



# First Friday News & Views



Monthly Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.

December 2023 | Volume 28 | Issue 12

**Next Meeting**  
**Friday**  
**December 1**  
**7:00 a.m.**



**Location**  
**Hoyt Sherman**  
**15<sup>th</sup> & Woodland**  
**Des Moines**



**Speaker**  
**Reverend**  
**Gregory**  
**Neal**



**Website**  
**ffbc Iowa.org**



## A Serving of Spam

by Byron Huff, Board President



The majority of us rely on email as an essential tool for communication, both at work and home. Most of us have also had to deal with problems both receiving and sending emails due to controls and filters that attempt to prevent spam. Spam has become the dark horse that was born out of the desire to send mass emails as part of many companies' desire to expand their business. Sadly, criminal elements have also utilized email in an attempt to gain financially by sending misleading messages; this leads many of us to be wary of opening some emails with attachments or links.

FFBC moved to distribution of our newsletter via email which had many positive benefits, including a significant reduction in the cost to produce and distribute because we no longer needed to print and mail a physical document. The use of email to gather RSVP's for our monthly meetings has been used far longer, but that process required manually keeping track of attendance. SignUpGenius is a newer tool FFBC pays to help tally the count, but it is a service that relies on the email ecosystem.



SignUpGenius has had delivery issues that had been reasonably managed, but of late, there have been a significant number of messages rejected by various email systems. Microsoft email ecosystem (Hotmail, MSN, Outlook) is rejecting emails sent from SignUpGenius; they deem them as spam/junk. The workaround is to use [info@ffbc Iowa.org](mailto:info@ffbc Iowa.org) to send the bounced emails which will be required going forward.

Delivery of our newsletter has relied on using our [info@ffbc Iowa.org](mailto:info@ffbc Iowa.org) address which has worked well with a handful of bounces each month that were usually caused by an outdated email. The November newsletter mailing saw 227 Gmail addresses bounced; we have tried contacting Google, but this seems to be a futile endeavor. Nicholas Williams, FFBC resident techie, found a service that offers a robust delivery of emails service which has been tested by resending the bounced Gmail addresses. We plan to continue using this service and will be exploring if it can be used in place of SignUpGenius to track RSVP's.

While this month's newsletter article may not be fun or sexy, I think it is helpful for our membership to understand the back story of how we keep this organization running. Email delivery will likely continue to be an evolving process as we deal with the everchanging war on spam. The moral of the story is to keep us updated if your email address changes and visit our website for our newsletters and meeting information if you have not received our email notices. The meeting announcement (RSVP) and newsletter are emailed seven days and four days respectively prior to the FFBC meeting.

# PRIDE NIGHT

WITH THE IOWA WOLVES  
SUNDAY DECEMBER 3 | 3PM

Come join the Iowa Wolves and the First Friday Breakfast Club as they host the Indiana Mad Ants for our PRIDE Community Celebration Night!






## Briefs & Shorts



Thanks to **CJ Petersen** for introducing our November speaker, **Evan Equality Peters**. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website, to **Nicholas Williams** for managing our Microsoft IT infrastructure, and to **David Wilfahrt** for managing FFBC's finances. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor. *Thank you to all our newsletter contributors!*

The **deadline** for the 2024 **January newsletter** will be **December 27**. If you have something on your mind to share, type it up and email it to Wade ([wadecpetersen@gmail.com](mailto:wadecpetersen@gmail.com)) by the deadline.



**Fundraising efforts** are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have awarded over **\$450,000** for scholarships to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a tax-deductible **contribution** online or by sending a check.



A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the **Donor Direct** program of **United Way**. Contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.



"I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights."  
-- Maya Angelou






oneiowa  
 **LGBTQ  
 WORKPLACE  
 CULTURE  
 SUMMIT**

Embracing Diversity. Transforming Workplaces.

Virtual Event Series  
 Nov 1 & 8th | Dec 6 & 13th



The **LGBTQ Workplace Culture Summit** is an annual event where industry professionals share insights on building safe and inclusive workplaces. Attendees will gain a better understanding of the LGBTQ community, learn how to create inclusive policies, attract and retain LGBTQ talent, and become effective allies for meaningful change in their workplaces.

The event takes place over four virtual sessions in November and December.

Explore sessions and buy tickets at [oneiowa.org](http://oneiowa.org).

**Session #3:** December 6th / 2-4 p.m.  
 TBA

**Session #4:** December 13th / 2-4 p.m.  
 Empowering Workplaces: Workplace Advocacy Strategies Against Anti-LGBTQ Legislation



**Thank you!**

Thank you to **PC Print Center** and Tim Lumadue for the generosity and support to FFBC with reduced production costs for printing.

Please return their support by visiting:

[pcprintcenter.com](http://pcprintcenter.com)



# Future Speakers

**January 5:**

**Jennifer Konfrst**

Iowa House Minority Leader

**February 2:**

**Ben Page**

Director, DSM Parks & Recreation

**March 1:**

**Rob Sand**

Iowa State Auditor

**April 5:**

**Melissa O'Neil**

CEO, Central Iowa Shelter & Services

**May 3:**

**Keenan Crow**

Director of Policy & Advocacy, One Iowa

**June 7:**

**Sarah Brown-Wessling**

2010 National Teacher of the Year

**July:**

**Donor-Member**

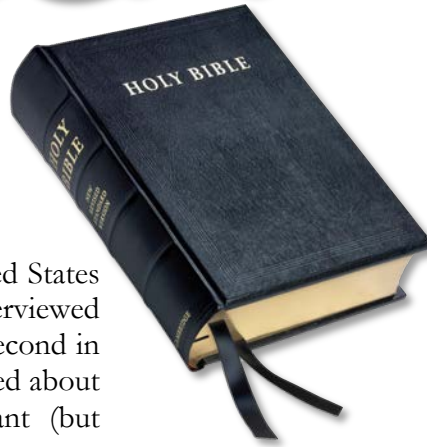
**Summer Party**





# Theocracy on Our Horizon?

by Jonathan Wilson



The recently selected Speaker of the United States House of Representative, Mike Johnson, was interviewed shortly after being given that title – putting him second in line to the presidency. When asked what he believed about a variety of current political topics, his flippant (but apparently serious) reply was, essentially, that if anyone wants to know his position on whatever the topic, just read the Bible. Read the Bible?!

Get this; the vast majority of those who actually own a Bible, whether they read it regularly or not, own one Bible -- ONE TRANSLATION of the Bible. There are more than 450 English translations of the Bible (and lots more translations in a multitude of other languages). I have half a dozen English translations of the Bible on my book shelf. Turn to the same scripture in each of them and try to read in unison the “inerrant word of God,” and it will sound like speaking in tongues -- gibberish. Protestant Christians and Roman Catholic Christians don’t even agree on what the Bible is. Protestants say there are something like 65 books, and Catholics say it’s more like 73.

I once had a contractor acquaintance who was a self-styled evangelical Christian. He told me that he was recently back from a church mission to a country in South America. I asked him what the mission of this mission was. He replied matter-of-factly that they were there to help build a Christian church. According to him, in the local community of **several thousand**, there were just **twelve** Christians; “All the rest were Catholics.” By his definition of “Christian,” Roman Catholics did not qualify.

But there’s more. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, there are more than 45,000 – yes, 45,000 – “Christian” denominations in the world, more than 200 in the United States of America. Unfortunately, they distinguish themselves from one another by biblical interpretations on a variety of issues that are, most generously, very nuanced and, in my opinion, somewhat petty. They have to emphasize those differences in order to perpetuate their “brand,” and maintain their identity and continuity, while playing down things on which they agree with other Christian denominations in their understanding of scripture.

But there’s still more. Assuming the unlikely agreement on what the Bible actually is, such as the number of books that qualify for inclusion, and the hypothetical,

singular translation into English, for example, there remains the need for interpretation. Even assuming agreement on what the Bible is and what translation is controlling, there will remain room, even the necessity, for interpretation (and the need to raise money for the church budget). Thus, the need for clergy. If the Bible were all that crystal clear on a myriad of important topics, there would be no need for biblical scholars -- educated theologians -- in the pulpit. Instead, “Here’s the good book; read it; and then behave yourself accordingly.” End sentence; drop mic.

But there is still even more. It’s called critical thinking. One of my copies of the English translation of the Bible has quotes attributable to Jesus printed in red, a wonderful feature. Jesus warns against false prophets (Matthew 7:15). Few clues are provided for discerning false prophecy, and I would suggest that even false prophets are not wrong about everything. It is not the proverbial choice between “all or nothing.” There was a day when biblical interpretation came only from priests; the Protestant tradition espouses the notion of the “priesthood of all believers.” That notion has grown in favor among Roman Catholics as well over the course of time.

We have God-given intellect, some more than others. But we are called to use our intellect when hearing the proffered interpretation of the Bible by our pastors. Try this: if what is proffered is contrary to the Gospel (that is, good news . . . for *everyone*), that interpretation is a strong candidate for false prophecy.

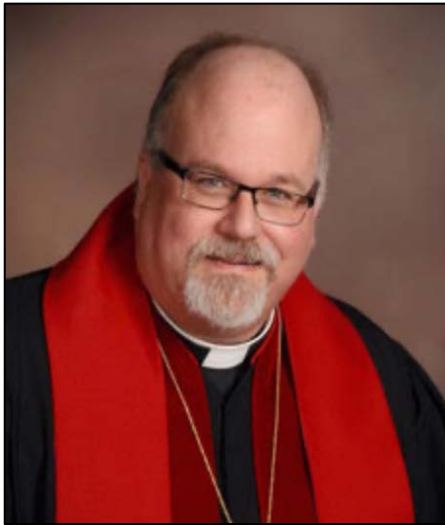
All of this is to make the case that the second in line to the presidency has expressed a worrisome deference to “the Bible,” as if there were just one and no need for interpretation. Simplistic and a dangerous signal in a pluralistic, multi-racial society that claims allegiance to democracy and the free exercise of religion, rather than aspiring to recognized examples of theocracy like can be found in places like Iran and Afghanistan. We have been forewarned. We can do better, and should.





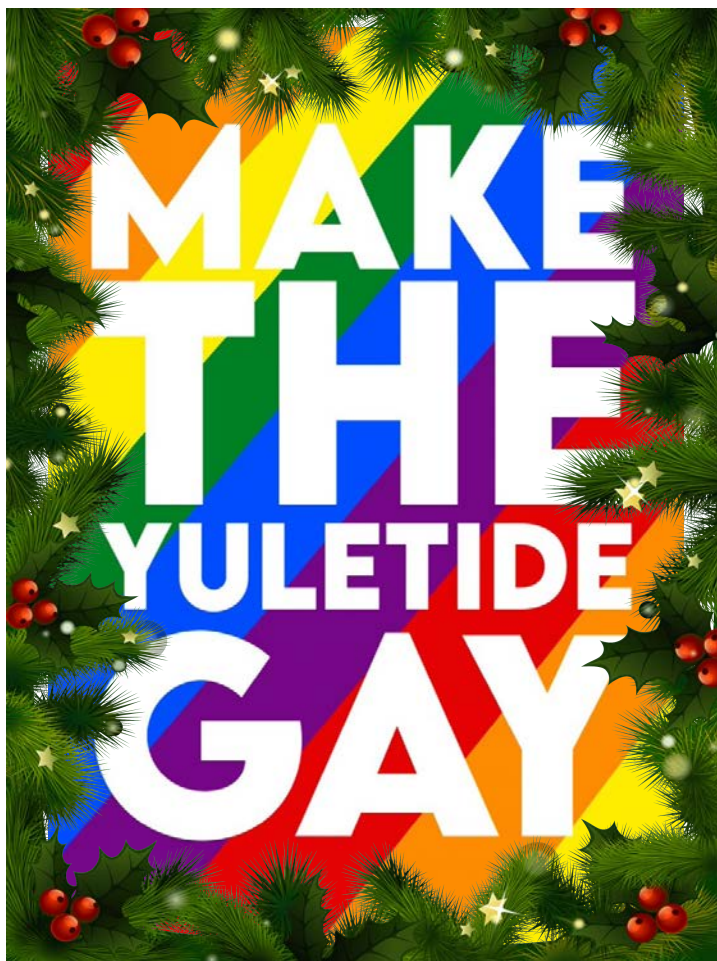
## December Speaker

# Reverend Dr. Gregory Neal



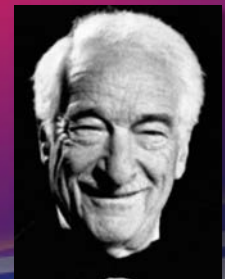
The **Reverend Dr. Gregory S. Neal** is a graduate of Southern Methodist University and Duke University where his studies included extensive work in Bible, Theology, Worship, and the Sacraments. While having been trained to be a Christian educator, as an ordained United Methodist minister, Dr. Greg's heart and soul can be found in the mission and ministry of the local church as an agent for change in society. Prior to coming to Grace UMC as Senior Pastor, he served for more than 30 years in the North Texas Conference, leading a multi-ethnic church, two Reconciling congregations, two inner-city churches, and a vibrant university church. He is gifted in helping congregations to think and plan strategically for times of change and is dedicated to helping people grow in faith and love toward God and their neighbor. He is the author of several books, including *Grace Upon Grace: Sacramental Theology and the Christian Life* and *Seeking the Shepherd's Arms: Reflections from the Pastoral Side of Life*.

Greg is married to Kade Rogers, who is a motivational speaker, a specialist in Communications and Administration, an accomplished singer/songwriter, and an activist for the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in The United Methodist Church. Together, they enjoy going to movies, plays, and concerts, watching a wide variety of TV shows, domestic and international travel, eating out and cooking at home. Over the past few years, they have engaged in ministry together in the local church and the LGBTQ community, each complimenting the gifts and graces of the other.



**“Santa Claus has the right idea. Visit people once a year.”**

(Victor Borge)



# November Speaker Gets Standing Ovation

by Gary Moore



Adam Peters, Director of Operations for Clock, Inc. was introduced by his close friend and September's FFBC speaker CJ Peterson. Both have shared an interest and passion for political activism and have been active in LGBTQ+ advocacy for some time. Adam first strikes you as a very young man, but his speech quickly demonstrates that his energy, experience, and ability to verbalize his command of LGBTQ+ issues sets him apart as a leader and organizer. He came to talk about CLOCK, Inc., an LGBTQ+ Community Center, a resource for Iowa and Illinois in the Quad City area, an area with approximately 400,000 population.

His description of Clock spoke to a highly active community center that supports eight different support groups for young people, adults, trans, and family members; counseling, LGBTQ+ awareness training; Clothing Closet, Chest Binder Program, Family Events, Computer Lab, and Library. Clock at present has two staff and relies heavily on volunteers. It also emphasizes the building of community partnerships. In its short five-year history, Clock, Inc. has expanded to offer a wide range of services.

Clock's Executive Director is Chase Norris. Chase Norris grew up in a small town outside of Peoria, Illinois. After graduating from Eastern Illinois University in 2014 with his bachelor's in psychology, he came out as female-to-male transgender and began his medical transition. In 2015, Chase accepted a position at Western Illinois University in Moline as a counselor education graduate student. During Chase's internship, he started a group for five people, the very first LGBTQ+ group at his internship site. After finishing his Master's and not wanting to abandon the group, Chase opening Clock, Inc.

The center is open on Christmas and Thanksgiving for those lacking family and/or support on the holidays. Last year, 40 attended and expressed they would not have had any place to go if not for that event. Clock has offered a Prom event for LGBTQ+ youth (50 attended last year) as well as programming for National Coming Out Day. Adam spoke of a thank you letter about the Coming Out program where the writer noted that she had lived in the closet and hid a core piece of herself from the people in her life. "It was isolating and depressing and hurt me in ways that I didn't even realize." Our stories matter -- a reoccurring theme that all LGBTQ+ activists recount.

Adam then shared more of his own personal story of being raised in Walcott, Iowa, known for the country's largest truck stop. At a young age, Adam was called names that he didn't even know their meaning; by junior high age when he understood, he used his natural instincts to suppress those feelings with heightened involvement in church, choir, and other activities.



November Speaker



In high school, he started to develop feelings for a close friend. "Those days were rough. I couldn't tell this guy I liked him because if I did, it meant I was marching on the road to hell.... There was no one to turn to and the thought of self-harm started to flood in and made me think it was my only option." How often have we heard similar stories from our youth?

Adam would throw himself into political volunteering after coming out of college and to his parents. He was active in a number of campaigns. Adam noted that during his volunteer work for Pete Buttigieg, Pete so wisely stated, "The more you know about exclusion, the more you think about belonging. We have a crisis of belonging in this country."

Adam spoke of meeting with local legislators concerning trans youth, and through their discussions, feeling like the legislators really understood how policy could hurt and endanger youth. But then those same legislators would come to Des Moines and vote for the party-supported harm to youth, which was maddening.

Adam noted misinformation and demonization are fueling a dangerous environment for LGBTQ+ Americans. "Gay people aren't pedophiles. Drag queens aren't groomers. Trans people are not mentally ill. Pride is not a month of woke indoctrination. Straight folks don't have a straight pride month because no one is passing laws to ban being cisgender or heterosexual. LGBTQ+ people have been here since the dawn of time and we will be here far after this current wave of bigoted hate finally dies away."

Adam concluded by saying, "This front porch is open to all. I'm going to quit preaching to the choir here. Long story short, we need more community centers. We need more Iowans fighting the fight."



# November Meeting Photo Gallery

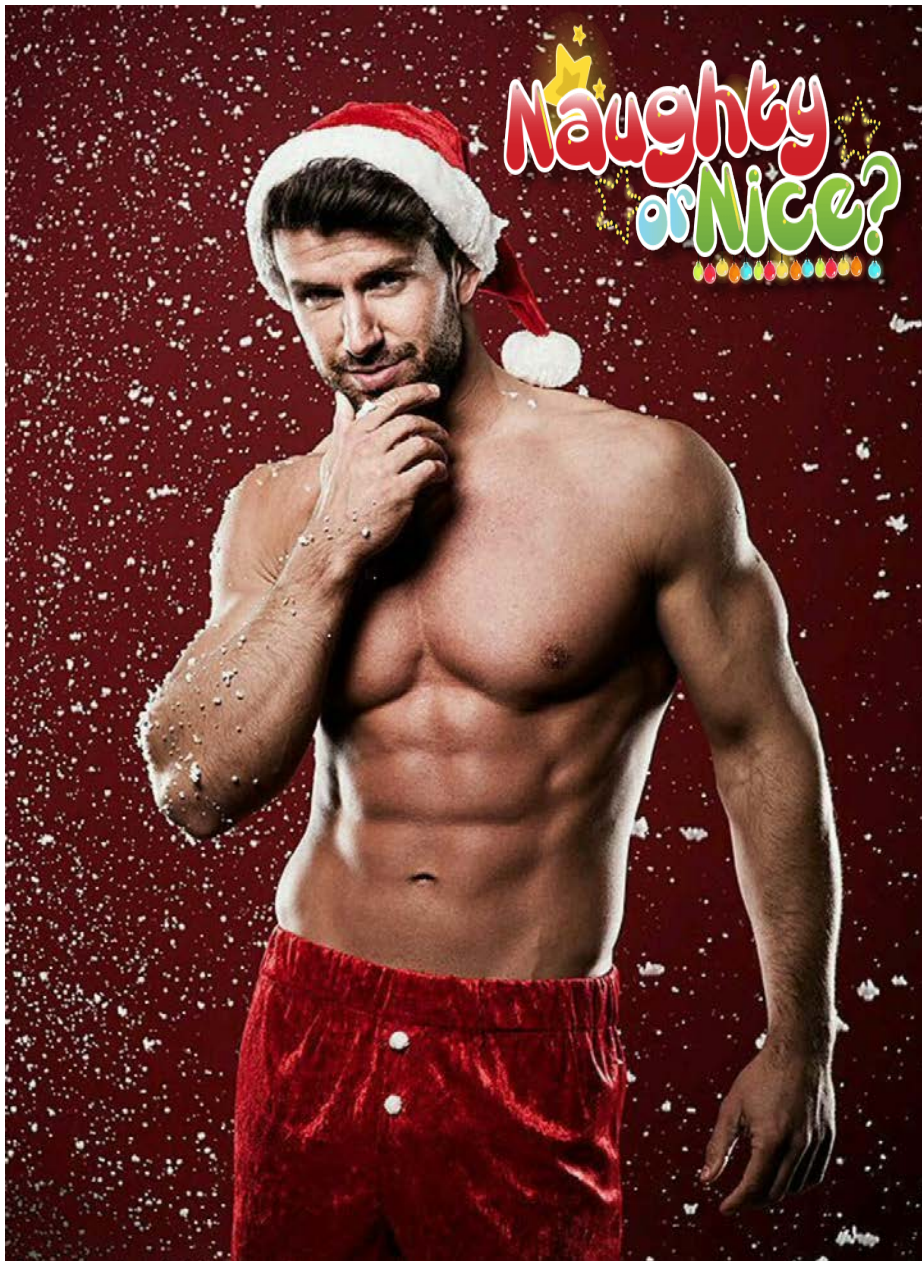
Photos by  
Gary Moore & Wade Petersen



CJ Petersen Introduces  
November Speaker,  
Adam Peters



# Naughty or Nice?



## FFBC Membership

FFBC membership is open to men who self-identify as gay, bisexual, or transgender, and their allies. We welcome all guests, regardless of sexual orientation or gender. Meetings are held the first Friday of every month from 7:00 a.m. - 8:15 a.m. at Hoyt Sherman Place in Des Moines. The following membership and guest rates help us cover our food and facility costs.

### In-Person Meeting Rates (Members & Guests)

**Annual Rate: \$180**  
(12 consecutive meetings)

**Quarterly Rate: \$48**  
(3 consecutive meetings)

**Month-by-Month: \$18**

**First Time or  
One-Time Attendee: \$15**

**Full-time Student: \$8**

**No charge to attend via Zoom**

### Payment Options

Cash or check at the meeting

Credit card prior to the meeting at [www.ffbciaowa.org](http://www.ffbciaowa.org); visit the Membership tab

### Meeting Schedule

6:30 a.m. - Doors open

6:45 a.m. - Breakfast service  
begins

7:00 a.m. - Meeting  
begins





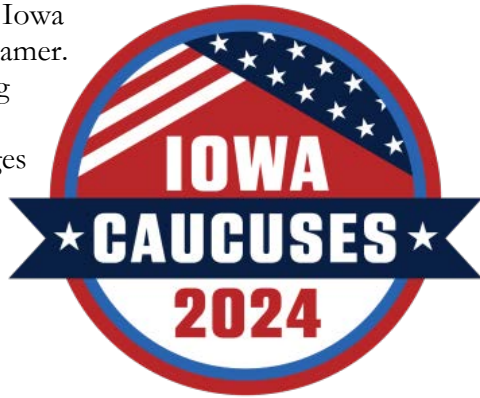
# Caucus Chaos



by Supervisor Matt McCoy  
Polk County, 1<sup>st</sup> District



As we prepare for the upcoming caucuses, now is a good time to reflect on the candidates, political parties, and media. The biggest development that has occurred recently is the withdrawal of U.S. Senator Tim Scott in the republican presidential primary race. Scott spent tens of millions of dollars trying to convince Iowans that his special brand of hate and evangelicalism would be the answer to the ills that America faces. With all that money spent, he never really passed Governor DeSantis or former U.N. Ambassador and former Governor Nikki Haley in the Iowa polls. The shift from DeSantis to Haley has been like watching a Hershey bar melt on an Iowa sidewalk in July. Haley has now earned the endorsement of former Governor Terry Branstad, former Ambassador to Barbados, and former Iowa State Senator Mary Kramer. Smart money is betting that Haley finishes a strong second and edges out DeSantis, even with his remarkable spending and endorsement from Iowa's Governor Kim Reynolds.



Recent polling indicates on the democratic side that President Joe Biden is under water in six of the swing states that he won in the last cycle to narrowly become president in 2020. While this is concerning, it's important to remember the following: 1. the election is a year away; 2. the polling is only showing a Trump/Biden head-to-head and a third-party candidate could move results; and 3. Trump's legal ensnarement is extremely problematic and expected to get worse over the next several months with the potential to face a February or March trial on the January 6 seditious charges.

Finally, when Americans have been faced with the choice of Donald Trump or Joe Biden, they have chosen Biden in the past, and there is no reason to believe that the silent majority won't reject the anti-democratic Trumpism that has festered within the Republican party since Trump rode down the escalator in the Trump Tower announcing he was running for president in 2015.

Next month, I'll provide some of my thoughts regarding the process changes that occurred in the democratic Iowa Caucuses and some of the potential ramifications this has on the democratic side.

**Light of the Season**

DES MOINES  
GAY MEN'S  
CHORUS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2  
HOYT SHERMAN PLACE





# The Fall of the House of Usher

A Netflix Review by Mark Turnage

Gothic horror has a sense of atmosphere that's almost immediately recognizable: a decrepit yet austere setting, supernatural omens of doom, madness more likely than hangovers, and a forecast as oppressive as it is gloomy—"a dark and stormy night," if you will. With Mike Flanagan's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the stage dressing of gothic horror is traded for corporate board rooms, launch parties, and posh penthouses, but its feelings of encroaching dread (and going mad) remain. Despite its details sometimes distracting from its plot, *Usher* isn't meant to be Flanagan's literal adaptation of a library's worth of source material, but instead is a love letter to Edgar Allan Poe, whose overarching themes and body of work are updated to reflect a modern-day crisis of capitalism and paired with liberal *schadenfreude* for dark humor.

In the present day, Roderick Usher (Bruce Greenwood), CEO of multibillion-dollar company Fortunato Pharma, alongside his cutthroat COO sister Madeline (Mary McDonnell), mourns the loss of his six adult children, who have all died from grisly freak accidents within the past two weeks. Roderick arranges a meeting with his longtime legal nemesis Assistant U.S. Attorney C. Auguste Dupin (Carl Lumbly) at his derelict childhood home, where Roderick agrees to confess to his crimes... and tell Dupin how his children really died. The narrative jumps between the present day into the 50s, 60s, and 70s, showing how Roderick and his sister Madeline ruthlessly built Fortunato Pharma at the cost of their families, friends, and countless others for the profits from Ligodone, a universally available and addictive Fortunato painkiller. In both past and present, the Ushers are shadowed by a

mysterious woman (a splendid Carla Gugino) who is present at each of their deaths, and Roderick and Madeline ask their quiet but intimidating fixer Arthur Pym (a standout Mark Hamill) to investigate on their behalf.

Those familiar with Poe's work will recognize the 8-episode miniseries' titles right away and even have some expectation of the episode's themes, but Flanagan's skill at adaptation still provides surprising twists and unpredictability, even if some of the Poe references are deep cuts that don't exactly roll off the tongue or stand out too prominently in a modern setting. Themes of madness, family, isolation, and identity from the original story are kept, with the setting of the original "House of Usher" becoming the story's framework. But for those who aren't familiar with stories like "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Pit and the Pendulum," or "The Tell-Tale Heart," the acting chops of Flanagan's known casting wheelhouse are more than enough to make each of the Usher children terrible, witty, and wildly watchable in their own unique ways. There are queer Usher children, too—but that in no way exempts them from awful behavior or a terrible fate. The script is packed with hot takes on the real-life one-percenters who evade justice right alongside the fictional Ushers. But the story slows down considerably during its flashbacks into young Roderick and Madeline's lives, perhaps because its "Poe conclusion" is a bit too easily telegraphed.

*The Fall of the House of Usher* is an American horror story, in the sense that unfettered greed, an "anything to win" attitude, unchecked capitalism, and justice that can be bought contribute to the creation of human monsters: an amoral



pharmaceutical empire, its unstable and cruel heirs, and the opioid epidemic they maintained for more wealth. Perhaps most in *Usher* than any of his other works, Flanagan's script and scene choices wholeheartedly contribute to a constant, impending sense of supernatural doom: the strange noises that interrupt Dupin's and Roderick's conversation, the ghostly spirits of the deceased Usher children, the apprehension whenever Carla Gugino's character is on screen, and the knowledge from the jump that most of the onscreen characters we meet won't survive. But there's also a powerful sense of righteous justice throughout. You could argue it's Mike Flanagan meets *Knives Out* for using the demises of the adult Usher heirs as episodic structure, complete with the central mystery of how the adult Usher children died and who (or what) is responsible. But Flanagan saves his biggest horror moments built upon the uncertainty of what's coming next—and the certainty of knowing how one part of the story ends.

See it and enjoy an epic gothic horror twist to shake-up your typical holiday fare. *The Fall of the House of Usher* is available for streaming on Netflix.



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Contact Us At: [info@ffbciowa.org](mailto:info@ffbciowa.org)

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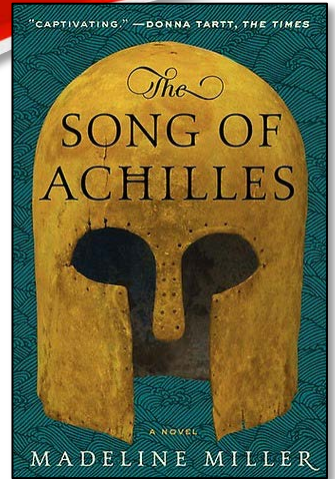
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First Friday Breakfast Club  
P.O. Box 41611  
Des Moines, IA 50311  
(515) 954-2996

## The Song of Achilles

By Madeline Miller

A  
Book  
Review by  
Steve Person



**\*\*\* I want to thank the First Friday Breakfast Club newsletter editor, Wade Petersen, for recommending this book to me.**

*The Song of Achilles* is a fresh look at The Trojan War told from the viewpoint of Patroclus—friend, confidant, and lover of Achilles. The story unfolds when Patroclus accidentally kills another boy, a bully, in an unfortunate childhood fight. His father, the king, has a choice of having his son executed or sent to a different kingdom. He chooses the latter.

Patroclus enters the kingdom of Phthia ruled by Peleus. Patroclus is just ten years old, and is housed with many other boys who have various skills and aspirations. Patroclus is initially scornful of Peleus' son, Achilles. Yet he is transfixed by the young son's ease with the other boys and the striking manner that Achilles displays, both physically and socially.

Eventually, Achilles and Patroclus become friends, and Achilles chooses Patroclus as his aide. When they are a little older, Peleus sends the two boys to be trained in the ways of the world by Chiron, a Centaur. Chiron also educated Peleus who taught him how to conquer the sea goddess, Thetis, and make her his wife. Their one and only meeting ended with Thetis giving birth to Achilles. That meant that Achilles would remain a mortal with a mortal father and a goddess mother.

Of course, the Trojan War centers around the abduction of Helen, wife of Menelaus, by Paris, son of King Priam of Troy. The various kings of Greece band together and sail in a thousand ships to the Plain of Troy to rescue Helen—who may or may not wish to be taken back. Her intentions are never made clear in this story.

Achilles, feted as the greatest soldier of his generation, refuses to join in the plan to rescue Helen. He even dresses as a woman in the Kingdom of Scyros. His disguise works for a time, but it is Odysseus who convinces him to come to Troy.

Miller's account of the Greeks' ten-year siege of Troy paints a picture of backbiting and pettiness among the major players—Agamemnon, Menelaus, Achilles, and Odysseus. Of course, the women of this time suffer the stigma of unworthiness and at the siege site are often little more than barter chips among the kings who have enslaved them. Achilles chooses Briseis as his captor after a particularly brutal battle. He does not wish to seduce her but to save her from the clutches of Agamemnon. When Agamemnon asserts his authority as the head of Greek forces, he takes Briseis away from Achilles and Patroclus. It is then that Achilles refuses to do battle for the Greeks. His mind is changed only when Hector—eldest son of King Priam—kills Patroclus who tries to stop Achilles from going to battle and save him from the terrible prophecy of his death. Patroclus dresses in Achilles' armor as a ruse to fool the Trojans. It is then that Achilles kills Hector and drags his body behind his chariot around the walls of Troy. Paris, with the assistance of Apollo, guides the arrow that pierces Achilles' armor and kills him.

Years ago, when I read *The Iliad*, it stated that Thetis dipped Achilles in the river Styx when he was a baby to protect him. His only apparent mortal spot was the heel she used to hold him in the river. Miller asserts that this version of the story was added many years later. She should know since she is a Greek and Latin scholar at Brown University. It's never too late to learn something new!

