



MONTREAT SMPC YOUTH REFLECTIONS

July 6-12, 2025

MONTREAT, NC



From Lindsey Odom

Associate Pastor of Youth and Missions/Outreach

I wish you could've been there and seen it. Truly, I wish every one of you could have witnessed the light and love that beamed through our youth at Montreat Youth Conference this year. Montreat is always a special place, but this year was extra special, meaningful, and moving. My 4 seniors, which included Davis Lee, Evan Williams, Josh Ellis, and George Elledge, made this year at Montreat one of the most memorable years for me as a Youth Pastor. An added bonus was having some of our college freshman youth come up to Montreat (Hank Jacobus, Collin Cushman, and Hunter Fant) and spend the day with us. That was amazing and so much fun!

Every summer, something extraordinary happens in the mountains of North Carolina. We pack up vans full of snacks, sunscreen, food, and a whole lot of energy, and head to the Montreat Youth Conference. This year's theme, "Light My Path," could not have been more fitting for the journey we took together, deep within our hearts, our faith lives, and our world. We laughed (a lot), we cried, and we danced with joy during energizers. Our youth also asked thoughtful and brave questions during small groups, and poured their hearts into keynote, worship, and back home group time in ways that moved me (and many others) to tears. If you read these reflections written by youth and look at some of the pictures from Montreat, you can see the tears, joy, and unconditional love shared between youth and leaders of our youth group. Our youth are truly incredible. They made new friends from other Presbyterian churches, and spent late nights in deep conversations about God, their purpose and plan, and what it means to share God's light with others. They found something holy together, something brave, bright, and beautiful. They found God's light shining within each of them as they were reminded that they are each a beloved child of God and worked to create that light within their youth group and beyond. Our youth's conversations about how we are called to come down from the mountain to share God's light and love were truly powerful and inspiring.

Through the theme, "Light My Path," it led to deep and holy conversations about belonging, fear, doubts, identity, faith, purpose, and calling. Some of the scripture passages we studied during worship, keynote, and back home time were Psalm 119:105, Psalm 23, Psalm 139:7-12, Ruth 1:8-18, Isaiah 2:2-5, Psalm 121, and Matthew 5:14-17. Two Scripture passages that stood out to me and our SMPC youth were Psalm 119:105, which says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" and Matthew 5:14-16, which says, "14 'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'" These two Scripture passages reinforced the presence of God's constant light within our lives, gave an opportunity for our youth to reflect on and share instances where they witnessed God's light shining through them and around them, and challenged them to consider how they might carry that light into the world with the assurance that God is already present in all spaces, experiences, and steps along the way.

(Cont.)

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In discussing instances where our youth witnessed God's light shining through them and around them, we also wrestled with big "what ifs" such as: what if a loved one dies before I get to say goodbye, what if I am not doing enough, what if I disappoint my family and friends, what if I don't live up to my expectations, what if we go to war, what if people think bad of me, what if God's plan doesn't align with my own, what if I make a big mistake, what if someone brings a gun into my school, what if I do not go to college for a sport and get a scholarship like my parents expect me to. Even with all the "what ifs" that are swirling around us, we were reminded that God is always with us. We affirmed that throughout all the "what ifs," we know what is constant and never changing, which is God's never changing presence that promises to always be with us throughout every season of our lives. We were reminded that even if life is uncertain, God is always certain. Even if the road gets dark, God walks beside us. Even if we feel unworthy, we are God's beloved children and learned that God's light shines in us and through us to bring others closer to Christ. We also learned that because we have God's light in us and through us, the light and love cannot just stay in Montreat; rather, it must go with us. The light we receive from God IS NOT MEANT TO STAY ON THE MOUNTAINTOP; RATHER, IT IS MEANT TO BE SHARED. Our world is in need of that light and love. We have good, needed, and important work to do when we come down the mountain for building up God's Kingdom in our world that so desperately needs it by reflecting and sharing God's light with others.

The youth in our youth group are NOT just the future of the church; rather, they are the church. I was reminded of this numerous times throughout our week at Montreat youth conference. Whether it was in the way they supported one another during difficult moments, how they showed up for each other, how they worshiped together, how they bonded and grew closer in their relationships with each other (even for youth who had just attended Montreat for the first time this summer), how they contributed insightful comments and led deep discussions during back home group time from their learnings collected during worship and keynote, how they played and prayed together, how they supported each other on the hike up Lookout Mountain, how they celebrated each other, especially on Evan William's 18th birthday, it was heartwarming to watch as a youth pastor. Their life in community together at Montreat reflected God's light the whole week and made me so proud of them, their gifts, and their hearts for others. On the last night, the final worship service of the week is the candlelight service around Lake Susan. This is always so beautiful as the seniors are the last one to blow their candles out and there is a blessing and prayer given over them. This year, I held 4 candles in my hands and blew each one of the candles out for my 4 seniors graduating and going off to college. It was a special and tender moment reminding us of the constant presence of Christ, who is the light of the world, and who offers hope and guidance to each one of us. This moment with candles also always creates a sense of unity and shared purpose and allows youth and myself to experience God on a deeper level. Our youth also showed me various ways that they are going to make a difference and change the world through their comments about what it means to reflect God's light in their words and actions. These youth are truly amazing and I feel privileged in my work as a pastor to be able to walk alongside them, guide them, and mentor them. I see in each one of them the light of Christ. I often say that these youth feel like my second family, and I mean it. They are "my kids" in every way that matters and I reminded them of this at Montreat. I believe in each one of our youth and that they all have meaningful and life-giving gifts to contribute to the church and the world. Their hearts are full of purpose, and I know they are going to change the world, not someday, but now. I see God's light shine vividly in each one of them. I learn from them, and I love them deeply. It is one of the greatest honors and privileges of my life and my calling to ministry to walk beside them on their faith journey. I am so incredibly grateful for this time we got to have together, for the ways that God lights our paths, and for the opportunities we have to share the light of Christ beyond the Montreat gate. We came home changed, closer to each other and closer to God.

I want to thank all of my amazing adult chaperones and cooks, which included Wyatt Hicks, Kara Guy, Jeana and Geoffrey Lee, and Steve Williams. The youth have become so close with Jeana and Geoffrey Lee over the past 3 summers that they have chaperoned Montreat that they received nicknames, which are "J Honey" and "G Money." They have poured into our youth with faith, love, and constant support, like they would their own kids. It is incredible to witness. I hope more adults will become involved with youth ministry programming like the Lee's did with our youth. Lastly, thank you to our wonderful SMPC church family for your love, prayers, and support that made this Montreat trip possible. Your generosity helps light the path for these youth and in turn, they are lighting the way for all of us. As we return home from Montreat, it is my hope that the youth who attended Montreat and also the congregants who read these reflections can consider these questions:

- What are some ways you can bring the light of God from the mountains of Montreat to others back home?
- How can you shine God's light in your school, church, community, and world?
- What are some challenges you may face in carrying that light forward, and how can you stay vigilant and encouraged?
- How can God's light provide you, others, and our neighbors in need with a sense of direction, comfort, assurance (of God's presence), love, or something else?

May we as a church community reflect the same light that our youth discovered at Montreat. May we be the kind of community that reminds our young people (and ourselves) that you are seen, you are beloved, and you are so deeply loved. Let's not stay on the mountaintop; rather, let's carry the light back home, together. Thank you.

I'm really glad I was able to come to Montreat this year. I really connected with the theme "light my path." I learned how God's light is in each and every one of us and how we should share God's light with everyone we meet. I realized that God does not want the edited versions of our selves that we should never hide or change any parts of us. I also realized that it's easier said than done, that it is hard to be yourself when you are afraid of what others might think of you. But God doesn't want us to be "edited versions" of ourselves because when we are true to who we are, God's light shines through us and we can help others do the same. Montreat has helped teach me many important lessons through worship and small groups that have helped me grow in my faith and build a stronger connection with God.

Siena Carr

I loved my week at Montreat. My small group leader John brought the whole trip together for me. The recaps of keynotes and worship enabled me to see other perceptions from others as well as further my understanding. John was able to do all of this while being able to relate to topics that are relevant in my life. The worships and keynotes had some very powerful metaphors that got the message of the day across. There were lots of fun activities that we did as a group each and every day. Every night at the house we would play card games, whether it be uno or poker. At the girls house for meals we would continue to play cards. We played basketball, pickleball, went to the pool, and played corn hole. I learned that God's light guides me down the right path, even through the ups and downs. God's path is the path we should follow. It's the path God has chosen for me. He will be with me always down that path.

George Elledge



Hi, my name is Logan Elliott, and my experience at Montreat has been so impactful for me. The theme of the week was Light My Path, and I can confidently say that throughout the week with the keynote speakers, interactions in my small group, and listening to the sermon in worship I have had my path illuminated in front of me, and I feel as if I have a clear direction to take after this week. I believe that this experience has been the most influential to my faith since confirmation. Being able to connect with the rest of the youth from SMPC was a phenomenal experience for me because I wasn't able to make it to as many youth group meetings and interactions as I would've liked due to things like work or other things. This group of youth has really helped to shape my faith journey and helped me to feel like I belong, even though I wasn't super close with them before the week. During this week at Montreat, I was able to learn lots of things about myself and my faith, and it all started on the first day, when we discussed our fears and "what if" scenarios, but we discussed how even through the "what ifs" and difficult experiences, God remains by your side no matter what. I also learned how to be my authentic self, as me and my small group had a deep conversation about how if we aren't willing to be true to ourselves, then we cannot be a part of the conversation and help to create change. I was also able to learn about how to follow the path of my faith journey in a way that really spoke to me. We learned that you don't have to plan out the whole journey, rather you just take one faithful step at a time. This really stuck with me because I have faced a lot of challenges in my faith and there have been many times where I really contemplated and questioned my beliefs. I really wanted to thank everyone who made this possible, from all of the amazing chaperones who took the time out of their own personal lives to come up to this mountain and allow us to further our relationship with God without worrying about having good food on the table or needing anything. These chaperones really allowed us to have whatever we needed and their sacrifices helped to show me God's light through their actions this week. I finally wanted to thank Lindsey Odom, who is actually the reason that I went to Montreat this year. I had never been to Montreat before this year, and I was apprehensive about coming on this trip, but it has changed my life. Lindsey helps to create an environment where I can connect with the other youth, but also to continue to grow in my faith. Lindsey helped to spread God's light to me through this trip, and I am so unbelievably grateful for her and everything that she has done for me, not only this week but ever since she joined SMPC. Montreat has been a life changing experience for me, and I am so grateful that I was able to come this year.

Logan Elliott



The theme at Montreat this year was Light my Path, which revolved around the idea that we need to follow God's path and become a follower of God to spread Light. Throughout the week we learned about the dark and our fears that prevent us from following God's plan, and how we can overcome those fears to see the light. We learned how to adjust to new changes within the light and the dark, and realized that God's light is in us. The preacher, Sam, taught the idea that "My light, is our light" meaning that we need to come together as a community to see God's light, and spread it into the world, rather than staying in one place. This week i experienced Gods light, at the huck hanging out with my best friends, having deep conversations with my small group, doing late night drives to cookout, hiking up look out mountain, even though everyone was scared to do it, but when we got to the top, we saw God's creation and his light. Montreat and the South Mecklenburg Community is a place of no judgement , because everyone here is a follower of God. To all the graduating seniors, I want you to know that I look up to every single one of you so much, and you are like the older siblings I never had. It's scary to think that next year i will be one of the oldest in the group, and other youth will look up to me as i did you for the past 4 years. SMPC will always be your family and if you ever need anything. Call and we will answer. I want to thank each chaperone who took time out of their daily lives to come here with us, to make our trip the best it could. I also want to give a shoutout to the keynoters and preachers this week. Who are honestly some of the best ive ever met and you can tell they love what they do and care so much about God's light. Most importantly though, I want to thank Lindsey for everything she does. She always does her best to get to know every single youth and makes sure we get the best experience here. She's someone I can talk to about anything with no judgement. There is no one else who loves her job as much as her. I can tell how passionate she is about working with kids, and she truly works so hard every single day and always will fight any battles for us. I look forward to coming back next year, and continuing exploring my faith with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and I know SMPC is the best church family one could offer.

Haley Davis

My time at Montreat taught me a lot. I have learned about lots of people both in my small group and gotten closer to my own youth group. I learned that God works in all kinds of ways and has guided each and every one of us to Montreat to learn and praise him. Connecting events in the Bible to modern day examples has helped me better understand God's word and understand a deeper meaning about the Bible. I appreciate everyone in my group, especially Davis and Lindsay, Davis for inviting me to this group and giving me the opportunity to come to Montreat, and Lindsay for being so welcoming and becoming a huge mentor for me, as well as being a great friend.

Joshua Ellis

This year at Montreat our theme was "Light My Path." The message told us that God lights our path, He guides us through our life. This message spoke to me by saying God is with us even when we are in the "valley of death." We can rely on him to be with us at all times. This helped me realize that even in the midst of my darkness, God will "leadeth me beside still waters."

The Scripture on Thursday was Mark 9:2-10. This speaks of the Transfiguration on the mountain. In Worship we were taught that just like Peter James and John could not stay in the mountain, we cannot stay in Montreat. This is because Montreat is a safe place with little judgement. We cannot stay there forever, we must bring the light that God has given us there and bring it to the people in our lives.

The best thing I experienced at Montreat was the community between all the youth, whether it was in small groups, worship, activities, or at our houses. This is the kind of community that our world needs. The acceptance across all differences breaks down barriers and gives us an example of how we are to treat our neighbors back home. It feels amazing to be accepted and loved and this is how God calls us to treat each other all the time.

My experience at Montreat this year was truly "mountain top," I have certainly grown in my faith and grown as a person. I have enjoyed this week more than I could have ever imagined. It has made me want to share this experience by spreading God's light throughout my life.

I would like to thank our Youth Pastor, Lindsey Odom for organizing our participation In this event, encouraging us to participate and grow together, and for being a role model for what it truly means to spread God's light. I would also like to thank the many chaperones that were with us this week, who all made this trip so special and possible. And finally I would like to thank the countless youth from all across the country who contributed to this experience but especially the SMPC youth who made me feel so welcome and loved and never made me question if I belonged.

Judah Estes





While here in Montreat, I learned that while there is much fun to be had, there was space for deep learning and emotion to be. While others in my small group were talking about their hardships, I learned that we have to accept others and love them as Christians, as they are, no matter what they are going through. We may never go through those types of things. However we can try our best to understand what they are going through and shine God's light upon them, as God can see us in both the light and the darkness. Also while in Montreat we learned that our 'what if' fears can be turned into 'even if' this happens, God's light will shine unto us. One of my fears coming into this retreat was if I would make friends in my small group, but I accepted that everyone in that group probably has the same fear and committed to allowing myself to make friends and have fun. On that note, our youth group helped me make the most out of this experience by playing card games with me. The great chaperones also helped make this experience even more memorable, especially Lindsay and all of the cooks that committed their time to make sure we were all well fed. Overall, the whole Montreat Retreat was a great experience where I both learned more about and got closer to God as well as having great leaders who enhanced my experience here.

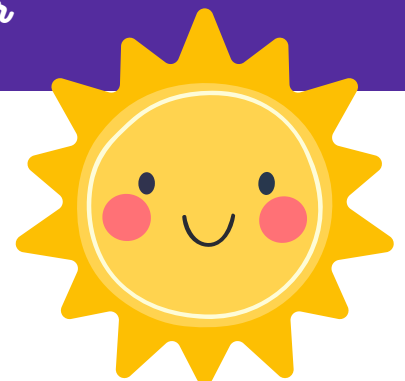
Luke Estes

This year was my first year Montreat and I could not be happier about deciding to go. I think the main reason that I decided to go was because linsy always talks about how fun it is and I had gone to a similar camp in middle school. I really enjoyed the theme of light my path. I felt like it personally related to me. One of the reasons I enjoyed this theme so much is because of the preachers. The preachers gave such great sermons that really touched my heart and I also understood them very well. Even if there was something that I didn't understand I could always talk to my small group about it and they would help me. A specific thing that I learned/talked about with my small group was that even when bad things happen in life God is still with you. I can personally relate to this because I feel that whenever bad things happen I start to question God. I learned from a few people in my small group that I'm not the only one who feels this way which is comforting. My group leader David also was very understanding and I'm so glad that he was my leader. Even outside of worship I still felt comfort though. I made new friends and tried new things. I want to thank all the at home leaders for just helping with meals and everything else. One of my favorite activities was the bubble party. I thought this activity was so fun because there are so many fun things to do. Lastly, just being able to create better friendships with our youth group was so much fun and I created so many stronger friendships. I had so much fun at Montreat this year and I can't wait to go back next year.

Elise Ullman

My time here at Montreat has been amazing. It was my first year and I couldn't have expected it to be better. I've learned so much about God's love and how He is always with us, no matter what we go through. The worship and messages really helped me feel closer to Him and reminded me that His plan for my life is good. I also had so much fun in my small group we played games, shared stories, and really got to know each other. It felt like a family, and I'm so thankful for the laughs and deep talks we had. Montreat has been a life-changing experience, and I'm leaving feeling more connected to God and excited to grow in my faith. I would like to thank my youth pastor Lindsey and along with all the other adults who came with us for making this experience possible and encouraging me to be myself.

Katherine Kuszmar



During my time at Montreat 2025 I learned and made so many long lasting memories that I will take back with me to Charlotte. This week was amazing and went by way too fast. I want to start off by sharing a phrase that changed my perspective of thinking from “what if” to “even if”. For example “what if i don’t choose the right college for me” and change it to “even if i don’t pick the right college for me i will still have god guiding me and support from friends and family. I thought that change of wording can help me think more positively and with an open mind. Another thing that stuck out to me was the phrase “Jesus's time was limited but his call is limitless” This shows that God's time on earth might have been short but his callings and the ability to follow him can continue forever. I also learned from the phrase “you don’t put a light under a basket, you put it on a lamp stand to shine out.” This phrase means that everyone has a light to share and you can’t keep it hidden or to yourself. You need to share it and shine the light with others because some may benefit from it. Comparing the first day of my small group to the last day has made me realize that you shouldn’t judge people before meeting the inside of them. I feel like it’s something we all do but just attending small groups and sharing our stories and opening “our suitcases” has made me realize this week that everyone has their own worries and traumatic things going on in life that you can’t see from the outside. So you should be kind to everyone no matter what. This year has definitely been one of the best keynote and worship speakers!! They talked so clearly and provided so many amazing and eye opening examples to understand what they’re trying to get across.

This week has really made me grow as a person and has made me become more open minded when it comes to things I may not be used to. Montreat is one of the main things I look forward to in the summer and I can't believe it's already over. The difference between the first day and the last day just shows how great our youth group is and the other churches around us. I'm so grateful for all the chaperones that attended this year and created so many memories and laughs such as the cup song and bonding over experiences. I have gained so many new friends and deeper relationships during this week that I will miss until next summer. The community at Montreat is truly so friendly and comforting to be around. I'm so happy I have this opportunity to make so many connections and learn so many new things and ways of thinking. I am already looking forward to next year!! Lastly I want to share that everyone has god by their side in the darkness or light and he has a path for you even when it might not feel like it. I also wanted to thank all the adult chaperones and Lindsey who volunteered at Montreat. I am so incredibly lucky to have a Youth leader as awesome as Lindsey is with us. Lindsey always makes me feel comfortable and is so easy to talk to. This year's montreat was honestly so fun and memorable. I loved the worship this year and actually understood it and took stuff back home with me. The night time food runs and just hanging out with our youth group and Lindsey were so memorable and such good bonding experiences. I am so grateful for a pastor like Lindsey. Even with everything she is going through, she still makes each of us feel so special and loved.

Addison Fraser



During my week at Montreat two very special sentences stood out to me during keynote and worship one being “You can’t hide a city on top of a mountain” this one stuck out to me because it shows how your own goodness can't stay hidden forever, you should go down the mountain to see and help everyone else's greatness shine just as much as yours does. My second take away is “You're not better than anyone and no one is better than you”. This impacts me because it shows how everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses and we all need to work together to help each other feel the fullest. You are just as equal as the person next to you and behind you. I enjoyed my small group very much but going into it I was nervous because you always have that thought in your head like what if I don’t make any friends or what if people won’t like me. As I walked in and looked around I noticed everyone else was feeling the same way that I was and I got to talk to everyone and see what they enjoy doing in their free time! I got especially close to my path finder group because we all had a lot in common including volunteering and our love for the movie Encanto. I enjoyed playing games in small groups like mafia and guess that adverb. I also enjoyed growing as a group with my church as we danced and sang together and coming back to the house to eat together. Some of the other girls and I learned how to do the cup song and made brackets together and shared some memorable laughs. After we got back home, we got to share what we enjoyed and did not enjoy about the day we got to go on late night food runs and I could really see God in how everyone was hanging out and everyone was getting along and everybody always wanted to go because we were all together having so much fun. All of the leaders and friends have made this year 2025 Montreat very special day for me and I look forward to coming back in the next few years to come!!

Brynn Holder

Spending a week at Montreat has been a gift I will always be thankful for. Throughout the week, SMPC has attended several worship services and keynotes, various recreation activities, shopping, small groups, and other spontaneous adventures with our youth group. Throughout the assorted activities, we have witnessed a continuous theme of God's presence and his light. Additionally, we have learned how to spread God's light. This includes listening to other people's opinions, treating everyone with kindness and empathy, and not holding back on your true self.

While we heard a handful of sermons, one particular sermon, spoken by Sam, focused on allowing your true personality and self to shine through regardless of how others may perceive you, or if you feel it is too much. This sermon resonated with me, along with several other members of our youth group. The concept also helped me to appreciate the people I can be my true self around. While the entire week has been full of spiritual growth and fulfillment, my favorite parts have been the little moments with my friends. Just sitting around at the house talking, getting a snack from the Huckleberry Cafe, and of course lots of bracelet making.

I was also allowed to participate in the Jeremiah Project. This was a group of people who helped to lead liturgy, interpret the scripture through skits, and carry out other parts of worship services. I enjoyed taking part in this and feeling like I had a bigger purpose in the service.

I truly feel I have grown closer to God over the week, and I plan to be more intentional with my daily actions as I try to spread God's light. I am thankful for every youth and chaperone who attended the trip and made it so special. I look forward to next year!

Elizabeth Glover

My week at Montreat was filled with inspiration, encouragement, direction, and God's Light. The conference stuck around the theme of "lighting my path". I learned many things however there were a few messages that really stood out to me.

The first was a simple message spoken at the first day of the conference and yet gave me so much direction. The message was that God not only works loudly in your life but silently too. I feel I struggle to really hear God's voice while others hear it clearly. I had never thought that God could work silently with people. Once I heard this message I felt connected to it instantly and things started making sense. I knew God was working for me. I just didn't know how. You don't need to always hear a clear, loud, strong voice in your head to believe that God is working for you. It can be silent, calm, and simple. God works in mysteriously different ways in everyone and I am so grateful I got to understand and experience that.

Another thing I learned was that a light does not shine to bring attention to themselves, rather to shine and bring attention to others. This reminded me to be humble and use my light for good, for others, and for God.

I also had the pleasure of having my mom come as a chaperone to Montreat. I was very excited for her to experience the awesome feeling that Montreat fills me with. I was also excited for her to experience the community and of course energizers. Montreat is a part of who I am and I was very happy she got to see this part of me. To future youth: do not be afraid to let your parents chaperone!

Finally as I go back down the mountain I am taking with me in my suitcase the lessons I learned, the friends I made, and the urge to continue living for God. I am super excited to shine God's light on others. Lastly, I would like to thank Lindsey, the chaperones, my mom, and my friends who shine God's light all over me.

Caroline Guy

During this week of Montreat, I became a different version of myself. I learned how to use my fears and worries to help light the path ahead of me. Furthermore, the theme of the week was "Light my Path". Each night we had worship with Sam, an amazing preacher. Throughout the week she taught us how God's light continues to shine in all of us with powerful sermons that were relatable and inspiring. I looked forward every night excited to hear Sam's stories and her teachings from God. She told us during the Wednesday sermon that we should not be afraid of our quiriness or our peculiarity, and used a suitcase as a metaphor. The suitcase, a metaphor for our personalities and physical appearances, represents everything we carry with us wherever we go, from school to work, new places, and even Montreat. Some people fear opening their suitcases and revealing their true selves to others. However, she encouraged us to embrace our uniqueness and showcase our talents and passions. I took this to heart, as it can be challenging to open up, especially in unfamiliar situations. But hearing her words related to me, filling me with courage and the Holy Spirit. I realized that I wasn't meant to hide my true self! I was meant to share my oddities and obsessions, like my love for singing and performing the Energizers, with my family after the week ends. Montreat provides me with an opportunity to express myself and my feelings in every way possible. It's a special gift to be here with my best friends, Lindsey, and the chaperones who guide me on my journey. I am incredibly grateful for the people I met this week, and I will cherish each and every one of them in my heart.

Camdyn Sheeler

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 My name is Lily Claire Jacobus and I have just finished my third year at Montreat and I am so sad that I only have one left. Montreat is truly such a special place full of god, peace, and kindness that I look forward to every year. The theme "light my path" truly spoke to me because we learned how we can never truly know our path and only God can. We learned that you must get off of the mountaintop and do hard things to show gods light. God will always be with us even in the hard times and sometimes the hard times are necessary. My small group showed me how people of all different backgrounds and lifestyles can all come together to worship god and meet new people. Montreat is something that I look forward to all year for all of those reasons.

Another reason that I love Montreat is because of the family that the south mecklenburg youth group is to me. Every year new people come to Montreat from our church and it is amazing to see how God's light affects everyone in different ways. Even the people who have never been here before truly enjoy the experience and I love being able to see it through their eyes as well as my own. The girls and guys on this trip have such a special bond and I will never forget the friends I have made throughout all of my time in youth group and at Montreat.

This trip would not have been possible if it wasn't for our amazing REVEREND LINDSEY ODOM!!!!!! She truly is and I quote "the coolest youth pastor here". She is so much fun, such a hard worker and is such an amazing role model for all of us. She shows us what it means to spread God's light in more ways than one and I am forever grateful for her and her knowledge that she has chosen to share with us. Also all of the amazing chaperones make Montreat such an amazing time for us youth and make it so we do not have to worry about anything except for furthering our relationship with God. We are so grateful to have amazing adults who are willing to spend their week with us. SHOUT OUT J HONEY AND G MONEY (Jeana and Geoffrey Lee), WE WILL MISS YOU NEXT YEAR!!!!

I also wanted to give a shoutout to Lindsey. I, along with the rest of the youth, love you and appreciate you so much. You are truly the best youth leader and I could not imagine anyone else that could be leading me on my faith journey. You are so special in so many ways and I see so much of God's light within you. I thank God everyday that you are in my life and for the blessing of you being my youth leader. Montreat this year was truly such a special experience and I am still on a high from this week. I am seeing and shining God's light as we speak. While I have always been excited to grow my faith, I never expected to be this moved by God's word before and a lot of that is because of Lindsey and the other adult chaperones who made this Montreat such a special year. Everyone at our church and in our youth group is amazing and exhibits God's light.

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.

Lily Claire Jacobus



Thank you SMPC Youth! My senior year at Montreat was very special. I made a ton of new friends and relationships that will last a lifetime. My first 2 years at Montreat were so much fun and I learned so much, but this year was a little bit different. Most of my youth group friends (Collin Cushman, Hank Jacobus, Blake Randle, Xander Case, Hunter Fant, Jack Nielsen, and many more) graduated last year. I was very unsure about going to Montreat for the Summer '25 youth conference. Although I had a lot of doubts about going to Montreat this summer, I knew once I arrived in Black Mountain, NC they would all wash away. Now that we are nearing the end of the week I am so glad that I came. One thing that really stuck with me was found in Matthew 5:14 "A city on top of a hill cannot be hidden". I believe that this verse represents that the gift God has given you cannot be hidden no matter how hard you try. I would also like to give a huge thanks to our reverend Lindsey Odom. Lindsey is the closest thing the world has to a living and walking angel. I've watched Lindsey go through thick and thin but one thing that never changes about Lindsey is her work ethic. She is the hardest worker I have ever met and that's something I adore about her. Lindsey has also always been there for me and helped me through some very tough times. So thank you Lindsey, I love you so much. I would also like to thank G money and J honey for always being there for me especially while I'm going into a new chapter of my life. Thank you for opening new opportunities in my life and helping me grow not only in my faith but also as a young man. Thank you Mr. Steve Williams, Mr. Wyatt Hicks, Mrs. Kara Guy for not only chaperoning Montreat but also raising amazing kids (Evan, Emery, and Caroline) that have helped me grow so much in my faith. Finally I would like to thank the SMPC youth group for giving me a safe place to worship and pray. Y'all mean the world to me and I seriously don't know where I would be without y'all. I can't express how happy I am that Jilly Young, Evan Williams, Logan Elliott, and George Elledge came on the Montreat trip for the first time and fit right in with the group and made it feel even more like a second family for me. I hope y'all understand how special Montreat is and the SMPC youth program is and become involved in both. Another thing that has stuck with me this week was said in worship this morning "The community turns out what if's into even if's. I believe this shows that no one is alone no matter what they are going through. Montreat isn't only about worshiping and meeting new people but it's also about paving your own path while following and trusting God. Thank you SMPC for always being there for me. I will take all these experiences with me as I go off to NC State and will never forget them. Thank you.

Davis Lee

During my week at Montreat I felt the light of God all around me. The theme of Montreat was light my path, and I saw light everywhere this week. Montreat is such a special place where I feel closest to God and it is a week that I look forward to all year. The topics this week were very relatable to my life and I was faced with confronting and thinking about many ideas that can be uncomfortable to talk about with other people. We talked about how God is the light in dark times and his presence will always be with us because light is the companion to darkness. This speaks to me because it reassures me that God has been with me through uncertain times such as my sister, Elowen's recent kidney transplant, my baby cousin's recent heart surgery, stress from a sport I loved, uncertainty of what my future holds for me and times of grief. Another topic from this week that stuck with me was the idea that we don't need a bunch of lights, because God is the light for us. During the keynote Friday, we talked about how mirrors reflect light, and we were then told that we need to be the mirrors that reflect the light of God. This is something that I can take into my life outside of Montreat by trying to be a reflection of God's light and love to people who may not know Him yet or have a strong relationship with Him. I also really enjoyed my small group this week and I am so thankful for all of the connections I made. I made so many new friends this week and really believe that this week has helped me grow stronger in my Faith and walk with Christ. I would like to thank my small group leader, Preston Shealy, my youth and back home group leader, Lindsey Odom, all of the adult chaperones from SMPC- Kara Guy, Wyatt Hicks , J Honey, G Money, Steve Williams, and the Montreat Staff for making this week possible. I cannot wait for the next year of Montreat..

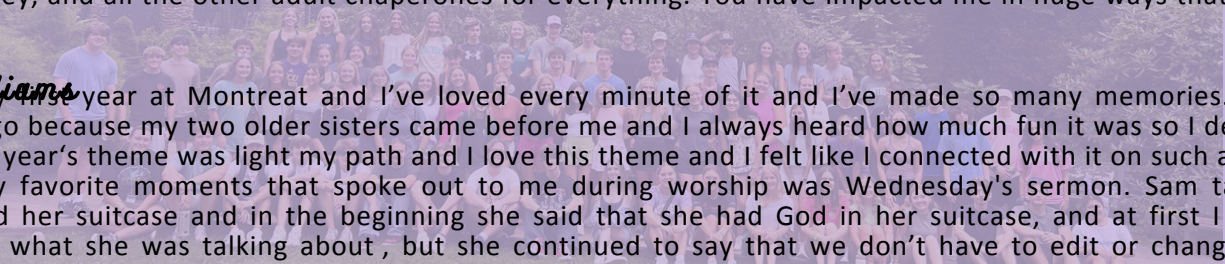
Olivia Smith

During my time at Montreat I was able to learn and connect to things and people that I will cherish forever. This was my first time ever coming to Montreat and I was lucky enough to be able to join my best friend's church (SMPC). Monday night's worship created such a great starting point for the rest of the week at Montreat by talking about our fears and our "what ifs?" The past few months of my life have been twisted and turned in every which way but letting my brain think about the fear I have been holding inside made me realize, why am I so afraid? There may not be solutions to whatever we are all going through but there is something we can say, and that is "even if." One of my biggest "what if's" was "what if I never become cancer free?" Montreat has made me realize that even if something doesn't work out, "God's light is within us." I absolutely love that and I think for every type of what if, we have each other, a community of people who only want the best for you. Another night of worship we talked about how Jesus came to be with us exactly like we are. I learned that we sometimes tuck away or hide a part of ourselves because we are worried about what others think. Our worship speaker, Sam said one thing that I want to live by; "When someone tells you to hide or edit any part of who you are, you go out and get a bigger suitcase." When I read that or listen to someone say it I get chills because it is such a strong sentence that I know impacted every single person in that room. Lastly, I wanna talk about how "We don't shine God's light by ourselves." I feel it is hard sometimes for anyone to ask for help or to open up about struggling. When realizing that together is better and the only way to move forward is through community, friends, family, etc, we are able to shine God's light more than ever. I am so unbelievably grateful to have experienced such a great week with some of my best friends. Going through worship, keynote, small group, back home time, eating meals together, playing games, energizers and everything else that I experienced here, has impacted me in a way that is for the better and unexplainable. I enjoyed this week SO much and I just want everyone to know that God's light is within all of us and no one is alone.

Jilly Young

Montreat was such a good thing for me to attend. I had such an amazing time and it was a monumental thing for my faith. Originally, I did not want to go to Montreat. I had not been that involved in the youth group at SMPC during my high school years due to ice hockey and not really having a desire to attend much after Confirmation, but I regret it so much. When the college freshman boys came to Montreat and played UNO and pickleball with us as well as ate dinner with us, it was so much fun. It made me realize that this is who I want to surround myself with and I wish I was here to do all of that and experience things like Montreat with them before they graduated. However, you live and learn. I took away so many things from Montreat like new friends and relationships, a source of community, an increased sense of faith, and what it means to love. One evening, I was talking to Davis Lee at Montreat while we played cards and it was not just about the cards, it was about us talking about life and growing closer and that's something I will never forget. We talked till almost 4 AM in the morning and I am so thankful for Davis and him stepping up as a leader and striving to make everyone in our group feel welcomed, including myself who came to Montreat for the first time this summer. Davis and I talked about life and college next year. We also talked about Montreat and how it is such a special place where you can go up to anyone, and talk to them, and you are almost guaranteed to make a new connection and friend. That's something that is so special and if I were an incoming freshman I would do that same thing in trying to make new friends and enhance social skills. Montreat is also so much more than a special place where you meet new people and form new relationships, it is a place where you grow tremendously in your faith, and I think more people need to know that.

Montreat has given me friends and memories that will last with me forever. I think I truly understood that after the candle light ceremony. When we started sharing our highs and lows, it was hard to listen to everyone's highs and lows because it was something that I know I can't be apart of again since I am graduating, and that's truly a sad thing. Everyone in that room including Katherine Kuszmar, LC Jacobus, Joshua Ellis, Logan Elliot, Olivia Smith, Emery Hicks, Elise Ullman, Luke Estes, Haley Davis, Elizabeth Glover, Caroline Guy, Camdyn Sheeler, Judah Estes, Brynn Holder, Siena Carr, George Elledge, Addison Fraser, Jilly Young, Davis Lee and all the chaperones gave me the chance to be myself and be accepted as the person I am, not who everyone wants me to be or expects me to be. That is another special thing about Montreat as it gives people the chance to be themselves in front of God and also in the open without any judgement. Everyone has grown and changed from Montreat including myself. There were numerous moments where I broke down and Lindsey and J honey (Jeana Lee) hugged me, comforted me, and gave me a shoulder to cry on and in that moment, that's all I needed. I can't ever repay J Honey for allowing me to have that moment with her. I will miss everyone that has guided me on my faith journey, especially Davis Lee, Josh Ellis, Logan Elliot, George Elledge, and Lindsey. Throughout any time of my life, I always know Lindsey is the one person I could call and she would have my back. Thank you for that. I will definitely be giving you that call at 2 am and maybe even calling the boys before they go off to college to go do another late night snack run just for a little bit of Montreat nostalgia. Thank you to SMPC youth group, Lindsey, and all the other adult chaperones for everything. You have impacted me in huge ways that I will never forget.



Evan Williams This was my first year at Montreat and I've loved every minute of it and I've made so many memories. I originally decided to go because my two older sisters came before me and I always heard how much fun it was so I decided to go myself. This year's theme was light my path and I love this theme and I felt like I connected with it on such a deep level. Some of my favorite moments that spoke out to me during worship was Wednesday's sermon. Sam talked about baggage and her suitcase and in the beginning she said that she had God in her suitcase, and at first I was a little confused at what she was talking about, but she continued to say that we don't have to edit or change ourselves because God made every piece of me and I thought that really helped me because that's something I struggle with sometimes but I can just be myself and God won't judge me for that. And at the end, when she opened the suitcase, there was a mirror in the bag, and I thought that would help show that I have God within me and God's light is within me. I also love Thursday's worship, saying that you have to come down from the mountain and we have to face darkness that way God can transform us and God will always be with us, even in the darkness and that we have to come down and share God's light with others. These were the things that really spoke to me. I also had so much fun with our youth group at the house and I am so grateful for my dad and getting him to experience Montreat with me was really cool. And all the other leaders in our house were so amazing. Jina was so loving and comforting to us the new people to the group and Kara as well. They were also super helpful in making meals etc. I love going to pickle ball and the fun parties after worship. I especially like the bubble party. I've never done something like that so it was really cool. I also love variety shows. It was so fun to see the different acts perform and seeing that also showed me that it took a lot of courage for those people to go up on the stage and how such a wonderful community is and how they don't judge others and how much we support one another. I also loved my small group and my small group leader. He was such a kind and funny person and super comforting to everyone in my group. It was such an amazing group of people. They just had so many stories in their life and our small group got very vulnerable at times and it was hard watching other people get emotional and just hearing about those stories made me feel for them, and a lot of the stories were very traumatic And it made me feel like some people have a rougher path than others, but God is still with everybody, and everyone has a different path than others. It also made me feel grateful for my life as well. But in all I had a lot of fun at Montreat and all the memories with the SMPC Youth group and I can't wait for next year. I love how closer I got with everybody here and I had such a wonderful time.

Emery Hicks