

Joe and Judy Blake

A Story of Faith, Hope, and Love

If you've ever wanted to know a little bit more about the people you always see at church on Sunday, stay tuned. This is the first of a series of articles featuring families who attend Cornerstone, designed to help you understand just how wonderful the Lord has wrought His people. Our premier biography focuses on Joe and Judy Blake; theirs is a story of faith, hope and love.

Through the years, the Blakes have hosted five foreign exchange students, fostered many children, and opened up their basement to their kids' friends for months at a time. The proud parents have two grown biological children, a daughter-in-law, three adopted children, and a foster daughter. "They love children. They really are unsung heroes," Pastor Peter says of the Blakes, though the modest couple is sure to disagree.

Faith

Cornerstone is blessed to have Joe serve on the Financial Ministry team, and Judy work as a kindergarten through second grade Awanas teacher on Wednesday nights. Their journey of faith in Jesus began seven years ago.

"We were Catholics all our lives," explained Judy. As she and her mother begged a priest to give her dying father his last rites in the hospital, Judy and Joe became confused over the conditions he demanded. They took their questions to the Bible.

"I just happened to see the passage about Jesus as the cornerstone, and thought of the church, so we tried it," Joe said.

"It was a good fit," Judy observed. "People were very welcoming, and I think we were both crying on our first day."

"I just had something in my eye," protested Joe.

Their sons, Joe Jr. and Jon, liked the change, too.

Joe described the plight many a parent has faced. "We'd been arguing with the two older boys about going to church, then once we started going to Cornerstone, they would get up on their own and start going."

The couple dove right in, working together in the nursery as well as teaching Sunday school classes.

"We both did the children's ministry at first," said Joe, "because we had children on our heart."

Judy laughed. "Yeah, and we thought it was just to teach."

They'd soon learn another lesson about faith—the power of prayer.

Hope

As Joe and Judy prayed about the children they had on their heart, they began hoping to adopt. Looking into foreign adoption, however, they decided the Lord wouldn't want them to go into debt to adopt.

The answer to their prayers came on a billboard at the end of the road.

“It was just like in a movie,” said Judy, in awe. “It said, ‘Foster to Adopt.’”

The Blakes did just that. After one brief fostering assignment, Joe and Judy were called about the children who eventually become their own: Julia, James, and Jacob. The siblings were all under the age three at the time.

A section in Joe’s biography, included with the couple’s application for foster parenting, explains reason they’d been called for the brothers and their sister.

“I wrote that I don’t want to see kids split up,” Joe recalled, going on to recant his own childhood. “When I was 2, both of my parents were killed in a car accident, and they were going to split the four of us up. My grandma stepped in, and took the four of us in--so I wanted to do the same thing for children.”

The agency called Joe and Judy a year and a half after they had fostered and then adopted the three little ones. Their biological mother had three other children who needed homes, too. The Linert family, close friends of Joe and Judy and also members of Cornerstone Church, adopted them, and Judy gives God the glory.

“It’s awesome to see God’s hand in it all. God has great plans for these six kids--for all the kids,” she beamed.

Judy’s also referring to their newest foster daughter, fourteen year old Lurlee, whom they’re planning to adopt.

“It’s been rewarding,” agreed the Blakes.

Love

Joe says his family has learned not to lean on their own understanding. At no other time has that been more important than the past two years, since Judy discovered she had breast cancer.

“When you hear the words ‘You have cancer...’” she marveled, shaking her head. “I said, ‘Is that my name at the top of the paper?’ and Joe said, ‘Yea, I already checked!’” laughed Judy, with the shared sense of humor which clearly keeps the couple grounded.

After a double mastectomy and numerous rounds of chemotherapy at Karmanos Cancer Institute in Detroit, Judy had nothing but praise for the Lord.

“Through the whole thing, God has given me such peace. I was crying out to God, ‘God, God, I’ve got these kids to raise, I’ve to get through this, you’ve got to help me! He was so good; He gave me the strength to get up.’”

“I don’t think there were many days that I just had to sleep,” she continued. “Then, my very last chemo—where they drug you with so many steroids you have to sleep—I had the best dream. Joe and I were both in a little tornado, and we were just swirling out of control. Jesus grabbed us, pulled us down, pulled us down, held our hands, and we walked away. I can remember looking back and saying, thank you Lord. I woke up and thought, it’s over.”

Their trust in the Lord is matched only by their love for one another

“It strengthened our marriage even more, because Joe was awesome,” Judy declared.

“I just didn’t want to lose her,” admitted Joe.

“Every doctor’s appointment, every chemo treatment—he was beside me,” she added.

High school sweethearts, they're each the youngest of large families: his included four children, and hers, nine.

"They say the babies shouldn't get together!" teased Judy.

Happily defying the odds, Joe and Judy Blake and their beautiful family stand as a living testimony for us all to see what the Lord can do when we simply lean not on our own understanding, and trust Him with all of our days.