

first  
stone

## newsletter

*"Let him who is without sin cast the First Stone"**And Jesus also said, "Go and sin no more." – John 8*

## MINISTRIES

## Ministry in Transition: Remembering Stephen



**Jim  
Farrington,**  
Men's  
Minister

I've known Stephen for a very long time. Throughout my adult life, one constant was Stephen's unwavering devotion and commitment to truth. I'm thankful that He has always been a lodestar. When I was a new believer, I marveled at how he could sway everyone to see everything in a certain way. If he approved of something, the group of us twenty-somethings instantly approved of it, and in like fashion, if he disapproved of something, we did as well without question. He's always had a way of influencing others. It's his influence concerning the importance of the word of God that I felt has helped me in my journey. Even when I was living outside of God's will in pursuit of a homosexual identity, I believe that Stephen's emphasis on God's word is the thing that helped me to always know the truth about God's will for our sexuality. In a world where compromise and departure from the authority of scripture is pervasive, Stephen has had a powerful influence, and I'm thankful for the times God has used him to help navigate my walk with Jesus.



**Laura Beth  
Smalts,**  
Women's  
Minister

I am so appreciative of Stephen's unwavering commitment to stand on the Word of God, regardless of the swaying winds of culture or compromising churches. Stephen taught me to have the courage to speak the truth and the devotion to practice the truth in my own life. He helped me learn how to connect with our Heavenly Father more deeply through intimate worship and time in His Presence. I am forever grateful for all he taught me about how to speak well and to be a minister of the Gospel. I think Paul's words in 2 Timothy exemplify Stephen well: "13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us... 2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 1:13-14, 2:2).

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**Joseph  
Thiessen,**  
Office  
Admin

Stephen assumed ministry to me when Jeff Janes moved to Israel. It was during those early years that he helped me to process the deep anger and pain I had toward my dad. He helped me walk the path from ambivalence toward forgiving and loving my dad. Through his pastoral insight, my relationship with Dad waxed stronger over the years. He also helped me establish much needed “breathing room” between my mother and I. Stephen provided Biblical perspective when I didn’t know how to fully form my words of pain, disappointment, and sorrow. With the recent passing of my dad, my gratefulness for Stephen’s ministry to me is heightened. He taught many, including myself, to try to have as few regrets as possible when it comes to settling matters with, having conversations with, and loving our parents well. I am forever grateful for his compassionate ministry in what for me were difficult matters to understand how to address.



**Laura  
Leigh  
Stanlake,**  
Executive  
Director

My first impression of Stephen was of his fiery prayer life. It made quite an impact on me as I entered full-time ministry. I am sure that past directors of FSM had loved God; however, Stephen also loves the truth. I appreciate his no-compromise attitude. He taught us all to keep ourselves clean and open with each other and with God. He demonstrated to me in my early years of counseling that I could fight for the soul of a person that was in bondage. I could wash them with God’s Word. I could pray, believing that God Himself would do what no person could do to set a man or woman free. Stephen also gave me opportunities to grow as a ministry partner. He entrusted me with souls. I’ll never forget that nor cease to be grateful.

We understand that Stephen came full-time to First Stone Ministries in 1993. He began to minister to men full-time and soon was made Assistant Director. In those early years, First Stone did everything it could to take the message anywhere it was needed. Prison ministry, support groups for parents, groups for strugglers, groups for wives, outreach to people with HIV, and discipleship were the many facets of the growing ministry. Stephen labored diligently alongside Jeff to make this new work healthy and clean.

In 1999, Jeff and Lezlie Janes felt God’s leadership to go to Israel and establish work there. When the details were complete, the ministry had a going-away reception for them. At that reception, Jeff did an amazing thing. He chose to call Stephen forward and

presented him with a beautiful tallit (a Jewish prayer shawl with knotted fringes). Jeff believed that God was moving the mantle for First Stone Ministries onto Stephen and believed that a ceremony signifying that was in order. Stephen was now to be the Executive Director and would have the authority to move the ministry in a new expression of the vision and mission.

Under Stephen’s leadership much changed to improve the ministry of First Stone. He enacted healthy policies and procedures to safeguard the work entrusted to his care. His leadership was fiercely protective. In the first ten years, Stephen developed ethics and appropriate boundaries for the staff and volunteer leadership. He began to assist pastors and community leaders in establishing healthy policies as well. He also created a tremendous resource through articles he and others had written. He actively worked to make our website resourceful. He mentored men with pastoral leadership callings into deeper expression of the call of God. This was very fruitful work in the development of the identity that First Stone Ministries has today.

This recent decade has been a different fight. The deception that entered the culture and church of universalism, progressivism, and individualism made way for the deceptive phrase “gay-Christianity”. This false ideology provoked Stephen to act on the cultural and ecclesiastical war. He took a stand and spoke out against the erosive influence of unbelief and the rejection of repentance toward holiness. He took a strong stand to defend true faith when Exodus International sharply turned away from God’s truth under a compromised leader.

What followed was an extraordinary season of loss for him personally and for his family. Stephen carried in his own heart and life the message that suffering itself is a crucible bringing forward what is useful and destroying what is not. It was also a great season of loss for our ministry. We lost long associations in the shared work of the Gospel ministry. Many ministries succumbed to the erosion of unbelief that people could be transformed by the power of Christ and began to compromise. Many ministries closed when their leadership embraced immorality and others partnered with unrepentant sinners to oppose the ministry of reconciliation and transformation. Through this time, Stephen grieved deeply for himself and for the Gospel. It has always been said that First Stone is

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# Annual Pledge Drive

First Stone Ministries is a 501(c)3 organization and utilizes donations from its supporters for all operation costs, salaries, ministry outreach, and programs. While these aren't the whole of our expenses, we are providing a breakdown a few of the monthly costs of running our organization by including some in the graphic on this page.

Included in this graphic is our Big Ask. Since we are in a new building, some of our old furnishings are worn and dated and simply don't look well our new location's refreshed color scheme and design. We'd like our first impression to be attractive, comfortable, and work well in a multi-purpose space.

Would you be willing to give a special gift toward these goals?

Would you be willing to pledge toward a year of giving for some of the following mentioned operating expenses?

- Printer Lease: \$1071.64/month or \$12,859.68/year
- Communications: \$319.40/month or \$3,832.80/year
- Software: \$162.22/month or \$1,946.64/year
- Paper: \$119.33/month or \$1,431.96/year

For our reception, we'd like modern lamps, a large sofa, end tables, bookshelves, and some reception chairs, all to match our current carpet and paint.

Additionally, we need window coverings to block out summer heat and to create much-needed privacy.

If giving online via [firststone.org/donate](https://firststone.org/donate) or by scanning the QR code, please select "Annual Pledge Drive" when setting up your donation; otherwise, write "pledge drive" as the memo on your check.

## Year-End Giving

We are grateful for your faithful and generous support of First Stone Ministries!

Reminder: All mailed donations must be postmarked by December 31, 2023 to qualify for the 2023 tax year.

We wait a generous amount of time for straggling mail from 2023 to come in and thus don't begin working on contribution statements until after January 15th. Rest assured, we will get this to you before January 31st.

Please consider making us a part of your giving in 2024.





# A Christmas Reflection



**Jim  
Farrington,**  
Men's  
Minister

I am blessed to be part of a devotional with a handful of men from my church as we explore together the title *Repeat the Sounding Joy*. For the last three years, Advent has started to become a time of reflection on the birth of Jesus, and my walk with the Lord, and it is a sweet time of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. Long ago, those who knew the scriptures looked diligently for the coming Messiah, but many of them missed it altogether, even to the point of wanting to destroy Jesus when the hint that He was the Messiah came.

I look at this time of the year fondly, gratefully, thoughtfully. We find that, since the beginning in Genesis, a time of preparation for the coming Messiah was pronounced repeatedly. I especially have thought of Simeon, who received revelation from the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before seeing the Messiah, and that beautiful moment when he takes Jesus in his arms and makes that declaration that his eyes have seen God's salvation. Simeon came by the Spirit into the temple. This is how he was able to take Jesus into his arms. He came to where Jesus would be.

Recently, I've been returning to and meditating on John 5: 39-40 which says,

<sup>39</sup>" You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. <sup>40</sup>But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." (NKJV)

There is something immensely powerful to me about this. It is easy to focus on the scriptures only rather than coming to His person who is the source of life. The scriptures are very important, but unless we come to Him, we won't have life. This is what Jesus said.

This Christmas, many will read the scriptures about the birth of Jesus, which are a wonderful testament to the promise of the prophesied Messiah. Let us endeavor also to come to Jesus. Let Him show us what it means to come to Him that we may have life, the life He was born to give for all mankind, that we may know Him and live.



FSM

*Continued from page 2 | Remembering Stephen*

a frontline ministry. That is true; however, this new direction was to give us a very different platform.

In 2017, Stephen published the book *Freedom Realized: Finding Freedom from Homosexuality & Living A Life Free from Labels* as a rebuttal to the false statistic that 99.9% of people do not change. Stephen wondered what our statistics might be? Calling our whole staff and volunteer leaders to the line, we began to embark on a survey of 25 years of client files. He had the courage to include the entire survey and the responses. He stood firm on the foundation of the Word of God that the Gospel truth could lead to repentance and that sound discipleship would convert the soul entirely. The survey confirmed that. And the *Freedom Realized* book told the whole story.

This work opened new doors of ministry for him and for First Stone. As Stephen grew his speaking opportunities and travel, he brought First Stone along. During this season, Stephen became a spokesman offering clear understanding of how receiving the Gospel of Jesus Christ transforms lives.

He also informed the Church of the dangers creeping in among her. He established the "Freedom Realized Live." His influence and clarity opened doors to the documentary *In His Image: Delighting in God's Plan for Gender and Sexuality*.



This time following Stephen's sudden departure has certainly been a difficult transition for this ministry he left behind. We have the wealth of his investment here to continue the work. We are grateful for the labor and the gift he has left behind. We also bless the work as he moves forward.

FSM

# Living Free Curriculum

In 2018, First Stone began developing our own support group curriculum. We formulated the name, Living Free, and a friend of the ministry created an amazing design of birds in flight.

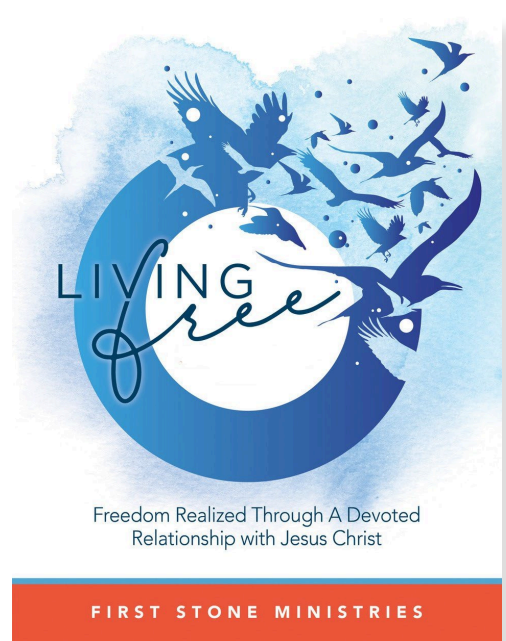
We started out with an initial framework of chapter titles and then began to flesh out how to convey each topic in a way that we knew would be good for our audience to grasp. Our goal was to create a program that is full of Biblical truth--which has power to save, heal, and deliver--and to couple that with the soul-healing practices that we have witnessed as being time proven.

Following COVID, our development efforts to finish the curriculum stalled out. We still ran it as a program and had wonderful teachings and small group times; however, toward the middle of the program, all we could offer was literature that could help with participants' understanding. This was not a bad solution, but this fell short of being a true curriculum we could offer.

At the end of this Spring (2023), Laura Leigh Stanlake jump-started the project by inviting one of our volunteer leaders to join us in the writing. Kerri Young had a lifetime of experience in project management. They talked about the goals of the program and the vision First Stone had been carrying and tasked her with finding a way forward with all the material, teaching, articles, and books we had used for years! We are a discipleship organization first, and this needed to be expressed in our healing curriculum. Kerri has moved us forward with the first, full writing of this program.

As of this newsletter, 14 of 22 chapters are completed! We have been able to get the chapters to our participants ahead of time for them to read, and we are still on track for the remainder of the program.

Much of the content comes from years of teaching topics from various other groups we have run or ministered with. Some material has come from the inspired teachings of our servant leaders and staff. This means the curriculum has truly been written by our team! We are excited that this is the case as our leaders have many years of serving with us and their understanding of the content was solid enough to be included in this developing program.



## Sample Chapter Layout

Chapter 5, Living Free

5

Consecration: Hanging onto Transformation

As you progress through *Living Free*, you are going to receive revelation<sup>1</sup> from the Word, blessings in prayer, and insights from teachings as well as experience personal encounters with God. How can you **make the most of these deposits into your healing process**? How can you hang onto your transformation? Through consecration.

**What is Consecration?**  
Consecration means to be set apart to a sacred use or purpose, such as Aaron and his sons being set apart in Exodus 30:30 to serve the LORD as priests. In another example, Leviticus 20:7, the LORD calls His children out of all manner of sin and to holiness: "Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God."<sup>2</sup>

The word translated consecrate (NKJV) in these verses is also translated sanctify, holy, and dedicate. What is helpful about the word consecrate is the picture it paints of being set apart. *Set apart* implies intentionality. I must will to do God's will. Thus, consecration begins with an unwavering, quality decision from which there is no turning back.<sup>3</sup> I will do and be what the Lord calls for in me, and I will not compromise. If He reveals, for example, that I am constantly thinking and speaking self-hatred over myself (a sin), I will, in agreement with Him (a quality decision), take all such thoughts and words captive "to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Part of the work of each *Living Free* lesson will be to ask, "How am I going to let this form me?" The degree to which you consecrate yourself to each lesson's deposit into your healing process will determine what you get out of *Living Free*. Let's look now at two practices that will help you be set apart in your *Living Free* journey.

**READING**  
**Bible**

- 1 Peter 2:9-10; Deuteronomy 14:2; Revelation 18:4; Psalm 4:3; 1 John 4:4-5; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18; 2 Corinthians 7:1

**Appendices**

- "A Guide to Devotional Life: Our Pathway to Abundant Life in Christ" by Andrew Franklin

5-1

Chapter 5, Living Free

Prayer

Prayer of Consecration

Heavenly Father,

I desire to consecrate myself to You—to Your sacred purposes for my life, to purity and holiness.

In the name of Jesus, I ask You to help me break free from the influence of weak versions of Christianity that would have me believe I can live like hell under the cover of an impotent grace that has no discipleship, no cross, no Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Help me also to break free from the influence of religious spirits that leave no room for relationship with You and would have me believe the path to purity and holiness is legalism.

Guide me by Your Spirit to make quality decisions to be set apart for You and strengthen me to follow these decisions with action. Holy Spirit, convict me where I am indifferent—apathetic—and do not follow through. Do not let me rest; do not let me fall into the slumber of cultural Christianity.

Jesus, I pray to hunger for Your Word. Forgive me for where I have doubted Your Word and have not pursued it. I need Your Word to make good decisions and to stand by those decisions. I need Your Word to fight my battles and win.

Jesus, most of all, I pray with all my heart that You get everything You came for when You came for me. I consecrate myself to You.

Amen.

5-5

Chapter 5, Living Free

Response

**Scripture Meditation**

- 1 Peter 2:9; Psalm 4:3; Psalm 105:5

**Who am I in Christ?**

- I am a doer of the Word and am blessed in my actions. (James 1:22 & 25)

**Questions for Consideration**

- What quality decision is the Lord calling you to make so you are set apart?
- Describe your engagement with the Word? Are you confident God's Word will not return void (Isaiah 55:11), and are you a doer of the Word (James 1:22)? Explain.
- What quality decision do you need to make to get the most out of *Living Free*?

**Freedom Check**

- Am I as free in this area (consecration) as I want to be? Explain.

Record your response to this lesson.

5-6

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# FSM Board on Navigating Our Transition

The First Stone Ministries Board had no plans in place for what was to unfold for 2023. Stephen Black was our trusted source of information and during lockdowns, the Board did not meet as it should have. At that time, there were three members of the Board: Stephen Black, FSM's Executive Director, Randy Rice, who has been a Board member for 20 years, and me, with four years of service with FSM. Unfortunately, the Board was made aware of a very important missed deadline and long-time Board member, Randy Rice, offered to find out what happened. What he discovered was that there were two missed legal deadlines, and the staff was afraid to give honest feedback on separate internal issues.

The Board convened a staff meeting where each person had the opportunity to share concerns and observations with Stephen. Stephen's response was completely unexpected and unacceptable. He was asked to go on sabbatical, to give him time to work out a variety of personal issues affecting his leadership. It is important to point out that at no time were we concerned about sexual immorality.

It was plain to see that our Board needed to take a more active role in fostering the growth of the ministry. I was able to recruit Dr. Kevin Clarkson to join the Board. Dr. Clarkson had served on the OBU Board of Directors and was a long-time pastor of First Moore. He currently pastors Liberty Church in Yukon. Our second addition was Gaylene Stupic, who serves as FSM Board Secretary, and attends Bridgeway Church. She has a passion to see people walk in the fullness of their identity in Christ and serves in prison ministry as well as a women's ministry, Beautiful Restoration.

And then there was the flood. The FSM staff had to hurriedly pack up ALL the First Stone property to keep it from damage, locate and move to temporary offices, run a ministry out of boxes then, and during subsequent construction, and negotiate the details of the missed deadline. From the outset of Stephen's sabbatical, Laura Leigh Stanlake played a stabilizing and pastoral role. It was only a few weeks into the sabbatical that the Board received Stephen's written notice of resignation. The Board then asked Laura Leigh to step in as interim Executive Director, while the Board worked through a separation agreement that would honor Stephen's service to the ministry without putting him or the ministry at risk.

The weight of the loss of such a long-serving FSM Executive Director was more bearable thanks to the latent talent of the entire FSM ministry team. The staff flourished under Laura Leigh's leadership and within weeks, it was clear that she was more than capable of handling the duties of an interim Executive Director. She attended to the long-overdue fiduciary tasks and held the Board to our deadlines and commitments. It was obvious that the anointing of God was guiding Laura Leigh on the direction FSM needed to go administratively as well as ministerially. The Board voted unanimously at the September 2023 Board meeting to officially make Laura Leigh the Executive Director.

Since that time, we have watched the staff go through illness, surgery, and the death of a family member and yet the staff is vibrant and full of ideas to move the ministry forward. Laura Leigh invited a lovely ministry friend to host a prayer night at our host church, Crestwood Vineyard. It was well-attended, and we look forward to the next one after the first of the new year. We praise God that her vision and abilities have provided clear direction and a promising future.

Bob Linn, Chairman



FSM



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## Pleased to Announce Newest Intern

We are pleased to announce our newest intern, Bronwyn Welch.

Her family has faithfully participated in our groups since 2016. She has already been serving at FSM on our Living Free team. She and her husband (Kelly) also co-lead our Parent's Group meetings.

Bronwyn has just finished her coursework in Biblical Counseling with Liberty University. She will intern with us to complete her required hours for the University. We are excited about her new role with us during her 2023 Spring semester.

FSM



# Support Groups

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## Staff



**Laura Leigh Stanlake**  
Executive Director



**Joseph Thiessen**  
Office Administrator



**Jim Farrington**  
Men's Minister



**Laura Beth Smalts**  
Women's Minister

For more information about each staff member, including links to any blogs, please visit [firststone.org/staff](https://firststone.org/staff).



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