

THE CURRENT

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EXPAND
YOUR
CIRCLE

TATES CREEK CHRISTIAN CHURCH





*"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus"
Philippians 2:4-5*

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From the Pastor's Desk

I promise you, the first thing I thought wasn't holy. I was two minutes from home when a city bus crashed in to my car. A thousand thoughts went through my mind. "What was he thinking?" "This was my grandma's car!" "I wonder what insurance nightmare this is going to be." I was angry. I was frustrated. I was tired and ready to be home. Like I said, none of my first thoughts were holy.

But, as I sat on the side of the road waiting for the police to arrive, the Holy Spirit kept whispering in my ear. There was a part of me that wanted to ignore it at first, but the instructions were clear. I should go talk to this guy while we wait. I should expand my circle. Truth be told, I wasn't sure I wanted this guy in my circle, he just wrecked my car after all. On the other hand, I doubt he did it on purpose. I doubt this was how he wanted to end his day. I'm sure he's a nice guy. I bet he feels bad about it.

So I made my move. I walked over and introduced myself. We talked about how his perfect bus driving record of no accidents ended with me. We talked about our past car wrecks. That soon led to a conversation about cars. That was the opening. I told him about the church car show on Saturday and I'd love for him to come be my guest. He said he'd think about it just about the time the police arrived.

I didn't see him there on Saturday, but that's okay. All we can do is be open to the Holy Spirit's leadership. I'm not sure how I'll respond the next time a bus hits my car, but I hope my first instinct isn't frustration. I hope I see a person who God loves. I hope I see a chance to love someone. I hope I see an opportunity to expand my circle. That's what this issue is all about. How do we expand our circles? How do we seize each moment God gives us to lead others closer to Him? Will you join us as we try to expand our circle?

- Justin Fluhr



Expand My Circle? At My Age?

This year at TCCC, one of our big goals is for everyone and each group to pursue expanding their circle of relationships and friends, with the intention of being Jesus in our community and giving light and salt to those around us.

One concern we hear is that senior adults won't go along with that goal, that they are more limited in opportunities to make new friends; they are stuck in their ways; they don't want to meet new people; you can't teach an old dog new tricks; they want to leave things as they are... and on and on. Are some of these comments true? Yes, probably for some, but I've discovered, they ALL don't have to be true. In fact, it's often the opposite!

I remember hearing the great Marshall Leggett say in a sermon that some of the sweetest, most wonderful people he has ever known have been some of those old saints in the church who, year after year, and decade after decade, just grow in their faith and their love for the Lord and people! But, Leggett continued, "Yet, on the other hand, some of the meanest, orneriest, most low-down people I have ever met, have been in the church too!"

Now, why is that? There could be various factors. We know we all are flawed and have weaknesses, but could it be that many times, we choose to walk in the flesh rather than walk in and be controlled by the Spirit? The Spirit that gives us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Galatians 5: 22-23). If I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, these attributes should flow out of me, and He commanded that as I go about life, I am to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Nowhere in scripture do we see an age limit on these instructions!



In expanding our circles, half the battle is getting rid of our “grumpy” face, putting on a smile, and just being friendly. Speak kindly to people and it sometimes opens the door to more conversation. And, it can happen right inside our church building!

Keaton Belcher, 39, moved to Lexington in the summer of ‘24 as the new boys head basketball coach at Tates Creek High School. Raised in a Christian Church in Pendleton County, he found TCCC, which was near his apartment. Not wanting to be noticed, (though he’s 6’ 8”) and take things slow, he slid into the back pew of the first service. But he did not go unnoticed... the senior adults sitting near him introduced themselves and invited him back. Though he was raised in a more contemporary style church, he loves the first service and the senior adults he sits with are always checking on him to see how he’s doing. Now, a year later, he’s plugged into a men’s discipleship group.

Opportunities can easily happen outside the church too. One senior adult couple started a friendly conversation with their waitress at a local restaurant. An out-of-state UK student, she told them she knew little of Christianity, but after some difficult experiences, she’s searching and would like to learn. The couple invited her to lunch... explained some of the basics about Jesus, Christianity, answered her questions, bought her a study Bible, which she is devouring, and she has come to TCCC twice by herself, and is looking forward to getting into a small group! All because of an intentional, friendly conversation.

I recently asked a group of senior adults for ideas of how they can expand their circle. Here are some:

- * Attend or start a Bible study in your home.
- * Attend activities at retirement or senior adult community centers or gyms.
- * Sit on your front porch and start a conversation with those who walk by.
- * Go to the same restaurants or businesses to develop relationships with the workers. Ask, “How can I pray for you today?”
- * Go to grandkids ballgames...befriend the other families there.



I miss my father-in-law, Charles “Skeeter” Waltz. Much like my own dad, he was so well liked, and could talk to almost anyone. I noticed that when he talked to people, you could tell he cared. He smiled, he leaned in their direction, and would ask questions that showed he wanted to know them (usually it would start with, where you from)?

I admit that Expanding Your Circle is not easy for everyone, but when we desire to love and care like Jesus, the Holy Spirit can help us do more than we could ever do ourselves. He just needs willing vessels, no matter how old they are.



Ernie Perry
Connections Minister



A Simple Invitation, A Big Impact

Sometimes, all it takes is a conversation.

Recently, a couple from our church was out to eat at a restaurant here in Lexington when they got to talking with their waitress, who happened to be a UK student. As they chatted, they asked if she went to church anywhere. She said no but mentioned she was curious and didn't know much about Christianity.

Instead of letting the moment pass, they took this as an opportunity to expand their circle and invited her to come to church with them—and she did!

After that first visit, they took her to lunch again, this time to talk more about who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him. Now, she's interested in joining a small group, and the couple even bought her a study Bible to help her learn more.

This is such a beautiful example of what our Expand Your Circle initiative is all about—stepping out of our comfort zones, starting new conversations, and being willing to connect with people we might not normally cross paths with.

It didn't take anything fancy—just a genuine question, a warm invitation, and a heart open to what God might do.

So, here's the encouragement: keep your eyes open. Pay attention to who's already around you. A simple "Do you go to church anywhere?" might just be the start of someone's journey with Jesus. Let's keep expanding our circles—one meal, one moment, one meaningful connection at a time.

Jesus reminds us that there are people all around us—curious, searching, and open—if only someone will take the time to notice them. The "harvest" doesn't always look like a massive crowd; sometimes it's just one person at a restaurant table.

What if we saw our everyday places—coffee shops, grocery lines, ball games—not as ordinary, but as opportunities for mission? What if we prayed each day, "God, help me see who You've placed in my path today, help me to step out of my routine—and give me the courage to speak up?"

You don't have to have all the answers. You don't need a perfect script. Just a willingness to be used. This week, ask God to expand your heart—and your circle. Be open. Be available. Someone's eternity might begin with your simple invitation.



Lauren Holderman
Communications Director



Expanding Circles: Experiencing God's Unfolding Grace

Life often feels like a series of concentric circles. We begin in the intimate circle of family, gradually expanding to include friends, community, and the wider world. But what happens when the boundaries of these circles begin to shift, when unexpected connections emerge, and when God invites us to step outside our comfort zones?

For me, the past year has been a remarkable journey of expanding circles, a time of unexpected encounters, and surprising grace. It began with a subtle nudge, a gentle invitation to step outside my familiar routines and embrace new possibilities.



One such nudge came in the form of a part time job at Five Guys. I work the grill in the kitchen, initially motivated by some extra money and a stress reliever. However, as I started to develop relationships with people there, most recovered or recovering addicts, I began to see beyond the labels and stereotypes. I saw faces filled with dignity, stories of resilience, and a shared humanity that transcended our differences.

This experience shattered some of my preconceived notions and opened my eyes to the suffering and struggles of others. It challenged me to move beyond sympathy and cultivate genuine empathy, to see the image of God reflected in every person I encountered. The circle of my compassion expanded, encompassing those on the margins of society.

Around the same time, the Byington family began bringing a young man, Gabe, to church that was in a group home for boys in foster care. Marty Byington worked with him at his school, and worked with his case worker to approve her family, and Gabe, to be able to attend church with them here at Tates Creek. Every week, without fail, Brad and Marty would have Gabe here for church.

Over the course of a year, Gabe built relationships with Dawn (KIDS Director), as well as David and Joanne Shuman (Pre-Teen's small group leaders). So much so, that all were also approved to be able to spend time with Gabe outside of church. This led to something wonderful!

Dawn and I prayed and prayed for what God would have for Gabe. After some time in prayer, we came to the decision that Gabe should live with us! Yes! We went through the training and certifications needed to be a Foster Parent so that Gabe could come and live with us! In this process, we were able to develop new relationships with caseworkers, other foster parents, AND Gabe's extended family!

Through these two examples, I discovered a richness and depth of human experience that I had never encountered before. I learned to listen with greater empathy, to challenge my own assumptions, and to find common ground with people who hold different beliefs. The circle of my understanding expanded, encompassing a wider range of perspectives and experiences.

Throughout this journey of expanding my circle, I have become increasingly aware of God's presence. It is in the unexpected encounters, the shared moments of joy and sorrow, the quiet moments of reflection, that I have experienced the unfolding of God's grace.

I believe that:

- God is the ultimate circle maker, constantly expanding my horizons, challenging my assumptions, and inviting me to embrace the unknown. I just have to listen and obey.
- God often works in unexpected ways, through seemingly insignificant encounters and surprising opportunities.
- God is present in the relationships I cultivate – in the bonds of family and friendship, in the connections I forge with strangers, and in the communities I belong to.

The journey of expanding my circle is an ongoing one. It requires a willingness to step outside my comfort zone, to embrace vulnerability, and to cultivate a spirit of openness and curiosity. It requires us to listen deeply, to learn from others, and to challenge our own assumptions.

As I continue on this journey, I am reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes." (Isaiah 54:2) This verse serves as a powerful reminder that God is constantly inviting us to expand our horizons, to embrace the unknown, and to live in the fullness of life.



This journey of expanding circles has been a transformative experience for me. It has challenged me to grow as a person, to deepen my faith, and to live more fully in the image of God.

- I have learned to cultivate greater compassion for those who are different from me, to see the world through their eyes, and to advocate for justice and equity.
- I have learned to embrace humility, recognizing the limitations of my own perspective and the importance of listening to others.
- I have experienced God's presence in unexpected ways, deepening my trust in God's love and guidance.
- I have come to appreciate the interconnectedness of all things, recognizing that we are all part of a larger story, a tapestry woven together by God's love.

As I look ahead, I am excited to continue this journey of expanding circles. I am eager to explore new horizons, to connect with new people, and to discover the unexpected blessings that await me. I know that this journey will continue to challenge me, to stretch me, and to deepen my faith.

But I also know that I am not alone on this journey. God is with me every step of the way, guiding me, supporting me, and inviting me to embrace the fullness of life. I just have to listen and obey.

The journey of expanding circles is a powerful metaphor for the spiritual life. It is a reminder that God is constantly inviting us to grow, to learn, and to love more deeply. As we step outside our comfort zones, embrace the unknown, and cultivate meaningful connections with others, we discover the boundless love and grace of God unfolding in our lives.

Reflections for the reader:

- How has God been expanding your circle in recently?
- What are some specific ways you can intentionally expand your circle in the coming weeks and months?
- How can you cultivate a spirit of openness and curiosity in your daily life?
- How can you use your expanded circle to make a positive impact on the world?

Robert Vela
Executive Minister



IDES and Judy Fish at Work in Uganda

When Judy Fish was working at the IDES exhibit at ICOM in Lexington last November, she met Patrick Kawooya, a young Ugandan pastor who was there to start the affiliation process with IDES. Judy learned that Patrick was orphaned at age seven and sent to a Christian school about an hour from his home. There, he gave his life and heart to Jesus and later met Florence, another orphan, who became his wife. They live in Nansana, Uganda where they have developed a Christian community around a growing church and a Christian high school serving 330 students. The school has had external funding but will soon have to be self-sustaining to continue the ministry.



Florence, Patrick, and Judy

In April, Judy and an IDES team visited Nansana which has a population of about 5,000 people from different tribes, the majority being Muslim and African Traditional Religion. She immediately saw that the rich, African soil would allow gardening to be a means of sustaining the community. The first plan is to develop a banana grove and a small coffee plantation and to raise chickens for meat and eggs. Surplus products from these efforts can be sold to augment the school's budget. With help from IDES, they have already planted 1300 coffee trees and have banana trees growing on a one-acre plot. They will also ask students and their parents to contribute to the school, either by paying a small fee or by volunteering each month to help with cleaning, food prep, gardening, or kitchen work. Florence currently makes the students' uniforms. These efforts will allow the community to be self-sustaining.



Baptism and Chapel Service



We have mentioned before in these articles that the goal of every missionary and mission organization is to work themselves out of a job by establishing strong churches and developing thriving Christian communities that can carry on evangelism in their area. It seems that will be the case with the IDES project in Uganda sooner rather than later.

*Carolyn Nipper
Global Missions*

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3150 Tates Creek Rd
Lexington, KY 40502