



FIRST BAPTIST ORLANDO
PASSIONATE ABOUT LIFE

An Important Message from Pastor David

I'm writing this message to you as your pastor with a disturbed and heavy heart. The events of this week have saddened me, but at the same time reminded me of the great challenge and opportunity to make a difference in our broken world, through the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

I am offended by and grieving the use of ungodly talk on social media by a few of our The First Academy students which recently came to light. The posting took place in June while these students were on summer break, but surfaced to the attention of the school administration as the school year began. Let me be clear on this; the language used by these students is not only in stark contrast to the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is repulsive, offensive and completely unacceptable. This kind of behavior undercuts one of the most basic truths about God and His creation, that all people matter to God. From the beginning in Genesis 1:27 we learn that God created man in the image of God, and this is a distinct gift of the Creator to all humans; it is not earned or exclusive to a particular race or religion. All men and women are created in His image and have great worth and value to God and should be respected by all.

This is something I have personally fought for since 1976 when Jesus changed my life. In every position of influence that God has granted me, this was and is the most fundamental truth and starting point for me. Here at First Baptist Orlando we have seen God honor this truth in His people. We are a beautiful melting pot of race, age, class, and culture. We work diligently to be one body in our Lord Jesus Christ while also acknowledging that racial and class barriers exist. We just believe the gospel overcomes all that would separate us.

It would be unfair and inappropriate to let the actions of these students define who we really are as a church or school. We will not let the important work of restoration and unity through the gospel be unraveled by this single Instagram thread. We are, and always will be, the children of God who have been saved by grace and are being made like Him through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Each year I tell every TFA family that my goal is for their student to be more like Jesus the day they leave The First Academy than the day they arrived. We understand this is not an overnight process but that does not diminish our confidence in this faithful promise from God.

I meet on a regular basis with a group of pastors from our Central Florida community. We are diverse in many ways, yet our hearts are set on greater unity around the good news – the gospel of Jesus Christ.

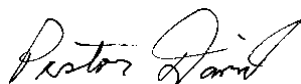
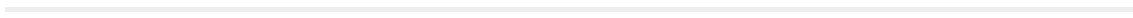
One in particular, Bishop Allen Wiggins, whose children attend The First Academy, has been a constant friend for nine years. In fact, he is one of my closest friends in ministry in this city. During these years significant progress has been made in the area of racial reconciliation. I have spoken with him more than once this week to seek out his wisdom and counsel. We are determined to not let racism and bigotry take foothold here. We will not let the unwholesome foolish talk of a few students, nor the comments of those who may react on social media, tear down what God has given us in our church, our school and our community.

To the students involved, I say God's grace is far bigger and stronger than anything you did. I am committed to help you know God's forgiveness and grace and to be made even more like Jesus through His restoration. Several of the students involved do not attend our church, but I have talked with their pastor and he is committed to the same end. This week I had the privilege of meeting with three of the students and their families and I can confidently tell you that God is already working in their lives to take this very bad decision and bring about His purposes in their life. They are repentant, humble and honest in their confession of what they did. As we know that is precisely what the Scripture instructs us to do. We must all remember our own sin and His grace toward us. These conversations have reminded me that even on my best days I am still a sinner saved by grace!

To our TFA family, I say this will not represent who we are. We are so much more than this. Steps are being taken even now to build an even stronger culture of grace and unity. I trust our TFA Administration and our school board and especially my friend, Dr. Steve Whitaker, to handle this in an appropriate way.

To our church family, I say I'm sorry to have such attitudes and actions anywhere among our members or students. I'm committed to stand against racism wherever it raises its ugly head. We will together drive out this darkness with the light of His gospel. I ask for your prayers for our church, our school, our community, and our TFA students and faculty. I challenge you to prayerfully consider the use and power of your own words and how they impact your family and community. Our words have power and it is my prayer that the "words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

Pastor David Uth

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor David Uth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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