

A Celebration of New Life

“There were times early on when I wondered if what I was doing was making a difference,” says Pastor Steve Johnson of **Oak Chapel Baptist Church** in Orange, VA. But God was at work.

“I came to Oak Chapel and found a warm, welcoming congregation that was wounded and needed to be loved.” Through God’s perfect timing and the partnership of the SBC of Virginia, God led Johnson to this small church in February 2016. Pastor Johnson stepped into a congregation of 40-50 people and was transparent with them. He loved them, was patient with them, and lived what he taught and preached to them.

Oak Chapel Baptist Church was established in 1891 and, as with any church, has had its ups and downs. Recent years have brought a difficult season of division, tension, and lack of vision. Although a former pastor planted seeds of Gospel commitment and dedication to God’s Word, the people did not realize the extent to which they needed to grow in spiritual health. The church endured a long season without a pastor before Johnson arrived.

Pastor Johnson was grateful for the help of SBCV regional missionary Darrell Webb. “Darrell was instrumental in identifying what he saw as the key challenges and weaknesses of our church,” says Johnson, “such as the need to develop relational skills.” Because many people needed to forgive, and some needed to be forgiven, Johnson led the church through a study of Paul Tripp’s book, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (with supplemental material from *Forgiveness* by John MacArthur). His leadership over the past two years has been marked by Gospel-centered preaching, a focus on discipleship, and a dedication to God’s Word for the answers to every issue.

Through one church member’s testimony, God showed Pastor Johnson that He was indeed at work. A woman shared how her young adult daughter had noticed the changes she’d observed in her mother’s life. She was able to tell her daughter that it was through the power of the preaching and teaching of the Word of God at Oak Chapel. Her daughter has been faithfully attending ever since and has invited friends to join her.

Due to a growing hunger for the Word, mid-week Bible study was extended from 30 minutes to an hour. Johnson has led the congregation through specific Scripture verses to mark in their Bibles to help them share the Good News. This renewed passion for the Gospel in recent months has drawn people to repentance and to put their faith in Jesus.

On Sunday, June 3, 2018, Oak Chapel Baptist Church had a “Celebration Service” where six people followed Jesus in believer’s baptism. It was a celebration the likes of which the church had not seen in years!

Prior to the service, Pastor Johnson taught a one-session intensive (now offered once per quarter) for these and other seekers as a prerequisite to baptism. The class format included:

AN EXPLANATION OF THE GOSPEL from the Bible

AN EXPLANATION OF BAPTISM from the Bible

QUESTIONS FOR THE BAPTISM CANDIDATES TO ANSWER about the Gospel, repentance, substitutionary atonement, and commitment to discipleship

One of the six baptism candidates was Hope Kidwell. She came to the baptism class as a seeker, but put her faith in Christ through the class.

In order to disciple these and other believers, discipleship opportunities are now offered on Wednesday evenings, Sunday mornings, and Thursdays at noon in Charlottesville (where many church members work). Between these classes, 15 are currently being disciplined. Pastor Johnson’s wife, Andrea, now leads a women’s class, which is reaching seven women, six of whom were not previously involved in Sunday School.

Although Oak Chapel is still relatively small in size, new life is springing up as disciples are being made and growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The baptism candidates wrote out their testimonies, which were edited and read at the Celebration Service.





PHILLIP ROBERTS

Phillip has overcome his own physical setbacks (along with his wife, Julia) earlier this year and is grateful for his family, this church, and God. He believes the Gospel is true, that Jesus was the only person qualified to make him right with God because “He never sinned” and [believes] that you should respond to the Gospel with faith in God. Phillip’s generous nature is a demonstration that his repentance is real. (Lord Jesus, help Phillip to grow in his knowledge of You, all that You did for him, and why it was necessary.)



CARLY JENKINS

Carly is the most inquisitive person we know at Oak Chapel. She is curious both for herself and wants to know how to answer questions she encounters from friends at school who don’t share her faith in Jesus. Carly believes Jesus “died on the cross for our sins” and that anyone who merely claims to believe in the Gospel hasn’t discovered what faith is or who they truly are. (Lord Jesus, we pray that You grant Carly victory over sin as she becomes more holy through the process of obeying Your Word.)

HOPE KIDWELL

Hope has been coming as often as possible since last December. She has a humble spirit and a tender heart. Hope believes Jesus loved her enough “to save” her and send His Spirit to live within her. She says, “you must walk the walk to be a Christian, to receive the Holy Spirit to change your heart, and turn away from all worldly things.” (Lord Jesus, lead Hope in all ways to be filled with Your power and not live in fear but believe in Your goodness and perfection. Amen!)



MASON BROOKING

Mason has matured more than anyone else at Oak Chapel over the past couple of years. Mason says God’s Word shows “how He sent His Son to die on the cross for us and our sins.” Mason believes the Gospel is true and “feels very bad” for those who claim to believe in the Gospel but continue to live according to sinful, selfish desires. (Lord Jesus, we pray that Mason would develop an even stronger relationship with You.)



CHRISTINE KENNEDY

Christine has been a friend of Steve Johnson’s wife since they moved to Virginia over seven years ago and has been coming to Oak Chapel for about a year now. Last fall, Christine expressed repentance and an interest in making a formal commitment to follow Christ and join His church. Christine believes that Jesus “was born in order to die for our sins and, through Him, we have a path to salvation.” Through her physical setbacks this winter, Christine felt Christ’s presence and knew she was not alone. (Lord Jesus, we thank You for giving Christine faith in You and for sending Your Spirit to dwell in her as Your abiding presence.)



KEN TYBURSKI

Ken has been coming to Oak Chapel since this past fall. He is kind and quiet, but if you take the time to talk to him, you will discover a man with genuine depth of understanding of the Christian faith. Ken believes this: “The Gospel is the Good News of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins and our rebirth if we believe in it. It was necessary as a means of our redemption for our sin, and it is our duty to spread this news with others and reaffirm it often.” (Lord Jesus, help Ken to change in ways that would conform to Your way of life.)

CONTACT

For more information, contact Steve Johnson at steve@stevepiercejohnson.com

RESOURCE

The idea for the discipleship lunch and the curriculum (*Christianity Explained* by Michael Bennett) came from Mark Dever, and the idea for the baptism class from Matt Chandler (free class outline at tinyurl.com/baptism-class-outline).