

COLUMNS

America's Revival

By Tim Patterson

FENTON, MI - When we think of our American heritage and especially the early days of our nation, most of us have idyllic conceptions that our country was a deeply spiritual place. We still envision our pre-Revolutionary War community as a very religious and Godly people that reflected the heart and attitude of the first Christian pilgrims that settled on the Eastern coasts of North America. But the fact of the matter is pre-revolutionary America had moved far away from God, and in fact, persecution and demeaning of Christians and the local churches was prevalent.

In the early 1700's the standards of morality were at their lowest and alcoholism was epidemic. Life was hard and dirty in more ways than one. Lawlessness prevailed and a general atmosphere of decadence spread throughout most of the population. It was in the midst of this melee and mess that God did a deep and reviving work not only in the general population, but also in the Christian community. God used the preaching of men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield to bring an entire nation back to God. It was estimated that 50,000 people, out of the colonies', sparse population of 340,000 were added to the New England churches.

Churches that had been lifeless and in danger of dying out altogether, received new life and vitality. The Awakening, as it has been called, had a lasting impact on the new nation that would soon be birthed. It had a significant influence on the development of American ideals of religious and political liberty. Many of the freedoms that we enjoy today were birthed in that extraordinary decade when the glory of God touched down on our infant nation.

Today our nation seems to reflect and magnify the same decadent atmosphere prevalent in the days before our nation's birth. Mainstream denominational churches are now condoning that which is specifically condemned in the Bible as sin. Who would have ever thought the great denominations that helped found this nation and themselves were founded on the Word of God would now ordain homosexuals and place them in positions of great power and authority? This is not the place for me to debate the sinfulness of homosexuality. In fact, there is no debate needed, if one believes the Bible. God's Word is very clear in its condemnation of this destructive and damning sin.

Today there are so many more of us, and the depth of depravity and sin is so severe, is it possible for God to do again what He did for our fledgling nation? Can a people who seem to be caught in the vortex of decay ever be rescued? Is there any hope for America or are we doomed to die a slow and agonizing death? The answer is yes!

There is hope and our nation can be saved from self-destruction, but it can only happen when God does what He did for our forefathers. A great spiritual awakening is the only answer, and now is the time.

If anyone is to blame for the moral decay of our nation it is the Christian Community. Far too long, we have been cloistered in our nice and comfortable monasteries that we call churches. Far too long, we have sat silently as opportunity after opportunity to share the Gospel passes us by. As Christians we must stand up for what is right. Speak out for Biblical truth, and kneel down before God and ask for Him to change our complacent and wicked hearts. If we will do this God will do it again.

II Chron. 7:14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Register or Be Homeless

By Tony Lynn

DALLAS, TX - Get ready. Stop and write this message on your personal calendar for October 1, 2018: "10 AM (EST) - Register for a Birmingham, Alabama hotel on October 1, 2018." Do what I am asking or be homeless in Birmingham. As that date approaches there will be more details at www.sbc.net. You will thank me, this time next year, for reminding you about this one-of-a-kind world event.

I'm inviting you to a 2-day business meeting on June 11-12, 2019 in Birmingham, Alabama which is unlike any other meeting you have ever experienced! Crazy uncles. A carnival-like atmosphere. Free book giveaways that will stack-up higher than an eight-year old. Preaching that will melt your heart. Singing that will make your soul rise. Representatives from some of the 47,000 churches that makeup the Southern Baptist Convention will gather to hear reports and vote on recommendations, a budget, resolutions, and elections.

Eating an Elephant One Bite at a Time

Come experience how our network of autonomous, self-governing convention of 47,000 churches cooperate together to accomplish God's will through 13 organizations. The national network of churches is so large that it is a miracle that we can accomplish so much in just two days of business. It is like eating an elephant one bite at a time. Monumental but doable. (Not that I have a craving for eating elephant meat.) You learn about and could one day serve on one of the following organizations.

Executive Committee
International Mission Board
North American Mission Board
Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission
Gateway Baptist Theological Seminary
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Women's Missionary Union (an auxiliary)
GuideStone Financial Resources
LifeWay Christian Resources

Become a TV Sensation

If you decide you want to ask a question of one of the heads of an agency, approach a microphone. One of the many cameras in the auditorium will find you. In a split second, your face will fill the screens in the auditorium and be streamed live, worldwide on the Internet. First impressions matter, so be careful of what you say on screen and how you say it. Still, never fear. Your question, your vote, and your presence are equal to anyone else in the building. However, remember before you show-up, next year, in Birmingham, Alabama, have your church pre-register you as a messenger from your church. They always want you to identify yourself by name and church membership before you speak at the convention. Your annual church profile (ACP) needs to be completed this fall too if you're going to represent your church home. Remind your church clerk or secretary to file the ACP this fall and pre-register you next spring.

Offered Instructions to J.D. Greear

If you come next year, what happened to me might happen to you. For example, I could tell you that I offered Dr. JD Greear, pastor of Summit Church, vital instruction mere hours before his election to president of the national Southern Baptist Convention. It would be true . . . sort of?

Let me explain. You see the day after JD preached the closing sermon at the 2-day pastor's conference which comes before the annual business meeting, JD and I had a chance encounter outside a set of elevators. I told JD how encouraged I was by his message. He in turn engaged actively in our conversation. During our brief conversation, JD entered my elevator which was going the opposite direction he and his friends were intending to go. I repeated what his friends were saying, "JD this elevator is going down, you need to go up." After my explanation and instruction, JD said to me, "Thanks. Have a good day." So, I did offer JD Greear instructions mere hours before his election to the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention. Though, my instructions were not as important as you might have thought. Ha!

But Seriously folks

Seriously though, you will have sanctified celebrity encounters all day long and every day you are at the annual convention. On Wednesday, I leaned back in my chair and thanked a former president of the SBC for mentoring one of our new church planters in Ann Arbor. On Thursday, I greeted another president of one of our agencies at the airport while he was buying caramel popcorn with his wife. You will discover that those who we think are unapproachable are actually loving, humble, pastoral people serving you and serving the Lord in their roles of leadership. You could very well be one yourself some day.

Please, start saving now. Ask your church to help you go to the convention. Arrange your housing and travel itinerary. Pre-register as a messenger from your church. Next year will come sooner than you think. I hope to see you next year at the annual Southern

Baptist Convention on June 11-12, 2019 and at all the other events that come before and around those incredible days. See you in Birmingham!

Surrender to Freedom

By Mick Schatz

Except for Christmas, my best day as a kid was the last day of school! No more teachers, no more tests, no more sack lunches, no more getting up early, no more homework, just complete freedom! Freedom to have fun, go to the beach, stay up late, play in the woods and freedom to stay with grandma for weeks at a time and eat as much ice cream as possible out of her magically stocked freezer. Sweet Freedom! Unfortunately, as we all know, this freedom was only temporary because school always came back around to enslave my time and imagination.

Thankfully there is a freedom that is eternal and magnificent. It is the freedom we have in Christ because He gave His life for us on the cross where He paid the ultimate price for our freedom. Yet there is a price we must also pay - the price of humble surrender. Compared to the price Christ paid, humble surrender should seem quite easy. Nevertheless it is the most difficult act of the human will. Our pride and our ego are far too important to just surrender control. We know what's best because we have all the answers.

This unwillingness to surrender reminds me of an encounter between Captain Naaman and the prophet Elisha in the book of 2 Kings, chapter five. Naaman was a great warrior but he had leprosy. He was sent to the prophet Elisha for healing who told him to wash in the Jordan River seven times and he would be healed (made clean and set free from the disease). The price of freedom was too high, too undignified, too humiliating so he stormed away full of pride and doomed to die. Proverbs 16:18 tells us the "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling". This was almost the end of Naaman's story, and for many of us this scenario has become all too familiar. We desire to obey God's word and grow stronger and deeper in our faith until we reach the place where obedience and relationship demand too high a price. We choose disobedience over obedience, defeat over victory, ego over humility, self-reliance over surrender and captivity instead of freedom.

Why? Because being free in Christ requires total reliance on him and not ourselves. For Naaman to be free he had to humble himself, surrender his ego and assumptions and literally allow himself to be "washed away". Freedom comes through the blood of Christ washing away our self - all of our pride, vanity, ego and self-righteousness. When we choose to live in freedom, in victory, we discover healing for our souls, the desire to forgive and be forgiven, and the ability to see and want the best in others.

The truth is, once you have experienced living free in Christ, anything less is unacceptable. We desire others to also live in Christ's freedom. Freedom is contagious, victory is inspiring. Jesus won the victory for our freedom. Let's live in it, let's share it!

The Hawk and the Lizard

By Mike Durbin

FENTON, MI - The hawk resting on his arm caught my attention. We were on vacation. Think white sand beaches, palm trees, light blue ocean and the love of my life. He walked around the resort, pausing for people to get their picture taken with this hawk. I was intrigued when he let the bird go free for a moment. It flew and perched on a nearby tree. My mind immediately wondered why this magnificent animal didn't take advantage of his freedom to soar to the heavens. After a few moments, the hawk returned to the outreached, leather padded arm of its trainer.

Then it happened! It was so quick that the trainer couldn't respond fast enough. The hawk pushed off his arm, flapped his wings to climb a few feet, and then, like a dive bomber descended to the ground. The trainer took off after him and a small crowd quickly gathered to see what was happening and to take pictures. I decided to move closer to see the action as well. The trainer had the hawk on its back, holding him down with his arm stretched across the bird's chest. With his free hand, the trainer was trying to pry something from the vice-like grip of the hawk's talons. The hawk was clutching an eight or so inch, light green lizard. The trainer worked meticulously to free the lizard, trying all the time not to crush or hurt either animal.

As the crowd dwindled, I was able to get closer to the action. The hawk, this magnificent hunter of the sky, was clutching onto a child's toy lizard! It wasn't real. I imagine that lizards taste good to hawks. That's why he held on to it with such great tenacity, but the toy was an illusion, an imposter of the real thing. Had the hawk been allowed to keep what he desperately clung to, he would have been sorely disappointed with the first bite.

As I walked away from what appeared to be an epic battle for the hawk, I wondered if I was clinging to anything in life that promises much and delivers nothing. Illusions are everywhere, and are as old as humanity. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (Genesis 3:6 ASV). We know the end of Adam and Eve's story and yet, it's played out in life all around us.

It's hard to describe what it looked like for the trainer to hold the bird down while he tried to free the toy. The hawk was his livelihood - he obviously did not want to crush or injure it. It may have been a cherished pet. He also did not want the bird to instinctively clamp down on his hand or fingers with his powerful talons. As he bent over the obviously distressed hawk, he also had to stay far enough away that the bird could not peck his face. He calmly, patiently released the toy lizard. And when he did, the hawk was free again. Truth does that! "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" - Jesus.

STARTING

Churchgoers stick around for theology, not music or preachers

By Bob Smietana

NASHVILLE, TN - Most churchgoers will put up with a change in music style or a different preacher. But don't mess with a church's beliefs or there may be an exodus, according to a new study from Nashville-based LifeWay Research.

The study of Protestant churchgoers found most are committed to staying at their church over the long haul. But more than half say they would strongly consider leaving if the church's beliefs changed. Pastors often worry about changing church music and setting off a "worship war," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. But few say they would leave over music. Churchgoers are much more concerned about their church's beliefs. "Mess with the music and people may grumble," he said. "Mess with theology and they're out the door."

Churchgoers stay put

LifeWay Research surveyed 1,010 Protestant churchgoers—those who attend services at least once a month—to see how strongly they are tied to their local congregations. Researchers found most churchgoers stay put. Thirty-five percent have been at their church between 10 and 24 years. Twenty-seven percent have been there for 25 years or more. Twenty-one percent have been there less than five years, while 17 percent have been at the same church for between five and nine years.

Lutherans (52 percent), Methodists (40 percent) and Baptists (31 percent) are most likely to have been at their church for 25 years or more. Fewer nondenominational (11 percent) or Assemblies of God/Pentecostal churchgoers (13 percent) have such long tenure. "Most church members have been at their church longer than their pastor," said McConnell.

More than half (57 percent) of churchgoers say they are completely committed to continuing to attend their current church. About a quarter (28 percent) are "very much" committed, while 11 percent are moderately committed. Two percent are slightly committed, while 1 percent are not committed at all. The more people go to church, the more committed they are to attending their same church in the future. Those who attend at least once a week are twice as likely to be completely committed to attending their church (62 percent) than people who go once or twice a month (31 percent). Those who attend once or twice a month are more likely to be moderately committed (36 percent) than those who go at least once a week (7 percent).

Churchgoers with evangelical beliefs are more likely to be completely committed (67 percent) than those who don't have evangelical beliefs (45 percent). Baptists (60 percent) are more likely to be completely committed than Lutherans (47 percent). About two-thirds (63 percent) of churchgoers who are 65 or older are completely committed to attending their same church in the future. That drops to 50 percent for those younger

than 35. Older churchgoers are also least likely to want to leave their church. When asked if they've thought about going to another church in their area, 92 percent of those 65 or older say no.

Overall, 15 percent of churchgoers say they have thought about going to another church in the past six months. Eighty-five percent say they have not. Of those thinking about going to another church, about half (54 percent) have already visited another church. Forty-six percent have not. "If people are thinking about leaving your church, chances are they've already started looking," said McConnell. "So they're probably halfway out the door."

Most feel their beliefs line up with the church

For the most part, churchgoers say they agree with their church's teaching. About half (52 percent) say their beliefs are completely aligned with those of the church. Forty-two percent say their beliefs are mostly aligned. Fewer than 3 percent say their beliefs are slightly aligned, not aligned or they don't know their church's beliefs. Education plays some role in how churchgoers view their church's theology. Churchgoers who have graduate degrees are less likely to accept all their church's teachings. Only a third (35 percent) say their beliefs are completely aligned with those of the church. Sixty percent say their beliefs are mostly aligned.

Two-thirds (62 percent) of churchgoers who have evangelical beliefs say they are completely aligned with their church's theology, while a third are mostly aligned. By contrast, 39 percent of churchgoers who don't have evangelical beliefs say they are completely aligned, and about half (53 percent) are mostly aligned. Sixty percent of churchgoers at big churches—those with more than 1,000 attenders—say they are completely aligned with their church's theology. That drops to 46 percent at churches with fewer than 50 attenders.

Baptists (57 percent) and nondenominational churchgoers (61 percent) are more likely to say they are completely aligned with their church's theology than Lutherans (43 percent) or Methodists (25 percent). Still, churchgoers don't like to see changes in their church's doctrine. More than half (54 percent) say they'd seriously consider leaving if church doctrine changed. Researchers asked about other factors that might cause churchgoers to switch churches. Nearly half (48 percent) would change churches if the churchgoer moved to a new home.

Some churchgoers would leave if the preaching style changed (19 percent), if the pastor left (12 percent) or if a family member wanted a new church (10 percent). Nine percent say they would leave over politics. Fewer would leave if they didn't feel needed (6 percent), if the music style changed (5 percent), if they had a conflict (4 percent) or if a friend stopped attending (3 percent). The survey shows churchgoers care about doctrine, said McConnell. "Still, pastors can't assume everyone in the pews agrees with their preaching," McConnell said. "Overall, 94 percent believe most or all of their church's teaching. But there's still substantial wiggle room. "Every time a pastor gets up to preach, there's a good chance more than a few people in the pews are going to disagree," he said.

Most find church programs helpful

Researchers also looked at how effective churches are in helping people grow spiritually. Most churchgoers think their church is doing a good job. Three-quarters (76 percent) think their church has been either extremely helpful (36 percent) or very helpful (40 percent) in their spiritual growth. Sixteen percent say the church is moderately helpful. Relatively few say the church has not been helpful (1 percent) in their spiritual growth or are not sure (2 percent).

Churchgoers did have some suggestions on ways churches can help them grow. Among them:

- 27 percent want their church to help them understand more about God and the Bible.
- 20 percent want their church to help them find new ways to serve.
- 19 percent want their church to provide more Bible study groups.
- 16 percent want their church to help them get to know more people in church.
- 14 percent say their church could provide forums to answer their spiritual questions.
- 13 percent want their church to give them more chances to serve.
- 13 percent want their church to provide worship experiences that fit their needs.
- 9 percent want their church to provide more interaction with the pastor.
- 8 percent want their church to provide them with a mentor.

Even though most churchgoers are staying put and are relatively happy, there's some reason for concern, McConnell said. At any given church, about 15 percent of the congregation is thinking about leaving. If they go, the church could suffer. "The average church in the United States has less than 100 attenders," McConnell said. "Losing 10 or 15 people could make a huge impact."

For more information visit LifeWayResearch.com and read the complete survey PDF.

About the author: Bob Smietana is senior writer for Facts & Trends at LifeWay Research in Nashville, TN.

Methodology: LifeWay Research conducted the study Aug. 22–30, 2017. The survey was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. People in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®. For those who agree to participate but do not already have internet access, GfK provides at no cost a laptop and ISP connection.

For this survey, a nationally representative sample of U.S. Protestant and nondenominational adults (18 and older) who attend religious services once a month or more often was selected from the KnowledgePanel®.

Sample stratification and base weights were used for gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, metro/non-metro, home ownership, education and income to reflect the most recent U.S. Census data. Study-specific weights included for gender by age, race/ethnicity, region and education to reflect GSS 2016 data. The completed sample is 1,010 surveys. The

sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

Evangelical beliefs are defined using the NAE/LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition based on respondent beliefs. Respondents are asked their level of agreement with four separate statements using a four-point, forced-choice scale (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree). Respondents are categorized as having evangelical beliefs if they strongly agree with all four statements:

The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.

It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.

Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.

LifeWay Research is a Nashville-based, evangelical research firm that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches.

Five Ways Church Planting will Change Your Life

By Will Browning (edited)

CHARLESTON, SC - While our church is now more than 10 years old, I still call myself a church planter. I get away with holding onto this enigmatic title because our church has from the beginning planted other churches — our daughter churches. In our short history, we have planted seven autonomous churches, each of which are thriving today. Raising up church plants is much like raising children. Both require a great sacrifice, but also come with several very real blessings. To say “church planting has changed my life” is certainly cliché, but it is true, nonetheless.

Here are five ways my life has been changed by staying in the church planting game after planting our own church:

1. Keeps me young. Church planting puts me around next generation leaders. Yes, they are Millennials, and they do things differently than any other generation before them. But don't forget, Boomers, the generation before you referred to you as “hippies” when you were entering the workforce. We have something unique to offer to one another. We can complain, or we can train!

2. Keeps me focused. Like little else, church planting fixes my eyes on the Big-K Kingdom over my little-C church. Jesus' favorite topic during his ministry was the Kingdom. He spoke of it 121 times in the Gospels. In comparison, he spoke of the church only twice. Being a multiplying church aligns us more with the idea Jesus himself was most passionate about.

3. Keeps me relevant. Mentoring other church planters forces me to stay on top of the latest ministry strategies. God consistently seems to entrust His next vision for our world to the upcoming generation. It's likely because we "established" leaders can easily get stuck in what makes us comfortable. Instead of falling into the complacency trap, I want to continue to ride God's wave all the way to the end, rather than getting stuck in my created rut.

4. Keeps me humble. Multiple times now, I have stood on the platform with a church planter by my side and told our congregation, "Everyone who feels compelled or called by this man's vision, with gladness I release you to join him." This keeps me humble because church planting reminds me that it was never my church to begin with. Giving away our resources (funds and people) for the benefit of others is a God-approved action He has used over and over again throughout history to conform us to his image.

5. Keeps me on my toes. Church planting is an adventure. I want to see fruits from my ministry grow on other people's trees, as others' fruits are now growing on mine. As a torch was passed down to me from the generation before, I have a legacy to continue. My glory is too small a thing to live for; therefore, I choose to join the adventure of creating a platform for the next generation.

There is an adventure waiting for so many pastors, maybe you, who are waiting on the sidelines of church multiplication. Let me invite you into this life-altering adventure. Get yourself ready for the biggest joy of ministry you've experienced since you led your first person to Jesus. Become a sending church!

About the author: Will Browning, born in Barnwell, South Carolina, currently serves as the Lead Pastor at Journey Church, a multi-site church in the Charleston area. While studying Human Resource Management at Georgia Southern University (B.B.A., 1995) Will became a Christian. He continued his studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div., 2005) and completed his doctorate at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (D.Min., 2015). In October 1999, Will married the love of his life, Tarah. Will and Tarah have three kids: Piper, Ethan, and Jedidiah. Will is an avid South Carolina Gamecock fan, coach to church planters, developing writer, novice triathlete, curious reader and lifelong learner.

STRENGTHENING

'All of us' must evangelize, SBC agrees with task force

by Diana Chandler

Date: June 14, 2018 - Thursday

DALLAS (BP) -- Lay persons, pastors, churches, state conventions and Southern Baptist Convention entities have a role in an evangelism renewal plan Southern Baptists adopted Wednesday (June 13). Messengers adopted an eight-pronged approach recommended by an Evangelism Task Force Steve Gaines appointed in 2017 in his final term as SBC president. Task Force vice chairman Adam W. Greenway presented the plan to messengers after first releasing the document June 11. "It will take all of us working together in unity for the task of the Great Commission to be accomplished," said Greenway, dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry. "Every one of us has a part to play. This is a critical task for us."

Before the vote, the task force concurrently submitted to messengers a 12-point Evangelism Articles of Affirmation and Denial, based on and supported by Scripture. "We wanted to take the opportunity to provide a clear set of principles in terms of things we believe Southern Baptists can heartily affirm as it comes to speaking about evangelism," Greenway said, "and with clarity saying things we do not believe evangelism entails. "One of the most important things we can give to our convention of churches, and to a watching world, is a clear statement about ... where Southern Baptists stand on the issues related to evangelism."

Southern Baptist churches are autonomous and are not obligated to put the recommendations in action; but are encouraged to embrace the report as a ready and viable church resource. The task force called on **all Southern Baptists** to "renew with great urgency the priority of evangelizing the next generations," and to adapt the recommended methodology to individual environments "without changing our theology."

"If the only people who ever hear you talk about the Gospel are already believers," Greenway said on the annual meeting stage, "then you are not being Gospel centered. You're not committed to sharing the Gospel. "It was never meant to be merely an intramural subject for debate," he said of the Gospel. "It was meant to be the intentional passion that we declare to lost people, that there is hope in Jesus Christ."

Churches should set aside a day each month to pray for salvation of the lost and the effectiveness of the church's evangelistic efforts, conduct annual witness training, adopt a baptism goal and submit their Annual Church Profile to help judge the SBC's evangelism effectiveness.

Pastors should model personal evangelism for their congregations, present public Gospel invitations of various kinds that call unbelievers to repent and believe; and "renew extending to followers of Christ God's call to the pastorate, to missions, to evangelism and to all other vocational ministries."

Seminaries should train and engage employees and students in annual witness training and Gospel-sharing events, such as mission trips, local mission partnerships and local churches; and "consider enhancing curriculum requirements in evangelism."

Directors of missions are encouraged to "identify, celebrate and use as a training model" churches and pastors that are effective in evangelism evidenced by baptisms, and to enlist support for churches from Baptist colleges, seminaries, state conventions and evangelistically effective churches.

State convention executive directors should infuse all their ministry efforts with an awareness of lostness and the need for salvation, the report states, and should prioritize evangelism in staffing, training and ministry.

The **North American Mission Board** should help reestablish evangelism as a denominational priority, the task force recommends, and NAMB's senior leadership should involve churches, associations and state conventions in evangelistic outreach.

The task force recommended the **Executive Committee of the SBC** establish a Baptism Sunday on the SBC calendar. Churches would be "invited to work especially hard to lead people to Christ in the weeks prior to the selected date and to focus on a significant baptismal service in which the meaning of baptism is articulated in preaching and teaching," the task force said. Greenway presented the report instead of former task force chairman Paige Patterson, who resigned his chairmanship at the close of his tenure as Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) president.

In addition to Greenway, task force members included SWBTS professor of preaching David Allen; Englewood Baptist Church of Jackson, Tenn., pastor Jordan Easley; Cross Church of Fayetteville, Ark., campus pastor Nick Floyd; North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church pastor Noe Garcia; newly elected SBC president J.D. Greear; Gateway Seminary President Jeff Iorg; Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS) professor of preaching Robert Matz; Cross Pointe Church of Duluth, Ga. pastor James Merritt; and First Baptist Church of O'Fallon, Ill., pastor Doug Mouton.

Concluding the membership roster were New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary professor of evangelism Preston Nix; Brown Missionary Baptist Church of Southaven, Miss., pastor Bartholomew Orr; SWBTS professor of evangelism Matt Queen; Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) professor of evangelism Alvin Reid; Family Church of West Palm Beach, Fla., pastor Jimmy Scroggins; SEBTS professor of preaching Jim Shaddix; and Gaines, ex-officio.

See BP's June 11 story for the full text of the recommendations and evangelism articles.

About the author: Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

FIRST-PERSON: Attracting a crowd at VBS

by Diana Davis

Date: March 01, 2010 - Monday

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Every year, thousands of children across our country meet Jesus for the first time at Vacation Bible School (VBS). Imagine what might happen if every member at your church invited an unchurched child to VBS this summer.

Consider these fresh publicity ideas:

-- Form a creative, committed publicity team to motivate and enable every individual and church group to impact VBS attendance.

-- Single adults coordinate an outdoor registration event for the community. The church softball team delivers door hangers to homes within a mile of the church. Senior adults pre-register members' children by phone.

-- Middle schoolers prepare a short puppet show, performing in the local mall and the church foyer. The choir and praise team post advertisement signs strategically around the city. Garage sales share invitations as they shop to find cowboy hats for a western VBS theme. Homebound members commit to pray for children who will attend.

-- Teens plan a Cell Party, recruiting dozens of adults to join them for a sixty minute phone blitz. Callers use their own cell phone, a script and simple registration form to invite and register kids who visited church last year -- Sunday School guests, sports, fall festival, daycare, Awana, mission groups, inactive members. When a child is registered the caller rings a bell and adds the name to a whiteboard. After a fast-paced hour, they pray for the children, enjoy snacks and celebrate.

-- Individuals help. A techie member designs an outdoor banner invitation. A theatrical member wears a VBS mascot costume, such as a cowboy horse inflatable suit, to visit Sunday School classes or church and community events. Sunday School teachers wear bandanas to show VBS enthusiasm. An inviting story in the local paper shows an intriguing photo of VBS preparations. The women's ministry group rents a huge cowboy advertising balloon.

-- Other members design the stage area. Woodworkers build a simple horse chute for children to enter, and some artistic members organize a branding iron design contest to create excitement. The deadline for children's brand ideas is a month ahead, and the winning design (announced during VBS) is made into a big rubber stamp to "brand" kids as they enter through the chutes each day.

-- Simplify participation. Provide yard sign invitations for church members' lawns. Give everyone postcard invitations to share with friends and neighbors. Create e-invitations they can email friends. A week before VBS, deacons give every worshipper a helium balloon invitation to deliver to a neighbor.

-- The youth group and their leaders plan a special "Howdy Partner" shindig for fifth graders shortly after VBS to honor them and welcome them into the youth department. Continue the cowboy theme with a barn venue, cowboy stew, western games and western style Christian music at a bonfire. Youth are assigned as prayer partners for the fifth graders, and spend time to pray and encourage them.

-- On Sunday after VBS, young adult and children's classes have prepared for new guests who will attend, with quality Bible study and lots of extra chairs, greeters, curriculum and Bibles.

Vacation Bible School can open doors to reach lost families for Christ, but only if those children come. Cast a large vision for every church member to help invite children to VBS.

About the author: Diana Davis is the author of Fresh Ideas (B&H Publishing) and the wife of the Indiana Baptist State Convention executive director. Learn more at www.keeponshining.com.

Ever Wanted to Fit In?

By NAMB Planter Wive's Blog

ALPHARETTA, GA - We had just packed up our kids moved to a new town to serve on church staff. Can you say culture shock?! This new place was way different than where we had previously lived. Women rarely met for bible study, mostly large double incomes, big houses and larger cars. Fancy vacations. Fancy everything. I was in over my head.

I felt lonely and out of place everywhere I went. At the same time, I also felt like God was calling our family to live differently. To spend differently. To love differently than we ever have. I felt conflicted everywhere I went. I wanted to love the least of those but was surrounded by daily extravagances. I felt a bitterness rising up in me. I began to resent and dislike the very people God had called me to serve.

I spent much time in what I call running prayers. Running prayers are me running around the neighborhood with my headphones blaring as I am pleading, yelling, crying, or dancing before the Lord. Yes, it is painful for others to watch but very necessary for my Christian walk. So I began ranting to the Lord about how I felt. As clear as the mailbox in front of me, I heard God say, "Kasey, I didn't call you here to fit in. I called you here to show them how to love Me."

That day literally changed my life and how we, as a family, have lived ever since. We then packed up our kids and moved into a low income neighborhood. We spend our family vacations on the mission field. I often show up at church in jeans, missions t-shirt, and no makeup.

That day I found freedom. Freedom to be who and what God has called me to be. Freedom to quit longing for the things of this world and desire the please the Creator of the Universe. Freedom found only in the Lord.

Courtesy of: Planter Wives Blog, namb.net

Finding freedom from your own expectations

August 08, 2016

By Marianna Dollyhigh

ALPHARETTA, GA - If you are like most women, you are your own worst critic. Being hard on ourselves is what we do. If you live your life never feeling like what you do is enough, then read on, friend! Finding freedom from our own expectations is not impossible.

Let's just cut right to the chase. We all have the propensity to heap unhealthy expectations on ourselves. Certain events and influences from our past can increase that tendency. Ultimately, visiting those places in our lives can bring healing, but there are a few truths that we can all grab hold of now that can help us begin to break free.

Here are some questions to ask to help find freedom from your own expectations:

Do I know my purpose?

Sometimes, we have expectations of ourselves that are outside our purpose. If I was a photographer, but I struggled with nagging thoughts like, "I don't rescue enough people from burning buildings," you would tell me to stick with my pictures and leave the rescues to firefighters. If I know clearly my purpose, then I can weed out other demands that inevitably fight for my attention. Are you clear on your purpose? If not, you may feel like you should do everything to cover your bases. That's exhausting. Find your purpose.

Am I pressured by the success of other women?

Comparing ourselves can be overwhelming. Social media compounds that issue by constantly bombarding us with a filtered version of everyone's best. Somehow, we think we should not only reach our goals for our own purpose, but do what other women are doing, as well. Besides not being realistic, that's not healthy. The result? We live splintered lives, unable to do anything well as we attempt to do it all. And we're exhausted. Run your race without comparing.

Do I know that the world will keep turning if I stop?

Ever find yourself thinking, "if I don't do it, nobody will" ? Perhaps, like me, you say it out loud, taking on a superwoman voice as you do. When we believe we are the only one who will or can do something, we might have an inflated view of ourselves. Yes, there are things that we have to do, but, based on the truth that "I" cannot do everything, there are others that must go. Someone else will and can. This might mean recruiting, and even training, your replacement. Perhaps an unrealistic expectation you placed on yourself is part of someone else's purpose. Let them have it.

Is God expecting this of me?

It would be cruel of a father to demand something from a child and then not give that child the time or resources to do it. If God has given you a task or responsibility, He will

also equip you with what's needed—including time. We beat ourselves up thinking, “if I could just figure out how to manage my time better, I could get it all done,” when in reality we are overloaded with things never given to us by our Savior. He is a good father who is not trying to work you to death and is certainly not demanding perfection. In fact, He wants you to rest.

At times, we are overwhelmed by demands in life we cannot control, such as an illness or loss. During these times, our expectations of ourselves change; they should change. Our focus becomes rest and healing. Yet, even during these times, we can expect too much of ourselves instead of walking in His mercy and grace.

At other times, we heap unhealthy expectations on ourselves unknowingly. Our desire to nurture, to help, to love and to be needed clouds our vision. We try harder and harder to do more than we were designed to do. Outside of God's purpose, we find defeat and exhaustion.

Jesus reminds us that He wants us working alongside Him—not running around trying to impress Him. When He tells us that His yoke is easy, He is giving us a picture of being yoked with Him, as two oxen were when plowing. Together, moving forward together. I believe He has the field already picked out and the seed ready. Are you where God wants you, or are you busy with work you heaped on yourself?

Are you exhausted from trying to get it together? Ask the Father for clarity.

For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. –
Philippians 2:13

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10

Courtesy of: Planter Wives Blog, namb.net via Marianna Dollyhigh blog post.

About the author: In the midst of a crazy life, Marianna Dollyhigh is searching for a connection with my Creator and with community. She is the wife of an amazing pastor who is truly wild at heart, a man's man. They have six children of various ages, colors, and personalities. She loves to write, explaining, “ It's how God works things out in me.”

Freedom: The Power to Become

Dr. Bill Livingston
June, 2018

“To as many as received Him, He gave the power to become God’s sons”- John 1:12

BAY CITY, MI - As we celebrate our nation’s independence on July 4th, Christians have a unique opportunity to renew their commitment to Christian freedom, which this verse describes as receiving both the power and potential to become more like Christ. The disciples of Jesus’ time totally misunderstood the concept of freedom in Christ. They would ask “can I divorce my wife?”, or “can I sue the person who owes me money?”, or “do I **have to** forgive my neighbor?” However, such questions totally miss the issue of Christian freedom.

Freedom is not about “can I do what I want.” It’s about “how you can be more like Christ, not more like yourself.” It’s about “making God’s priorities your priorities...not the other way around.” It’s about “Christ setting you free...not about you setting yourself free.”

The modern day false prophets have tried to create a religion where man is God and God is the servant. Church attenders often believe that if they say nice things about God, He will wipe their board clean, get their daughter into a Top 5 college, and give them new marketing ideas. While false religions imply that God’s role is to feed their selfishness may experience temporary success, commitment to selfishness creates a sinkhole trap from which they will never be free.

It’s the same with ignoring God’s call to holy living. While sin can seem to be enjoyable, its pleasures are only for a short time. I recently had the “pleasure” of discovering that we had a cracked sewer line. We had to get down in the muck, dig out the line, and lift up the pipes. We hoped to eventually get to a place where the ground would be dry, but because the line was broken and continued to leak, the more we dug, the deeper the muck we had to stand in. Living life apart from God’s Spirit is the same way...that’s why Paul (Romans 6:1-5) notes that we are to be dead to sin, and righteous living alone will set us free.

Many Christians embrace selfishness or sinful living because they wish to avoid the inevitable conflicts that come from confronting sin in either their personal situation or in society. The children of Israel thought by avoiding conflict they would spare their children from pain (Numbers 14); instead, they doomed them to wander in the desert for two more generations. Christian freedom won’t stop the battles, but they will keep the battles from stopping you and that is freedom found only in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Romans thought being rich, powerful, educated, and in control they had everything, they had it all. And yet, the society that had all the power and wealth in the known world of that time used their “freedom” to become immoral, diseased, and corrupt. They savaged entire populations of people for their own gain, and eventually collapsed from internal rot and external attacks by weaker enemies. Paul recognized the real meaning of freedom in his writing to Philemon (1:10-21), which is highly instructive here...for all of

the wealth and power of Rome, it was the slave who committed his life to Christ and was obedient to Him who was truly free.

About the author: Bill Livingston is an HR graduate professor, Baptist historian, and former Michigan Baptist pastor. He and his wife Anne live in Bay City, Michigan.

From Generation to Generation

By Leonia Ross

DAVISON, MI - Since the beginning, every generation has been tasked with passing the knowledge of the works of God to the next generation; to make his power, beauty, and heart known to them. We are to teach them, not just tell them, that God loves them, and has a purpose for them, so they learn to get their strength in Him. There is no greater inheritance that we can leave our children, and our children's future children, than a relationship with Jesus, and not just a religion.

God has placed that responsibility on us as parents, grandparents, and leaders in the church. It's a command and a privilege, but it can also be daunting. Years ago, as both a young parent and a new Christian, I knew He made it known to me that the responsibility of teaching my children was mine, but I remember thinking "How do I do this?"

When we are so busy with the things of this world and everyday life, we can often forget the most important foundation we can give them: the ability to see Jesus. Thankfully, we're not the first generation to encounter busyness. How do we know this? In Deuteronomy 6, God instructed the Israelites to teach the words of God "diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them when thou sittest...walkest by the way...liest down...and risest up."

In other words: anywhere and everywhere you can. If it were written today, perhaps God would say "when you ride in the car," "when you serve the elderly in your neighborhood," or even "between innings at the t-ball game." Every moment is a moment to teach. Even if we're unaware, we're still teaching something. Our children watch us like a hawk. They learn what from what we do and don't say, and from what we do and don't do. So why not make the most of every opportunity? If we're looking, conversations and questions about God can be inserted into most moments. Pray for wisdom and He will guide you.

Opportunities don't have to be big or perfect. The examples in Deuteronomy 6 were from the mundane, daily routine. When my kids were little, I remember walking outside with them, looking up, and saying "Isn't it great how God gave us trees?" It can be that easy. If children can learn to see God's handiwork in the small, how much more will they recognize it in the big?

We must also make sure we never stop learning as we guide them. One lesson I'm still learning is to really listen to what my children are saying, especially as they grow older. It's hard to listen if my mind is already made up. But when I've been open, the Lord has used my children to teach me, and help me not be stuck in a generation. In the process,

God has reminded me that He's the real teacher, and that my children and I are learning together as we "walkest by the way."

About the author: Leonia Ross served at Davison Meadows Baptist Church in Davison Michigan with her husband, pastor Randy Ross, for over 20 years. Pastor Randy went home to be with his Savior and Lord December of 2016. Leonia Ross continues to be a faithful member and regularly shares her faith with others and invites them to share in fellowship at Davison Meadows.

How to find freedom from regret

By Matt Rogers

GREENVILLE, SC - Regret is as deadly as worry. One confronts an unknown future, the other an unfortunate past. Both seem unwilling to relinquish their death-grip once they find their way into your mind. They paralyze your actions and plague your relationships. Pastors and church planters are prone to such regret, as we reflect on our personal failures and the ways these decisions have negatively influenced those we love and the churches we lead. Regret over sins or volition or inactivity is one of the major contributing factors to dark days among pastors.

Clichés do little to lessen the pain. We cringe when we hear "live and learn," "forgive and forget," or "you are normal just like all the rest of us." These trite statements, while true, provide little help in confronting the failures of our past. Our theology is the only hope we have when regret seems overwhelming. It's in these moments that our active theology is seen. We can say we believe in God's sovereignty all we want, but if we are crippled by worry, we show that we don't really trust His good plan. In the same way, pastors can rattle off theological concepts like propitiation and justification, but regret proves we've got yet to apply these astounding truths to the real sin in our past and present.

The life-giving promises of Scripture are the God-appointed means of renewing our mind when we feel regret. Promises like: "I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." (Isaiah 43:25 ESV)

or

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," then he adds "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more"(Hebrews 10:14-17 ESV)

The human mind struggles to grasp these truths. We have no mental framework for this type of response. When someone sins against us, we don't respond this way. Perhaps, if God is gracious, we are able to forgive the person for the wrong they've done. Our offer of forgiveness means we will not seek to get even, we won't hold the sin over their head, and we are willing to continue some level of relationship. But we don't forget. We can't.

Yes, I've long since forgotten the name of the kid who stole my sandwich in the middle school cafeteria. Given enough time, we will forget such menial offenses. Deep wounds

don't work that way. The hurt lingers, hovering in our minds like an ever-present hummingbird.

God doesn't work that way. Certainly, He knows our every sin—after all sin is fundamentally an offense against God. And we've sinned against God in far more profound ways than anyone will ever sin against us. Yet, God remembers our sins no more. God doesn't forget our sins, like an absent-minded husband does with the groceries he's supposed to get from the store. He consciously chooses to not remember our sins. They are done, finished, fully paid for by the wrath-bearing substitute, Jesus Christ. He doesn't bring them up again.

God doesn't think, "I know that guy, he's the same guy who was once overcome with addiction or enslaved by anger." He doesn't question our repentance because, after all, we are the same person who's broken promises repeatedly in our past. He doesn't turn away from our corporate praise because we've failed to turn to Him in our private devotions. He remembers our sins no more.

I'll never be able to do the same with my past sins. From time to time, they will come to mind. But, when they do, I can choose to trust God at His word, embrace the forgiveness I've been given through Christ and find freedom from regret. As a pastor, this is my only hope for fighting regret in my own life and leading others to do the same.

Courtesy of: Church Planters Blog, namb.net

About the author: Matt Rogers is the pastor of The Church at Cherrydale in Greenville, South Carolina - a church he planted in 2009. He's married to Sarah and has four children. Matt loves to write and has a number of articles and blog posts published.

SBC resolution affirms women, denounces abuse

by Tom Strobe (Edited)

Date: June 12, 2018 - Tuesday

DALLAS (BP) -- Messengers to the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention affirmed the dignity and worth of women, denounced all forms of abuse and called for sexual purity among Christian leaders in adopting 16 resolutions Tuesday (June 12).

Passage of the resolutions on women, abuse and pastoral purity by nearly unanimous votes late in the afternoon session came after months of disclosures of sexual abuse and misconduct by male leaders had rocked Southern Baptist and other evangelical churches and institutions.

The resolution on women recognized May 15 as the 100th anniversary of female messengers to the SBC meeting and honored "the immeasurable contribution of women to our cooperative mission of Great Commission work." It also affirmed women's gifts "in their distinctive God-assigned roles" and urged Southern Baptists "to encourage, cultivate, and celebrate the diverse gifts, callings, and contributions of women in biblically appropriate ways."

The measure on abuse renounced "all abusive behavior as unquestionably sinful" and called for decisive action to report abuse allegations to law enforcement authorities. It also offered compassion to abuse victims, "being careful to remind the abused that such injustice is undeserved and not a result of personal guilt or fault." In the resolution on clergy purity, messengers repudiated actions that undermine the New Testament standard of holiness for Christian leaders and urged churches "to exercise appropriate redemptive church discipline" when needed.

While the subjects of these first three resolutions had some overlap, the Resolutions Committee -- which received 38 resolutions, the most since 1997 -- "determined to address each theme individually" because of the number of proposed statements it received, Chairman Jason Duesing told reporters afterward. "It was clear to us that the convention wanted to speak to those themes," and separate resolutions allowed the committee to meet that desire, said Duesing, provost and associate professor of historical theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., and a member of Antioch Bible Baptist Church in Gladstone, Mo.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, commented on the three resolutions by commending the Resolutions Committee "for strong, positive resolutions that address a crisis in our country and in our world right now." The resolution process not only speaks "to the outside world for the convention" but also serves "to help educate and equip" Southern Baptists, Moore said at the news conference. "And my hope is that these resolutions, as weighty and biblically crafted and worded as they are, would help to spark conversations and actions in local Southern Baptist churches and other churches about how can we best respond to those who are being abused."

In addition to Duesing, the other committee members, in alphabetical order, were: Ken Alford, pastor, Crossroads Baptist Church, Valdosta, Ga.; Byron Day, pastor, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Laurel, Md.; Candi Finch, assistant professor of theology in women's studies, Southwestern Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas and member of Hope Church, Fort Worth; Willie McLaurin, special assistant to the executive director, Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, Franklin, Tenn., and member of Simeon Baptist Church, Antioch, Tenn.; Chris Metcalf, pastor, Lihue Baptist Church, Lihue, Hawaii; Jason Paredes, lead pastor, Fielder Church, Arlington, Texas; Adron Robinson, senior pastor, Hillcrest Baptist Church, Country Club Hills, Ill.; Alicia Wong, associate professor of women's ministry, Gateway Seminary, Ontario, Calif., and member of Rosena Church, San Bernardino, Calif.; and Curtis Woods, associate executive director for convention relations, Kentucky Baptist Convention, Louisville, Ky., and member of Watson Memorial Baptist Church, Louisville.

About the author: Tom Strode is Washington bureau chief for Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention's news service. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

Summer Vacation with Bible School

By Staff

I was born with SBC blood flowing through my veins. My parents were Southern Baptists as were my parent's parents. So, attending vacation bible school was inevitable. It would never be a question asked in our home, not that I didn't try.

Like every other kid, during the school year I dreamed of summer vacation. I longed for those days when we played outside with friends, the many adventures down to the creek or out in the woods, and staying up late because we could. Who could possibly get excited about summer vacation with bible school? Just the sound of it screamed of summer school, and no one wanted that. It was as if adults added the word vacation in order to trick us or something. Ugh! Yes, I went because that is what we did in our home.

From the very first time I can recall, it was fun! There was nothing about it like school. We marched in, sang songs, participated in crafts and outdoor activities, plus we always got a snack and fresh lemonade. Then there were biblical stories, too, where we learned life lessons and memorized scripture. Sometimes the person from the Bible would show up to tell the story themselves. Okay, so maybe it was the pastor dressed up and wearing a fake beard, but it was still fun. The week flew by and before I knew it, I was wishing it would last longer. Through the years I remember being introduced to real live missionaries and saw slide shows of far away places. They told us about people on the other side of the world who lived very different from us and needed Jesus. It was awesome!

As I got older, it seemed a natural transition to move from participant to worker. This experience was also fun, in its own way. Now I was involved in the preparations, handing out cookies at snack time, and helping play games with the kids. As a VBS worker I learned many new skills and spent more time in my Bible. All those verses I had memorized through the years were coming back to me in a most helpful way. Now I was learning the stories behind them, and able to help others learn these life changing verses. VBS had become a vital part of my summer, I had gone from not looking forward to it and thinking it was something that it wasn't, to loving it and enjoying the experience, and thrilled when the time came to serve.

I still think the name is misleading and most kids aren't interested in going to school during summer break. But, when you get there, feel the excitement, and learn of the love of Jesus your life changes. VBS has always been a blessing in my life and now in the lives of my own family. I am proud to be a Southern Baptist and blessed to serve each summer with our churches Vacation Bible School.

The art of civility: 14 Practical Ways to Demonstrate Civility

June 6, 2018

By John Yeats

JEFFERSON CITY - Growth in the social media sphere has created a challenge for Southern Baptists that we did not have prior to the launch of Facebook in 2004. Prior to the invention of social media there were not as many voices attempting to gain market share with their particular message. Even those in our Baptist ranks who were tasked with the duty to communicate the messages for our media outlets wrote and spoke in the context of certain “rules” that applied – even when discussing difficult issues.

Now, there are hundreds of voices speaking simultaneously into the context of the latest issue, and there seem to be no rules. Some of these voices speak from the context of fact. Others regurgitate the messaging of someone who has an axe to grind. Still others don't have a clue about Baptist theology or biblical values. They use their troubled voices to create an air of suspicion about Southern Baptists in general, our SBC leaders and, ultimately, the gospel.

Our tribe, Southern Baptists, have a history of pronouncing our opinions. However, because we are people of the Book, our history records that we eventually submit to its authority and to one another.

There is no doubt that Southern Baptists have some real issues, but somewhere, somehow, Christ-followers must turn down the noise and listen more closely to the Lord and to one another. As a part of the process, we must learn the art of responding to one another with civility.

There is a growing realization that our inability to deal with our Baptist struggles is largely attributable to the destructive ways in which we talk about issues and one another. Frankly, on a national scale, POTUS's Twitter account is not conducive to civility and sets an unappreciated tone for verbal abuse. Neither is the plethora of blogs, websites, Facebook and Twitter accounts hurling words of contempt and spewing venom at people and institutions with words that are all too hurtful.

Southern Baptists must pause and ask ourselves, “Are we victims of our culture, or will we demonstrate a different, more biblical way to have conversations about the difficult issues we face?” This raises a crucial question: What exactly do we mean by “civility”?

Civility means something more than mere politeness. We really haven't learned civility if all we accomplish is training people to say, “Excuse me, please. Pardon me please,” while the opposition (figuratively) stabs you in the back. Civility cannot mean “roll over and play dead.” When people feel disenfranchised or sense they are losing something precious, they need to be able to raise tough questions and present their cases to those in leadership. But we can all do so with kindness.

There are tough and difficult issues that cannot be avoided because we choose politeness as our defense mechanism. We cannot deny there are real issues of importance that need careful deliberate conversations. Sometimes a public forum is not the best way, but if we must use the public forum, at least for Christ-followers, we must

be civil. Consequently, Christ-followers must become increasingly sensitive to the use of our words and attitudes reflected in public, including the realm of social media.

We need to carefully consider how we speak and write about one another.

Here for your consideration are Dr. Yeats' 14 practical ways to demonstrate civility:

Acknowledge someone's presence by greeting them.

Always express gratitude—please and thank you are always in order.

Everyone is worthy of respect, even if you disagree with them or they have hurt you.

Be ready with a question to show interest in their world. It shows that you think of others more than you think of yourself.

Actively listen to their response. Work at eye contact and avoid chasing after peripheral movement.

Pause and think before you speak. It is a good time to carefully choose your words that do not curse but bring forward the healing salve of forgiveness, redemption, and restoration.

Guard your words and attitude as if the Lord Jesus was listening and watching your conversation (He is).

Don't cross your arms. If you are to be an authentic listener, you cannot let your body language communicate disinterest.

Don't skirt the issues but seek to frame the conversation in terms of seeking solutions; don't focus too much on the details of a problem.

You may not come to an agreement but let the record indicate you are attentive, kind and sensitive toward those who disagree with you.

Keep anger at the foot of the cross, along with snarky, crass, and sarcastic words.

Do your best to separate people from the problem; focus on solutions.

De-escalate by seeking a win/win for methodological and systemic contexts. A solution is not a win if it violates Scripture. The Word of God is never up for a vote.

Remember the evidence of the fullness of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:20-23). "Be alert, stand firm in the faith, act like a man, be strong. Your every action must be done with love" (1 Cor. 16:13-14 CSV).

This article was originally published in The Pathway a bi-weekly newsjournal by the [Missouri Baptist Convention](#) and endeavors to cover not only the events that affect Baptists in Missouri but also the Southern Baptist Convention as a whole and evangelical Christians everywhere.

About the author: Dr. John Yeats is the Executive Director of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

What Does VBS Mean?

By Elaine Weathers

LIVONIA, MI - Recently, while wearing a VBS t-shirt, I was asked by a 20-something young man, "What does VBS stand for?" (Yes, I continue to wear the shirts after VBS.) I replied, "Vacation Bible School." He said, "I know what those words mean but I don't know what that is." I explained, but it saddened me to know we have a generation that does not know the happiness, joy, love and truth that is all part of VBS.

VBS, Vacation Bible School, evokes many precious and wonderful emotions; from the love of the leaders, to the happiness of being with friends, to the joy of learning about Jesus. They all are part of my fond memories. But there is no greater emotion than that created by the many wonderful opportunities VBS provides the church member.

Taking a walk down memory lane first takes me back to childhood, where it seemed that everyone had a VBS. Not only did I attend our church's VBS, but also those of my friends and relatives. Yes, there were different themes and new verses, but I encountered the same caring servants of God. It was also a first opportunity for me to invite others to enjoy VBS in the fun environment that included the gospel in both message and the lives of the children and leaders. As a very young Christian, I was able to be a witness in my Jerusalem, as Acts 1:8 admonishes.

Fast forward a few years to my life as a teen. That was my first opportunity to serve as a VBS helper. It was there that I learned the importance of service in the church and my role in that. From that first exposure, I went on to minister, as a teenager, in children's choir and as a bus captain. VBS was the door that opened my heart to service. As an adult, I have had the opportunity to continue that desire for ministry both in and out of VBS. God has provided several VBS roles in which I have been privileged to serve—from nursery to crafts to teacher and, most recently, to VBS director. Having attended our church for more than 25 years, I have had the privilege of watching many of the children I've ministered to grow up and, in turn, serve the Lord.

Now, as a grandmother, I love that the Lifeway curriculum gives me a connection with my grandchildren, even those in other states. They love showing me that they know the songs, motions and Bible verses. Some of the songs are so memorable that we continue to sing them years later. Although VBS is a significant starting point, the relationships we create can and should be nurtured beyond that. Since we our church has VBS for the whole family—from birth through adulthood—we, the whole church, can find a place to minister and someone to whom we can minister. We then need to build on those relationships to make disciples as directed in Matthew 28.

Yes, VBS is an opportunity. It is an opportunity to serve God and others, to create and build relationships, and to share the gospel with those who need it. These are all part of our responsibility as the body of Christ. Let's ensure that this ministry opportunity remains by each supporting our own church's VBS.

Survey: VBS remains popular among American parents

by Bob Smietana

Date: May 24, 2018 - Thursday

NASHVILLE (BP) -- Back in the 1890s, a pair of Sunday School teachers -- D.T. Miles of Hopedale, Ill., and Virginia Hawes of New York City -- both had the same idea. School kids were off for the summer. Why not invite them to church to study the Bible? And maybe sing a few songs and have some fun along the way?

The idea was a hit. Today, Vacation Bible School -- better known as VBS -- remains one of the most popular church programs in America. Six in 10 Americans say they went to VBS growing up. Two-thirds of American parents say they plan to send kids to VBS this summer -- even if they skip church themselves.

And almost everyone involved had a positive experience, according to a new survey from Nashville-based LifeWay Research, which surveyed 1,200 American adults about VBS. "Each week of the summer there are thousands of VBS programs going on around America," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "It's one of the things that people love about church."

VBS attendance & memories

Twenty-two percent say they went every summer growing up, while 14 percent said they went most summers. Another 13 percent went occasionally. Five percent went more than once. But 40 percent never went. Many went because of a family tie. Forty-two percent say they went because their family attended that church. Twenty-five percent went because their parent or another family member was one of the leaders. Twenty-six percent went because the church was near their home. Twenty-five percent went because a friend invited them.

Among their memories: spending time with kids their own age (46 percent), learning Bible stories (45 percent), singing songs (40 percent), creating crafts (37 percent) and playing games (34 percent). One in 6 (17 percent) remember making a spiritual commitment at VBS. Most (88 percent) say VBS helped them better understand the Bible. That includes two-thirds who either completely agree (37 percent) or mostly agree (26 percent). Twelve percent disagree.

Americans who didn't go to VBS as a child also didn't go to church at all (31 percent) or went to a church that did not offer VBS (31 percent), were too busy (10 percent), weren't invited (7 percent) or didn't go for some other reason (15 percent). Five percent say their family went to a church that offered VBS -- but they weren't interested in going. More than half (61 percent) of American adults who did not go to VBS agree they have some positive thoughts about the program. That includes 28 percent who completely agree (14 percent) or mostly agree (14 percent). Thirty-three percent slightly agree. Thirty-nine percent disagree.

A majority of Americans (57 percent) who did not go to VBS also believe the program could have helped them better understand the Bible -- at least a little. Forty-three

percent disagree. About half (52 percent) agree the program could have impacted their spiritual growth. Forty-eight percent disagree.

The survey's results are a great reminder why VBS matters, said Jana Magruder, director of LifeWay Kids. "It's a strong affirmation of the work that churches put into VBS programs," Magruder said. "I hope churches are encouraged by this research to continue to host VBS for their communities."

Popular with parents

About half (47 percent) of parents with kids under 19 say their child has been to VBS. The most common reasons: The family attended the church where the program was held (38 percent) or the parents were also taking part in VBS (33 percent). Twenty-nine percent say they valued their child's spiritual growth; 27 percent valued studying the Bible. A fourth (26 percent) say their child went to VBS because someone -- other than family -- invited them.

Most parents (95 percent) say VBS was a positive experience for their child. A similar number say VBS helped their child better understand the Bible (94 percent) and influenced their child's spiritual growth (95 percent). Most (95 percent) also say that VBS is one of their child's most meaningful church experiences. Among the reasons parents didn't send kids to VBS: The family didn't go to church (29 percent), the family was too busy (14 percent) or the child was too busy (13 percent). Still, parents who didn't send their kids to VBS have a positive view of the program (83 percent) and say it would have helped their child better understand the Bible (69 percent) or grow spiritually (71 percent).

And this summer, Vacation Bible Schools may be packed again, according to LifeWay Research. Two-thirds of parents (64 percent) say their child is likely to go to VBS this year -- including about half who completely agree (29 percent) or mostly agree (18 percent). A third (36 percent) disagree. More than half (58 percent) say their child may go to more than one VBS. Forty-two percent disagree. Most parents (60 percent) say they'll encourage their kids to attend VBS even if it's held at someone else's church. More parents will encourage their child to attend VBS at another church if they get invited by a friend (69 percent).

"Two-thirds of American parents," Magruder noted, "are eager to send their children to a church activity where they will have fun experiences centered on what churches care about most: Bible stories, the Gospel and worship." "People still believe Vacation Bible School is good for kids," McConnell said "Even parents who don't go to church want their kids to go to VBS."

Methodology: A demographically balanced online panel was used for interviewing American adults. LifeWay Kids sponsored the study. The survey was conducted March 7-10, 2018. Quotas and slight weights were used to balance gender, age, ethnicity, education and region. The completed sample is 1,200 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error from the online panel does not exceed plus or minus 3 percentage points. (This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting.)

Margins of error are higher in sub-groups. LifeWay Research is a Nashville-based, evangelical research firm that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches.

About the author: Bob Smietana is senior writer for Facts & Trends, a magazine and website of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

SENDING

A tour unholy in name, unpleasant by design

by Scott Barkley/The Christian Index

Date: June 06, 2018 - Wednesday

ATLANTA (BP) -- It's Thursday evening, and a group boards a bus at the Georgia Baptist Convention building for several strip clubs, a few hotels and an apartment complex where human trafficking has been reported. The "Unholy Tour," jointly sponsored by Georgia Public Service Commissioner Tim Echols and the Georgia Baptist public affairs office, stretched nearly three hours instead of the scheduled two. Still, it didn't feel like enough time for various speakers to tell their stories from the front of the unmarked bus.

Among them: Kasey McClure, a former Atlanta stripper accustomed to making at least \$1,000 most nights who left that world after giving her life to Christ and the birth of her daughter. In 2004 McClure established 4Sarah, honoring her daughter while providing a platform to build relationships with women in the sex industry and, ultimately, to show a way out. In the 15 years since she left the industry, McClure said, sex trafficking has proliferated. "There are three main areas now where girls go -- the strip clubs, on the street and online," she said. "Technology has made it tougher to fight trafficking. Even though sites like Back Page have been shut down, others are doing the same thing."

In addition, girls entering the sex industry are getting younger and "promised great lives, but that's not what they get." McClure recalled the impact of former Georgia Baptist public policy spokesman Ray Newman, who died in 2013 from a brain tumor. "He came onto the board of 4Sarah in 2007 and encouraged me to start a scholarship for the girls we were helping," she said. "He made a difference in my life." McClure recalled a story shared with her by Newman's widow, Gwen, in a letter. In the 1970s Ray told his wife about a young lady who he'd see walking to the club. He prayed for her to go to church one day. And one day she did. Speaking with Newman afterward, the young lady said she didn't feel she belonged there. Of course, Newman urged her to consider that, yes, she belonged. "So many times these women don't feel like they belong. But, we all belong. We belong in the body of Christ," McClure said.

Eight other women plus Echols spoke with the group, including those fighting sex trafficking through law enforcement and legal means, as well as some formerly in the industry now working through nonprofit groups to help young women get out of

enslavement and others involved in programs to prepare kids to stay away from being entrapped. Echols began the evening referring to William Wilberforce. The English politician became known for his fight against the slave trade but knew he couldn't accomplish his goal of abolishing it alone.

Wilberforce believed it would take a personal experience for his peers to join in the struggle, Echols said. The commissioner told how Wilberforce would plan scenic tours of the Thames River, only for the tour to conclude at a slave ship. Its cargo may have since been discarded but the stench of death and misery remained. "Wilberforce wanted people to face the reality of the slave trade," Echols said. "My goal is to bring people in front of those like Kasey, who are trying to help women get out of this and put the bad guys away."

The tour wound its way through Norcross, the edge of Lilburn, Chamblee, and Brookhaven before reaching north Atlanta, countering the idea that this is a "big city" issue. Seedy hotels exist in small towns, too. And it's not just hotels. At one point the bus stopped near an apartment building. McClure explained how a madam (yes, it's not unusual for women to enslave other women in the sex industry) had operated from one of the residences. Looking at the apartment complex, bus riders didn't see neon signs but children's bicycles and grills on the porches. There were no obvious signs of a prostitution ring.

Later on, the bus pulled near what has become one of Atlanta's most popular strip clubs. McClure said the place has become known for prostitution, pointing to the packed parking lot that included at least one minivan. Lt. Sara Koth of the Forest Park police department and mother of two, said people are shocked to learn how prevalent sex trafficking has become and Atlanta's prominence in it. "To arrest and throw them in jail, you're feeding into the perception that they can't go to the police for help. They'll just get arrested," Koth noted.

Those victimized by human trafficking experience a tough process trying to pull out of it, she said. Often, they're drawn to re-enter a lifestyle that -- even if only for a brief time -- gave them some kind of value, as hard as that is to believe. "The victims don't always act like victims," Koth said. "It can be hard when you work to get someone out of it, you even think they made it, and then they go back to it. "You can't take that personal. You go to the next person and try to help them."

The victims, said Ryn Beasley of Atlanta Redemption Ink, literally become possessions.

"We see women who get branded by their pimp or madam. Girls have come to us with 'Pay me' tattooed on their hand or 'Snitch' on their gum line. Bar codes, a crown, anything that symbolizes they belong to someone -- it's a form of ownership," said Beasley, who worked in the sex industry prior to joining ARI.

Mike Griffin, Georgia Baptist public affairs representative, hopes more churches and pastors will take part in the Unholy Tour. Atlanta has become among the worst cities in America when it comes to human trafficking, he told The Christian Index, newsjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention. "It's important for churches to be knowledgeable. They

should be able to educate their congregation on warning signs and dangers involved. Churches need to be able to minister to these victims.

"Overall, the tour helps show the need for better public policy regarding human trafficking and support for better law enforcement. Because of the internet and social media, it's become a problem that really knows no boundaries." McClure's faith in God's power to lead anyone out of the sex industry rests in her own testimony. "My relationship with God changed me. When I took that final step out of the club, I had all the material things I thought would better my life. But they didn't, so I thought, 'Why not try God?' "Now when I talk to girls I ask them what they have to show for themselves. They may be staying with men in an extended stay hotel and unable to buy their own food. I was making \$1,000-\$2,000 a night and still wasn't happy. The only thing that made me happy was stepping out on faith and depending on God." McClure's initial step of faith has led to several more. "I have a 10th-grade education, but now speak to teachers, doctors, lawyers, anyone who wants to hear me. God has opened up those doors for me because I decided to follow Him. "He's using my past to help others."

About the author: Scott Barkley is editor of The Christian Index (www.christianindex.org), newsjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

Freedom of a different sort

By Staff

WASHINGTON, DC - House Speaker, Paul Ryan, released a statement back in February regarding the horrible state of sex trafficking in America. He began by stating, "Sex trafficking is a crime that involves coercing a person to engage in commercial sex acts. It is the ultimate violation of human rights and really is modern day slavery."

Often considered to be a crime in certain parts of the world, the International Labor Organization estimates there are 20.9 million victims of a \$150 billion industry in existence worldwide. Speaker Ryan wants to raise awareness to the tragedy taking place in our own country. Literally hundreds of thousands are being forced into this work across the nation. "So many victims of human trafficking are in our own backyard, and many of these cases start with deceit, exploitation, and recruitment on the internet," stated Ryan.

Surprisingly, this sort unlawful action is taking place under our noses, in the suburbs and around the corner. Amy Lipovsky, ministry leader for FRe Outreach, shared in a recent article, "The way trafficking happens in the suburbs is through hotels and motels, not brothels and street prostitution. In nice hotels in affluent communities, we notice more of what I call the 'Pretty Woman' or more high-class call girl" while other victims may look like a woman on a business trip or even an ordinary mom." It isn't always easy to detect so training and keen awareness help, especially when we can educate front desk clerks.

Lipovsky added in two star hotels/motels trafficking victims tend to be more unkempt, bringing with them few, if any, personal belongings. They arrive with older men whom seem "like an odd pairing." In Detroit we have noticed, "a lot of people, when they see

these things, just don't know what to call it and are unsure about what's going on. FRe Outreach Ministry seeks to help hotel staff be more observant and recognize these issues taking place in their community, their hotel.

Barb Fahrenkrug, volunteer with FRe Outreach, shares, "We don't want to be obnoxious - we just want to show we care about their business and the people who visit their hotels." "Building relationships with them is a really good thing. We've been able to pray for and minister to staff as well..." Churches across the country have just as much opportunity to get involved in their own community. There can never be too much care shown in the name of Jesus. The hotel staff respond to it and the victims of trafficking can be rescued. It's a win-win!

Human trafficking has become so rampant in certain parts of the world it is woven into the fabric of the culture. As Christians we should make no bones about it, God does not like it, nor ever intended for such atrocity. The Bible is clear that vulnerable people are to be protected, cared for and loved. We can not turn our eyes from the obvious sin in our midst lest it become part of the culture here in our home land. I Timothy 1:8-10 states kidnapping as sin, "Whether the bondage is physical or psychological, unjustly restraining another is wrong." When Jesus ascended into heaven, God provided the Holy Spirit to be His representative on earth, guiding our hearts and lives. He specifically charged the church with showing love to others, to look after the disadvantaged and to keep ourselves uninfluenced by the world's values. It is the church, gifted and prepared, that is called to stand up for injustice.

People caught up in sex trafficking often struggle with acceptance once rescued. They need to see and experience good, healthy community in order to heal. Many have come from broken homes, were abused as children, and have never known what a good family looks like. The church family can provide these victims with a safe, caring environment in which to overcome and observe Godly acceptance. Since victims are often conditioned to think a certain way, feeling the wrath of an absolute authoritarian when they fail, truth can be misguided, misunderstood and misplaced. God loving people are called upon to wrap the victim in their arms of healthy love, shower them with positive examples, and disciple them in the ways of the Bible.

So, what do you do if you suspect someone is being trafficked? Pray, always pray. If the situation feels urgent call 911. If there is no immediate need call the non-emergency number of 311. You can always search the internet for your local anti-trafficking ministry/organization or call the national hotline - 888.3737.888. Whatever you do, please do not turn a deaf ear or blind eye to the ever growing problem. Help the helpless once again find freedom in the land of the free.

Pew: Religious restrictions spreading globally

by Diana Chandler

Date: June 22, 2018 - Friday

WASHINGTON (BP) -- Religious restrictions continue to spread globally in Pew Research Center's ninth annual study of laws and social hostilities in 198 countries, although most countries still rank low to moderate on a study scale researchers devised.

Less than half of the countries, 42 percent, ranked high or very high on Pew's scale of restrictions including both laws and social hostilities, up from 40 percent in 2015 and 29 percent in the baseline study period of 2007, Pew said.

"Since some of these countries are among the world's most populous (such as China and India), this means that a large share of the world's population in 2016 -- 83% -- lived in countries with high or very high religious restrictions," Pew said, as compared to 79 percent of the world's population living in those countries in 2015. With religious minorities bearing the brunt of the restrictions and harassment, Pew said, "the actual proportion of the world's population that is affected by high levels of religious restrictions may be considerably lower than 85%."

In spite of the rankings and variables, religiously motivated harassment and restrictions of varying amounts, whether from the government or society, were reported in 187 of the countries studied. The findings are up from 169 countries in 2015 and indicate the most widespread harassment since 2007. Rankings are based on a composite of government restrictions, including laws, policies and actions by officials, which had increased, and hostilities perpetrated by organizations and social groups, which had remained stable. In its study, Pew devised a 10-point scale based on several indicators and divided the countries into five regions, the Americas, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, Asia-Pacific and Middle-East/North Africa.

Christians were most likely to face governmental and social harassment in the Asia-Pacific region, Pew said. There, governments in 30 percent of the countries harassed Christians, and social groups in 27 percent of the countries had done so. Across the globe, Christians were harassed in 144 countries, up from 128 countries in 2015. "In Uzbekistan, for example, authorities raided the private homes of Protestant Christians, seized religious literature and imposed fines," Pew said in its report. "And in Nepal, local communities in the Kathmandu Valley opposed burials by perceived 'outsiders,' making it difficult for Protestant churches to access land they had bought years earlier."

Muslims were most likely to face harassment by both governments and social groups in Europe, where governmental harassment was found in 28 percent of the countries and social harassment in 36 percent. Globally, Muslims were harassed in 142 countries in 2016, up from 125 the previous year. Jews, who comprise 0.2 percent of the world's population, faced harassment in 87 countries, most often perpetrated by individuals rather than the government.

Egypt, Russia, India, Indonesia and Turkey had the highest levels of both government restrictions and social hostilities in 2016, among the world's most populous countries. In

government restrictions alone, China ranked highest, with India ranking highest in social hostilities. When considering government restrictions alone, 55 countries comprising 28 percent of those studied ranked high and very high on the scale, Pew said, compared to 50 countries or 25 percent in 2015. When considering societal harassment, the 54 countries that ranked high or very high on the scale in 2016 were virtually unchanged from the 53 countries ranking high or very high the previous year, remaining stable at 27 percent.

Ranking highest in government restrictions in addition to China, Russia, Egypt and Turkey were Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Turkmenistan, Syria, Algeria, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Eritrea, Morocco, Brunei, Singapore, Western Sahara, Azerbaijan, Laos, Burma, Iraq and Mauritania. Ranking highest in societal harassment in addition to India, Russia and Egypt were Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Palestinian territories, Israel and Bangladesh.

Government restrictions included efforts to ban particular faiths, prohibit conversion, limit preaching or give preferential treatment to one or more religious groups. Social hostilities included religion-related armed conflict or terrorism, mob or sectarian violence and harassment over religion-based attire.

Researchers studied more than a dozen sources of public information, including reports from the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, various European groups, the United Nations and many independent, nongovernmental organizations, Pew said.

The full report is available at pewforum.org under the religion tab.

About the author: Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

MICHIGAN NEWS

Freedom of a different sort

By Staff

WASHINGTON, DC - House Speaker, Paul Ryan, released a statement back in February regarding the horrible state of sex trafficking in America. He began by stating, "Sex trafficking is a crime that involves coercing a person to engage in commercial sex acts. It is the ultimate violation of human rights and really is modern day slavery."

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Freedom: The Power to Become

Dr. Bill Livingston

June, 2018

“To as many as received Him, He gave the power to become God’s sons”- John 1:12

BAY CITY, MI - As we celebrate our nation’s independence on July 4th, Christians have a unique opportunity to renew their commitment to Christian freedom, which this verse describes as receiving both the power and potential to become more like Christ. The disciples of Jesus’ time totally misunderstood the concept of freedom in Christ. They would ask “can I divorce my wife?”, or “can I sue the person who owes me money?”, or “do I **have to** forgive my neighbor?” However, such questions totally miss the issue of Christian freedom.

Freedom is not about “can I do what I want.” It’s about “how you can be more like Christ, not more like yourself.” It’s about “making God’s priorities your priorities...not the other way around.” It’s about “Christ setting you free...not about you setting yourself free.”

The modern day false prophets have tried to create a religion where man is God and God is the servant. Church attenders often believe that if they say nice things about God, He will wipe their board clean, get their daughter into a Top 5 college, and give them new marketing ideas. While false religions imply that God’s role is to feed their selfishness may experience temporary success, commitment to selfishness creates a sinkhole trap from which they will never be free.

It's the same with ignoring God's call to holy living. While sin can seem to be enjoyable, its pleasures are only for a short time. I recently had the "pleasure" of discovering that we had a cracked sewer line. We had to get down in the muck, dig out the line, and lift up the pipes. We hoped to eventually get to a place where the ground would be dry, but because the line was broken and continued to leak, the more we dug, the deeper the muck we had to stand in. Living life apart from God's Spirit is the same way...that's why Paul (Romans 6:1-5) notes that we are to be dead to sin, and righteous living alone will set us free.

Many Christians embrace selfishness or sinful living because they wish to avoid the inevitable conflicts that come from confronting sin in either their personal situation or in society. The children of Israel thought by avoiding conflict they would spare their children from pain (Numbers 14); instead, they doomed them to wander in the desert for two more generations. Christian freedom won't stop the battles, but they will keep the battles from stopping you and that is freedom found only in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Romans thought being rich, powerful, educated, and in control they had everything, they had it all. And yet, the society that had all the power and wealth in the known world of that time used their "freedom" to become immoral, diseased, and corrupt. They savaged entire populations of people for their own gain, and eventually collapsed from internal rot and external attacks by weaker enemies. Paul recognized the real meaning of freedom in his writing to Philemon (1:10-21), which is highly instructive here...for all of the wealth and power of Rome, it was the slave who committed his life to Christ and was obedient to Him who was truly free.

About the author: Bill Livingston is an HR graduate professor, Baptist historian, and former Michigan Baptist pastor. He and his wife Anne live in Bay City, Michigan.

From Generation to Generation

By Leonia Ross

DAVISON, MI - Since the beginning, every generation has been tasked with passing the knowledge of the works of God to the next generation; to make his power, beauty, and heart known to them. We are to teach them, not just tell them, that God loves them, and has a purpose for them, so they learn to get their strength in Him. There is no greater inheritance that we can leave our children, and our children's future children, than a relationship with Jesus, and not just a religion.

God has placed that responsibility on us as parents, grandparents, and leaders in the church. It's a command and a privilege, but it can also be daunting. Years ago, as both a young parent and a new Christian, I knew He made it known to me that the responsibility of teaching my children was mine, but I remember thinking "How do I do this?"

When we are so busy with the things of this world and everyday life, we can often forget the most important foundation we can give them: the ability to see Jesus. Thankfully, we're not the first generation to encounter busyness. How do we know this? In

Deuteronomy 6, God instructed the Israelites to teach the words of God “diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them when thou sittest...walkest by the way...liest down...and risest up.”

In other words: anywhere and everywhere you can. If it were written today, perhaps God would say “when you ride in the car,” “when you serve the elderly in your neighborhood,” or even “between innings at the t-ball game.” Every moment is a moment to teach. Even if we’re unaware, we’re still teaching something. Our children watch us like a hawk. They learn what from what we do and don’t say, and from what we do and don’t do. So why not make the most of every opportunity? If we’re looking, conversations and questions about God can be inserted into most moments. Pray for wisdom and He will guide you.

Opportunities don’t have to be big or perfect. The examples in Deuteronomy 6 were from the mundane, daily routine. When my kids were little, I remember walking outside with them, looking up, and saying “Isn’t it great how God gave us trees?” It can be that easy. If children can learn to see God’s handiwork in the small, how much more will they recognize it in the big?

We must also make sure we never stop learning as we guide them. One lesson I’m still learning is to really listen to what my children are saying, especially as they grow older. It’s hard to listen if my mind is already made up. But when I’ve been open, the Lord has used my children to teach me, and help me not be stuck in a generation. In the process, God has reminded me that He’s the real teacher, and that my children and I are learning together as we “walkest by the way.”

About the author: Leonia Ross served at Davison Meadows Baptist Church in Davison Michigan with her husband, pastor Randy Ross, for over 20 years. Pastor Randy went home to be with his Savior and Lord December of 2016. Leonia Ross continues to be a faithful member and regularly shares her faith with others and invites them to share in fellowship at Davison Meadows.

AROUND THE STATE

African American Historical Trip - Temple of Faith is hosting an African American Historical Trip to Charleston, South Carolina (3 nights); and Savannah, Georgia (2 nights) August 15-21, 2018. The cost is \$499.00 which covers the bus. However, the cost of the hotel is not included!! Cost of Hotel: Hotel 3 nights at \$137.66 per room, per night in Charleston; and 2 nights at \$105.57 per room per night in Savannah. Breakfast is complimentary at each hotel. There are 17 seats available. They will be sold on a first come first served basis. If interested, please call Temple of Faith Baptist Church at 313-836-0720 or call Rev. Kevin Williams at 248-259-2576. All payments are due July 15th, 2018. There will be no extending of the date. To reserve your seat, make out your check of \$499 to Temple of Faith Baptist Church 15801 W. Chicago. You don't want to miss out on this historical Trip! I'll see you there!! Please remember: July 15th, 2018 is the last day to pay and secure your seat! It cannot be extended!

Harper Creek Baptist has a new pastor

Harper Creek Baptist Church, located at 13222 Beadle Lake Road, Battle Creek, Michigan, welcomed Jeffery Renard, M. Div., as its Pastor on Palm Sunday (March 25, 2018). Brother Jeff is a graduate of Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri, and graduated with a Master of Divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. His wife, Sharon, is also a graduate of Southwest Baptist University with a degree in Elementary Education. They are originally from Wichita, Kansas.

Jeff and Sharon, will be moving to Battle Creek, from Albertsville, Alabama. They served for 21 years as missionaries in Brazil with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. They have four adult children.

Harper Creek Baptist Church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Please visit their website at www.harpercreekbaptist.org for more information.

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Ad Submission Guidelines

Baptist Beacon classifieds are posted free of charge.

All classified posts will run for 2 consecutive months. Longer or shorter times may be requested. Publication of classifieds correspond with the monthly publication of the Baptist Beacon.

Classifieds must be from a BSCM church.

Be sure to include thorough details of request, name of church, contact information as well as a point of contact.

Submissions must be made no later than the 10th of the month prior to publication.

Submit all classified ads to beacon@bscm.org

ABOUT US

The Baptist Beacon is the official newsjournal of the [Baptist State Convention of Michigan \(BSCM\)](#), in association with the Southern Baptist Convention. The mission of the Baptist Beacon is to communicate with Michigan Baptists in our shared mission of punching holes in the darkness through starting, strengthening, and sending churches.

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