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# NORTH VALLEY FRIENDS CHURCH

Official Newsletter

## DANCING FOR JOY, AND FOR JONAH: MEET NVFC'S JUSTIN WESTBROOK

Sunday morning meetings are for dancing. At least that's what Justin Westbrook's son, Jonah, seems to think. Most Sundays, during the North Valley Friends Church programmed services, you can find Jonah dancing in front of the pulpit, or in the arms of his dad. Seeing Jonah's joy in experiencing music is infectious, and his love of music is woven into the fabric of Justin's life—and the life of Sierra Westbrook, Jonah's mom.

“Jonah loves music in all of its forms,” Justin said, “and our days are spent singing, dancing, watching music, listening to music, and creating music.”

Beyond the dancing, Sierra and Justin have been an integral part of the NVFC community for fourteen years, and both play active roles in the church's life and leadership. Justin serves as an elder, a position he took on after careful consideration in 2023, having been warned that the church was in transition, and elders might need to sacrifice more time to help shepherd upcoming changes.

Little did Justin know that the transition was about more than the need to hire a new full-time pastor. But Justin was grateful for the opportunity to serve. “North Valley has been my home church for over a decade,” Justin said, “and it has been an honor and privilege to serve our community in this way during this time of many changes (even more than I had anticipated when I first became an elder).”

Justin landed at NVFC in early 2013, months after moving to Newberg to complete an internship at Chehalem Youth and Family Services; he arrived from Pasadena, Cali., where he was completing a doctorate in psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary.



## MEET JUSTIN WESTBROOK, CONTINUED

In Newberg, Justin met Sierra through a mutual friend “ostensibly to help with finding a place to live, but actually hoping that we would hit it off,” Justin said.

And hit it off they did. Or Justin did, at least. Sierra had told Justin about NVFC at their first meeting, getting tea at Chapter’s, but because “I was more interested in her than she was in me at first and I wanted to give her space, I visited some other churches in the area first.”

Luckily for Justin (and Sierra, and NVFC, too), none of the other churches were quite right. And so, in January 2013, Justin said “I remembered Sierra talking about North Valley and decided to visit.” He was warmly welcomed immediately, and surprised that he knew so many people who already attended.

“When I came back the next week, I was touched by how people, particularly Anna Baker, remembered what I had shared about myself the previous week,” Justin added. “I got connected with the young adult group. And it didn’t hurt that the woman I was interested in was still attending. I didn’t visit another church after that.”

Attending NVFC became a conduit for Justin’s relationship to Sierra, too. They started dating in 2016, and married in 2017, having spent time at church, in small groups, and with mutual friends. Before having Jonah, the Westbrooks enjoyed “exploring the area (taking hikes, reading in coffee shops, trying out restaurants/new foods), taking impromptu trips (to the coast, the Gorge, etc.), and staying at home (cooking/baking, watching TV shows/movies, and taking walks around the neighborhood),” Justin said.

Having a toddler has changed the Westbrooks’ ability to do some of those activities, although the family still seeks time together in the outdoors, going to parks and play spaces; trying out new restaurants and eateries, including The Heist food truck pod in Woodstock, where Jonah is more free to move around; and of course, lots and lots of music, singing, dancing, and going to concerts.

Bringing Jonah into their lives was itself a journey, complicated by difficulties in conceiving. Justin shared part of this journey in a May sermon, which you can [listen to here](#). “We are so glad to have Jonah in our lives!” Justin affirms. “He is a bundle of fun-loving energy who keeps us active and on our toes.”



## MEET JUSTIN WESTBROOK, CONTINUED

In his professional life, Justin is a licensed psychologist, working at Legacy Emanuel Internal Medicine Clinic as an integrated behavioral health clinician. His roles include “providing direct patient care in a short-term, problem-focused manner for folks experiencing mental health concerns, substance use issues, and health behavior issues,” in addition to supporting and training medical residents and supporting student therapists.

His work as a therapist dovetails nicely with Sierra’s. She is the founding director of Eden Spiritual Care, a spiritual formation non-profit that provides spiritual direction, classes, and retreats.

“Our professions overlap in a lot of ways, and we are able to support each other well in them,” Justin said. “I appreciate her wisdom, creativity, care, thoughtfulness, humor, and warmth in her work and in her life in general. We laugh and cry and sing and dance and collapse in exhausted heaps at the end of the day once Jonah is asleep.”

Although Justin is committed to the Friends ethos embraced by NVFC, he considers himself a “denominational mutt.” His dad was raised Methodist, and his mom Missionary Baptist. They married in a Christian Missionary Alliance church, and Justin was raised in an Evangelical Free church in Beaver, Penn., about one hour north of Pittsburgh.

In Beaver, Justin attended a Reformed Presbyterian school from 3rd grade on. His high school graduating class had sixteen students. “I was raised in the love of Christ and in a loving, supportive community there and at home,” Justin said, noting that he grew up attending an Evangelical Free church where his mom and sister are still members.

After leaving Beaver, Justin attended a Christian Reformed Church college (Calvin in Grand Rapids, Mich.) and a Christian Reformed church, then went to a “broadly evangelical seminary” and a Nazarene church near Fuller.

Although a “denominational mutt,” Justin has found comfort and a home at NVFC, where he has been able to serve in a wide variety of roles, including being an elder, an usher, and a small group leader. His reasons for cherishing NVFC are many, from “appreciating a community of people who are committed to following Christ,” to the fact that NVFC “wrestles and struggles with difficult issues and do not require quick, pat answers, but can sit in the mystery, and that we do not always agree on everything, but are still present with and for each other.”

Finally, Justin said that he “appreciates the space that is given for children and youth in our community and how graciously that has been given to Jonah as he dances his heart out during our worship through music on Sunday mornings.”

Jonah’s joy is ours, too. We are grateful for the Westbrook family, and for their rich contributions to the life of our church.

# TEARS ARE A PRIVILEGE

## BY LAURA DUNN

I've always been a "crybaby." The thing about being a crybaby is that, at least for me, I don't only feel sadness deeply, but also joy, happiness, fear, excitement and love. To me, the joy and love are worth the uncomfortable sensitive feelings that come with it.

But, the tears? The tears are a bit much.

I've gotten all sorts of messaging around displaying my emotions in front of others, especially tears.

"Don't cry, you'll make me cry,"

"Don't cry, you will make me mess up my makeup."

"Crying creates wrinkles; you don't want wrinkles do you?"

From a job that I adored, a loving boss would say "take some time, go wash your face." It was code for "stop crying."

From another job when I was assaulted by a patient and bullied by my coworkers, "if you can't regulate yourself, this isn't going to work out." And it didn't. I was booted after four months, but who wants to be assaulted and bullied to tears at a workplace, anyway?

Recently I've been in conversations with God about when/if I will speak again in church. I've had a number of excuses, but I settled on one that I was kinda peeved with God about.

I said "God, why did you make me this way? You've got to turn these tears off, they are getting in the way, they make people uncomfortable, it can make it hard for me to communicate, I'm tired of them, they're exhausting, they're embarrassing."

I heard back, and the first thing God said was "your tears are a privilege."

I also heard, "your tears are a gift and they are exactly what people need. You don't know what you are asking for."

"Tears show that you are hydrated and well-resourced. Tears are a part of a system that I created in human bodies for you to regulate yourselves. Your system functions well, and you have exactly what you need (hydration, energy, space, time, and emotional health and intelligence) to bear witness to another's suffering. It is a gift to people to see examples of this system working well."

"Do you think that families who are living without water right now wish they could waltz into a well-stocked grocery and grab a couple of coconut waters off the shelf the way you do? Or take a few steps in their home and have water flow plentifully from a tap? Those resources are part of why your tears flow so easily. I am caring for you, your needs are being met."

"Do you think Palestinian mothers wish there was clean water to drink so that their children do not dehydrate and so they could cry for their dying children?"

## TEARS ARE A PRIVILEGE (CONTINUED)

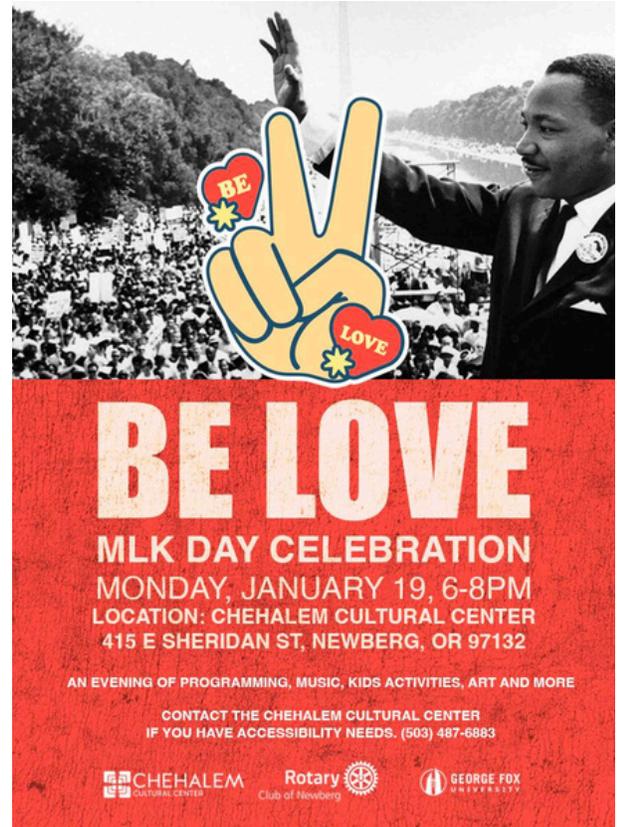
“Sometimes you are crying for others who can’t cry for themselves. Are you really asking to have your tears turned off?”

No! I wasn’t. I didn’t realize what I had been asking of God.

I googled tears. I read that tears release hormones like oxytocin and endorphins. These can ease physical and emotional pain and improve mood. Tears keep our eyes lubricated and clear.

Tears can show others we care, that we feel tender toward them, or that we are in need of support. Shared tears can bond us. Our tears for a loved one who is suffering or has passed are a testament to how deeply we love that person.

God, thank you for my tears and for reminding me that I am not broken, but functioning exactly how you created me. I now understand that tears are a gift and a privilege.



### DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

I'm once again looking for writers at North Valley to contribute to the NVFC newsletter. This is your chance to share a word or thought with the NVFC community--you do not need to be a professional or even seasoned writer to do this! (I'm happy to help edit, if you're worried about that!) Each reflection should be on the shorter end--around 300 or 400 words--and you are free to write about anything that you would like to share with our congregation. Deadlines are flexible. If this is something that interests you, even just a little, feel free to reach out to Melanie Springer Mock at [mmock@georgefox.edu](mailto:mmock@georgefox.edu)

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