive forgiveness and new life in Christ. As we confess our sins and receive the mark of the ashes in the sign of the cross we are reminded of the depths of our sin but the even greater depth of God's love and mercy revealed to us in Christ!

**February 25, 2026 First Sunday in Lent Genesis 3:1-21; Psalm 32:1-7; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11**

Genesis 3, the story of the Fall, is about how the first humans were tempted and led astray by the serpent (devil). Their disobedience becomes the original sin that is passed on to become the source of our sin nature. In Matthew 4 we see that Jesus, after His baptism where He is announced to be God's Son whom God loves and is well pleased, faces the temptation and lies of the devil in the wilderness. Jesus overcomes the temptation through reliance upon God and God's Word and therefore revealing that He is God's sinless Son who will become the sacrifice for our sin and the example for us to put our faith in God and God's Word.

### **B.L.E.S.S. DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY MODEL**

In the Fall of 2025, Grace took part in the 30-Day Challenge of **Pray and Go** written by Thom S. Ranier. **Pray and Go** focused on our call to be **Great Commission Christians**. This means that we ask God in prayer to equip and empower us as disciples to prepare us to go with the Gospel into our community to connect with others as we introduce them to

Jesus. After praying, we were encouraged to invite our neighbors to worship or church events verbally or through letters or email/texts. We were encouraged to find our “one” and mentor that person in the faith. The book reminded us that very few church members invite others to their church even though most people not connected to a church would respond favorably to an invite.

While we all should continue to Pray and Go, I felt like we needed something else as a congregation to guide us in reaching out to our community. God answered that prayer with the **B.L.E.S.S. Discipleship Ministry Model**. Pastor Dave Ferguson of Community Christian Church in Chicago wanted to encourage his people to reach out. As he prayed about it, he saw a theme in Scripture starting with the call of Abraham. God said that he would bless Abraham and Sarah to be a blessing. This theme of receiving God’s blessings that compels us to be a blessing is throughout Scripture. How do we, as Christians, bless the world around us? Dave Ferguson takes a look at our call to bless others, making a case for blessing as a means of disciple-making.

Dave put forward the acrostic, **BLESS**, as a means of blessing the world around you:

**B—Begin with prayer (And I added Begin with the Bible)** It is important that we abide in God’s Word as Jesus said in John 15. It is where we learn about God and about who and whose we are. We also learn that we are called as discipleships to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. As we read God’s Word, we pray for understanding and for ways that we can put our faith into action. What have you called me to? Who do you want me to bless?

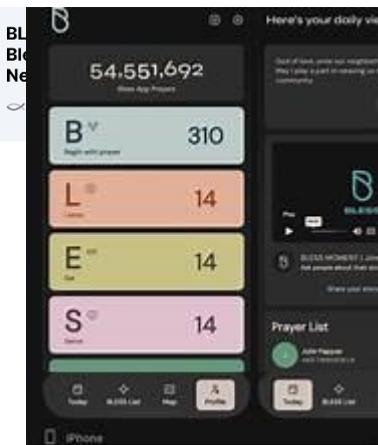
**L—Listen (I added Look and Love – we listen and observe with love to develop a relationship with others)** Take a listening posture. Listen to the people and places around us. What needs are present?

**E—Eat** Eating slows us down and shared meals build relationships. Meal times offer 21 different opportunities a week to be on mission. Meals offer an opportunity for fellowship and is a wonderful way to connect with others.

**S—Serve** Listening and eating often provide opportunities to hear how you can serve. It is said that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Listening and serving are ways that we show we care.

**S—Story** Your service allows you the opportunity to share your story—how God changed your life. And His story—what He’s done to redeem the world. As people see

that we care and love them in Christ, we can share the Gospel story of Jesus' love and salvation.



This is great so far, right? I have even more exciting news. Pastor Dave and his church developed a BLESS App: Bless Your Neighbor (Be a Light for Christ). In your smart phone or tablet or computer, go to the App Store and get the BLESS App for free. Once you sign up for it and put in your address, it will give you a list of 50 neighbors around you (names and addresses). This is your BLESS list. You Begin with prayer/Bible, then look to connect by listening and loving, etc. When you pray for or listen or eat or serve, you can note that for each family you have adopted. There is also a map button to show you on a map where your neighbors live. If you need help

with setting up the app, please let me know.

Let's say you don't have a smart phone or tablet... Someone who does have an app can put in your address and find plenty of neighbors with names and addresses for you to BLESS. I will be providing resources to help you reach out to your neighbors, like a welcome letter. So if you want to write a personal letter to all of neighbors, a welcome



letter would guide you in that. There is so much that we can do with the BLESS Discipleship Ministry Model. I pray that you will download the app and begin to bless others around you with the love of Jesus. Over the next few weeks I will provide more support and ideas for us to BLESS our neighbors. I know God will lead and guide us as we seek to reach out to our neighbors with Jesus' love. Let us all be in prayer about this wonderful tool and this amazing discipleship ministry called BLESS! God bless you, Pastor Doug Hefner

## WORSHIP ASSISTANTS FOR FEBRUARY

- |                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| ❖ Lector               | Todd Childers                |
| ❖ Ushers               | Jacob Jarrett & Jack Wilfong |
| ❖ Communion Assistants | Tina Hefner & Cindy Bivens   |
| ❖ Altar Preparation    | Cindy Bivens                 |
| ❖ Offering Tabulators  | Todd Childers & Tim Eckard   |

*Please be mindful of your commitment to serve. If you are unable to fulfill that commitment, be reminded that it is **your** responsibility to find someone to serve in your place.*

### FLOWER CHART FOR FEBRUARY

<b>2/1 – OPEN</b>	<b>2/8 – Todd Childers</b>
<b>2/15 – OPEN</b>	<b>2/22 – LENT, No Flowers</b>



If you wish to place flowers on a given Sunday, please list your name on the chart in the narthex. The liturgical color of the day is listed to assist you in selecting flowers appropriate for that Sunday. Please notify the Church Office by the Tuesday prior to your selected Sunday to ensure correct information is printed in the bulletin.

*You are responsible for ordering the flowers from a florist of your choice. If you would like your flowers to be delivered, Kathy's Flowers & Gifts (704-462-1162) in Vale will deliver to our sanctuary at no extra cost.*

### ATTENDANCE AND GIVING TO OUR LORD'S WORK FOR JANUARY

	12/28/2025	1/4/2026	1/11/2026	1/18/2026
<b>Sunday School</b>	13	10	10	8
<b>Worship</b>	38	45	46	40
<b>General Fund Offerings</b>	\$2,281	\$2,416	\$5,967	\$1,779

**FRED T. FOARD SENIOR LUNCHEON** will be held on Wednesday, February 4<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 noon at Laurel Hill United Methodist Church. All are invited!

Below is the luncheon schedule for the remainder of 2026:

<b>February 4<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Laurel Hill UMC</b>
<b>March 4<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Ebenezer UMC</b>
<b>April 1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>Sardis Lutheran</b>
<b>May 6<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Plateau Community Church</b>
<b>June 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>Grace Lutheran</b>
<b>July 1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>Wesley Chapel UMC</b>
<b>August 5<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Laurel Hill UMC</b>
<b>September 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>Ebenezer UMC</b>
<b>October 7<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Sardis Lutheran</b>
<b>November 4<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Plateau Community Church</b>
<b>December 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>Grace Lutheran</b>

**THE GRACE PRAYER BREAKFAST** will be held on Saturday, February 14<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am at Four Peas in a Pod Restaurant on Highway 70 in Conover. Great food and great fellowship! Please come and bring a friend!

**THE NEXT MEETING OF THE LEADERSHIP MINISTRY BOARD** is scheduled for Monday, February 16<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm.

**THE GRACE PRAYER LUNCHEON** will be held on Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 noon in Fellowship Hall. All are invited!

**ASHURE MINISTRY FOOD ASK** for the month of February is macaroni or other pasta and canned spaghetti sauce. We are doing great things at Grace in helping feed the hungry in our own community. Let's try to donate 2,000 pounds in 2026! That would be around 170 pounds per month. We are off to a great start with 85 pounds donated in January.

## THE STORY OF SAINT VALENTINE



Happy Valentines! Or good riddance to Valentines?! Valentine's Day may be one of the most controversial mainstream holidays we have. One person plans an over-the-top romantic trip to Paris while another yells "booo" at their co-workers for smiling. It routinely lands in the top 4 holidays for candy sales and greeting cards, but what is this day really about? Where did it come from? Let me set the scene.

It is around 265A.D. and the Roman Emperor Claudius has made it a law that young men are not to marry. He believes that they will fight with more abandon in war if they don't have a wife and family to worry about. This results in a culture that becomes more and more vile. Polygamy runs rampant. What is a young Christian person who wants to "tie the knot" supposed to do? This is where the true history behind St. Valentine comes from.

St. Valentine secretly married and ministered to couples in discrete locations so the Roman soldiers would not find out. He put his life on the line to help unite men and women in marriage and keep them away from sinful lifestyles. He did this for years, all hidden from the eye of Emperor Claudius. Unfortunately, he was found out. Claudius demanded that he recant his beliefs and become a loyal Roman citizen, but Valentine stood strong and because of that was put to death.

Before he died, he sent letters out to his friends, many of which he had the chance to secretly marry and asked them to pray for him and all the Christians in Rome. He urged them to keep their marriages sacred and focused on Christ. He closed each letter with these words, "Remember your Valentine." He was killed on the 14th of February in 270A.D. This is why we celebrate each year on that day.

Valentine stood for something much bigger than him. He put his life on the line to marry people, tell them about Christ, and help them win against sin. As servants in God's ministry, we are doing the same thing, but it's not only our lives that are on the line. It is the lives of each person we get to work with. Although we may not be administering their weddings, we do get the incredible opportunity to tell them about Christ and help them win against sin. Thanks for being a part of this incredible mission, and I challenge you to tell your those around you, your kids, and grandkids the story of St. Valentine this year. And then give them those little chalky boxed hearts.

*Peter Baye*