

Summer 2023



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# The BLAZE Bulletin

Youth Ministry (Grades 6–12)

## HAPPENINGS: Youth Revival Camp/New Season

Take a deep breath. Do you smell that? Change is in the air at The Exchange Church, stirring our spirits to lean more into His heartbeat as a Church family. Here's what God has been up to in our Church family and where He's leading us!

How was camp this year? Glory to glory would be the only way to describe the way God met us during our time at **Youth Revival Camp** this year. There were so many testimonies of physical, emotional, and spiritual healing within the hearts and minds of our young saints, testimonies that marked their walk with Jesus and that they will carry with them into every season with Him. His work didn't stop at camp—He was only getting started. When we returned home, students were hungry for the word of God and are ready to go wherever His presence leads them.

With all of these spiritual manifestations and gifts, sometimes we're left wondering "what now?" When we experience an incredible encounter and find ourselves shaking under the power of God, what happens when we get up off the ground and go back to real life? What happens when we go home? What happens when we're back in our schools and faced with the same trials? Do we check into His presence and check out? Do we wait for camp next year? Do we partner with the lies of the enemy as he tries to convince us that the

change was only temporary? Do we live waiting for feelings? By. No. Means.

This is where the real journey begins, when we enter into the mission field with Him. This is when His Spirit is at His best work in us and when we receive the opportunity to know Him even deeper. We do this by following the fruit of the spirit and measuring the fruit in our own lives. We measure fruit, NOT manifestations. We welcome the manifestations, and we welcome the gifts, but they are not indicators of progress in our walk with Christ. Gifts and manifestations are given out of the grace and mercy of who He is, while the fruits of the Spirit are witnessed by the day-by-day surrender to the leading of His spirit. So what fruits are we witnessing and sensing in our community of young saints as they return from Youth Camp?

Even at camp we could see that there is a specific season that many of our young people are walking into, and that is a season of pruning and prayer. One of the most asked questions at Camp was "Why can't I feel God's presence the way that I used to? Did I do something wrong?" So many Christians face this season, which was referred to by Martin Luther and many other heroes of the faith as "The Dark Night of the Soul," otherwise known as a kind of "Pruning" as Jesus referred to it. A

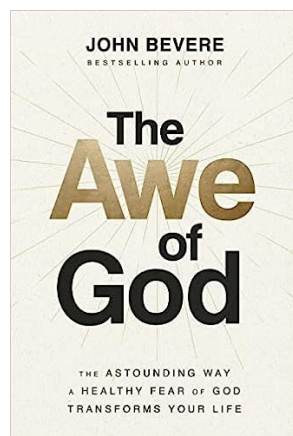
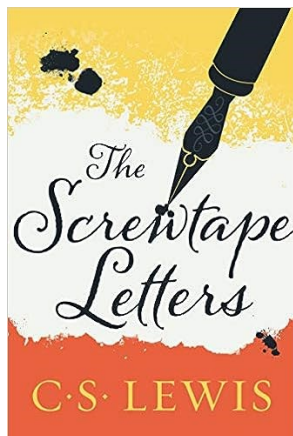
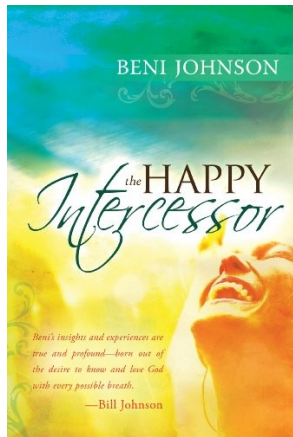
deeper understanding of this can be found in an excerpt from an amazing article on page 2, but in brief, this is "a season in our apprenticeship to Jesus where he intentionally takes away the felt sense of his presence in order to do a deep work of purgation and preparation in our soul for a greater freedom, love, and intimacy with God."—  
*John Mark Comer*

This season is actually a fruit of maturity rather than a symptom of regression. So if this many of our students are experiencing this season, we can only imagine the world-altering destiny being carved out by God for the futures of our young saints!

That being said, this is a season that requires deep prayer and rest, so we are shifting our times of worship to hold a focused space for prayer, meditation, and intercession! We're having a beautiful worship prayer stream playing while the kids can find any space in the room to bury themselves in prayer. We'll have an open mic for prophecy as well as materials for prophetic art and scripture meditation. We will be known as the generation of prayer leaving a legacy of intercession. Our hearts burn with expectancy as we engage with this radical move of His Spirit and we will continue to share what He's up to in this season!



## Have You Read



## PARENT'S CORNER: About the Dark Night

### What a dark night is:

A season in our apprenticeship to Jesus where he intentionally takes away the felt sense of his presence in order to do a deep work of purgation and preparation in our soul for a greater freedom, love, and intimacy with God. An experience of God that feels more like absence than presence. It's unlearning, as much as it's learning. Less of an experience, more of a non-experience. A place where our faith is given an opportunity for testing and refining.

"An ongoing spiritual process in which we are liberated from attachments and compulsions and empowered to live and love more freely."

—Dr. Gerald May

A transformation of desire. From love of things/sensuality, to love of God/spirituality. This process involves self-denial, detachment, prayer, growth in virtue, and the adjustment of our loves and longings for a greater experience of God.

### Feelings you may experience in a dark night:

"Regression. Like I'm going backward emotionally and spiritually."

"I've done something wrong."

"Things that were once life-giving (spiritual or otherwise) are now dull and uninteresting. The spiritual disciplines feel boring and dry."

"God has abandoned me." "God isn't real." "This is forever."

Yet still: desire for God runs deep.

### What's actually happening:

Progression: God is freeing me from attachments and anxieties.

God is freeing me from misplaced confidence in ideas about God, feelings of God, and formulas for how to become like God, and instead gracing me with trust in himself.

God is preparing me for the next stage in my life with him and in the world.

My desires for sin are going down, but desire for God is going up.

### Quotes for Contemplation

"The passive night of the senses involves God's own action upon the soul in question. As the person begins to strip away his inordinate sensual attraction to the things of this world, thus getting rid of the old-self, especially through prayer, meditation and self-denial, God then allows a profound period of spiritual aridity to best the believer, the ultimate purpose of which is to effectuate an even more powerful purification of our inordinate passion and desires, especially as these vices begin to manifest themselves on a spiritual level (as in a craving for spiritual delights and pleasures). As the believer perseveres through this 'dark night,' where no consolation of God is experienced, but not wanting to turn back to the futility of his old ways, a breakthrough ultimately occurs whereby, through sheer grace, the believer begins to experience the interior presence of God and makes the transition from meditative prayer to contemplative prayer."

—St. John of The Cross

"Sooner or later He withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their

conscious experience, all those supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs—to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that is it growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be. The prayers offered in the state of dryness are those which please him best. . . . We cannot 'temp' to virtue as we do to vice. He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys."

—C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (A book from the point of view of a demon)

"This process is obscure; one does not recognize what is going on. It usually feels as if there is something wrong: laziness, lassitude, depression, or some other spiritual or psychological problem. The truth is seldom even considered: that the feelings of aridity and emptiness are the birth pains of a freer life and deeper prayer."

—Gerald May

Excerpted from John Mark Comer's "Step Sheet" at Practicing the Way/Dark Night of the Soul, <https://practicingthewayarchives.org/naming-your-stage-of-apprenticeship/step-sheet>.

## LEADER FOCUS: Jaden Estrada

This leader has shown what it means, not only to be a Blaze leader, but a follower of Christ in general!!! This man goes to pick up a carful of students each Wednesday night and brings them to The Blaze and then takes them all home at the end of the night. He gives of his time and GAS to make sure that young people in his community are

plugged in to a Godly group of kids. His obedience resulted in 3 students giving their lives to Jesus as well as three more getting baptized at revival camp this year. Jaden, the fruits of your labor are evident and God sees what you are sowing into His children. We should all be more like you. 😊



## STUDENT FOCUS: Bella Lujan

One of our students had an incredible encounter at camp! Bella Lujan says that she used to struggle with deep depression, even to the point of taking her own life. She then began to attend the Blaze where she gave her life to

Jesus. She then began to receive many prophetic words from various people that she would be a light to people in the dark. Then at camp when she was baptized and had an incredible encounter with God. As she was submerged

into the water, she saw a vision of herself in the water in deep darkness, but within her was a beaming light. She now will continue to show God's light to those in the darkness!! Thank you, Jesus!!

## STUDENT FOCUS: Ryan Castañeda

After having incredible encounters with the manifestation of God's presence each summer at youth camp, Ryan suddenly began to struggle in his ability to sense God's presence. After striving for it at camp he still never got to

experience what he usually does at camp. Then after he got home from camp, he surrendered his struggle to Jesus and suddenly began to experience the manifest presence of Jesus with Him, to the point where he had to pull over

on the side of the road as he trembled under His power. God let Ryan know that he didn't want Ryan to depend on youth camp to pursue Jesus but to have a sustaining relationship with Him even after camp was over!! AMEN!!!

## PRAYER FOCUS BY PEDRO CASTAÑEDA

We believe in the power of **intercessory prayer**. What is intercessory prayer?

*"Intercession is prayer that captures the heartbeat of Heaven and declares that into our world; It's true agreement with Heaven."*

—The Happy Intercessor by Beni Johnson

*"Intercession is prayer that . . . involves taking hold of God's will*

*and refusing to let go until His will comes to pass.*

—"What is Intercessory Prayer?" by CBN

So let's join together in intercessory prayer for the following prayer focuses:

🙏 Women in the Church, of all ages and backgrounds, who are on fire for Jesus to join the Blaze Team!

🙏 For divine appointments and connections to be built between our youth group and surrounding schools in our community.

🙏 For our young saints to develop relationships that grow beyond a Wednesday night service. Lifelong covenant relationships between young believers!

## BIBLE TRIVIA

**The Bible is the best-selling book in the world.**

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the Bible is the best-selling and most widely distributed book in the entire world. Though it's impossible to know exactly how many have been sold over the last 3,000+ years, Guinness estimates somewhere around 5 trillion.

**China is the largest publisher of Bibles.**

It may or may not come as a surprise to you that China is the largest producer of Bibles in the world, as they've been the largest exporter of goods since 2009. The country exports Bibles to 70 other countries thanks to a partnership between the Amity Printing Company and United Bible Societies, who have distributed more than 160 million Bibles as of March 2017. That number may not rise as quickly as first anticipated though—CNN reports that earlier this year, Beijing pulled Bibles from online stores like Amazon in an effort to control religion.

**The Bible was written long before Jesus's birth.**

Although Jesus's life and teachings are a central aspect of the Bible, it's construction actually began many years before his birth. The Old Testament, which was the original Hebrew Bible, is a compilation of many sacred Jewish scriptures that were written between 1200 and 165 BC, according to BBC.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver.**  
 2 Corinthians 9:7



### Have You Heard

“Coming Back”  
 Thrive Worship

“Psalm 63”  
 Jeremy Riddle

“Give me Faith”  
 Southside Worship



## GIVING & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Providing food for our kiddos each service is one of our favorite practices at The Blaze. Providing food allows us to build trust and relationships with our kiddos. In Acts 2:42, we see the breaking of bread given the same significance as prayer and discipleship. The supernatural generosity of the Church as a whole gave them the means to provide.

Keeping this truth at the forefront of our hearts, we have

an opportunity for all of us to partner with Spirit-filled generosity. If only four parents committed to donating food once a month, we could provide food for our kiddos every Wednesday without measure.

We've gathered some examples of snacks we like to provide our kiddos that are affordable and easy to prepare! Please reach out to me via email if you feel led to volunteer!

### SNACKS

- \* Mac and Cheese
- \* Pizza Rolls
- \* Cereal (with Milk)
- \* Mini Corn Dogs

### BEVERAGES

- \* Apple Juice
- \* Soda
- \* Sweet Tea
- \* Capri Sun
- \* Water

## UPCOMING EVENTS: Keep These on Your Radar

### AUGUST 30/SEPTEMBER 3

#### BLAZE PROMOTION

Promotion Wednesday is August 30. That Wednesday night we will be welcoming incoming 6th graders to our Blaze Family. Here at The Exchange Church, we believe in Reaching Beyond, which looks like creating opportunities to have casual and life-changing conversations about what God is doing in our lives and The Church. This causes us

to spiritually grow and creates a window for others to see Christ. We've decided to reach beyond and have a **Blaze Promotion Meet and Greet!** This is for Incoming 6th graders, any new Blaze students, as well as anyone wanting to hear what The Blaze is all about and what God's been up to with us! The meeting will take place Sunday, **September 3** immediately following the service.

### OCTOBER 11

#### TALENT NIGHT/POTLUCK

#### PARENTS WELCOME!

This will simply be an open Mic night where students of all walks of life get to show the amazing talents that God placed within them (whether they know Jesus or not), SO invite your friends!! This will be a potluck (dinner and a show!) so make sure to bring some cool friends and even COOLER food. Stay tuned for a signup link coming soon!

## CLOSING PRAYER BY PEDRO CASTAÑEDA

Father, we thank you that you are always at work in our spirits and our souls. We ask that you pour out grace to trust in your guidance and for humility to rely on each other even more during this season. We thank you for the gift of

prayer and rejoice in knowing that as we draw near to you, you will draw near to us. Help us to rely less on ourselves and even more on your Spirit and our fellow believers. In Jesus Name. Amen!















# BIBLE GUIDE

## HOW TO READ THE WORD EVERY DAY

- ◆ Ask the Holy Spirit for help!
- ◆ Make time for it. Prioritize it.
- ◆ Read with friends!
- ◆ Consistency: Start with committing to one verse each day!

## 3 WAYS TO READ THE BIBLE

### DAILY BREAD

- ◆ Breakfast for your spirit! Ask Jesus what He wants you to read each morning, afternoon, and before bed. Even one verse is enough!

### DEEP STUDY

- ◆ Study the language, authors, and purpose of each book of the Bible. This will strengthen your ability to understand the Bible!

### TEACHING

- ◆ Sunday sermons are the best way to start your journey in the Bible. Especially with friends! Go over Sunday's Bible passages with some friends.
- ◆ Also, listen to Bible podcasts/YouTube channels!

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

- ◆ The Exchange Church
- ◆ The Belonging Co Podcast
- ◆ The Handlebar Podcast (UPPERROOM)
- ◆ The Porch Podcast
- ◆ WHOA That's a Good Podcast
- ◆ Southside Rabbi
- ◆ Thirty Minutes with The Perrys
- ◆ Let's Talk About It (Moral Revolution)

## SHORT DEVOTIONAL RESOURCES

- ◆ YouVersion Bible App
- ◆ Glorify App



Podcasts



# The Blaze Merchandise



<https://www.bonfire.com/store/awakengreater/>





The Exchange Church

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**Who We Are**

We exist to see young people transformed by the Presence of God, empowered as a carrier of revival, and infused in a healthy community of believers. All of this is a byproduct of our only goal: To become more like Jesus.

## Weekly Services

We meet every Wednesday from 7:30pm to 9:00pm at The Exchange Church in the back the building!

Drop-off/Pick-up

Pull up to the stairs so we can ensure the safety of kids as they come & go.



## YOUTH LEADERS

### Core Team

Pedro Castañeda  
Aliah Tait  
Caleb Breaux

### Blaze Leaders

Mariely Salinas / Mercedes Estrada /  
Jordan Rose / Ryan Castañeda /  
David Dinan / Matthew Breaux /  
Zachariah Martinez/ Jaden Estrada /  
Tristan Rose

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