



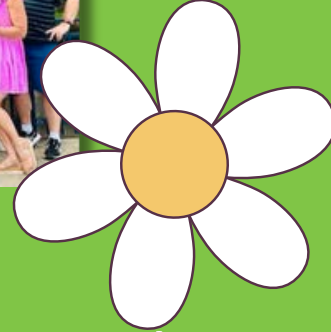
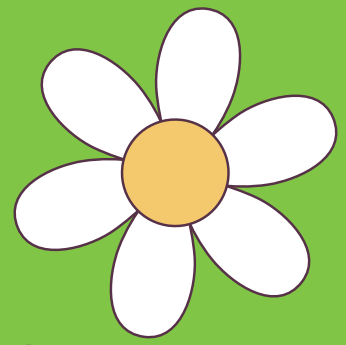
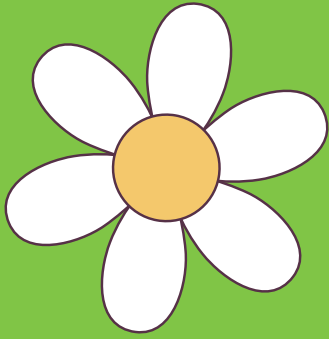
**PLANTING
PEACE**

*Montreat Youth
Conference 2024*

MONTREAT SMPC YOUTH REFLECTIONS

July 7-13, 2024

MONTREAT, NC



From Lindsey Odom

Associate Pastor of Youth and Missions/Outreach

Montreat was one of the most fabulous weeks of the year!! We began each day with energizers, worship, keynote, small group, and prayed and experienced God's peace in new and meaningful ways. The theme of the week was "Planting Peace." The theme was divided into four key words: "peace, plant, prune and persist," for focus during worship, keynotes, small group time, and outside recreation time. These four key words: "peace, plant, prune and persist," conveyed larger theological statements for the youth to ponder on as they consider God's peace and how God calls them into the work of peace. I loved this theme because it gave youth an opportunity to dig deep into the meaning of peace and learn how they can spread peace around to others. It also allowed them to determine where they experience peace and what gets in the way of them experiencing peace. Because by determining the source of peace in their own lives, which is in and through Jesus Christ, they can then work together to provide peace for others and create a world where all can thrive and live in peace and harmony with each other.

Montreat compared us creating peace to the process of planting a plant from a tiny seed. Once a seed is planted and it has all the nutrients it needs, it has the potential to become whatever it wants or can become. In the same way, we all have the ability to plant peace and plant seeds of hope, ideas, justice, compassion, care, and service, and make a difference in our world. But we also have to let go and put our seeds in a place where God can use them and do something miraculous with them. So, what are you going to plant and who is your seed going to impact? What will happen when your seed blossoms into something else? There has never been a more perfect time to plant. Our world needs us to plant peace, love, justice, and hope. We plant peace, not only because God calls us to, but because it is an act of faith. Planting seeds of peace allows us to become co-creators with God in creating a world that matches with God's vision for all of humanity. Even when times get difficult or are unjust, we must persist in our work of creating peace for all God's people to experience and enjoy. We are diverse and different from each other, but we are called to be together and live in community with each other. We are taught to live peaceably with all, even when things in our world are not peaceful. For as our Keynoter John Moore reminded us, "God does not erase our differences; God erases our divisions." Jesus brought peace and still continues to provide us with the gift of peace, breaking down the walls of hostility and division that separate us from each other. In response, we must recognize that the harvest of peace is for everyone to experience and enjoy, and work to create peace for all.

Some of the highlights from the week included our hike to Lookout Mountain, the keynote messages, worship, recreation events, and our back home time with just our SMPC youth group. I am so extremely blessed to be the youth pastor at SMPC and be able to help lead these youth on their faith journey and to lead them to experiencing God's peace and how God calls them into the work of peace. It was truly a gift to be with all of the youth this past week at Montreat. They make my job so easy. Montreat is always such an amazing and fun retreat. I am so inspired by SMPC youth and their faith and the way they love each other, look after one another, and treat each other like family. Very thankful to experience this week at Montreat alongside SMPC youth and chaperones and see how they connected with each other and connected with God and learned about God's peace and how to spread God's peace to all whom they encounter!! A BIG Thank you to our incredible chaperones, cooks, and drivers (Jeana and Geoffrey Lee, Cullen Case, David Bartholomew, Valerie Glover, Denise Davis, and Dave Jacobus) and all who contributed meals, snacks, drinks and prayers! So thankful for our church community.

As a graduated senior that does not really know what the future will hold, this year at Montreat really taught me a lot about peace and how to prune, persist, and plant peace for not just myself, but for others. Jesus provides us with a unique peace that we cannot experience anywhere else and that peace is what should guide our words, actions, and living. Throughout this week at Montreat, God has shown me that peace is not the easiest to attain, but it is our calling and something we must work towards as that is how God created us to live in peace with each other, peace with our world, and peace in our relations towards others. For hardships, injustice, and conflict will always be present in our world, but I learned that it is how I react, live, and persist in pursuing peace that will bring peace to myself, others, and our world. Shalom was discussed during keynote and worship to remind us of God's unique and incomparable peace unlike anything else we could ever experience. Shalom taught me how to seek out peace even in troubling and difficult times. Shalom needs to be found within yourself, your neighbors, and in Christ. Montreat also taught me about pruning and persistence. Pruning is the action of removing something that might be good in the moment, but not be good in the future. It is the faithful work that God calls us to do in order to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. In my life, there are many habits I have followed that need to be pruned in order to create space for peace, meaning, transformation, love, and hope. While pruning is important for growth and experiencing Christ in a new way, so is persistence. At Montreat, persistence was compared to growing a plant and how you need all the right nutrients, foundation, and time for a plant to grow. You must give a plant all that it requires such as sunlight, water, soil, and healthy air. Being a committed and faithful disciple of Jesus Christ requires all the right things too, such as prayer, attitude of love and justice, openness to God's Word, joy, peace, hope, and a heart to serve. If you follow those things, peace can be found easily within yourself, within our world, and in our relationship with God. Montreat has really impacted me in my faith and in my relationships within our youth group and beyond. I will carry all the amazing memories and fun times we had at Montreat with me as I go off to college. I would like to thank Lindsey, SMPC, the chaperones, my family and myself for being faithful to attending church and retreats like Montreat and for all that these experiences and people have done for my faith in helping it grow and guide me.

Collin Cushman



My second year at Montreat was filled with lots of meaningful life lessons and faith-filled lessons. I learned a lot about myself and improved my relationship with God. Being a part of the Jeremiah project, which allows us to assist in worship at Montreat with liturgy and creative elements, was a huge blessing to me. 5 other guys from our SMPC youth group and myself participated in the Jeremiah project where we performed skits in response to the scripture reading, read the Call to Worship and prayer, and did other things. It was scary and uncomfortable at first as public speaking intimidates me, but I felt God most closely in Jeremiah project and with the other guys in my youth group. I am going to miss the senior guys this year so much because they have been a huge part of my faith journey, have welcomed and loved me, and have encouraged me. We have all become so close with each other. I have made lifelong friends through youth group at SMPC and experiences like Montreat. The theme this year was "Planting Peace." I loved the idea of pruning peace and pruning the bad experiences, relationships, or things in your life or our world in order to experience true peace and experience God in new and transformational ways. I also want to thank Lindsey for helping me grow closer to God at Montreat and beyond, for supporting me, and for being someone I can talk to about anything.

Davis Lee



Montreat is one of the best places I have ever been to that I also call home. I look forward to it all year long. It is one of my favorite and most meaningful experiences out of my entire year. I feel most connected to God and each other at Montreat through keynote, worship, small group time, and being surrounded by the beautiful mountains. This week, we learned about peace and what the destination of peace is and that you need to be in peace with God and with each other. We learned how to plant peace through our words and actions. We also learned how to keep persisting in order to experience the peace of Christ, even when times are tough, bad things occur, or we face challenges. We learned how to prune the bad parts out of our lives so we can truly experience God's peace and work to spread it to others. One of my favorite parts about Montreat was my small group. Everyone here wants to get to know people and grow in their faith. Being in a small group of 14-18 people really helps with connecting with youth from other churches and connecting with God on a deeper level. My small group leader, Chris, had so much energy and was able to have deep and serious discussions about our faith, life, and peace. Everyone in my small group was so easy to talk to and I felt so comfortable around them. I also enjoyed seeing friends I made last year that I have kept in touch with. This year I became really close with new and old friends. I love going to the Huck to chat, get ice cream, and talk about our day at Montreat. The girls from SMPC and I talk for hours at night and debrief our day. I love doing energizers with them and singing worship and praise songs during keynote and worship. I also loved when we got to the top of Lookout Mountain as the song, "On Top of the World" was playing. That was the moment where I felt God on a deeper and more intimate level. It was also the moment where I felt closest to my peers. Lastly, I want to thank all the chaperones and cooks, and Lindsey who not only took the time out of their week to be with us and help out, but also supported us and encouraged us.

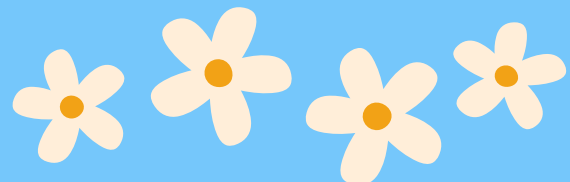
Haley Davis

First and foremost, this was my first time going to Montreat and it was definitely the right choice. It not only provided me with a week to explore my faith in Christ through contemplative and fun activities, but it also provided me with a week of fun with the other guys within our youth group. Every morning, we would go to a keynote to break down the theme and hear the main ideas of the day. After the keynote, we would split into small groups with youth from other churches to do activities and have a time of discussion on the scripture passage and theme. After that, we would get 2 hours for lunch, which allowed us to eat and hang out with the guys in our youth group playing spike ball, going to the huckleberry cafe for ice cream, going to the pool, or going rock hopping. It was so much fun. We would then rejoin our small groups in the afternoon and attend worship in the evening. I loved the way the schedule was structured and what it gave us opportunities to do together. The theme was "Planting Peace" and I learned about God's powerful and unique peace that reorients our lives and the lives of others, which is why we are called to live into it and help spread peace. Montreat was an amazing experience and I hope to return next year.

Alec White

My third year of Montreat was amazing and lived up to my expectations and more. From our keynotes and sermons, I learned how to prune things out of my life that will restrict my growth as a person and prevent me from experiencing the peace of Christ. The pruning could include all aspects of our lives such as relationships, sports, faith, and much more. Aside from the teachings, I grew close with guys in our youth program who I barely knew and strengthened relationships with guys who I grew up with at SMPC. Montreat is always seriously amazing and I am so sad this was my last year. I want to thank all of our chaperones and the many hands that went into making Montreat happen. Montreat is one of the best weeks of the year and truly a special place.

Hank Jacobus





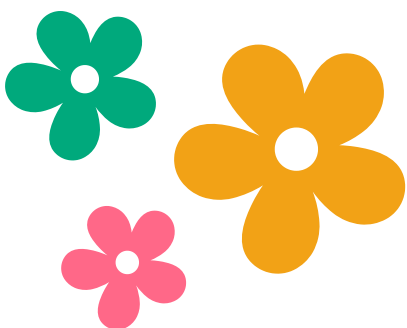
Something that I learned at Montreat was that it is so important to put yourself out there and talk to new people. Without doing that, my time in small group and connecting group would have been much less enjoyable. The thing I learned about planting peace this week was that something small can create a huge impact, just like a seed. A small seed can grow into a strong and sturdy tree or plant. Here at Montreat, my favorite thing to do was being active with the other guys in our SMPC youth group through rock hopping, playing basketball, going to the pool, etc. I really enjoyed hiking, rock hopping in the creek, playing basketball and spikeball. I really love being in nature, especially the mountains, so Montreat was an amazing experience in that way. The landscape is just incredibly beautiful and the weather was perfect. Lastly, my experience at Montreat would not have been possible without my small group leader David, all the amazing chaperones, and of course our wonderful youth pastor, Lindsey. My experience at Montreat has been like none other and has been life changing. I cannot wait to come back next year.

Judah Estes



Planting Peace was the theme for Montreat this year. My biggest take away was having to prune away the bad or the past in order to grow and move forward and experience peace. I always look forward to going to Montreat every summer and being with my best friends partaking in fun activities all week. Not only do I get to spend time with my church friends, but I get to make many more friends within my small group. I am so sad this will be my last year attending Montreat. Every year, we always have the best time. The keynote and worship services are so meaningful and the other girls in our youth group always provide such fun times, meaningful talks, and good laughs. I am so blessed to have had this experience and to be able to have such a strong bond with Lindsey. We are truly the luckiest church to have Lindsey as our youth leader and have her teachings and influence on us. This trip would never be the same without her. Montreat and Lindsey have taught me so many positive and empowering lessons for my faith journey and I genuinely would not be the person I am today without our church, Lindsey, and experiences like Montreat.

Addison Hicks



My first year at Montreat was also my first ever camp that I have attended. For being relatively new to church and youth group, it was amazing to be embraced and loved by people at Montreat and our SMPC youth group and adults. At Montreat, you are surrounded by such a loving church community. I have learned that everyone is welcome and truly felt God's peace while helping serve Communion during worship and assisting with liturgy in worship. I have learned that faith has so many different stages. It can be slow, fun, peaceful, wild, happy, sad, or not even make sense, but throughout all of this, God is always with us and provides us with a peace that is different from any other peace we could ever experience. Being a part of the Jeremiah project, which allows you to do worship leadership, helped me tremendously in my faith and with putting myself out there and embracing different ways to spread the peace of God. One thing that stuck with me from worship is that "God does not erase our differences, God erases our divisions." Thank you SMPC and Montreat for making such a significant difference in my life of faith, especially before I go off to college.

Blake Randle

During my time at Montreat, I had a blast, made new friends, grew closer to the girls in our youth group, and learned a lot of meaningful things for my faith. I learned to prune my anxiety and try and embrace God's peace that is offered to all. This involves us trusting in God completely and doing what God calls us to do. I learned that in order to plant peace, you have to remove items from your life that may not be the best for you. It is what the work of pruning requires from us. We have to prune whatever prevents us from living as the beloved Child of God that God created each of us to be so you can experience the true peace that Christ offers us and work to create that for others. This year at Montreat was extremely special to me because there were so many seniors in our group, including my sister. Montreat is such a fun place to be yourself, meet new people in small groups and other settings, and do energizers together. By the end of the week, I was best friends with youth in my small group. I love walking to the Huckleberry cafe on campus to get coffee or ice cream. It is always rewarding when you get to the top of Lookout Mountain too. I want to thank all of our chaperones, especially Lindsey. I am so thankful for her and would not be the same without her. Also a big thank you to the mom of our group, which is Jeana Lee. She takes care of everyone. I am so happy I could attend Montreat and look forward to the years to come.

Addison Fraser



During Montreat this year, I learned to plant peace everywhere I go and make sure I am surrounding myself with good and kind people. I made lots of friendships in my small group and outside of it with the girls in our SMPC youth group. I enjoyed walking around Montreat as it is such a beautiful place and going to the Huck to get ice cream, fries, or coffee. One main thing I am going to take with me after this trip is to prune away the bad and blossom into the new experiencing God's peace and working to create that peace for others. The friendships that I have made on this trip, I am going to cherish forever. I am so happy for all the memories we made together on this trip. Thank you Lindsey and all of my chaperones for guiding me and my faith this whole year. I am so happy that I got more involved in our church and youth group this year and all the friendships I have made through it.

Brynn Holder



Montreat is always one of my favorite weeks of the entire year for many reasons. I have made so many new friends and have grown in my faith and as a person. The theme this year was "Planting Peace." The theme taught me how to bring, create, and spread peace. I have also learned to persist through bad things and prune away the things that make you or others unhappy or the things that are harmful. My small group leader welcomed me and others into a safe space where we can be ourselves and talk about our faith freely. Lindsey has been so helpful and welcoming throughout this week and I am so grateful to have her as my youth pastor. Our chaperones have also been so amazing this week. They have helped us have so much fun while also keeping us on track to learn and discuss God's peace and how it can influence us and our lives of faith. I have learned so much this week and grown in my faith and as a person, and am already counting down the days until next year.

Lily Claire Jacobus

We learned a lot from Montreat about peace. I learned that pruning and planting not only applies to plants, but to people too. I learned that sometimes aspects of life that we have planted require pruning in order to get stronger. Before one can succeed, they will face setbacks. I also learned that planting a small seed of peace can grow and create a forest of peace, just like us and our relationship with God. Montreat was also a ton of fun!! Between hiking Lookout Mountain, shopping in Black Mountain, rock hopping, playing basketball, and even swimming, I have had so much fun this week. Someone responsible for making Montreat awesome and meaningful was my small group leader Margaret, Lindsey, and our other SMPC chaperones including my dad. It was really cool having my dad with me on my senior year trip to Montreat and watching him get to experience it and love it as much as I do. I want to thank Lindsey for planning Montreat every year, making Back home time so special, and for putting up with us. You do an amazing job so thank you Lindsey.

Xander Case

Montreat has been a great experience for our youth group, including myself. This was my first time attending Montreat and I am so glad that I did. We learned so much about planting peace, pruning some of our bad habits and attitudes, and persisting through the most difficult times in our lives and in our world in order to have peace and experience shalom. I have loved growing deeper in my relationships with both old and new friends at Montreat. One of my favorite parts of Montreat has been our small groups. I am so thankful for the staff at Montreat, our youth pastor Lindsey, and our chaperones from SMPC for making this trip possible. We love you Lindsey and love Montreat so much!!

Elizabeth Glover

The theme of Montreat was "Planting Peace." Planting Peace really helped me understand how to prune, persist, and plant peace in both my life and in our world today. Learning about these concepts helped me grow closer to God. I met so many new friends that I know God sent to me for a reason. Getting to go to all the keynote and worship services and hearing about the peace of Christ and how it can influence and impact our lives as well as how we are called to do the work of peace was so powerful for me. I want to thank my small group leader, Jody Welker, for facilitating deep and meaningful discussions and for changing my perspective on God and my outlook on life due to God's peace. I truly felt so connected with my small group and felt like I could trust everyone in it. I also want to thank my church for everything and everything that Lindsey did to make Montreat happen. At first I was a little hesitant to attend Montreat, but I am so thankful for Lindsey and her convincing me to go because it was such a positive and fabulous experience. I feel so much stronger now that I know a lot more about my relationship with God, God's peace that cannot compare to any other kind of peace we experience, and my faith as a whole.

Camdyn Sheeler

I always look forward to Montreat every year!! This year the theme was all about peace. I learned how to plant peace, prune things in order to make room for peace, and about persisting in order to experience the peace of Christ. It really helped me understand how in our daily lives, we will face worries, concerns, anxiety, grief, stress, difficult times, and injustice, but God's peace is always there and is unlike any other peace we could ever experience. Your peace affects others and the peace of the world affects yourself, so, as God's people, we are called to spread God's peace through our words, actions, and daily living. I experienced God's peace this trip through new people, people in our youth group, leaders like my small group leader and Lindsey, and the music during keynote and worship. What I learned here at Montreat are things that will help me so much into the future and my college years especially. I loved meeting new people, singing new songs, doing energizers, and just being in this thin and beautiful place called Montreat. I want to thank Lindsey, the chaperones, and all my youth group friends for making this such a memorable and meaningful experience. I am grateful for all the memories and friendships I made.

Caroline Guy

An important thing I learned from planting peace and the keynote pastor is that if one person's peace is not accomplished or experienced, we all do not experience peace and live in a state of unrest and chaos. Our peace is dependent upon the body of Christ so we must work to create peace so that all God's people can thrive and flourish together in peace and harmony with one another. I also learned about pruning away negative things in my life and replacing them with positive things such as justice and peace so that we can live like God wants us to live. I loved meeting so many new people, trips to the Huckleberry cafe, and most importantly growing in my faith with some of my best friends. After only my first trip to Montreat, Montreat has become one of my favorite places and I cannot thank Montreat enough for showing me how great God is and that the peace that God provides cannot compare to any other peace we experience. Montreat also allowed me to surround myself with such loving, caring, and compassionate people and leaders during small group time, keynotes, worship, and back home time with just our church group. I want to thank Lindsey for being the best leader, our cook Valerie Glover, Denise Davis, G Money and J Honey (Geoffrey Lee and Jeana Lee), Dave Bartholomew, Cullen Case and everyone in our youth group as well as all of my friends I made at Montreat for making it such an amazing experience. I cannot wait to come back next year.

Olivia Smith



I really enjoyed Montreat. This was my first time going to Montreat. I also have been relatively new to SMPC and the youth group, but started attending after Davis Lee and his family and Lindsey convinced me to attend and I am so glad that I did. Montreat has helped me learn and grow in my faith in God. It helped me understand what we have to do in order to experience God's peace in our lives and how we can work to spread God's peace with others. I enjoyed hiking Lookout Mountain and seeing the view of the mountains. I also enjoyed getting to grow closer to the guys in our youth group through playing basketball, pickleball, spikeball, attending worship and keynote together, and playing uno at our house. I want to thank my leaders and friends who encouraged me to come on this amazing church retreat.

Josh Ellis



I have been to Montreat for the past 3 summers and now as a graduated HS senior, I look forward to not only getting to learn and grow with youth from our own youth group, but also getting to spend time with friends I have met from my small group time over the past few years at Montreat. I love how Montreat is a big bonding experience for everyone involved. This year, we learned about peace and what we must do in order to obtain peace. The day we learned about pruning peace really stood out to me as we have to prune bad habits and behaviors out of our lives in order to experience God's peace in our own lives and create peace for others. God intended for all of God's children to live in peace and harmony with each other and our lives and world often do not reflect this due to the busy, unrestful, stressful, and unjust seasons we go through. But we are taught to change this. We must cut out the things of our life that keep us from experiencing God's peace and work to replace it so that we can experience God's peace and work to create it for others. I love Montreat so much and am going to miss it deeply.

Cameron Fraser

This final year at Montreat was the most special. I got to share this retreat with church friends who I have grown up with and my boyfriend, Jack. He got to see the life of our church and how close our group is. I watched him grow closer to boys in our back home group and in his small group and it brought me great joy. I had the privilege as a graduated senior to help the new girls thrive and blossom this year. We shared meals together, laughs, and stories. It was so much fun. I loved to help lead with Lindsey to show the new girls what a special place Montreat is and how it makes such a difference in your life of faith. This year's theme was "Planting Peace." After the stressful and disappointing college application process, the night before Montreat, I finally came to a decision that I would be attending UT. I think this allowed me to let go, fully experience and enjoy Montreat, and know what true peace is. The mountain views from our hike up Lookout Mountain, walking around campus, and attending keynote and worship brought me true peace. I could finally relax and enjoy the mountains and my youth group time. I connected to everyone more than ever this year. My small group leaders and members this year were so open, supportive, and faithful. I got to hear many different perspectives and ideas. As much as I liked the activities, energizers, games, sermons, etc, my favorite parts are the moment with our own youth group and Lindsey. Lindsey's presence in our group is what I credit most to us becoming such a close, fun, and energetic group at Montreat. Her kindness, advice, hospitality, helpfulness, and patience is always appreciated and seen by me everyday. She gets along with everyone of us and genuinely cares and wants us to grow in our faith and grow closer to each other. She is involved in every single one of our lives and will be there for us if we ever need her. During this week, we talked about planting new seeds of peace, weathering through tough times knowing Jesus provides us with a unique peace, and pruning out the bad in our lives and in our faith. Montreat, SMPC youth group, Lake Susan, hiking Lookout Mtn., and attending keynote and worship together will always be some of my favorite memories that will follow with me into my next chapter of college and beyond. I cherish Montreat and all its teachings and memories. Nothing will live up to what I have experienced at Montreat. I cannot believe I am about to move on to college and leave SMPC and my church family, but I know when I return, SMPC will be like my home and I will be so excited to see everyone. Thank you for everything that Lindsey and all the rest of the chaperones did to make Montreat amazing and meaningful each year.

Brooke Hicks

When I came to SMPC, I did not think I would be here for very long, but Lindsey and Zach invited me and encouraged me to keep attending. I came as a guest to youth choir and bells and then to youth group afterwards. And to everyone in the youth group, I was known as Brooke Hicks girlfriend. But the more I started coming, the more I grew closer to everyone in the youth group and SMPC began to feel like home. Also, even though I was not a member of the church and was just involved, I was treated with such love and hospitality by everyone in the youth group and at the church. Lindsey showed me such hospitality and opened my heart to the church and how welcoming it is. Not only did Lindsey do this, but to all the youth that are my age, they showed me the radical love and inclusion that a church family could have for one another. All the guys included me at Montreat, made sure I was okay, and allowed me to have fun with them. I felt like I could really be myself around them. This also describes my experience at Montreat perfectly. When Lindsey offered for me to go, I was initially unsure. But the assurance and convincing by the Hicks family and other kids in our group convinced me to attend Montreat. I am so glad I did. It was an opportunity that I could not pass up. I felt more connected to God and to each other than I ever have in my life. The Monday keynote and worship service on peace helped me understand how to better my heart towards kindness over anger, compassion and justice over violence, and love over misunderstanding and division. It also helped me understand the importance and necessity of peace in our lives and in our world amidst the brokenness, hostility, and injustice of our world. I felt like I could better understand the words of God as empowering and encouraging rather than laws and commandments. Even though I am a graduating senior and this was my first time at Montreat, the seniors in our group welcomed me, loved me, provided me with advice/ guidance, and helped me experience the BEST possible Montreat experience. They helped me enjoy every minute of Montreat. The fun, energy, faith, and richness of our SMPC youth group I was given was indescribable. I have never felt that way. My fellow seniors gave me guidance throughout the day and helped me enjoy every moment of my time at Montreat. I never felt like a visitor or outsider, but instead like a family member of the SMPC Youth group. The kindness, welcome, and hospitality I received from members of our SMPC Youth group and my small group at Montreat was amazing. With this reflection, I want to extend my gratitude, appreciation, and love for the SMPC youth group and experiences like Montreat. The staff at Montreat, sermons preached during keynote and worship, and beautiful view of the mountains made it a memorable and amazing week. I want to thank all of the people within the SMPC Youth group for letting me in with open arms and loving me. Y'all are some of the best friends I have ever made and had the chance to know and be around. I really would like to take the time to thank Brooke Hicks, Addison Hicks, and the rest of the Hicks family for extending the invitation to join this amazing church and for treating me like family. But most of all, I would like to thank Lindsey for everything she has done. She has welcomed me in as a leader, mentor, pastor, and friend. In the little time that I have known her, she has provided me with amazing advice, laughs, joy, and experiences. I pray for the groups to come and that they will get to experience things like the SMPC youth group and Montreat like I did as it was such a meaningful, faith-filled, and memorable experience that I will carry with me to college.

Jack Nielsen

This year at Montreat has been very different from my last 2 years at Montreat. Me and 5 other guys from our SMPC Youth group joined the Jeremiah Project this year, which provided us with opportunities to lead worship and keynote. We were able to write and lead liturgy, lead skits, read Scripture, and help serve Communion. I have to say, Montreat becomes so much more meaningful when you get to help lead worship. It is a lot more responsibility to lead than just sit in worship and experience it. However, as I am about to embark on this new journey of college, I strongly believe that this change this year benefited me in my faith and relationship with God, and will help me so much as I go off to college. On day one of Jeremiah Project, I was afraid and shy, trying as hard as I could to not sign up for things that would make me go on stage instead of just allowing me to sit in the pews. As I am writing this reflection, we are now on day 4 and I have spoken 3 times in worship, been a part of skits, and read scripture. I am no longer afraid of the big audience at Montreat, but feel at home and at peace helping to lead worship. I feel like I am where God has called me and placed me to be. I have also made so many close friends in the Jeremiah Project program that have influenced my faith. One thing that I have taken away from this week is about the act of pruning peace. John 15:2 has stuck with me the most as it talks about cutting away the branch that bears no fruit so it can be fruitful. There is always something in our lives such as old or bad habits or things that we can trim and work on. For me this week, I feel that God has pruned my ability to lead, along with my ability to speak in front of a large group of people and made it feel like something that brings me peace.

God works in many different ways and everytime I attend Montreat, I always experience God working closely in my life. If it was not for the other guys in our youth group, the friends I have met in small group time, and our amazing youth pastor, Lindsey, I would not be here. I would never have been able to learn about the peace that we experience from God and the pruning and persistence that needs to take place in order to create a more peaceful world and experience peace in our own lives. If you had told me 3 years ago that I would have a tight knit community of faith and be leading worship in front of 600+ people in Anderson Auditorium at Montreat, I would have laughed in your face and thought you were crazy. But I do believe that this was a God-given opportunity and experience to lead worship at Montreat and that God placed me and 5 other guys in our youth group in Jeremiah project for a reason. To my core group of senior guys within our youth group who I have grown up with: Hank, Xander, and Collin, I love y'all so much. You truly will never know how much you have changed my life. To Blake Randle, thank you for always making an attempt to be my friend and for being so easygoing and encouraging. You are truly so loving and caring. To Jack Nielsen, Thank you for always making me laugh and being so open and loving to all of us. To Davis Lee, Thank you for lighting up a room when you walk in, for being hilarious, and for keeping the fun going. Davis, you are amazing at basketball and such a good friend, and I hope you can become a leader and keep the SMPC youth group growing after a bunch of us graduate. Josh Ellis, thank you for attending Montreat this year. It was a pleasure getting to know you better and you never fail to make me laugh. Alec and Judah, thank you for joining our group and bringing your God-given gifts and insight to this youth group. Y'all are so cool and fun to be around.

And best for last, Lindsey, I know I have told you this a million times, but without you and your encouragement of me coming back to SMPC and youth group, I would not be here. I would not be a faithful disciple of Christ and I would not know what faith can do to your life in changing it for the better and transforming you. Lindsey, you have changed my life forever from your teachings, to your compassionate and caring heart, to the way you minister to us and allow us to have fun and bond as a group. Thank you for being the best youth pastor and for making such a difference in my life of faith, especially as I go off to college. You truly have impacted every youth in this church in such a positive and life changing way.

Lastly, Montreat, thank you for being such an amazing youth conference and for providing me with powerful faith-filled teachings, memorable experiences, and fun for the past 3 years. From uno games, to spike ball, to basketball, to the pool, to pickleball, to keynote and worship, to small group time, and to all the friends I have met during Montreat youth conference, I cannot thank you enough. Montreat is always something I look forward to and count down the days for. These past 3 years at Montreat have been some of the best weeks of my entire life.

I love all of you guys and I will never forget what peace is and how we can experience it in and through Christ. Christ's peace is a unique peace that we cannot find or experience anywhere else. Montreat will forever be my second home and I cannot wait for the next time I come back to Montreat to either hike Lookout Mountain and experience the beauty of Lake Susan or come back to be a small group leader. Goodbye, MYC 2024 Conference. Thank you for influencing me and my faith in such positive and powerful ways and for teaching me how to plant peace in our lives and in our world. Love you Montreat.

Hunter Fant

