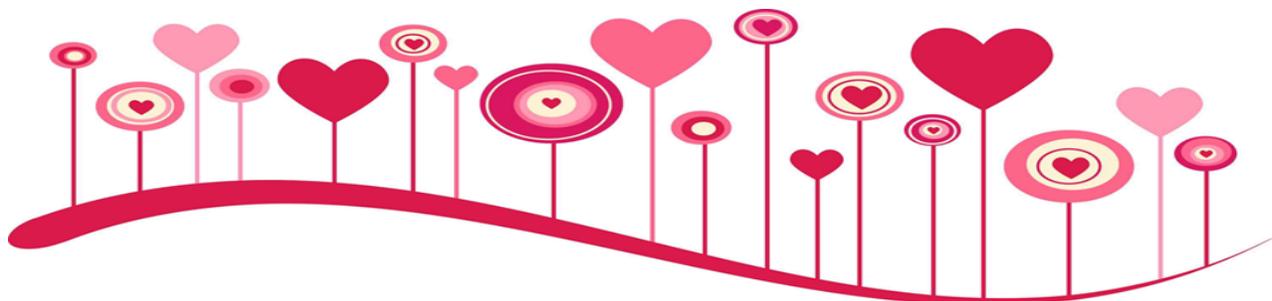




"FOR GOD
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♥ JOHN 3:16

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A Word from Pastor Blake

Taste and See that the Lord is Still Good

A little over a year ago I interviewed at Appleton Community Evangelical Free Church. Part of that process involved preaching a message on Sunday morning. I preached out of Psalm 34 and titled it God's Goodness in Suffering. I used a friend of mine, Matt Bishop, as an illustration. Over the last 7 years he had cancer twice, had a bone marrow transplant, learned to walk multiple times, broke his back in a car accident, was put into a medically induced coma, had a rare blood disorder, and had countless other setbacks in his fight for life. I asked the question where is God in all of this? The conclusion of that sermon was God is good through it all! I had the invitation for all to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

Matt Bishop died December 29th, 2020 at the age of 31. I want to invite you taste and see that the Lord is still good in the midst of suffering. This is my feeble attempt to write something in honor of my friend. Nobody here knows Matt personally, but I still hope you are inspired by his life.

Matt,

I miss you! I said those same words many of times before you went home to be with your Savior. Life seemed to take us in opposite directions, but it was like old times when we got together. We quickly rekindled our friendship and started reminiscing about the old times and talking about God's faithfulness in the present. Oh, how I wish I could go back to a simpler time with you! I miss the random movie nights at the cottage and half off apps nights at Applebee's.

I still remember being introduced to you by Scott Thiry. You, Scott, Josh, and I went through the book Crazy Love while sitting in Atwood at St. Cloud State. I didn't know that would be the start to a great friendship and partnership in ministry. You got involved with CRU and ministry at Calvary. It was a joy to watch you minister to those around you. You were the type of person who would light up a room when you walked into it. Your life was a giant party! I miss the energy that you brought with you!

I can't tell people my testimony without talking about the impact you had on my life. I was disciplined by you both in our everyday conversations and in observing you from afar. You were a person who outwardly displayed the fruit of the Spirit. You demonstrated love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. People often say that your true character shows when life gets hard. In all of your hardships in life you still displayed the fruit of the Spirit. Never once did I hear you complain. I told you many times that if the roles were reversed and all this suffering happened to me, I don't know if I would be a Christian. You just smiled but I meant every word of what I said. God supernaturally empowered you to endure. You are a testimony to all who suffer. I feel like I understand the book of Job a little better after watching you in your suffering. You faithfully took the good and the bad in life and still blessed the Lord.

I long for heaven to see the fruit of your faithfulness in all the suffering you went through. Every doctor and nurse knew the story of Jesus because of you. They knew that your hope was not in any medical diagnosis, but it was in Jesus Christ. You counted it all joy to face suffering because you knew the end result would make you look more like Jesus. You truly lived a life of faith. The gospel was always on the tip of your tongue and I am sure many people have come to faith or will come to faith because of the life that you lived. You glorified Jesus in your life.

The author of Hebrews wrote chapter 11 to encourage the persecuted believers to keep the faith and lay aside every sin that is holding them back. The author showed how Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others lived their life by faith by focusing on a heavenly city and a heavenly reward. The author ends with saying, time would fail him if he recounted all the other stories of God's people who lived by faith. When I think of Hebrews 11 I think of you, Matt. By faith you patiently endured suffering because your sight was set on something other than this life. By faith you kept preaching the gospel because you knew your life on this earth was short, but you wanted everybody to spend eternity with Jesus. By faith you focused on the heavenly prize to help you get through this temporary pain. Your faith points me to Jesus who is the founder and perfecter of our faith.

I thank God that I knew you and that one day I will be with you in eternity. Your life is an example of God's goodness in the midst of suffering. You are an example that good can come out of terrible circumstances. You are a reminder that we live in a broken world, corrupted by sin, but God is still at work in the midst of it. He is sovereign and in control.

Matt! You fought the good fight, you ran the race, you kept the faith. I know you heard the words well done good and faithful servant. Enter into rest, my friend. I will see you soon and once again reminisce about the old times and talk about God's faithfulness through it all. I long for one of your hugs again. Maybe this time I will be a little taller, so I don't end up hugging your belly button.

I love you Matt,

Your brother in Christ!

Blake

Updates and Opportunities

The Nest



How can it be that it is already February?! God sure has given us a lot of time to slow down and enjoy the time we get with our families and loved one. The Nest is still on hold at this moment, it's been difficult for me not to see all of you and spend some time together. I'm hoping to start up The Nest again after summer, if anything changes before then I will be letting you all know. If any of you ladies need anything or any prayers please reach out.

God Bless you all,

Stephanie

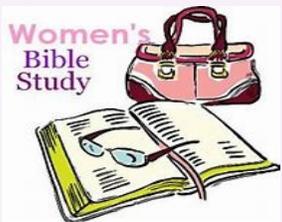


Please pray for the missions team as we prepare to go Morehead City NC March 12-19. For the health of the team and staff, before, during and after the trip. That travel plans would fall into place and for our safety as we travel. Most importantly, pray that we follow God's leading as we serve homeowners and any one else we come in contact with. May He prepare our hearts and attitudes to reflect His love to all.

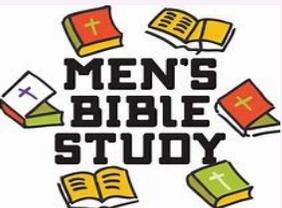
Sue Diestler



La Courte Oreilles: The Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation trip is scheduled for April 23-25. Please contact the Diestlerts for the paperwork and details at [920-851-3104](tel:920-851-3104) or Diestlerts@aol.com. This will be subject to current Covid conditions and restrictions from the tribal elders.



We are meeting on Monday evenings at 6:00 p.m., Tuesday evenings at 6:30 p.m., and Wednesday mornings at 10:00 a.m. We would love to have you join us, please call the church office at 920-735-9971 or email office@applefreechurch.org for more details.



We are meeting on Wednesday mornings at 6:00 a.m. for a virtual study. Please consider joining us for a time of fellowship, reflection, and growth. Contact Pastor Blake for more information at 920-735-9971 or by email office@appletonfreechurch.org.

Growing God's Way Ministries

What's Happening in Children's Ministry:

It has been a blessing serving your children face to face in Children's Ministry Sunday mornings.



The end of January we finished learning about The Armor of God. We used hands-on learning activities to reinforce The Armor, it was great hearing the children participate in the Sunday morning decisions.



This month the children (2.5yr-5th gr.) will be learning about The Fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23.



Lil' Sprouts, God made food! The little ones will celebrate that God made food. They will look at pictures of food and name items if they can. Reinforce God made (created food) God made everything!

Prayer for your children (and parents), that they would experience PEACE. Philippians 4:6-8 Lord, I ask that you would flood their minds with peace. That they would not be anxious but instead turn to you in prayer for wisdom, peace and thanksgiving. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Things get pretty silly on our Awana nights, even on Zoom. Pull out those silly socks for our first February club night on Zoom!



After surveying our families, it looks like we do not have enough interest to hold our Awana Grand Prix this February. The Awana Grand Prix missionary is willing to come in the spring if we would like to reschedule. A survey will be sent to our Awana families to see if there is interest in a later date.



Come and join us on **Sunday nights from 6:00pm-7:30pm** at the church for our Yamily Gatherings. Everyone is welcome!



Elders Report



Proverbs 16:9 NIV

“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.”

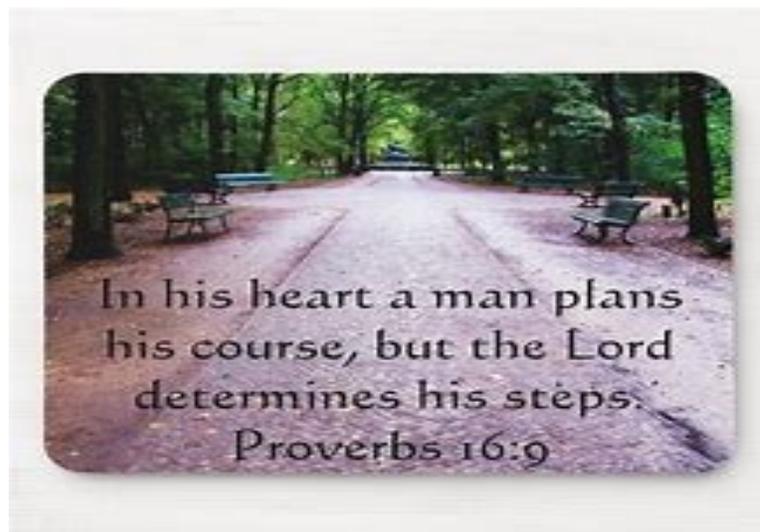
“48:29:34, 48:29:35, 48:29:36”...I sat in my car, watching the seconds tick by on my dash panel, indicating to me how much time had gone by since I last reset my odometer. I kept thinking to myself, “Have I really spent almost 50 hours in my car?” My mind then began to drift off into ideas of what else I could have done with those 50 hours besides drive back and forth from work and wonder why so many people on the road seem to be out of blinker fluid.

As I tend to do, I then began to draw parallels between the “what seems to be mundane” and “life as a whole”. What are you doing with your time? Are you making a difference in people’s lives? Is that difference a good difference? One that is furthering the Kingdom of God? All of these questions began to flood my mind as the seconds on my dash panel droned unceasingly on. I suddenly came back to reality, shifted my car into drive, and pulled away from work. I felt a little nudge, more of a loving reminder, that was telling me that the grains of sand have already been counted out, locked away in my hourglass of life, and are known and kept safe by my loving Creator, and by my loving Creator alone.

I think any person in their right mind would live their life differently if they knew how many years, days, and minutes they had left on this earth. However, we as Christians need to see things differently. We need to back into these types of questions from the perspective that our eternity has already begun and how we are using this knowledge to truly invest our time, our love, and the message of Christ into those we come into contact with every day. When I really think about it, even if given the chance, I wouldn’t want to know how much time I have left here on earth. Why?

Because I don’t want my conduct to be driven by a selfish human heart that is confined by the temporal things of this world. I want to be broken, molded, and transformed by the One who knows me and loves me the most. The One who knows what is best for me, even if I think I have it all figured out.

With prayer and love,
Justin



The Truth War: Trusting With True

Three Essential Exhortations From the Apostle Paul

1—Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever has a good reputation, if there is any excellence, and if anything is worthy of praise, let your mind be focused on these things! (—Philippians 4:8)

2—Don’t be conformed to this current world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may present and prove what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect. (—Romans 12:2)

3—Watch carefully to make sure that no one takes you captive with empty, deceptive ideas based on popular opinions and worldly people’s intellectual pursuits, things not according to what Christ taught us. (—Colossians 2:8)

There is (and has been for a long time) a battle for the control of our minds that is raging all around us! I’ll spare the details (and some of the drama) by simply saying, “the truth of God’s Word is being suppressed by a rampant unrighteousness and lawlessness that has taken hold in our society.” The news and information we’re being given is being filtered by most media sources to “twist the truth” and deceive our thinking.

On one hand, there’s a flood of information that often overloads and overwhelms us, increasing the need for a biblical filtering system to help us sort out what’s true from what’s false. But on the other hand, even though the amount of information is huge, we’re not always getting the whole story. The words highlighted above from Philippians 4:8, Romans 12:2 and Colossians 2:8 remind us that there is a never—ending spiritual battle being waged for the control of our minds—one that started long ago when Eve met the serpent.

Over 100 years ago, a shrewd marketing expert named Edward Bernays revolutionized the advertising (as well as the political) world by developing mind—control strategies that actually should/could be described in a plain and simple way as “deception and spiritual warfare.” Bernays defined his plan to persuade people to want what he was selling as “propaganda” or “intelligent manipulation.” Here’s a quote from his book (entitled *Propaganda*), “Those who **manipulate** using this **unseen mechanism of society** constitute an **invisible government** which is the **true ruling power of our country**.” He goes on to say, “we are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes are formed, our ideas are suggested largely by people we have never heard of. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind, who harness old social forces and contrive new ways to bind and guide the world.”

Please take a few moments to compare/contrast what Bernays said, with the warnings inserted above from the Apostle Paul. It’s important to observe that there’s a hidden agenda behind the attempt to sell a product or influence people to follow a different path—it’s all about controlling a person’s mind and eventually controlling their behavior/lifestyle.

In conclusion, I’d like to point out that in our contemporary society, it’s very likely that we’re more susceptible and more exposed to false teaching and a non—biblical, secular world view than any time in history. But that’s not a reason to throw up our hands, and compromise with anyone who’s using “propaganda” to persuade and push us away from strongly standing up for God’s Truth. His Word is as **relevant** as ever, His Gospel of mercy, grace, and sacrificial love is what **rescues** people from the penalty and power of sin, and His promises are the **reason** we have **HOPE** that enables us to trust totally in Him.

With prayer for God’s glory and praise for His grace ...
And as always, with prayer for our ACEFC family, Pastor Greg





Dear ACEFC Family,

Over the last couple of months, the COVID restrictions here in Germany have gotten stricter and stricter. I've been hearing and personally experiencing that this latest and most strict lockdown (since Christmas) has been the most difficult of all for many, many people. And it's just been extended again! Maybe until Easter, which makes it hard to plan any event. Currently, we can only meet with one other person outside our household. Yet I find much comfort in knowing

that GOD is still in control and He never stops working behind the scenes, regardless of what's happening here or in the States. I've been clinging to the truths in Romans 8:28 recently: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..."* Regardless if we can see or understand it.

It has been quite encouraging to those of us on the church leadership team in Oberursel to see more people tuning in to our worship services online, even more so since Christmas! Many who are in our church family have been staying connected over the months with their small groups via Zoom, etc. Relationships have been strengthening and growing deeper. New people are asking how they can get connected. It's exciting to see the spiritual hunger in people. God is on the move!!!

For me, my cell phone is my main ministry tool to connect with people and has been for several months. The ladies in my Bible study group are "Zoomed out", so we've not met since November when the COVID restrictions prohibited it. However, they do appreciate the text messages from me, and I appreciate the prayer requests they share with me. – I also enjoy and am grateful to those who are willing to meet with me and go for walks one-on-one. That has been such a joy and sanity saver!

Yesterday I went for a walk with one of the ladies I sponsor/mentor in Al-Anon. (Al-Anon is a 12-Step program for families and friends of alcoholics.) This lady (Mary) calls me almost daily – and sometimes several times a day. Anyway, I was so surprised, yet thrilled, to hear her say that last week she and one of her Catholic friends went walking in the woods and prayed as they went! – Mary has heard me pray for her several times over the years and I've noticed subtle, encouraging changes in her. I always pray to Jesus. Mary knows He is my "Higher Power". – One day in early December was the first time in five years that I heard her call her Higher Power Jesus! -- So please pray that in my last few months on the field, Mary will hunger to know Jesus more and be willing to have in-depth spiritual conversations.

Prayer & Praise Requests:

1. Feb. 25-26 GEM-Germany's **Virtual** Winter Retreat. This will be the last time I "see" many of my teammates from other parts of Germany.
2. Pray that I finish well here; for my time of transition and all the "Good-byes" ...
3. June 30 is my official date of retirement. However, I'll be flying home at the end of April and staying at Son-Shine Apartments in Menasha for an indefinite period of time.
4. I praise the Lord Jesus **for you**, my ACEFC church family, for standing with me in this ministry for over 18 years, for your faithful financial and prayer support, and all your encouraging words via letters, cards, emails, and visits! I couldn't have done what the Lord called me to do in Europe without you! I'll be forever grateful.
5. My prayer for me and each of you is from Ps. 92:14 – that we will still bear fruit in old age, that we will stay fresh and green...

To God be the glory!

Our Mission here at Appleton Community EFC is to lead all **people** in a growing relationship with Christ.

Growing together in Christ we value:



Biblical Truth

We depend on the Bible as our source of authority in what we believe, what we teach, and how we live. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Worship

We believe that we are created by God to worship Him. Therefore, we live in worshipful response to God's character and activity. (Psalm 86:11)

Prayer

We believe that daily prayer is essential in the life of a believer and as such we pray with expectancy knowing that God is actively involved in our world. (Colossians 4:2)

Evangelism

We believe in sharing the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ with honesty and humility. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Fellowship

We believe that accountability, caring and a sense of belonging are essential for each believer to grow in their relationship with Christ. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Encouragement

We believe we are responsible for caring for and encouraging one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Appleton Community
Evangelical Free Church
2490 West Capitol Drive
Appleton, WI 54914

Regular Church Office Hours
Closed Mondays
Tuesday—Friday
8:30 - 2:30

We're on the Web!
applefreechurch.org



whatever you do
work at it with all your
as working for the Lord,
not for men.

COLOSSIANS 3:23

