

Deaf to the voice of God

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – Some time ago I made a quick trip back to Texas to visit a dear friend of mine. It was a great time for Sabrina and I to travel the highways of Texas because of all the beautiful wildflowers that are in bloom. Especially beautiful is the state flower of Texas, the "bluebonnet".

This short excursion to my homeland really brought back some great memories of days gone by, and the ministries I have had in that great state. It seemed as though every sight, sound, and smell would cause the events and people of my past to spring up in my memory like the flowers of the season.

One such gentleman who came to my recollection was a man I had the privilege of pastoring several years ago. He was a great man and a true friend. He had one slight problem. He had a severe hearing loss and needed hearing aids in order for him to adequately understand conversations.

The problem really wasn't his hearing, but his refusal to wear his hearing enhancement piece. As long as he wore his "aids" he was a joy to be with and to talk to, but the moment he went without them, he became a completely different person.

His whole demeanor would change, and his attitude would go "south" in a hurry. He would interrupt while others were speaking, and completely misunderstand what they were trying to say. On several occasions, he became enraged because he misunderstood another man's statement.

It was quite easy to ascertain when he was driving, and not wearing his hearing aids as well. He would appear to be in his own little world, and totally oblivious to his surroundings. On several occasions he just barely avoided being involved in or causing an auto accident because he could not hear the warning blasts from other drivers' horns.

When large groups would gather, he would isolate himself from everyone, or just leave the gathering altogether. Many thought he was antisocial and did not like socializing. Nothing could have been farther from the truth. He loved people and enjoyed their company more than anyone could know.

But all of this embarrassment, pain, and these problems could have been avoided if he would only use that which could help him receive communications clearly. All he needed to do was to use his hearing aids.

In every Believer, God has given us a special "hearing aid". That hearing aid is the Holy Spirit that dwells in each of us. By Him, we communicate with our Heavenly Father and receive our directions, instructions, corrections, and encouragement.

Today many of us travel the "information superhighway" and the vast majority of us are "connected" to the web through a plethora of media. The truth is that God established a "Supreme Information Superhighway" when He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within us thousands of years ago.

It is super "hi-tech" and you don't need to log on to it. All we must do is pray. But if we refuse to pray and use this wonderful gift that God has given us it will ultimately cause others and us untold pain and suffering. We will begin to isolate ourselves from other Believers, misunderstand and create unnecessary conflict.

When we refuse to stay connected to our Father, not only do we cause self-inflicted wounds, but we can create an atmosphere surrounding us that can wreak havoc on those closest to us.

Prayer is not so much us talking to God, but us listening to Him, receiving instruction from Him as to His will, and then living our lives accordingly. If we don't listen, we will not know. If we do not stay connected, we will be doomed to a life of isolation and misunderstanding.

No one would willfully choose to be deaf. Deaf to the voice of God. Now that is sad!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Patterson is Executive Director/Treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Elected unanimously in May of 2015, Patterson formerly served for 9 years as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla. He also served as trustee chair and national mobilizer for the North American Mission Board.

Transforming an association of churches

by Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – On July 19, 2021, in Flint, Michigan I witnessed the association of churches, in which I grew up as a teenager, make a bold decision to trim down their administrative expenses. This radical course change by the churches intentionally increased the churches' funding for evangelism, community engagement, and church planting.

Send Network Church Planter/Pastor Jason Loewen of Union Flint Church in Flint was elected

Assistant Director of Missions. Pastor Ed Emmerling of Westside Church in Flushing was elected Director of Missions.

Loewen and Emmerling's bond and brotherhood grew during the early months of the COVID-restrictions. Church planter Loewen and the launch team found it very difficult to find a gathering place. Long time pastor, Emmerling was moved by Loewen's radical focus on reaching local people for Christ and led his congregation to generously share their facilities with the new church plant originally located mere minutes from their established church.

When other men would have felt fear, frustration, or jealousy, these two men increased in faith and felt compelled by God to combine their efforts and hearts for God's Kingdom and for the redemption of the lost surrounding them throughout three counties. The two separate churches meeting in one location has intensified the presence of God, and the proclamation of the Gospel in the area.

On that Monday evening, Transition Team leader, Pastor Chris Tenneriello of Bethany Baptist Church, Grand Blanc explained how the team altered course during this past year. The team admitted financial resources were too meager to hire as they had in the past. At the same time, the team was keenly aware that a mighty movement of collaboration had swept into the region more than a year ago.

Corporate prayer preceded this associational transformation! Southern Baptist pastors and non-Southern Baptist pastors in the region, started a regular prayer gathering inviting God to create a movement unlike anything they had ever seen before. The attendance at the prayer meetings has remained one of the highest priorities of the pastors' calendars. Those prayer gatherings gave way to conversations between pastors erupting in community-wide initiatives that are still being discussed months later.

Following the very brief session where Loewen and Emmerling were unanimously elected new leaders, a gathering of [BeTheChurch.org](https://www.bethechurch.org) cohorts got underway with inspirational Pastor Joel Wayne of Chapel Pointe Church in Hudsonville facilitating the roundtable discussions. "Be The Church" comes alongside spiritual leaders of today and tomorrow to equip them through authentic leadership development, foster relationships that weather any storm, and discover the massive impact they can make in churches and communities for the Kingdom of God.

There was an unmistakable rhythm of deep reflection as participants listened to Wayne speak, followed by enthusiastic roundtable discussions among pastors and church leaders. Participants during the evening, remarked that previous associational gatherings may have had ten people in attendance whereas on this night, seventy people were enveloped in dreaming about the increased effectiveness of their church and the collaboration of all of the churches.

Emmerling has been overheard saying, "I'm at a point in my life, I don't care who gets the credit, I just want to see more people saved." Highlighting the radical transformation of the local association in which he has participated for decades, Emmerling explains the new design

by saying, "It's about getting more of the money from our churches into the streets of our communities so that others can receive Christ."

How does a transformation like this occur? Here are some of my observations:

1. Prayer

I think the association's transformation started more than one year ago in the midst of praying pastors who invited the Lord to do something radical. God is acting.

2. Humility

Established pastors, with many years of service in the region, have been gracious in receiving new pastors and new church planters into their numbers as friends.

3. Respect

Younger men and older men in the ministry honor one another as those called by God to spread the Gospel among the nations and into local populations.

4. Collaboration

Pastors and planters at different ages and who serve in different contexts share authentic feelings and thoughts that create bold, fresh initiatives.

5. Courage

Every pastor is displaying his bravery by letting go of the traditions and preferences of the past in order to take hold of God's new endeavors.

6. Laymen

This divine movement is trickling down into the hearts of lay leaders within the local churches.

7. God

The Lord is the overwhelming driving force behind this united effort overshadowing the other current topics that create divisions among believers.

8. Gospel

The desire to see an amazing number of people come to know Christ is the foremost concern on the hearts and minds of my friends in the Greater Flint area.

9. Anticipation

Everyone believes God is up to something only He can do, and they want to take part in His movement.

Might we see evidence of God doing similar things like this throughout North America? I believe if we look around, we will see that God is making things like this happen all around us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tony L. Lynn is the State Director of Missions for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as lead pastor for more than six years at Crosspoint Church in Monroe, Michigan. He and his wife, Jamie, also served with the International Mission Board in Africa and in Europe.

SPARK is back!

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – SPARK is BACK!

SPARK is free online equipping for church staff, leaders and volunteers without the time or expense of travel. It's training your church can access in teams or individually for greater ministry impact in your church, community and beyond!

Much has changed in the last year and a half, but the need to "...equip the saints for the work of the ministry" remains. The Spark Conference is an incredible resource churches can use to equip leaders and volunteers taught by leading practitioners across our convention. It's just what we need as we continue to engage our world with the hope of the world.

It's completely free for all who register before August 12th at thesparkconference.com. All content will be available for FREE from August 12 through September 4 if the individual, church, or association has registered before August 12. This incredible equipping resource is made possible through our partnership with Georgia Baptists.

Hear keynote messages from Tony Evans, Charles Lowery, Ben Mandrell, and David Kinnaman.

Over 40 Breakout sessions are available in the following categories: Discipleship, Evangelism, Kids, Students, Women, Worship and Music, Missions, Pastoral Wellness, and more.

What will you learn?

- Strategies for ministry longevity
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- Doing practical, simple evangelism
- Conversational apologetics in women's outreach
- New post-pandemic rules for small group success
- Starting missions from zero
- How your church can help end human trafficking
- Leading worship in a post-pandemic world
- New ways to get your church into church planting
- Starting a bulletproof church security program
- How to implement the 3 pillars of successful children's' ministry
- Gaining data-driven knowledge of your community
- Protecting your ministry in a changing culture
- Recovering a biblical framework for discipleship
- Engaging and mobilizing Gen Z
- Updating to current changes related to reducing risk of abuse

Remember, Spark is free for everyone who registers before August 12th at thesparkconference.com. Follow this link for more information and a complete list of breakouts. Contact mike@bscm.org if you have questions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Durbin is the State Evangelism Director for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before joining the state convention staff, Mike served as Church Planting Catalyst and Director of Missions in Metro Detroit since 2007. He also has served as a pastor and bi-vocational pastor in Michigan, as well as International Missionary to Brazil.

A simple piece of proverbial principle

by Coye Bouyer

LANSING, MI – As a pastor I come in contact with a lot of different people, and over the years I have learned that people are very different. There are a variety of attitudes and actions just depending on who you're talking to. I have also learned how to listen to just about anyone even if I don't always agree with everyone.

However, it never fails that at some point I come in contact with someone who instead of looking to listen and learn from biblical council, they would rather YOU listen to THEM, and simply leave them where they are.

In fact, I have come to appreciate listening to all, but leaving some right where they are. Sounds a little like a Proverb I once read, *"He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you,"* (9:7-8a).

In this particular Proverb, Solomon basically says, *any attempt to alter the attitude or actions of an arrogant individual is only asking to be abused."*

Wanting to express a fundamental truth that makes practical sense to many yet is only practiced by a few, Solomon highlights a principle that even Jesus will teach His disciples later. *"Do not give what is holy to dogs or cast your pearls amongst swine."*

Why does Jesus say this in Matthew 7:6? For the same reason as Solomon, both men recognize that intelligent individuals desire to illuminate and enlighten the minds of the naïve, foolish and young.

But both men also understand that when you are dealing with an individual whose attitude and actions are marked out by haughtiness, pride, or simply arrogance (in Hebrew, "a scoffer"), then you are inviting insult, and in some cases, injury into your life.

For whether they trample on your wisdom like swine do pearls, or turn on you to tear you to pieces like wild dogs, in the end the one offering help is left in need of help because they failed to pay attention to this simple piece of proverbial principle given by Solomon and promoted by Jesus.

So, what is the point of this lesson? Simple, you and I as pastors, ministry leaders, lay-people, parents, and as everyday people must learn the balance and skill of *'learning to listen to all, but leaving some right where they are.'*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Coye L. Bouyer is the founding pastor of Kingdom Life Church in Lansing, MI where he has served since March of 2010. Pastor Bouyer recently stepped into the Diversity Ambassador role for the BSCM and firmly believes that he was not only called to Preach the Gospel as part of the process of reconciliation of man to God, but also using any platform as a bridge of reconciliation of man to man, and even more so amongst the brethren. Pastor Bouyer and his lovely wife Keturah (Gen. 25:1) have been married four over 20 years and have four children; Sierra, Seth, Cayla and Coye II.

Are you under construction?

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Summer has finally arrived here at Bambi Lake. It's refreshing to hear the sound of children, teenagers, and adults splashing in the lake, screaming as they fly down the Bambi Booyah water slide, or just enjoying the many activities available here at the camp.

The snow is gone and the grass is growing-fast. Projects put on hold during the long winter have resumed as well as new projects beginning. We know summer is here in Michigan because of the orange barrels that seem to pop up everywhere you drive. Here at Bambi Lake it always seems as if we are UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

There is always maintenance to be done or projects to be started and completed. Every day seems to bring with it the promise of new opportunities to repair or build. Feeling overwhelmed and frustrated at the seemingly endless projects can be a battle. Fortunately, we have a great staff who can prioritize and accomplish the tasks at hand.

So let me ask you a question - "Have you ever experienced this in your own life?" Have you ever felt as if you were constantly UNDER CONSTRUCTION? I have and do feel this way every day. I'm breathing six feet above the ground.

The good news is that we should feel this way, if we are following Christ in our life journey. In his letter of encouragement to the believers at Philippi, Paul puts it this way - "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" Philippians 1:6.

This truth should bring us great joy and encouragement each day we are alive. God is constantly shaping and molding us to be more like Him. This means we are in His process and He loves us too much to leave us the way we are.

God is continually allowing situations in our life to strengthen our character, and remind us of our need to totally depend upon Him. Growing and maturing spiritually requires constant maintenance and attention.

And just like here at Bambi, sometimes deconstruction has to happen before reconstruction can happen. Out with the old and in with the new is typically the only solution. This is especially true in our lives. God has to take out the old habits, faulty attitudes and toxic sinfulness and build something completely brand new and beautiful.

At our most recent WildWeek Youth Camp we had 23 students experience God's saving grace in their lives - out with the old in with the new!

Just as being UNDER CONSTRUCTION is making Bambi a better and stronger camp, Christ is also transforming us more and more into His image through his construction on us. It may seem endless in the moment, but Christ has promised to complete us so we are perfected for His return. As for Bambi, I know God's hand in this camp, and He is shaping and molding us to have a greater impact on this world for His Kingdom. So for now, I'm happy to be UNDER CONSTRUCTION!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mick Schatz serves on the staff of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. He is the State Director of Spiritual Enrichment and Retreats and lives at Bambi Lake.

NAMB joins with state conventions to bring Timothy + Barnabas to pastors

by Brandon Elrod

SAN ANTONIO, TX (BP) – With reports of increasing numbers of pastors leaving the ministry in recent months following increased pressures from the pandemic, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) has joined with state Baptist conventions to host Timothy + Barnabas Getaways for pastors and their wives.

“We are, in a very real sense, on the frontlines of a very real battle,” Sagemont Church pastor Matt Carter said when addressing pastors at the Timothy + Barnabas event in San Antonio earlier this summer.

“I’m convinced that Satan knows the name of every pastor,” Carter said as he explained that faithful pastors who share the gospel, preach the Word and make a difference can expect spiritual pushback in their calling.

NAMB hosted the San Antonio in cooperation with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC). It was the first in a series hosted across the South. NAMB invited pastors for a two-day getaway for encouragement and equipping in Mississippi with events planned for the fall in Virginia and Louisiana.

“It is part of our desire that no pastor or wife would ever be alone in the state of Texas,” said Tony Wolfe, associate executive director of the SBTC. “We want to be more than just a network of churches pooling their resources together for the advancement of the Great Commission. We want to actually pull our relationships together to serve and encourage one another.”

That heartbeat to serve pastors has been the impetus for Johnny Hunt, NAMB’s senior vice president of evangelism and leadership, since he launched Timothy + Barnabas 27 years ago.

“Timothy + Barnabas started out a deep conviction and desire to come alongside pastors to provide them with encouragement and instruction to help them flourish in their ministries,” Hunt said. “What started as a personal ministry now belongs to NAMB so that it will outlast me and serve pastors for many, many years.”

To better serve pastors across North America, NAMB began working with state convention partners to host these events to provide a time for pastors to be encouraged in their ministries. These getaways are shorter than a typical Timothy + Barnabas Retreat and hosted in a location that is accessible for pastors who are served by the state convention.

Texas pastors who attended the Getaway in San Antonio shared that one of their greatest challenges has been a sense of aloneness. So, the chance to come together with other pastors and hear from other leaders encouraged them.

“I think the nature of the pastorate inclines all of us toward isolation. When things get hard, we tend to withdraw more rather than gather with others,” said David Norman, pastor of University Baptist Church in San Antonio. “Hearing stories and rubbing shoulders with guys who are facing the same difficulties, running into the same struggles and just realizing you’re not alone—that’s encouraging.”

Russell Smiley, pastor of Pleasant Run Baptist Church in Colleyville, Texas, shared the same sentiment about how easy it can be for pastors to feel detached.

“It’s been very encouraging to sit amongst other leaders of other churches and not only commiserate but also encourage one another about how God is moving through all of these things,” said Smiley.

Preaching from Matthew 13:15, Carter cautioned attendees about the dangers of a dull heart, deaf ears and dim eyes that might lead a pastor to go through the motions of ministry.

To combat complacency and feelings of weariness, Carter encouraged pastors to remember the beginning of their calling, learn to be content in their calling and to maintain focus on the end of their calling, which will yield an eternal reward in Heaven.

In reflecting on his years of pastoral ministry at First Baptist Church in Woodstock, Ga., during a session with the pastors, Hunt described the urgency and impact of living a life centered on the Kingdom of God.

“I’ve really attempted to, in leadership as a pastor, to build a church that is a Kingdom church,” Hunt said. “I’ve got one life. One day, I’m going to appear before the King who changed my life. I’m going to have to give an account of what I did with what He gave me.”

Kathy Litton led sessions for the pastors’ wives. Litton, who serves as NAMB’s director of planter spouse development, has helped with Timothy + Barnabas events for six years.

“The Timothy + Barnabas Getaways are such powerful, life-giving opportunities for wives,” Litton said. “The chance to disconnect with their husbands from the demands of ministry and connect with other wives can encourage them deeply. These women pour into their churches and people, and these gatherings allow us to generously pour into them.”

The Timothy + Barnabas Getaway in San Antonio took place May 17 – 18. The following week (May 24 – 25), NAMB hosted a second Timothy + Barnabas Getaway for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB).

“After this difficult year of ministry during the pandemic, the Timothy + Barnabas Getaway was such a blessed time of encouragement, refreshing, and instruction for our pastors and wives,” said John Pace, director of pastor and leadership development for the MBCB.

Timothy + Barnabas Getaways with the Louisiana Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia will take place in the Fall of 2021. For more information, contact info@namb.net. There is also limited availability for the [Timothy + Barnabas Retreat in Branson, Mo.](#) NAMB will announce the 2022 Timothy + Barnabas Retreat dates in September.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

Reap the benefits of the Harvest Retreat

by Mickey Gross

GARDEN CITY, MI – Why should I attend a Women's Retreat?

Do I even need a retreat?

What would happen to my to-do list if I went away for a whole weekend?

These are among the first thoughts that run through my head when the invitation to sign up for Harvest Retreat rolls around every year.

Don't get me wrong—I LOVE God, His people, and camp ministry. But my life is also very full of work, family, household chores, and even church commitments. It doesn't feel wise to take time away from all of that for an optional experience.

Then, memories of my first camp experience come flooding back.

My parents, being wiser than I was at 8 years old, decided that it would be a good idea to send me away to GA camp at Bambi Lake for a whole week in the summer. I had never heard of such a thing, but my friends were going and I liked them. Despite the butterflies in my stomach from trying a new thing, I willingly packed my bags and went. The ride up to camp felt like an eternity, but once there, I was able to have an abundance of experiences that wouldn't have been possible otherwise.

Five decades later, I still have vivid memories of that week:

- practicing sign language during rest time that Gina and I had learned in a mission-focused lesson
- watching the flag raise in the morning, presided over by none other than Ms. Frances Brown herself
- purchasing a daily Milky Way from the snack shack on the path
- developing an appreciation for nature that was not available on the eastside of Detroit, and
- being taught by Godly women who were committed to faithfully planting the Word in the hearts of the young.

Attending camp for the first time set the groundwork for my love for God, His people, and camp ministry that is still firmly planted today.

My decision to go to Harvest Retreat 2021 flowed from these precious memories. I will put aside my "normally occupied position" to experience God in His nature, His people, and His

Word. I will go, because after being apart from faces for more than a year, it will be refreshing to see smiles, to hear laughter, and to connect in person.

I will go because I will come back refreshed by Biblical insights, giving me a fresh perspective for ministry here at home. I will go because being there will help me to run and finish the race well.

At whatever age and stage of life you are in, you too can gain a renewed sense of your purpose in Christ, worship alongside and learn from one another, and most of all, enjoy God and His good gifts.

Harvest Retreat 2021: Love God, Love People

October 15-17

Registration: <https://bambilake.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/507983>

CHECK IN: Begins at 3:00 pm Friday

Retreat Ends at 11:00 am Sunday following worship

Bambi Lake Retreat & Conference Center

The Harvest Retreat Leadership Team is anticipating a full retreat, so sign up today!

Using CDC guidance, we have an excellent plan to minimize COVID risk to guests and staff. We are adhering to regulations while still maximizing the opportunities for women to connect.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mickey Gross lives in Garden City, MI and is a member of Resurrection Church in Lincoln Park. She has devoted years in church leadership as a children's ministry director, praise team member, pianist, facilities coordinator, and event planner. Mickey loves camp ministry and has had the privilege of spending time at camp as a camper, serving as a volunteer, and operating on the leadership team for Harvest Retreat.

What can separate us from the love of God?

by Eli Garza

DETROIT, MI – Before going to bed in the very early morning hours of Saturday, June 26th, we heard a high pitched squeaking sound coming from the air vent in the kitchen. This led me to go to the basement to investigate the cause of the sound. I was shocked to see that our basement was flooding fast with approximately close to a foot of water filling the entire basement. My son and I quickly tried to rescue boxes, books, personal belongings and place them in our main

floor rooms.

The water finally stopped rising at 1.5 ft and slowly receded over the next two hours. We lost so much of our personal memories through pictures, books, and mementos. In addition we lost all of our appliances and book cases and suffered some electrical damages.

I asked for prayer for our family over Facebook because of the unprecedented flood. Pastor Tim Patterson responded by notifying the BSCM Disaster Relief team to include us in their list of homes to assist.

On Friday July 9th, the team, led by Don Bezeau, did a great job of removing many of our damaged goods, cutting out the damaged drywall, and wood paneling and sanitizing the basement. The team's work helped us save thousands in cleaning and removal costs.

They were also a physical testimony in our neighborhood since we are very likely the only evangelicals in a two block radius of our neighborhood in East Dearborn. Our Muslim neighbor understood who the team was and represented, and thanked them for helping our family.

Chaplin Jim Ellsworth was a great encouragement to me while the team worked as we discussed our hardship and the ministry needs of our city. We are so grateful for the Disaster Relief Team's hard work, joyful disposition and friendly contacts with our neighbors.

An unexpected disaster will shake up one's life, routines, outlook and cause one to grieve deeply over financial losses and the loss of meaningful personal belongings. I felt like what David wrote in Psalm 61:1-3 as the waters receded in our basement in the middle of the night: "Hear my cry O God, listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you. I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe."

Yet, the Lord provided unexpected love and help after the flood through a gift, offers for help, and the work of the Disaster Relief team.

After the team left, I was encouraged by Paul's words in Romans 8:35-39, especially through the answer to the rhetorical questions of verse 35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"

The answer to these rhetorical questions is that nothing can. Paul makes it clear in verse 39: "neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord".

We are grateful for the Lord's care demonstrated in various ways and through the Disaster Relief team's work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Eli Garza was born in Detroit, MI and worked as a structural engineer for 20 years before serving as associate pastor and senior pastor of First Spanish Baptist Church. He attended First Spanish for 57 years. His family lives in Dearborn, MI.

The church is a better plan

by Philip Miles

MIDLAND, MI – In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul eloquently reminds the Gentile Christians of Ephesus that they were once far from Christ and the covenant promises of God. This alienation left them without hope and without God in their midst. However, in Christ, they were brought out of that alienation and made near to God and His promises.

Jesus Christ broke down all of the hostility and division that separated Jew and Gentile, “...*that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility*” (Ephesians 2:15b-16). Out of this destruction of division and hostility emerges one citizenry who are members of the household of God, thus giving us all access to the same God through the same cross by the same Jesus.

Following this, in chapter 3, Paul makes an astounding revelation that we should not miss. He says, in essence, that this was the plan all along. Though it was a mystery shrouded from understanding for a long time, it was always God’s plan that the gospel would make Jew and Gentile, alike, heirs of the same promise in Christ.

Here’s the kicker. In Ephesians 3:10, Paul says that the church, uniting Jew and Gentile together in Christ and killing their long standing hostilities, demonstrates to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places, “*the manifold wisdom of God.*” In short, whenever the rulers and principalities and powers of the air raise an accusation against God or try to beguile Him and His foolish plan of redemption, it is the church to which He points to silence their hisses.

In light of this, Paul in his imprisonment urged the church, “*to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” (Ephesians 4:1-6)

This is the spiritual essence of the church. It should be that our churches represent the death of hostility and the unity of the Spirit. It should be that our churches are the places in our communities where people see genuine humility, gentleness and patience on display. The church ought to be the place where a body of people bear with one another and carry one another's burdens. The church is called to display unity and peace. All of this is meant to be so regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, etc.

The surrounding world craves this kind of community, whether they know it or not. Our churches should be living, breathing examples of the gospel's work that smashes hostility and false identities and lives out our conviction that in Christ we are not defined by anything else, but by our position as joint-heirs with Christ. In the church, we all entered through the same door. We all have the same Lord, we all believe in the same gospel and we've all partaken in the same baptism.

On a whiteboard in my office I have written the following:

Beware of any teaching, "ism", or school of thought that promises that which only the gospel can deliver.

May we resist any effort on the part of the enemy to be drawn into a fight that unnecessarily threatens the unity of the Spirit and may we also reject anything that seeks to supplant the preeminence of the gospel and its work in our churches.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Philip Miles, Pastor of Sunrise Church Midland, MI. Husband of Kari and dad to 4 children (teenage down to 6 years old). My hobbies include: podcasts, reading, guitar, cheering from the sidelines of whatever one of my kids is doing, and dreaming with my wife.

Keep it simple

by Dr. Garth Leno

WINDSOR, CANADA – When we planted The Gathering in Windsor, Ontario, in 2014, we were a rag-tag bag of people who gathered on Saturday nights for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. We drank coffee after the study and ate too many cookies.

In the beginning it was super casual. But when we organized and launched our small, but enthusiastic, church plant with SEND Detroit, we knew we needed to implement some structure.

Since then, The Gathering has taken on more organization and ministry diversity. We hired staff and implemented policies, and the lanes began to feel a bit crowded with so many “good things” for us to do.

Jesus is adamantly opposed to anything that gets in the way of people encountering Him. So, we need to ensure that our churches, newly-planted and well-established, do not become *cluttered*. Clutter makes it difficult for people to encounter the simple, powerful, life-changing message of the Gospel. We don’t want our earthly expressions of the Bride to get so weighed down with programs that people get busy *doing* church instead of *being* the church.

Vision leaks and mission drifts, so we are convinced that we must cling to a simple process that pulls everything together; a compelling process that moves people toward spiritual maturity (Col. 1:28).

What are we here for?

The Gathering exists to bring glory to God through lives changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our mission statement succinctly describes our heart. We exist to bring glory to God. This is the chief aim and purpose of humanity and of all creation. The glory of God is ultimate (1 Cor. 10:31). What is your vision? What’s the vision for your church?

Why gospel-centered?

The gospel is the historical narrative of the triune God orchestrating the reconciliation and redemption of a broken creation and fallen creatures through the life, death, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus. In short, the Gospel is the good news that the everlasting and ever-increasing joy of the never-boring, ever-satisfying Christ is ours freely and eternally by faith in the sin-forgiving death and hope-giving resurrection of Jesus Christ (John Piper).

We are unashamedly gospel-centered at The Gathering, as every church plant ought to be, because the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, and in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed (Rom. 1:16-17). We intentionally emphasize the centrality of the gospel in our preaching and teaching, in worship, in calling people into community with one another, in service that seeks to extend his grace and mercy to others, and in making disciples who make disciples and planting churches (Matt. 28:16-20).

What’s at the center of your life and your church?

How can we avoid “drift?”

The expanding ministries of our church must keep the vision and mission dead center at all times. We must remove congestion from our church by courageously saying “no” to *good* opportunities so we can say “yes” to the *best* opportunities. We cannot allow the vision to leak

or the mission to drift off course. We must be tenacious and bold in order to maximize the energy of everyone in our church by creating alignment. If ministries or events do not align with our vision and purpose, we must firmly say no.

At our church we seek to make gospel-centered disciples by following a simple plan:

1. Create significant, meaningful, Christ-centered Sunday morning worship experiences that are full of simple worship, passionate prayer, and strong teaching.
2. Expand the scope and influence of small groups so that everyone has an opportunity to join a gospel-centered fellowship where they can get connected, grow in faith, care for one another, and serve God and others. Life-change happens best in small groups!
3. Offer courses, seminars, workshops or conferences (on topics like marriage, parenting, dealing with addictions, etc.) that supplement the teaching and life-change ministry of our church.
4. Say “no” to everything else.

Let’s keep it simple. Focused, directed, centered ministry. It’s the best way to make disciples.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garth Leno lives in Windsor, Ontario Canada, with his wife and one daughter, Jamie. Two more children, Nathan and Kristin, are married with families of their own. Garth is the senior pastor at The Gathering which he planted with friends in 2014. He is also on the Send Canada Advisory Board. He has a master’s degree in church planting from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and D.Min from Bethel Theological Seminary.

“Give us a word, pastor.”

by Clayton Knight

But Micaiah said, “As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me.”

1 Kings 22:13-14

WARREN, MI – The older I get and the more seasoned I become in ministry, the more I am convinced that I have nothing to say to people. Now, what do I mean by that?

I mean that I don't have the necessary insight, life experience, or wisdom to help people. Oh, did I mention that I'm a pastor? Does that seem counter-intuitive? If that does, let me break some news to you: the fact that I'm a pastor doesn't mean that I have all the answers.

I'm not a professional Christian. I don't claim to "hear from God" regarding our church's 5-year plan. I've stood in my pulpit on a Sunday morning before and said, "I don't know." I've told people in counseling sessions, "I will do my best to help you, but there are certain times when I may say to you, 'I don't know what to do in this situation.'"

To make matters more complex, I'm a sinner. I live and work and worship around other people who are sinners. So not only do I lack necessary words and wisdom, sometimes my words, opinions, or beliefs on a matter that I *do* have are sinful.

Moreover, we're all swimming in an ocean of ideas, opinions, and worldviews. Just try being dogmatic about "God," "truth," "morality," "life," "identity," or "meaning" on a public online forum and see what happens. Any 10-year-old with access to Google is forming opinions about these massive realities as we speak.

So, what is my role as a pastor living in this kind of wikipedia-style, pluralistic, relativistic age? And what do I do as a pastor who recognizes his own need to peel away the bad ideas he has imbibed from a lifetime of living in this broken world? And what hope do I have for effectively shepherding people for whom I will one day give an account?

The short answer to that question is this: Go to the Word of God.

The current state of affairs in 2021 America is not reason to retreat from Scripture. It is motivation to embrace it even more. Saturate your mind with the Word. Don't settle for a vague familiarity with it, but grapple with the phrases, the inspired logic, the *therefores*, and the *thus-es*. Don't settle for simply knowing the stories, but wrestle with what the stories mean. Don't herald the indicatives (who you are in Christ), without proclaiming the imperatives (who you must be now that you're in Christ) with equal tenacity.

More than anything else, our churches need the Word of the Lord. We need to become churches filled with men and women and children who are growing in their knowledge, articulation of, and application of Scripture.

What other source of wisdom is greater? What other word offers better comfort? What else lasts in this life?

When people have been ripped apart by loss, they need to hear God.

When a kid has no idea who they even are anymore, they need to hear God.

When someone gets a dreadful diagnosis, they need to hear God.

When conflict invades the church, they need to hear God.

When life is good, we need to hear God.

When life is hard, we need to hear God.

The prophet Micaiah was resolved. “As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him *only* what the Lord tells me.”

May we likewise feel bound by the beautiful confines of the Word of the Lord, and may we model its relevance, power, effectiveness, timelessness, and sufficiency in our churches, homes, and workplaces.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clayton Knight is husband to his best friend, Sarah, and daddy to his sweet daughter, Aubrey. The Knights recently moved to metro Detroit so Clayton could serve as the Senior Pastor at Warren Woods Baptist Church in Warren, Michigan.

Attitude is everything

by Dan Russell

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges. He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”

Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)

SOUTHGATE, MI – Attitude is everything! Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Britain during World War II said, “Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.” Albert Einstein, the famous physicist who formed the theory of general relativity said, “Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character.” So what kind of attitude should we have? A good one, obviously! A bad attitude is like a flat tire on your car... if you don’t fix it, you’re not going anywhere!

In the world around us, attitudes are often defined as either “good” or “bad”, “positive” or “negative”, and can include having attitudes that are kind or unkind, cooperative or uncooperative, or unifying or divisive. Millions upon millions of dollars are spent in the areas of

business, education, and counseling in order to cultivate attitudes that promote teamwork, academic excellence, and mental health.

The dictionary definition of “attitude” is “a complex mental state involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways.” But what is God’s definition of “attitude” in His Word, the Bible? The word translated “attitude” in Philippians 2:5 is the Greek verb “phroneo”, which means “to think in a certain way”. We are told that we must think the way that Jesus did when He was on the earth. How did He think? Where can we find His attitude described in the Bible? Beyond the words of Jesus in the Gospels, which give evidence of His attitudes told many things, we are given His precise “thinking processes” in the verses that follow Philippians 2:5. In fact, in the three verses that follow, namely verses 6, 7, & 8, we are given the three main attitudes of Christ. We would do well to study them, apply them, and live them out in our lives!

In Philippians 2:6 it says, “Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges.” This clearly shows Christ’s attitude of SELFLESSNESS! He was selflessly willing to leave the glory of Heaven and His equal existence with God, the Father, to come to earth on a mission of mercy to save fallen humanity from the curse of sin.

In Philippians 2:7 it says, “He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.” This is a wonderful example of Christ’s attitude of SERVANTHOOD! He was willing to become a human being in order to “serve” human beings. This was the Master of the Universe becoming a slave to humanity for the purpose of dying for the sin that had enslaved each and every human being.

In Philippians 2:8 it says, “When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on the cross.” What an awful, yet beautiful, picture of SUBMISSIVENESS to the authority of another. Jesus obeyed the call of His Father to drink the cup of suffering and death in order to appease the wrath of God and pay the sin debt for all human beings.

Notice that from start to finish, from birth to death, throughout the entire existence of Jesus on the earth, He exhibited these three attitudes. In His incarnation and birth, He showed us how to be SELFLESS. In His life and ministry, He showed us how to be SERVANTS. And, in His suffering and death, He showed us how to be SUBMISSIVE to authority.

In the midst of the tremendous truth of this great sacrifice of Christ is the example to Christians of what kind of attitudes we are to have as we walk the same earth Jesus did. And as we apply the attitudes of Christ to our relationships with Him, our family, our friends, our employers, our professors, our fellow-students, and all those we relate to in this world, we will have the same attitude of Christ Jesus! WHO Jesus was (and is) can be WHO you are as you seek to be a “selfless” “servant” who is “submissive” to authority. This is what it means to allow Jesus to live through you! As you yield to Him and have these attitudes, your whole life can be transformed

into the Christian He really wants you to be. So stop “trying” to do it on your own and simply start “trusting” Him to do it in you and through you... through the transmission of His attitudes through you to those around you!

Check out my book on this subject, [*The Christ In Christian: How Every Christian Can Experience The Three Divine Attitudes of Christ*](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Dan Russell is the Executive Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Southgate, Michigan, a Church Strengtheners for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, and an adjunct professor in the Christian Ministry Department of Spring Arbor University at two campuses in southeastern Michigan. He has 36 years of pastoral experience, including lead pastorates in Missouri, Kansas, and Michigan. He and his wife, JoLinda, live in Brownstown, Michigan, and have three adult children, along with seven grandchildren.

Spiritual and physical growth

by Sharon Gilbert

FRANKFORT, MI – Things are happening at Crystal Lake Church in Frankfort, Michigan! This church has had many ups and downs, mountains and valleys, growth, and decline, but after 28 years as the Pastor at this amazing tiny church, we’ve been blessed even through the low times. God is faithful.

Around the beginning of the year, through a generous donor, we were able to hire Sarah Anderson as Director of Community Development and Youth, with the prayer that we can better reach young families. We also were able to finish the construction of our church which has been on hold for years.

Even through COVID, we were seeing people being used to reach others for the Kingdom of God. Our Outreach Director developed the Facebook Page, M22 Fellowship, which is used primarily to reach community members who need a friend, who are lonely or have some kind of need.

Through this platform, we met Robin who had brain surgery in February. She was struggling at the time, but now she is our biggest missionary. Robin loves the Lord, shares about His love and forgiveness to everyone she meets. Recently, we had a bonfire event to use for outreach. 33 people attended including 5 non-church families. We are praying for these new families, getting to know them, and hope to love them to faith in Christ.

There are spiritual and physical changes happening at our church. We have hired an architect, and now we are ready to move to the next stage of construction.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Gilbert has partnered in ministry with her husband Roger Gilbert, who has been the pastor of Crystal Lake Church Frankfort for 28 years. They have 2 grown children and 4 grandchildren, who all know and love the Lord, and serve Him. Crystal Lake Southern Baptist Church, or known as Crystal Lake Church, is associated with the Northwest Baptist Association and the Baptist State Convention of Michigan.

For revitalization focus on the mission, leadership development, says church health strategist

by Scott Barkley

DALLAS, TX (BP) – Jonathan Smith remembers the day he learned his church couldn't afford a cup of coffee.

He knew the church had struggled. It held plenty of building space but not the people to fill it. An aging membership reflected the difficulties in reaching the next generation. The congregation had been formative in planting other churches...but only because of a couple of splits in the fellowship.

One day his ministry assistant was shopping around for a vendor when she called Smith. "You have to come see this," she said.

The church's bank account showed \$1.06. On top of that, the large crowds the church had drawn in the 1980s had dwindled to 25. Nevertheless, a process toward prioritizing the right things had been underway and would eventually lead to a \$750,000 budget and attendance reaching 450.

"You cannot out-mission the Messiah. We had to get back to the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, loving our community and loving the lost," Smith, director of Church Health Strategy for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, told Baptist Press.

"Over time the Lord just turned it around to becoming a really great, strong church." In a culture that demands immediate results, it took about eight years for Smith's church to experience the turnaround. That time consisted of building trust among members while

identifying problems related to leadership development and missions involvement. One of the more difficult steps came through removing ministries serving more as a faded photo from yesteryear than effective outreach of the current day.

“The upside-down church has a very large structure, but a small mission,” he pointed out. “It needs to be the other way around. We fall in love with programs, when we need to fall in love with the lost.”

God began to move after missions and evangelism became a priority. When growth had reached 100 members, 40 of them at any time could be on a mission trip. After returning from Germany one year, Smith asked someone who the person was on stage leading worship for vacation Bible school.

“That’s Becka.”

“Who’s Becka?” Smith asked.

“Oh, her family is one of the ones who came here while you were gone.”

Five families had joined the church during Smith’s two-week absence in Germany. “That’s when it hit me that the more mission work we do and engage with the mission of Christ, the more people the Lord brought to us,” he said. “I tell pastors that we tend to focus on growing the church, when we should be focused on growing the kingdom.”

That growth brought the need to develop leaders. It’s an issue churches tend to ignore when experiencing a time of growth, and when it’s not addressed also can hasten a decline, Smith noted.

“Every pastor wants his church to grow until it does. We weren’t ready for growth, so we had to find ways to take care of the people God brought to us. I learned that you always have to be developing new leaders if you want your church to grow.”

In a [recent podcast](#) with Church Answers, Smith called the layperson “the greatest untapped resource of the church. Our role as pastors is to develop and equip the saints.”

Revitalization, he added, requires a sense of urgency but also trust. Of course, those are difficult to mix when one works against time constraints and the other requires them. One way to address both is to “problem-cast” continuously – identify an issue and place it before the membership for their input.

While discussing those issues, find ways to celebrate victories. Rather than have designated Baptism Sundays with several individuals, Smith would schedule one for each Sunday. Their story would be thoroughly shared and celebrated with testimonies by friends and family.

As many churches age—both in membership and buildings—many have become more open to the necessary steps of revitalization. In much the same way, pastors and churches adopted online strategies last year when COVID-19 took away in-person gatherings.

Smith maintains that such steps are more obvious than churches want to admit and often need to reach a point—like seeing \$1.06 in the bank account—to make the move.

“Every church has a psychology and instinctively knows what they’re supposed to be doing,” he added. “Nothing stirs the heart like three things: baptisms, new members and mission work.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley is national correspondent for Baptist Press.

Michigan Campers on Mission

by Cindy Truesdale

GRAND BLANC, MI – Michigan Campers on Mission (MI-COM) celebrates our 1st Anniversary. Amid Covid, we persevered July 31, 2020 at Bambi Lake Baptist Camp, Michigan Campers On Mission became chartered as a National COM Chapter.

National COM Coordinators, Jerry and Renee McGovern, came from Florida to administer the oaths of commitment. Don and Jan Kragness, COM Region 4 Representatives, came from Illinois to support and uplift us. Pastor Tim Patterson, Baptist State Convention of Michigan’s Executive Treasurer, offered a charge to the 28 charter members. We were busy before we were chartered, and continue to look for mission opportunities.

We began this chapter knowing that Bambi Lake Baptist Camp is our “core” center to work and to support their efforts. Little did we realize then that we would be able to work with inner-city churches on their housing projects, too. Our most recent opportunity was for the month of July 2021. We worked with the Jachin Baptist Church ABC Program in Flint.

This amazing program is open to boys and girls ages 7-17. It teaches the youth skilled trades (electrical, plumbing, carpentry, cooking, sewing, character) and life skills. The older youth worked on a house that Jachin purchased from the land bank. They ripped off siding and resided the home, installed windows, flooring, and much more. The younger children built lamps, benches, flower boxes, shelves, and other fun projects. Some young ladies learned to sew and made curtains for the home.

The home will be auctioned off and the proceeds will go to support the program next year. Campers on Mission appreciate Pastor Derrick and Christine Watkins for giving us the opportunity to work with this project. MI COM plans to make it an annual project because of the immense value and impact ABC makes on the local youth in Flint.

Would you like to be a member of MI Campers on Mission? There are no membership fees. To join MI COM, go to our website: www.michigancampersonmission.org and click on Membership, and fill in the blanks. Or call Rick and Cindy at (810) 869-4716. We'd love to tell you more!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick and Cindy Truesdail have been married for 29 years. Together they have 5 children and 14 grandchildren. During their early years together, they worked as leaders of a Single Adult Ministry. Rick is a Licensed Professional Counselor and a licensed SBC minister. He served as Associate Pastor with a Spanish-speaking church in Flint for 10 years and Cindy served as the Pastoral Assistant. They are active members at Heritage Baptist Church, Grand Blanc, and Presidents of Campers on Mission in their retirement.

Southern Baptists persist in the fight against human trafficking

by Timothy Cockes

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Southern Baptists continue to fight against human trafficking worldwide as the issue is acknowledged by the United Nations on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons today, July 30.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, human trafficking is the fastest-growing criminal industry in the world. Recently, the United Nations Global Report on Trafficking in Persons indicated there were nearly 50,000 detected victims of human trafficking in 2018. The U.S. Department of State estimates there are actually 24.9 million victims of human trafficking worldwide at any given time, whether reported or not.

Human Trafficking is defined by the United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol as “the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation.”

Traffickers have various purposes for their victims, including commercial sexual activity (sex trafficking) or forced labor. Many of the cases of trafficking in the Western part of the world are related to sex trafficking.

Sex trafficking remains a large problem in the United States. The National Human Trafficking Hotline reports that of the 11,500 cases of human trafficking in 2019, more than 8,000 involving sex trafficking. Trafficking experts say the COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of people who could be vulnerable to sex trafficking.

Southern Baptists are actively fighting against this worldwide evil year-round, not just on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.

Kay Bennett is one of the North American Mission Board's foremost experts on the issue of human trafficking. Bennett, a Send Relief missionary and the executive director of the Baptist Friendship House in New Orleans, La., told Baptist Press that Southern Baptists have a huge role to play in the prevention of trafficking in their local area.

"If we as Southern Baptists could become educated about human trafficking so that we can take preventative measures, such as reaching out to people that are vulnerable, may be living in poverty, folks that are experiencing homelessness, or folks that are just vulnerable because of abuse or things like they may have experienced," Bennett said, "if we can be preventative in those ways then we can help to stop human trafficking."

One of the main ways Bennett and the Baptist Friendship House (which has served New Orleans for more than 75 years) fight against trafficking in their community is by practically helping trafficking survivors who contact them.

The Friendship House will provide out-of-state transportation to survivors who are in danger, and also houses survivors who need immediate shelter and safety.

Bennett said they have served 30 human trafficking survivors already this year, including four in July alone. When survivors stay at the house, they receive backpacks with various hygiene supplies as well as a blanket and clothing.

"That backpack says I care about you, but it also builds trust with them," Bennett said. "And then it builds a relationship with them to be able to hear their story and share Jesus with them."

Send Relief, which also has a [Send Relief Center](#) in New Orleans, partners with the Friendship House in a variety of ways, including by helping prepare and distribute the backpacks to survivors.

The Friendship House will also be participating in Send Relief's [national backpack day on Sept. 18-19](#), in which Southern Baptists are encouraged to pack a relief backpack as well as donate

\$10 for every backpack prepared. The backpacks will then be distributed among Send Relief ministries.

Bennett said Send Relief also partners with the Friendship House to host visiting teams from other churches, ministries and state conventions. The visiting teams learn about the issue of human trafficking and how to prevent it so they can apply the information in their local context.

Recently a group of 12 representatives from the Ohio Woman's Missionary Union visited the Friendship House.

Jean DiFilippo, president of the Ohio WMU, explained that Ohio ranks in the top ten for the number of calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. The group plans to travel two by two (two representatives together) throughout their convention educating others on the awareness of Human Trafficking.

"We have no desire to reinvent the wheel. There are many agencies [both Christian and non-Christian] that do a great job of rescuing victims and helping prosecute the abusers," DiFilippo said in a statement to Baptist Press.

"Our goal is to help people recognize the warning signs and to contact authorities. Our motto is 'If you see something, say something.' First and foremost, we need to bathe it in prayer. We personally prayed for a young woman and her child who were rescued while we were in New Orleans.

"While we continue to pray for that young family, we also need to pray for the abusers. They need Jesus. We need to pray they will find Him and turn from their wicked ways."

The Woman's Missionary Union is also very involved in fighting human trafficking on the national level.

Human exploitation, which includes human trafficking, was a focus area for WMU from 2010-2014. There are several resources regarding human trafficking on WMU's website including links to an [online minicourse about trafficking](#) and a [simulation](#) showing the realities of trafficking.

Another ongoing ministry involving trafficking involves "[WorldCrafts](#)," a WMU fair-trade ministry that supports artisan groups who help women at risk or involved with trafficking.

"It is our privilege to partner with talented artisans in the WorldCrafts Support Freedom Campaign as they make beautiful items and rebuild their lives after being rescued from trafficking," said Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director for the WMU. "When you purchase an item from these artisans and pray for them, you are a part of their transformation story."

Bennett concluded by stating it's important for Southern Baptists to get involved with trafficking prevention through prayer and support, because no matter how many people are ministered to, every person is valuable to God.

"I think we should pray for trafficking victims to be able to find the help that they need to get out of the situation," Bennett said. "Pray for people like us at the Baptist Friendship House and in other ministry centers that are helping them and pray for wisdom and knowledge.

"One of the greatest things also is for people just to pray for the needs that are around them. Most all of us live around people in need. It's amazing when we start praying for the needs around us. God opens our eyes and opens the door for us to minister to people."

"It (fighting human trafficking) matters to every person that you reach ... and it's important to never give up on anyone, because Jesus never gives up on us."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Timothy Cockes is a Baptist Press staff writer.

Kentucky church embracing grace in pro-life ministry

by Tessa Redmond

SHEPHERDSVILLE, KY (BP) – Cedar Grove Baptist Church is discipling women with unplanned pregnancies and single moms. The church partners with Embrace Grace, Inc., a non-profit that equips churches to love and support women and families through gospel-centered small groups with the intent of integrating them into local bodies of believers.

"I think, historically, churches have made single pregnant ladies feel like outcasts, so this is an opportunity for us to not do that anymore," explained Christie Vaughn, women's ministry leader at Cedar Grove. "It's an opportunity to really build relationships with people that are hurting and feel like the last place they can go is to the church. But we want them to know that's the first place they should go."

Cedar Grove offers two different small groups: Embrace Grace for single, expecting moms and Embrace Life for moms who have given birth to their babies. Over the course of 10 to 11 weeks, leaders share their testimonies and present the gospel. Eventually, meetings explore parenting, financial habits, Bible study practices and time management from a gospel perspective.

“It’s about relationship building,” Vaughn said. “It’s not just about an opportunity to get together and talk about the gospel. That’s one step. Let’s see how we can help you live out the gospel.”

The church then provides a free baby shower to moms who have completed all or most of the program. And according to Vaughn, each woman has walked away changed.

“They’ve gone from being hopeless and not knowing how in the world they’re going to handle having a child, or having another child, (and) they have hope,” Vaughn said. “They know they’re not alone. They know the Lord cares about them, and so they don’t feel lost anymore.”

Several moms who have walked through Embrace Grace and Embrace Life are now attending church, both at Cedar Grove and with other congregations. One is doing a Bible study with Vaughn because she wanted to continue meeting.

Vaughn believes local churches should consider ministries like Embrace Grace small groups because they facilitate lasting, generational change.

“I think it’s this type of ministry that really changes people’s minds about abortion and changes their hearts towards abortion,” Vaughn said.

“Their minds aren’t going to be changed by protest. Their minds are going to be changed by somebody reaching out to them in love, and supporting them, and sharing the gospel with them. When their hearts are transformed toward God, their hearts are going to be transformed about abortion.”

Providing Embrace Grace groups has also impacted Cedar Grove members, who have discovered many commonalities they share with the young women who have benefited from the ministry. Leaders have been able to share their experience with abortion, adoption, sexual abuse and pregnancy outside of marriage.

“It’s just neat as our church has come together around this ministry,” Vaughn said. “We kind of get in this habit of just focusing on what’s right in front of us, and we lose sight of the world outside the church walls. This has helped us to refocus ourselves on the Lord and then to reach out to our surrounding community.”

To learn more about the Embrace Grace and Embrace Life groups at Cedar Grove Baptist Church, visit cedargrovebaptist.church. To learn how your church can start an Embrace Grace small group, visit embracegrace.com.

To view the corresponding images and links that accompany these stories or to read past stories and issues of the Baptist Beacon, visit BaptistBeacon.net.

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