

January  
2025



## Speaking to Tough Questions: Providing Real Answers with Grace



## A Special Message From Pastor Tony Barnes

As Christians, we are often confronted with tough questions about our faith. Whether it's a skeptical friend, a curious coworker, or a searching family member, these conversations can feel intimidating. However, scripture reminds us to always be prepared to give an answer for the hope we have but to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Starting in mid-January, we will be diving into a sermon series on how to answer some of life's toughest questions. For now, let's explore how to respond to these challenging questions with truth, love, and grace.

### **The Importance of Listening**

The first step in addressing tough questions is to listen well. James 1:19 instructs us to be "*quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.*" Before rushing to provide an answer, take time to truly understand the question being asked. Often, the underlying concerns are as important as the words spoken. For example, someone questioning the existence of God might be wrestling with pain or disappointment rather than purely intellectual doubts. By listening, we demonstrate Christ's love and compassion.

### **Grounding Our Responses in Truth**

When we respond, our answers should be grounded in scripture and the truth of the Gospel. Tough questions about morality, suffering, or the reliability of the Bible can be daunting, but God's Word provides a firm foundation. For instance, when addressing the problem of evil and suffering, we can point to the hope and redemption found in Christ. Romans 8:28 assures us that God works all things for the good of those who love Him, even in the midst of pain.

### **Answering with Humility**

We don't need to have all the answers, and it is okay to admit we don't know something. Humility can be a powerful witness. When faced with a question we can't answer immediately, we can respond by saying, "That's a great question. Let me take some time to research and pray about it, and I'll get back to you." This shows that we value the person's inquiry and are committed to providing a thoughtful response.

### **Speaking the Truth in Love**

Ephesians 4:15 calls us to "*speak the truth in love.*" Our tone and demeanor are just as important as the content of our answers. A defensive or argumentative response can alienate the questioner, while a gentle and loving approach can open hearts. Remember, the goal is not to win debates but to point others to Christ.

### **Practical Tips for Tough Questions**

- 1. Pray for Wisdom:** Before engaging in these conversations, ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. James 1:5 promises that God will give wisdom to those who ask.
- 2. Be Prepared:** Study apologetics and familiarize yourself with common questions about Christianity. Resources like C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* or Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ* can be helpful.
- 3. Stay Calm:** Don't let tough questions shake your faith. Remember that doubts and questions are opportunities for growth - both yours and theirs.
- 4. Follow Up:** If someone has more questions or seems open to further discussion, invite them to coffee or a Bible study. Ask them to come to one of our Alpha classes on Wednesday nights. Building relationships is key to meaningful dialogue.

### **Trusting God with the Outcome**


Ultimately, it is not our eloquence or knowledge that changes hearts - it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our role is to faithfully share the truth and trust God with the results. Isaiah 55:11 reminds us that God's Word will not return empty but will accomplish His purposes. Tough questions are not obstacles but opportunities to share the love and truth of Christ. By listening well, responding with humility, and speaking the truth in love, we can be faithful witnesses in a world hungry for real answers.

God Bless,  
Pastor Tony  
[tony.barnes@stillwaterchurch.com](mailto:tony.barnes@stillwaterchurch.com)

# PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE LOVE AND SERVE JESUS

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

### WEDNESDAY NIGHT DINNER AND PROGRAM



Join us as Wednesday Night Dinner and studies resume on January 8. We have programs for all ages from nursery through adults. We will have one adult group study that night. Then, on January 15, we will begin 3 adult group studies. The studies will include Alpha, led by Tony Barnes. Alpha is a program for those new to faith or those who wish to learn more, seek, and ask questions about faith. The second group, led by Linda Burr, will incorporate fun, devotions adapted from Max Lucado's "The Heart of Jesus," and prayer into their time together. The third study, led by Cindy Messer, is on the book, "Living Fearless," by Jamie Winship. They will explore how to share Christ's hope with our community. Dinners begin at 5:30pm with the studies following at 6:00. Meal cost is \$8 for adults, \$6 for children, \$25 family maximum, and first-time guests and college students eat free.

***We need cooks to prepare the meals on Wednesday nights. If you or your small group will prepare a meal, please contact Kim at [kim@stillwaterchurch.com](mailto:kim@stillwaterchurch.com).***

### VIBE MINISTRY

Launching on Jan. 9 is VIBE, the newest ministry of Stillwater Church. VIBE's mission is to "help young adults build their foundation on Jesus." As written in Matthew 28:19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," VIBE intends to support that calling by reaching young adults who have completed high school through their mid-20's. If this is you, then join us at Stillwater on Thursday nights at 6pm in the sanctuary.



### TAKE DOWN CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

On Tuesday, Jan. 7, at 9am, we will be taking down and packing up the Christmas decorations around the church. Many hands are needed! Please come help if you are able!



### "READ ME WHEN" PRAYER JARS

The Prayer Team is selling "Read Me When" prayer jars for \$15 each or two for \$20 on Sunday mornings at the Welcome Desk. The prayer jars have color-coded bible verses inside for when you are happy, thankful, angry, anxious, lonely, or sad. All proceeds will go to the Stillwater General Fund.

### OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS

- Mondays - Food Pantry, 9-11am
- Tuesdays - Prayer Team Meeting, 6pm, Sanctuary
- Jan. 5 - Men's Breakfast, 7am, Fellowship Hall
- Jan. 7 - Take Down Christmas Decorations, 9am
- Jan. 7 - Tuesday Adult Small Group Resumes, 10am, Choir Rm (weekly on Tuesdays)
- Jan. 8 - Wednesday Night Dinner & Program resumes, 5:30pm, Fellowship Hall
- Jan. 9 - VIBE Ministry, 6pm, Sanctuary (weekly on Thursdays)
- Jan. 11 - Worship Team Quarterly Mtg, 10am, F. Hall
- Jan. 12 - Ministry Safe Training, 12pm, F. Hall
- Jan. 12 - Kids Ministry Team Mtg, 3pm, F. Hall
- Jan. 17-19 - Students Winter Revive at Blue Lake
- Jan. 17 - Club 345, 6-8pm, Fellowship Hall
- Jan. 19 - Missions Team Mtg, 12pm, Fellowship Hall
- Jan. 19 - Hospitality Team Mtg, 3pm, F. Hall
- Feb. 2 - Men's Breakfast, 7am, Fellowship Hall

### 2025 STILLWATER LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

During the season of Lent, our church will produce a church-wide daily devotional guide called "40 Days of Decrease." We invite you to write one of the short, 1/2-page devotionals in the guide. You may write about a personal story or Bible teaching that goes with the scripture of that day. To sign up for a scripture/day, contact Pastor Mike or James Currie for information.



### HOSPITALITY TEAM MEETING, JAN. 19

The Hospitality Team will meet on Sunday, Jan. 19, at 3pm. This meeting is for all greeters, ushers, and coffee hostesses, as well as anyone that prepares and gives out welcome bags, etc., to our first-time guests. This is an important meeting! Please be present so that we can brainstorm about the things we do well and things we need to improve. Contact Betty Moye (251-604-0949 or [betty@stillwaterchurch.com](mailto:betty@stillwaterchurch.com)) if you have questions.

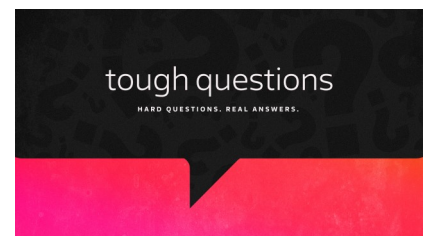
# PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE LOVE AND SERVE JESUS

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY SERMON SERIES, "TOUGH QUESTIONS, REAL ANSWERS"

Join us in January and February for the sermon series, "Tough Questions, Real Answers," a sermon series that tackles some of the deepest and most challenging questions of the Christian faith. Designed for seekers, new believers, and those looking to share their faith, this series offers clear, biblically grounded answers to some of faith's toughest questions.

### SERMON SCHEDULE

Jan. 12	"How Should Christians Respond to Atheists' Questions?"	Col 4:2-6
Jan. 19	"Is the Bible Reliable and Believable?"	2 Peter 1:16-21
Jan. 26	"Does Science Disprove God's Existence?"	Romans 1:20
Feb. 2	"If Evil Exists, How Can God Be Good?"	Habakkuk 1:2-4
Feb. 9	"How Can We Know if Jesus Really Existed?"	Mt 16:13-17
Feb. 16	"Do Christians Respect the Beliefs of Other Religions?"	1 John 3:13-16
Feb. 23	"What Do Christians Say About Evil Done in the Name of Religion?"	Romans 12:14-21



### STUDENT MINISTRY UPDATE

Stillwater Church is seeking a Director of Student Ministries. This part-time role (15-25 hours weekly) seeks to unite our volunteer and staff team in reaching and discipling students in grades 6-12. We seek a passionate follower of Jesus with the calling to lead by coordinating events, study, mission, worship, and serving opportunities. For more information, contact Pastor Mike Hoppe at [mike@stillwaterchurch.com](mailto:mike@stillwaterchurch.com).

### KIDS KORNER

**Ministry Safe** training will be held on Sunday, Jan. 12, at 12pm, in the Fellowship Hall. A light lunch will be served for those who attend. Ministry Safe training is required for all youth and adults volunteering with our Kids Ministry and Student Ministry. Please sign up on the ledge in the church lobby if you plan to attend.



The new **Kids Ministry Team** will meet on Sunday, Jan. 12, at 3pm. This team will consist of parent representatives from each age group (birth-5th grade) and a variety of people who work with our Kids Ministry in either volunteer or paid staff positions. The purpose of this team is to discuss ministry needs for each age group, implement new programming, encourage volunteer participation in programming, and dream for the future. If you would like to become a member of this new team, contact Betty Moye at 251-604-0949 or [betty@stillwaterchurch.com](mailto:betty@stillwaterchurch.com).

**Club 345** will have a movie night on Friday, Jan. 17, 6-8pm. Dinner will be served! Please wear something comfy and bring a blanket for movie watching! All 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders are invited to come. Friends are always welcome!

### FOOD PANTRY UPDATE

An average of 75 families per week use our Stillwater Food Pantry for assistance. Your financial contribution to this vital ministry directly feeds people in need. Your gift either online or in a check to Stillwater Church, with "Food Pantry" noted on the memo line, helps touch the lives of people needing nutritious food, prayer, and a listening ear.



### BACKPACK MINISTRY UPDATE

The **Stillwater Backpack Ministry** is currently in great need of donations of ravioli, individual macaroni and cheese cups, pudding cups, and pop tarts. In addition to donating food items (complete list in church lobby), other ways to serve the Stillwater Backpack Ministry are packing bags and delivering bags to the schools. Donated food items can be dropped off in the lobby at our missions table. Sign-up sheets for packing bags and delivering bags are available at the Welcome Desk in the church lobby. Thank you for your support in supplying our area school children with much needed nutritional assistance on the weekends.

### MISSIONS TEAM UPDATE

The Missions Team January focus is blankets! We will be collecting blankets of all sizes to be handed out during Mobile's Homeless Coalition "Homeless Connect" at the end of January. Donations can be left at the Missions Table in the Lobby. The Missions Team welcomes Stephanie Moye as our leader for 2025. Her passion for missions and serving others will bring a fresh new outlook to our team. We also thank Dotty Armour for her service as our 2024 team leader.

# Happy Birthday!



- 01/01 Emma Holm
- 01/02 Reah Haddock
- 01/04 Steve Smith
- 01/06 Mike Robbins
- 01/07 Gwen Waltman
- 01/08 Timothy Davis
- 01/09 Reed Hoppe
- 01/11 Noah Whetsel
- 01/12 Jack Bonvillain
- 01/14 Briana Corley
- 01/15 Will Bonvillain  
Renee Grimes  
Jalen McBride
- 01/17 James Bryant  
Pam Sasser
- 01/18 Traci Smith
- 01/19 Kiho Kim
- 01/20 Nealie Epperson, Jr.
- 01/21 Jim Bryant
- 01/22 Katie Holm  
Emme Jennings  
Jim Moore
- 01/23 Reed White
- 01/25 Bryson Mills
- 01/26 Thomas Killingsworth  
Joe Lloyd  
Dominic Marchiolo  
Dexter Schlegel
- 01/29 Chad Boutwell
- 01/30 Magnolia Sasser  
Shay Sullivan
- 01/31 Doris Knight

## THANK YOU TO...

- ~ Everyone who helped make our Christmas Concert, "Christmas Light," and Kids Christmas Pageant a success.
- ~ Everyone who helped with the Stillwater Christmas Day Lunch.
- ~ Everyone who contributed to the special offering for the Food Pantry on Christmas Eve. We collected \$3,800! Your gifts and prayers are sincerely appreciated by those in need.

## WELCOME TO...

- ~ New members Melanie MacPhail and Russell and Lori Stanley.

## SYMPATHY TO...

- ~ Judy Callen and Elaine Moore on the passing of their brother, Roy Hartley.

# Monthly Financial Update

	Attendance		General	Capital
	In-Person	Online	Fund	Fund
Dec. 1	178	73	\$ 9,617	\$ 208
Dec. 8	183	56	\$ 9,716	\$ 405
Dec. 15	170	47	\$12,250	\$ 60
Dec. 22	164	35	\$ 5,107	\$ 10
Dec. 24	260	43	Incl. below	Incl. below
Dec. 29	156	61	\$ 7,882	\$ 235

## WAYS TO GIVE

1. Scan the QR code with your phone.
  2. Mail your gifts to the church at P.O. Box 415, Saraland, AL 36571.
  3. Recurring giving online by creating an online giving account at <https://www.stillwaterchurch.com/online-giving>.
- Thank you for your faithful giving to God's work!**



Find us online at  
[stillwaterchurch.com](http://stillwaterchurch.com) and  
 Facebook. Email us at  
[info@stillwaterchurch.com](mailto:info@stillwaterchurch.com).



**KIDS CHRISTMAS PAGEANT**

## CHRISTMAS DAY LUNCH



**NEW MEMBERS: MELANIE MACPHAIL, LORI & RUSSELL STANLEY**