

# Student-led discipleship impacts Tarleton University

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The Paradigm college ministry at First Baptist Church in Stephenville has seen tremendous growth this year. A story featuring pastoral staff perspectives on the ministry can be [read here](#). How do Tarleton students describe the impact of the ministry?

Ella Murray is a senior at Tarleton, set to graduate in December with a degree to teach special education. She has served as a challenge group leader—small discipleship groups for college students that take place around the Tarleton campus and Stephenville—for a couple of years, and she works in the children’s ministry at First Stephenville.

Murray grew up in Stonegate Church in Midland and attended a private Christian high school. However, she didn’t always feel like she understood all that Christianity was or could be before she went to college and a friend invited her to a Paradigm service.

The ministry has helped her to grow in her faith and specifically has helped her understand how to study the Bible effectively, she said.



Ella Murray leads a Challenge group through First Baptist Stephenville’s Paradigm college ministry.  
(Courtesy Photo)

Murray’s first visit to the Paradigm worship service showed her what

worship can be like when everyone who is there is intentional about worship, serious about knowing Jesus and really wants to be there.

She was anxious to become more involved with a ministry like that, she explained.

Becoming involved with Paradigm and First Baptist Stephenville changed her life, Murray asserted.

“I don’t think my life would look the way it does now,” she said, if she hadn’t “gotten plugged in” to Paradigm and First Baptist Stephenville.

She expected to go to college “and party and have all this freedom,” but she’s grateful for God’s compassion in showing her a different path, she said.

Murray believes finding her place in Paradigm hasn’t just changed her time in college, but the overall trajectory of her life.

Murray expects to make disability inclusion in the life of the church a big part of her future. She sees it as a “certain call” now that she “didn’t have before this.”

## **Catalyst for growth**

She also noted she’s learned to be more intentional about seeing opportunities to share her faith with the people she meets. She doesn’t miss a chance to tell someone she bumps into about Jesus.

The “immense growth” the ministry has seen this year has been notable, she said.

She’s thought about what might have been the catalyst for the extreme growth, and she believes Drake Wayland stepping into the college minister role at First Baptist Stephenville after a period of time without a dedicated

college leader has been a key element, she said.

He had vision to focus on sharing Christ with others and “he’s passing that on to us.” She noted, “you can tell it’s not coming from a place of pride,” but a sense of assurance that “God is going to do this through the ministry.”

“It’s just been so cool and exciting,” to see the vision spread and the ministry grow, she noted. “I’ve just never seen anything like it.”

## God is moving



Luke Torbert, far right, poses with three other Paradigm ministry mission trip participants. (Courtesy Photo)

Luke Torbert is a sophomore who also has been serving as a challenge group leader this year. He grew up in a Baptist church in Crawford, but he said college is where he began to get more serious about his faith.

He remembers asking God to give him a purpose in college, and “for the rest of my life.” He sees leading a challenge group for freshmen this year as “that purpose being fulfilled.”

“God has just been moving on the campus,” he said. The Paradigm worship service has grown so much it’s had to move out of the Paradigm building where it had been housed and into the worship center at First Baptist Stephenville to accommodate all the students, Torbert noted.

And he personally had several opportunities to have gospel conversations with students this year. He said even people who have no church

background at all are demonstrating an openness to Jesus and a “willingness to go all in.”

Torbert said it’s been neat to see the relationship between the older people in the church and Paradigm.

Some adults from the congregation come to Bible study in the Paradigm building with the college students on Sunday mornings. He said he’s never seen that before and he appreciates the wisdom they bring.

The Paradigm ministry at First Baptist Stephenville has made a huge difference in his life, Torbert said. He learned how to lead his brother to Christ, something he noted he didn’t think he ever would have done without the training he received from Paradigm.

He’s also learned how to build discipleship relationships with new believers and “help them in their new walk,” Torbert explained. The new believers’ faith and Torbert’s faith continue to grow through those connections.

## **Redefining the college experience for a campus**

First Baptist Stephenville has become “the place to be on a Sunday morning,” so he has plenty of opportunities to keep building relationships with other dedicated disciples of Jesus.

“I think Paradigm has redefined the college experience,” Torbert said.

People think college is “getting drunk and doing all the drugs and doing all the things,” but Paradigm, “for Tarleton, is turning that culture around.”

“It’s noticeable,” Torbert asserted. Spiritual conversations can be heard all around the campus. Students are wearingshirts with Christian messages. Students are reading the Bible.

“We’re just flipping that culture of, you know, doing all the things that are supposed to be fun” and life-giving and trading them for “what does God say about life?”

And both students are grateful they got to be a part of that at Tarleton this year.