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God is Pro-Choice

By Tim Patterson

Some of you who just read the title to this article had to race to the medicine cabinet because you had to take your blood pressure prescription in order to keep you from going into cardiac arrest. You can't believe that anyone would have the audacity to think that God would come down on the side of the pro-abortionist. Others of you may be saying to yourself or someone in your presence, "Now that's the kind of enlightened thinking I like to hear." But before any of you "blows a gasket" or enters into a joyous jig, you should consider what the title states and what it does not.

Your presuppositions have again taken over your thoughts before you know all the facts. You see, presuppositions are like wearing tinted glasses. Everything you see through those eye coverings effects and changes your perception of reality. Even though the change may be slight, nonetheless what you perceive is not completely accurate. The problem is that we get our presuppositions much like we contract the measles. We are not quite sure where they come from, but the evidence that we have been infected is without doubt. The question then arises, "Can we truly be without presuppositions?" The answer is no, but we can be aware that we are affected by them and adjust our actions, attitudes and decisions accordingly. It is vitally important that we see and understand things from God's perspective. That is, we must presuppose that God is the ultimate source of truth and knowledge. Such an issue to which we can apply this premise is that of "Pro-Choice vs Pro-Life".

First of all, I believe (presupposition! based on the fact of and faith in the living, personal, creative God) that He sets apart human life as unique and valuable since it bears His image. [Gen.1:26,27].

Secondly, He therefore preserves and protects human life as no other life on earth. [Psa. 8:4-5] We are not just plants and animals that are only pieces of an enormous floating ecosystem.

Third, that kind of life begins at conception and continues to develop in the womb where God is at work; shaping the child into the precise kind of person He desires it to be. [Psa. 22:9-10; Psa. 51:5; Psa. 139:13-16; Matt.1:18-20; Luke 1:41]

Fourth, since it is God's will that every child's life be protected after birth, (thou shall not kill) it is certainly His will that such protection applies to the child in his or her prenatal state.

It is my presupposition that we are ultimately responsible and accountable to God for our actions. If my logic and presuppositions are correct, then I understand God to be Pro-Choice. That is, He chooses life for all humans and so should we. We should especially do so for those who do not have the opportunity to choose for themselves, the pre-born.

The sanctity of human life is precious to God and thus must be precious to man. Those who do not choose life, but say that before birth the human within a mother's womb is nothing more than a mass of lifeless tissue presuppose that God is not who He says that He is and that life within a womb is not precious. Their argument is based on the faulty presupposition that a woman's right of choice, whether for convenience, health or circumstance must take precedence over the rights of the pre-born to choose life and the choice of God to give it.

What we must do in addressing this or any issue is to honestly analyze our logic and reasoning, and decide whether or not we are presupposing there is a God to whom we are accountable or not. The man or woman who believes they are nothing more than animals, and that there is no God, will ultimately act and think as animals. The Choice is up to us.

Neglecting the Penitent Baptist

By Tony Lynn

Were you the ignored “good kid” in the family because you were not causing any obvious trouble? Yet, underneath the pleasant veneer you were in a private war? Did you feel neglected? Or did you grow comfortable with your secret battles?

Would you have liked some help with the struggles you kept private? Would it have helped if someone would have taken the time to sit down with you to ask, “How are you really doing?” Would you have gushed all that you wanted to confess?

Now, as an adult, a pastor, a ministry leader or a teacher are you neglecting the good behaving “Penitent Baptist” right in front of you?

- In one church ministry, a pastor frequently gave a teenage boy the opportunity to perform a musical special on Sundays because members of the congregation were inspired when they saw the young man perform.
- On another occasion, a pastor was thankful to have an energetic man serve others throughout the church with an enthusiasm and intensity rarely seen in anyone else. The man’s instant response to the pastor’s request for help was always, “Yes, whatever you need pastor.”
- In another circumstance, a woman who was a wife, mother, and faithful servant in the church committed suicide after her husband was called by their local bank asking why they were severely behind in their house payments?

What I have come to call the Penitent Baptist is the church member who by all obvious observations appears to have their lives all together, but in reality they are suffering alone. Many admire them. Some want to be like them. Yet, all the while they are caving into temptation, they are trying to win more credit with God by doing good, or they are ashamed of the private pattern of life that has enslaved them.

- After the Holy Spirit stirred the pastor’s heart, he approached the adolescent with a simple question, “Why do you want to perform a musical piece on particular Sunday mornings in such a spontaneous, urgent way?” The teen looked down focusing on the floor between them and muttered, “When I am out on the weekends with my girlfriend or my buddies I give into temptations and afterwards I feel guilty; yet, after I perform on Sundays I feel I am brought back closer to God because he forgives me.”

- After the pastor and helpful man became closer friends, the pastor realized his friend was driven by strong emotions. The man lacked self-assurance. He required constant affirmation by other people. The man kept account of what he considered offenses against him. He easily grew resentful of those who he thought made critical remarks or did not esteem him enough. As the pastor and man visited over coffee one day, the man realized that he worked hard in public to offset the private, negative resentments and anger he felt toward others who had done him wrong.

- Later it was discovered, the woman in the rural county took her own life because she had taken the earnings, savings and investments from her family's life to gamble. Within six-hours in a single day, the woman went from the discovery of concealing her gambling losses to ending her own life without facing and overcoming the challenge with the love and support of her family and her church.

How can those who seem so admirable and heroic go unnoticed when they actually need help? Why do adults, pastors, ministry leaders and teachers neglect those who may be privately struggling? I believe there are two myths that cause us to neglect those who struggle while they serve frequently and happily in the church. The two myths are:

1. Service means sinless – We incorrectly assume those who are busy in ministry do not struggle with sin. We do not assume perfection, but we assume too much.
2. Service means maturity – We make the mistake of believing those who enthusiastically serve the Lord are spiritually mature in every area of their lives.

Is there a better way to help the Penitent Baptist? Can we rethink the way we see the energetic servants of Christ so that we don't leave them abandoned in their quiet, swirling whirlpools of guilt and shame? I believe we can help by practicing the following three mandates. The three mandates are:

1. Cultivate relationships of trust – People who are in trouble are more apt to approach someone with whom they already have an established trustful relationship. Time and depth build those meaningful relationships. Good leaders set aside time to regularly visit with energetic servants offering opportunities for those in trouble to ask for help. A simple question such as, "How are you doing spiritually?" can rescue someone in a world of trouble.
2. Build a culture of mutual reliance – Many of us teach others to be self-reliant and not to disturb us with their difficulties. We give the impression, "You have been given a

task and empowered to do it. Get your job done while I do mine.” The danger is that those who follow our example think we do not want to be bothered by their spiritual battles. In our communities of faith, we will assist one another to pull-off a big church event, but we ignore those who need help to win a spiritual victory that could change a life. Good leaders model mutual reliance by communicating, “We are here for one another.”

3. Teach that sanctification is a lifelong process – We need to lead people to find comfort in the fact that much of the Bible was written to offer correction to average people like us. Prophets and people who walked with Christ were often corrected or spoke to others about changing life toward patterns that would glorify God. There is the comfort; but, the other side of that reality is that no one should become content at being anything less than entirely faithful to the Lord. All of us should pursue obedience and we best work out that obedience together, not in solitude.

As we walk through our community of faith, let’s walk slowly watching for the Penitent Baptist, those who are busy for the Lord while burdened with sin. As we have conversations, let’s listen carefully to the dedicated, earnest servants who labor out of love but who may also have a heavy load of guilt that they need to share. By doing so, we will help the silent ones caving to temptation, those trying to earn their salvation, or the men and women enslaved to patterns of addiction hiding their troubles in shame.

Bless Every Home

By Mike Durbin

It's the middle of May as I write these words. The sights, sounds, and smells of Spring are everywhere. A pair of mallards are swimming in water beside our home and chipmunks are scurrying back and forth. Spring flowers have burst through the soil and are in full bloom. Almost all of the trees around our house are full of buds and the birds are chirping songs. In the distance, we can hear the high school band playing and the crowd cheering for one of the teams. Winter's darkness is gone and we are enjoying, not just the warmth of Spring, but the long hours of daylight it brings.

It's very noticeable that people are outside once again. They're riding bikes, walking, or like us, doing yard work. For many of us, it's much easier to connect with our neighbors outside during the warmer months of the year. We greet one another and catch up on each other's lives. These informal moments help us build relationships with the people who live closest to us. As followers of Christ, we want our neighbors to know Him. We count on our churches helping us to share our faith and giving us opportunities to invite our neighbors to events where the Gospel will be shared.

If your church hasn't already done so, this is a great time to plan summer and fall outreach events: Block parties, concerts in the park, service projects, VBS, BBQ's, outdoor baptisms, or neighborhood movie nights. Events like these (and many others) help us share our faith by giving us opportunities to invite family, friends, and neighbors to participate.

Bless Every Home is an excellent prayer strategy that uses an interactive website that helps us pray by name for our neighbors. When you sign up as a "light" in your neighborhood, you will receive daily notifications to pray for 5 neighbors by name. In addition to Prayer, Bless Every Home will provide you with the resources to Care for your neighbors, Share the Gospel with them, and Disciple them for a life journey of faith. Click on the yellow Bless Every Home quick link at BSCM.org for more information.

While you're planning your outreach events, remember that we have evangelism grants available to help Michigan Baptist churches who give through the Cooperative Program to engage your communities with the Gospel. Churches can apply for two Evangelism Grants up to \$1000 each per year. It is our desire to partner with your church as you share the Gospel in your community. The Evangelism Grant Form only takes a few minutes to fill out, but it can really help your church conduct quality outreach events. Go to BSCM.org and scroll down to the yellow Evangelism Grant quick link to apply.

For those who have received a grant in the past, there is a significant change on the form that I want to explain to you. To receive a grant, a church has to fill out the Annual Church Profile (ACP). In recent years, only about one-third of Michigan Baptist Churches have filled out the ACP. As a result, baptism totals for our state have plummeted to about half what they were a decade ago. This is concerning because it represents fewer people being reached for Christ. Hopefully, that is not the case, and it is only a reduction in reporting. The only way we can get an accurate picture of what is happening across our state is for churches to fill out the ACP. It helps us measure the effectiveness of our evangelistic and other efforts. To update your ACP, contact Andrew at our office and he will help you. It's quick, and it matters.

COME RIDE WITH US!

By Mick Schatz

What a ride! In March I began my third year here at Bambi Lake, and what a ride it has been! Each day brings new challenges and opportunities so no one day is ever the same as the last. However, there are three things about Bambi Lake I am passionate about— it's past, present, and future.

Past – At every camp or retreat that we host, I encounter stories of how Bambi Lake has impacted a life for eternity. I hear testimonies of individuals who were saved here as a child, and now serve in a church or full-time ministry. Most often those individuals are now bringing their family, student group, or church to Bambi Lake. I watch as friends reunite and share memories of first meeting each other at a camp or retreat fifteen or twenty years ago. I listen to students tell of the first time they heard the voice of God speak to them in the quietness and calm sitting by the lake. Numerous are the tales of cramming a few hundred into Hubbs chapel, but it did not matter because worship was the priority of the day. Being uncomfortable was not an issue because God was in the house and His presence was imminent. That will preach! Many, many lives have been transformed by the power of the gospel here at Bambi Lake. What a heritage, what a legacy.

Present – It has been said the best gift we can give ourselves and those around us is to be present. With such an amazing heritage to learn from and stand on, and by the grace of God, Bambi Lake now has the responsibility to be present. We cannot be satisfied and rest on the accomplishments of our past – however great – we must be present. We must be engaged in raising up new leaders and fiercely empowering young and old alike to share the Good News of salvation, the Good News of Jesus. I am excited to say that this is a reality at Bambi Lake. Every camp and every retreat, new stories are emerging in people's lives. New chapters are being written in the lives of those who are discovering freedom, healing, joy, and forgiveness in Christ. Bambi Lake is discovering new ways to encounter the culture with the love of Christ. We are implementing new programs and opportunities for the Body of Christ to be encouraged and empowered for the Kingdom. Bambi Lake is striving to be a lighthouse in our community, state, nation and world. Bambi Lake is Present!

Future – With a legacy of life change, and a mandate to be present, I am ecstatic about the future of Bambi Lake. We should all be! As great as the past has been, I believe the future is going to be even more amazing. Not just because of new camps, retreats, or new activities, but because of people like you. Yes, people just like you reading this

article, God's people, Christian Michiganders who love God and worship together with other believers at churches filled with worship because the presence of God is evident. How you ask? By praying for Bambi Lake and taking advantage of opportunities to participate. Many of you already have stories written at Bambi Lake. Others have yet to experience a weekend or week of enjoying fellowship with God and making new friends and memories. I believe, like many of you, God has great plans and designs for Bambi Lake. His presence is being felt and experienced here in new and refreshing ways. The cool part? He is inviting you and me to come. So, come join the ride. Come be refreshed. Come find rest. Come be present and see God move!

WMU Streetwalking Ministry: Light in the Darkness

By Trennis Henderson

RICHMOND, Va.—This isn't your typical WMU ministry project. A small group of volunteers gathers two nights a month in south Richmond, Va., to walk a mile-long strip of the city and minister to prostitutes and others they cross paths with along the way.

The volunteers meet in the parking lot of a nearby fast-food restaurant about 11 p.m. for a brief time of orientation and prayer before heading out two by two along a street dotted with aging motels, used car lots and the occasional pawnshop or tattoo parlor.

Usually spending 90 minutes or so strolling along the route, team members pause frequently to pray specifically for the women and men on the streets and for the neighborhood in general.

On a recent night, one of the ministry volunteers noted that a shooting had been reported in the area earlier in the evening. A few blocks later, group members saw several police cars and an ambulance parked in front of one of the motels. Rather than deter the team, one of them stopped to pray for those involved, including praying for the motel manager by name.

Valerie Carter Smith, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia, organized the streetwalking ministry more than a decade ago while she was serving on staff in a local congregation. Pat Eggleston joined the ministry effort a few years later, helping coordinate and lead the volunteer ministry.

A soft-spoken, white-haired grandmother of eight, Pat doesn't match the image of someone who would be walking the streets of Richmond's prostitution zone at midnight or 1 a.m. But she sees that as an advantage.

"It's obvious that I have a few years behind me. I would just say age is sometimes a wonderful opportunity," she remarked. "I'm obviously someone's grandmother and I'm able to approach people in that manner. Often there are people who think I'm too old to do certain things but we have to use the advantages we have. God has given old age a real advantage and I believe we have to use that."

Offering hope and resources

As the ministry volunteers strike up conversations with young women and young men they pass on the streets, “we just meet them where they are,” Pat noted. She said they seek to convey a sense of personal dignity and self-worth to those struggling amid difficult circumstances and choices.

“This is a very unscripted opportunity. Each person injects his or her own personality based on just how the Spirit leads us and the person we encounter,” she said. “My intro is usually, ‘Hi, how are you tonight? Are you safe? We’re from the church and we’d just like to take a minute and speak with you. Is there something we can pray with you about?’”

While the volunteers watch for signs of individuals being trafficked, “most of the young people we meet here are substance abusers,” Pat said. “Most of them are here because of their drug addiction and they are prostituting to make the money.

“Our goal is to be salt and light to a dark world,” she emphasized. “It’s a very dangerous lifestyle. We go there and just casually meet people, we talk to them, we offer prayer. Our goal is to just offer them hope, offer resources.”

Explaining that “so many of these young people really want out,” Pat quickly added, “They didn’t want in to begin with. Many are searching for a way out.

“We don’t go and chastise anyone,” she said. “We’re not there to pass judgment or offer correction. We are there to just lift them in prayer and love them, take their hands, hug them, whatever opportunity comes to us.”

Serving in a dark, dangerous place

Recounting one painful memory of ministering in such a harsh setting, Pat described her final visit with a young man she had gotten to know. She said she pulled her car over, rolled down the window and asked, “Are you okay tonight?” His response was, “Just pray for me.” Two weeks later, Pat said, he was murdered.

“It’s a very dark place. It’s very dangerous,” she reiterated. “But we love them, we love the folks we meet. They’re looking for hope. ... I feel like our witness is through what they hear us pray. We’re not going to lecture them but when they hear us pray for them and lift them to the Lord, we hope that puts hope in their heart and that they feel the grace of God and the grace and love that we offer them.”

How does serving in that environment mesh with National WMU's goal of "making disciples of Jesus who live on mission"?

"I just see WMU as being about people – people locally and around the world," Pat said. "It's an incredible organization that I believe has contributed to changing the world. We haven't changed as much as some of us would like yet but we're moving in that direction with passion."

"It doesn't leave the DNA of WMU at all. It doesn't deviate," Valerie agreed. She said the streetwalking ministry is a practical, hands-on example of "mission involvement or what we used to call mission action before that, mobilizing and inspiring the church to be involved."

Pursuing "divine appointments"

As sirens wailed in the background, Valerie paused to greet a young woman on the street, "Hey, Sweetie, how you doing?" she asked. "Be careful, okay?"

As the woman continued on her way, Valerie explained, "We pray for what we call divine appointments, asking, 'God, who do you have us to share with?' They don't have to be those caught in prostitution. We talk to anyone that we pass.

"The significance rests in the parables in the Gospels of the lost sheep, the lost son and the lost coin," she pointed out. "Our purpose is to share Jesus with people who are caught. These girls make one bad decision or something happened to them that took them further than they wanted to go and getting back is a whole 'nother story."

Among their ministry tools, volunteers hand out gloves in the winter and bottles of water in the summer. They also distribute small brochures that pose the question: "Do you want out?" The discreet pamphlets provide hotline numbers for such resources as counseling, 12- step recovery programs, transitional housing and an emergency shelter as well as Valerie's personal contact information.

"If they call my number, I follow them all the way. I don't let them go," Valerie affirmed. Noting that she updates volunteers and other WMU members about the needs and victories along the way, she added, "I've seen girls recover from drugs and prostitution because WMU ladies prayed for them."

Sharing good news in the trenches

While such tangible results as professions of faith, rescuing underage girls from the streets or helping drug addicts get into treatment facilities have been limited over the years, Valerie said, “God spoke and said, ‘Your call is to be in the trenches, to be light in darkness, to be obedient to that.’ This is my calling. I’m just here to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Pat agreed that the motivation is not based on visible results. “It’s a ministry where you have to be satisfied that you don’t know if you made a difference,” she said. “You have to be able to know that I may never see this person again, but I have two or three minutes, maybe, to love them, to put something in their heart encouraging.

“I believe we are planting a seed. We see ourselves as often the first responders,” she shared. “We love them, we pray with them, we pray for them and pray that God puts another person in their path.

“We’re just part of a series of contacts because it’s such a brief encounter. That’s not comfortable for everybody,” she acknowledged. “We’re sort of results-oriented people so you have to be satisfied with that. You do your part and then God takes care of the rest.”

For Pat Eggleston, Valerie Carter Smith and other volunteers, that means faithfully shining the light of hope and love even on Richmond’s darkest street corners.

Class of 2018 Church Plants Already Bearing Fruit

By Brandon Elrod

(CALGARY) — Chris and Mindy Flora responded to God’s stirring in their hearts and moved to Canada in January of 2017 to reach a city whose population desperately needed the gospel.

“When we heard that the city of Calgary was 95 percent lost and one of the fastest growing cities in North America,” Chris said, “God broke our hearts for the city.”

After inviting people to Bible studies, hosting block parties and summer camps and carefully cultivating relationships, the Floras launched Multiply Church in February 2018 with a core group of 28 people.

“It’s now about 130 people who call us home,” Chris said, “and we average between 60 and 70 people every week. We saw eleven accept Christ and seven baptized in our first year.”

Throughout the US and Canada, similar stories can be told of how God is blessing new congregations that are already making a significant gospel impact on individual lives and communities.

In Atlanta, an under-reached area in the gospel-soaked South, Mike McKee and his team launched Image Church in January 2018. They average 191 in worship attendance, have baptized 21 people and have built strong relationships within the community, especially a local elementary school they serve.

Grace Church, in Boston, has a plan to multiply across the city, and in September 2018 they launched a third campus, Grace Church West Bridgewater, led by pastor Stephen Sargent. The new congregation has baptized 27 since its launch and on Easter Sunday 2019 they welcomed 667 people.

Last year, 878 churches were added to the ranks of Southern Baptists. Of those, 624 were new church plants and 254 became newly-affiliated, cooperating churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. Of those new church plants, 62 percent were either non-Anglo or multi-ethnic.

The North American Mission Board (NAMB), comes alongside churches, associations and state Baptist convention partners to plant new churches in North America.

“We plant churches everywhere for everyone,” said NAMB president Kevin Ezell. “We are incredibly grateful for each of these new churches and the missionaries who lead

them, but we need so many more. We could plant a hundred more tomorrow if we had the qualified church planting missionaries to do it.”

NAMB has developed its strategy to help churches plant healthy churches that can thrive in cities and neighborhoods where their gospel witness is desperately needed.

“Over the years, we have continued to hone our church planting pathway so that our missionaries are able to start with a strong foundation,” said Dhati Lewis, vice president of the Send Network, NAMB’s church planting arm. “That enables these churches to be a lasting presence in communities for years to come.”

A key aspect to discovering and developing more of those missionaries has been the creation of the Send Network’s Multiplication Pipeline. The Send Network instituted multiplication as a core value within partner churches in order to encourage and equip church plants and establish churches to train new missionaries.

“We have been working to identify churches that we call ‘multiplying churches.’ These are congregations that intentionally disciple and lead their people by preparing them to become workers in the harvest,” Ezell said. “Any church, no matter the size, can multiply if they decide to do so. At NAMB, our goal is to help churches create this sending culture.”

To learn more and to involve your church in NAMB’s Multiplication Pipeline, visit namb.net/pipeline.

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

Dad, the Lord and I, Together

By Billy Walker

Southgate-I have started this article a couple of times, and hoping the creative juices will flow easier with each new beginning. Since the last time I put pen to paper (or fingertips to keys) to share, my dad went home to be with Jesus. Exactly halfway between the beginning of December and Christmas, our family gathered at the house as paramedics worked to revive my dad, who at that point was gone by earthly standards, yet already more alive than he had ever been before. The very next night, we hosted a special concert with Ernie Haase and Signature Sound. An evening made possible, more than anything else, because of my dad. A church our size had no business hosting a night like that, and I was baffled that it had all worked out.

God planned the perfect night of hope and healing for our church family. Instead of having to somehow muddle through two nights of community driven concerts that weekend, we instead hosted the community to his viewing and homegoing celebration. They drove to Detroit from as far away as the Upper Peninsula, Illinois, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and all points in between. It was a wonderful tribute. Let me try to share just a few life lessons that have been part of the process of hurt, hope and healing that have taken place.

First of all, is the need to give thanks; give thanks for the memories, give thanks for the lessons taught, give thanks for the time shared. Can I admit something to you? I can find myself questioning, doubting, even resenting God's timing. But I endeavor to quickly eradicate that thinking and move into the lane of gratefulness. Here is something that may sound a bit on the crazy side, but has been a recurring theme. I am thankful for the hurt! If only because in this case, the pain of losing him at this stage of life has simply shed light on all the years he was with us. I am keenly aware that is not the case for everyone, and it moves you to have more empathy with those not as fortunate in their parental relationships.

Speaking of the hurt, emotion is a wave that can be ridden, but rarely completely controlled. Just a couple of days removed from the funeral, my wife mentioned that she felt she had cried so much, there were no more tears to be shed. We, of course, have found many more. I know there are some of you that might fit into the "never let em see you weep" category, but that was not my dad, and it's definitely not me. Let grief happen, and if it happens with tears than so be it. It is a far better venue of relief than many other mechanisms of coping with loss. And do not be surprised at how that emotion can arise seemingly out of nowhere. Interestingly I have had a hard time at the end of my sermons.

Another piece of advice that bears repeating because of its relevance. There have been times where in my selfishness I wish that dad was back here. Even if it's in a hospital bed or a rehab assistance center, I need to see him, hear his voice, get his advice, know his love and encouragement. It's what I need! At those times, it is helpful to try to

imagine what he is doing, what he is part of, who he might be with. When the realization of heaven becomes real, I love him too much to continue wishing he was still here.

Finally, but most important, there really is a peace that passes earthly understanding that can only be truly understood when life is anything but peaceful. The Sunday after his passing, I was continuing a series on “Unwrapping Christmas,” and the gift we just happened to be opening that day was PEACE. The prophets promised peace, and peace on earth was delivered that first Christmas. I don’t think it would have been wrong for me to skip speaking that Sunday, but dad had engrained in all of us that if “the show must go on” in the entertainment industry, the ministry was far more important than that. With or without dad’s “stick with it” mentality, the only explanation for what happened that morning, and throughout the days to come, was a God-given grace that could only be experienced by those having a relationship with the Prince of Peace.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 12:10, “If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Dad understood the importance of that. He lived at peace, and he died at peace, because he knew the Prince of Peace and his greatest desire was for others to know Him, too. At the end of so many of his messages, he would share John 1:12; **“But to as many as receive Him to them He gave the power to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name.”** To God’s glory, dad spoke to well over a million people in his lifetime, and personally shook the hand of more than 30,000 who gave their lives to Jesus Christ. He also prayed with hundreds of others who today serve around the world in full time ministry, and attribute that decision to a message and invitation he had given. He leaves a tremendous legacy and shoes too big to personally fill.

My dad was definitely my hero, and the thing about our heroes is that they are supposed to be invincible. I am sure that is one reason why this has been one of the most difficult seasons I’ve ever dealt with. But here’s the final thing, the lesson he taught above and beyond everything else. As much as my earthly father loved me, my Heavenly Father loves me even more. There are countless numbers of people who still need to experience that love. While they may not have the earthly experience I’ve been fortunate enough to have, they can know my Jesus, and by God’s grace, I will do everything in my power to continue to share that Good News until the day I see my dad again. I cling to this promise – Dad is with the Lord, and the Lord is with us, and someday we will all be together again.

Digital coaching tool to help build healthy marriages by Joy Allmond

NASHVILLE (BP) -- Pastors and church leaders may feel called upon to be experts when it comes to shepherding the marriages in their congregations, but research shows many don't feel up to the task.

In 2015, LifeWay Research found 78 percent of pastors surveyed had at least one couple approach them regarding challenges in their marriage within the past year, and 69 percent of churches didn't have an ongoing marriage ministry.

LifeWay Christian Resources has launched Woo Marriage to come alongside church leaders to help create a healthy marriage culture in their congregations. Woo Marriage is a Christ-centered, 30-course digital marriage coaching tool that offers biblical encouragement and practical guidance from 11 ministry and marriage expert couples.

Those marriage coaches include Transformation Church pastor Derwin Gray and wife Vicki, author and researcher Shaunti Feldhahn and husband Jeff, LifeWay marriage and family strategist Joshua Straub and wife Christi, Reach Fellowship Pastor D.A. Horton and wife Elicia and New Spring pastor Clayton King and wife Sharie.

Woo Marriage video sessions explore foundational topics in marriage, such as communication, intimacy, boundaries, conflict resolution and forgiveness, as well as curated pathways for all seasons of marriage.

Specialized courses for pastors and their spouses are also included.

"The LifeWay Research study uncovered that pastors were facing barriers ministering to couples due to time, a lack of resources and feelings of inadequacy when coaching couples," said Mickey Pitts, brand manager for Woo Marriage.

Other findings from the 2015 research showed 40 percent of pastors said they and their staff lacked the time to invest in marriage ministry, and one-third (34 percent) of pastors said they didn't feel qualified as marriage experts.

"We wanted to create something for church leaders that would serve as a supplemental tool for marriage ministry that would duplicate their time, give them a flexible resource for the digital age and provide biblical coaching from ministry leaders they can trust," Pitts said.

Mark Dance, director of LifeWay Pastors, is featured in several of the video-teaching sessions with his wife Janet.

"Pastors like to start, strengthen and save marriages, but can sometimes get overwhelmed by the never-ending weight of the task," Dance said.

"I expect Woo Marriage will help churches build transformational marriages in their congregations -- and help leaders strengthen their own marriages as they shepherd God's people."

Pitts explained that ultimately, the aim of Woo Marriage is to point people to the Gospel.

"LifeWay built this resource in hopes of wooing -- hence the name -- couples to Christ and one another," Pitts said. "We know that a full understanding of the Gospel and Christ's pursuit of us is the key to building, equipping and restoring marriages that last a lifetime."

Woo Marriage is available on a monthly or annual subscription model, has a virtual support team available to answer questions and provides a short video that demonstrates how to use the resource. For more information, visit WooMarriage.com.

SBC: Baptisms Decline Nationally, But Increase in Michigan

by Carol Pipes

NASHVILLE (BP) -- Southern Baptist congregations saw an increase of more than \$82 million in overall giving in 2018, according to the latest Annual Church Profile (ACP) report. However, other key metrics declined slightly in 2018, including baptisms, membership, average worship attendance and total number of Southern Baptist churches.

Meanwhile, here in Michigan baptisms showed a 20% increase in 2018, growing from 709 in 2017 to 852 last year.

The number of churches cooperating with the Southern Baptist Convention declined by 88 to 47,456 or 0.19 percent. Southern Baptists also reported 4,085 church-type missions last year, a decline of 291 or 6.65 percent. The number of churches and missions combined is 51,541 congregations. The ACP is compiled by LifeWay Christian Resources in cooperation with Baptist state conventions.

"Part of the Annual Church Profile process is for associations and state conventions to connect with each congregation and to confirm they still exist and are cooperating together in ministry," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "This year several states put extra effort into identifying and confirming cooperating churches, revealing the decrease in the number of congregations."

Four state conventions saw double-digit growth in the number of Southern Baptist congregations. The Baptist General Convention of Texas added 44 congregations, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention grew by 31, the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention added 22 congregations, and the SBC of Virginia grew by 20. Those figures include churches along with church-type missions -- congregations that are not fully independent or self-sustaining.

Although Southern Baptist congregations reported increased giving, reported membership of those congregations declined by 192,404, down 1.28 percent to 14.8 million members. Average weekly worship attendance declined by 0.43 percent to 5.3 million worshipers.

McConnell noted that while the ACP offers a snapshot of the Southern Baptist Convention, it does not tell the whole story. Seventy-six percent of Southern Baptist

churches participated in the 2018 ACP by reporting at least one item on the profile. Almost a quarter of churches did not report any information.

"The percent of churches reporting in 2018 is up two percentage points from 2017 but lower than the three previous years (2014-2016) when we had 77 percent participation," he said.

As in previous years, reported totals do not include all of the activity of Southern Baptist congregations, though the summary does include adjustments in some categories for non-reporting congregations.

Baptism decline slows

Southern Baptist congregations baptized 246,442 people in 2018, a 3.02 percent decline from the 254,122 reported in 2017. Southern Baptists saw a 9.49 percent decline in baptisms from 2016-2017. In 2016, Southern Baptists reported a 4.89 percent decline in baptisms from the previous year.

"Seeing our neighbors or children follow Christ in believer's baptism has never been something to take for granted," McConnell said. "Every baptism reported signifies change that only the Holy Spirit can bring about. Southern Baptists are blessed to have seen these lives transformed. We pray God will continue to move and that He would empower us to share the Gospel with more people in the coming year."

Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, agreed, "While this report contains news that concerns us greatly, we need to celebrate every life who was positively impacted by the Gospel.

"As we look forward," he said, "it is time to press reset spiritually and strategically in the Southern Baptist Convention. Prioritizing and elevating the advancement of the good news of Jesus Christ into every town, city and county in America, as well to every person across the world, must be recaptured by every church. Urgency is not an option for any of us as Christ-followers. People need Jesus and they need Jesus now. Our generation of Baptists must believe and determine now that we will do whatever it takes to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations."

Several state conventions experienced growth in baptism numbers this past year. State conventions with the largest increases in baptisms in 2018 were the California Southern

Baptist Convention, which grew by 2,653 to 12,212; the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, which grew by 2,092 to 21,563; the Florida Baptist Convention, which grew by 1,245 to 26,162, the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina grew by 469 to 17,511; and the Colorado Baptist General Convention grew by 353 to 1,834.

Giving & mission expenditures

Total church receipts and undesignated receipts were both up for the second year in a row. Total church receipts reported through the ACP increased 0.7 percent to 11.8 billion. Undesignated church receipts increased 0.87 percent to \$9.6 billion.

Congregations reported total mission expenditures of \$1.17 billion and Great Commission Giving of \$572 million.

Giving through the SBC's Cooperative Program is not included in the ACP statistical summary. Those totals are available through Baptist state conventions and the SBC Executive Committee which processes the mission gifts.

Individual congregations voluntarily report their ACP data to their local Baptist associations and/or their state conventions. National statistics are compiled and released when all cooperating state conventions have reported.

Honor Your Father

By Greg Burdine

Adrian - Dads are special. I have great memories of my dad. He was a steel mill worker who worked the swing shift. He worked hard, but seemed to take a lot of time with four kids. Every summer he would take his vacation, and we would go to Smoky Mountains or Florida and have a great time.

But something happened when I became teenager. I thought I knew more than my dad. It's not that I didn't love him anymore. I just didn't see the value of my dad in my life. I seldom took his advice, and I bristled against his correction. But now that I'm older, I realize the wisdom in honoring my dad.

Throughout the Bible we are commanded to "Honor your parents" (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Matthew 15:4; Matthew 19:19; Mark 7:10; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Ephesians 6:2). So, I want to share with you three reasons it is important to 'honor your father.'

1 – Honor your dad because he knows more than you.

Your dad knows some things just by the process of living. Children, youth, and young adults can share in this accumulated knowledge and wisdom.

Do you think you will know more in 25 years than you do now? Regardless of your age, if your father is still around, he has already been your age and knows the results of the path you are choosing. You can learn a lot from his successes and mistakes.

2 – Honor your dad because disobedience is dangerous.

A father is often the first authority God places in our life. God gives authority figures to guide and discipline us. They guide us into a blessed life and discipline us away from danger. If we do not learn to respond appropriately to dad's authority, we will not likely respond well to other authority figures in our lives, even to God's authority.

3 – Honor your dad because it makes it easier to honor your Heavenly Father.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:2 that the command to honor your parents comes with a promise of blessing. Why is there a special blessing to this commandment? Because our earthly parents are our first glimpses of God. The way we

respond to our parents will dictate our response to our eternal Father throughout our entire life.

Hall of Fame Dad

One of my favorite stories is about the Baseball Hall of Fame. In 1993, workers were cleaning behind a display cabinet and found an old photograph. It was a stocky man in a baseball uniform with the words 'Sinclair Oil' on the shirt.

Stapled on the picture was a note that read, "You were never too tired to play ball. On your days off, you helped build the Little League field. You always came to watch me play. You were a Hall of Fame dad. I wish I could share this moment with you."

After some research, they found the man who put it there. It seems the ballplayer in the photo was his late father. He was proud of his dad, so he decided to honor his father by holding his own little ceremony to induct his dad into the Hall of Fame.

I hope you will be the kind of father (or mother) whose children honor you, and I hope you will be the kind of person who will 'honor your father.' You can still do that, even if your father has passed away.

IMB trustees approve 26 missionaries, look toward future growth

By Julie McGowan

International Mission Board trustees approved the appointment of 26 new missionaries to take the gospel to the nations during their May 22-23 meeting in Richmond. Trustees also considered pivotal changes in ministry advancement and prayer strategies; welcomed a report from Adam Greenway; heard an update from external examiners; and elected 2019-2020 officers.

The new missionaries will be commissioned for service at a Sending Celebration June 11 at 4:20 p.m. during the afternoon session of the SBC annual meeting in Birmingham, Alabama. The service will be live-streamed on sbc.net.

Advancing mission

In his address to the board of trustees, IMB President Paul Chitwood referenced Revelation 7:9: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’

“They are worshipping — worshipping the One who is worthy,” Chitwood said. “We call that the IMB’s vision, but we’re always quick to point out that it is, first and foremost, the vision of the Church.”

He said the fulfillment of that vision takes people such as Brian and Ronda Massey, IMB missionaries deep in the mountains of Colombia who are not deterred by immense challenges: hours of “beating and banging” in a four-wheel-drive pickup to get where they’re going; rains that bring flash flooding; military checkpoints on their way up the mountain; or rebel-controlled checkpoints once they are on the mountain.

“They are not dissuaded because, there in the mountains, there is a people who haven’t yet believed and, should the world end today, that people won’t be there, standing before the throne,” Chitwood said. “And that is unacceptable because the Father gave the life of His only Son for them to be there.”

The Masseys are choosing to live — and, if called upon, are willing to die — to see that vision fulfilled, he said. “And all over the world today, in mountains, on the plains, in the sprawling cities, along the coastlines, in the jungles and villages, and refugee settlements, and bombed out buildings where people shift about in the rubble, IMB missionaries will go and they will share, choosing to live and, if called upon, willing to die, in order to see the vision fulfilled. And they go with an unshakable confidence that the vision of the Church, the vision of heaven, will be fulfilled.”

“And that’s why we are here,” he told trustees. “We are here to ensure they can go out there. We are here to do everything that needs to be done — everything that has to be done — to give them the support they need, the training they need, the resources they need to be as effective as they can be as they go. Just as much as they are doing their job in fulfillment of the vision, we must do our job in fulfillment of the vision.”

Chitwood announced Ministry Advancement/Fund Development and the IMB Prayer Ministry will be moved to the President’s Office in an effort to elevate resourcing the mission. Funding the mission has been one of the greatest challenges facing the IMB over the past decade. He said that challenge compels senior leaders to do a better job of letting individual donors know about opportunities to worship God and fulfill the Great Commission through giving.

“We also know that personnel and personal checks are not our greatest resource in fulfilling the Great Commission,” he said. “The Holy Spirit of God is our greatest resource. We tap into that resource through prayer.” To reinvigorate prayer support, the President’s Office will oversee the IMB Prayer Ministry “to invest ourselves more heavily in appealing to the One who Reigns over the nations to give us the nations.”

Advancing partnership

Dr. Adam Greenway, who was elected president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, in February, brought greetings and an update from the seminary.

“Southwestern Seminary desires to be the greatest partner and friend we can be with you,” Greenway said. “We come not to be served, but to serve. ... Our seminary has been the place where thousands of men and women over our 111-year-history have sensed God’s calling or further developed God’s calling to go the nations. Southwestern Seminary, in our history, has been the greatest provider of people — God-called men and women — who have come through the FMB (Foreign Mission Board) and the IMB. ... Our Great Commission roots run deep. That is not the metric that is true today, but I

am committed to doing all I can as president of our seminary to work with the IMB to see that situation turn around.”

Every missions faculty member at Southwestern is IMB-experienced, Greenway said, representing nearly seven decades of missions experience. The seminary will never have a missions professor who is not an IMB veteran, he committed.

Reporting that more than 320 unreached people groups reside in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, he said Southwestern Seminary “may be the most providentially situated of the six seminaries for having a field-laboratory for field engagement and for reaching the nations. God in His kindness has positioned our seminary to be the kind of place where people can come to get hands-on experience in reaching people who are lost in spiritual darkness.”

Advancing best practices

Trustees heard [recommendations](#) Wednesday (May 22) from the firm conducting an external examination of IMB’s handling of past allegations of child abuse and sexual harassment (including sexual assault) and IMB’s present policies and practices. Chitwood [responded immediately](#) with an apology to victims and a pledge for the future. Leaders also [expressed their affirmation](#) of the examination.

“On behalf of the trustees, I’m grateful that we walked through this process,” said Lisa Lovell, a trustee officer who represented IMB on the task force. “One instance of abuse is one too many. We’ve learned so much, and implementing the recommendations will help us improve our prevention and response efforts.”

In his plenary address Thursday, Chitwood said the IMB’s efforts to see the vision of Revelation 7:9 fulfilled have included “such pressing assignments as taking significant steps forward to help guard the safety of every missionary, staff member, TCK (third-culture kid), volunteer, and national partner from abuse. Those efforts have included acknowledging past failures, repenting of them, and apologizing to those who have been harmed. Make no mistake, that is not a distraction from our mission of seeing the vision fulfilled. It is vital to our mission. Thank you for understanding and affirming that as our governing board.”

Transitions

Trustees adopted a resolution of appreciation for the service of [Gena Wilson](#), missionary to European peoples from 1995-2000 and 2001-2019, who died May 13. The resolution read: “The International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, herein expresses appreciation for faithful service to God through this board and pledges special prayer support for the family during the days ahead.”

Twelve trustees were recognized for their service as they complete their terms or resign: Gary Barkley, Missouri; David Beauchamp, Florida; Barbara Carlson, New Mexico; Max Croft, Alabama; Rick Dunbar, Mississippi; Jordan Easley, Tennessee; Rob Futral, Mississippi; Don McDonald, Arkansas; Rob Peters, North Carolina; Tim Simpson, Maryland/Delaware; Tony Smith, South Carolina; and Jay Wolf, Alabama.

Seth Polk, lead pastor of Cross Lanes Baptist Church in Cross Lanes, West Virginia, was elected as trustee chairman for 2019-2020; Chuck Pourciau, senior pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana, was elected as first vice chair; Lisa Lovell, a member of First Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, was elected as second vice chair; and Cheryl Wright, a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Shawnee, Oklahoma, was elected as recording secretary.

God ‘miraculously’ provided

Outgoing trustee chairman Rick Dunbar told of visiting IMB personnel last year in Africa. While floating in a boat along a river, Dunbar asked a missionary about her work. She told how they use SD cards to share the Bible, the JESUS Film, and other gospel resources with people in their heart language. One particular day, the SD cards were popular, and the team gave them all away.

“Later in that day, a young lady came up to our missionary and said she wanted to know more about Jesus,” Dunbar recalled. “Our missionary told her about Jesus, but the lady was distraught they were out of SD cards.” She wanted a resource to take home, and she asked the missionary to check her bag one more time to see if any were left.

“To prove there were no more, the missionary took the bag she brought the SD cards in and turned it up and shook it,” he said. “She knew the bag was empty, but somehow one SD card fell out.”

The same thing happened again. And again. Three times the missionary checked her empty bag, and three times an SD card loaded with the Bible in the heart language of the people fell out of the bag.

“We know that God’s Word never comes back empty (Isaiah 55:11), but accomplishes His will and His purpose,” Dunbar said in ending the meeting — and his service as an IMB trustee. “I wonder what God wrote on those SD cards? ... God stepped in miraculously and provided. One day when we get to heaven, I want to know the rest of that story.”

The next IMB trustee meeting is scheduled for Sept. 25-26 in Richmond, with a missionary Sending Celebration at Swift Creek Baptist Church in Midlothian, Virginia.

Julie McGowan is public relations director for IMB.

Ronnie Floyd: Planning to lead with 'pastor's heart'

by Shawn Hendricks

NASHVILLE (BP) -- In his office on the seventh floor of the SBC Building in Nashville, Ronnie Floyd sat down with Baptist Press to talk about his first fast-paced, meeting-filled week on the job as president of Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

Floyd wrapped up his final sermon as pastor of Cross Church in Springdale, Ark., this past Sunday (May 19). And following the EC presidential search committee's election of Floyd in April, he has hit the ground running getting ready for Monday (May 20), his first official day on the job.

During his interview, he discussed the challenges Southern Baptists face in today's culture, and he shared how he has developed more of an appreciation for his new role.

"I know that I've got to lead in a way that is different than this position has ever had someone to lead," Floyd told BP Tuesday (May 21), noting he has no desire to lead in a "business-as-usual" way. "Clear, strong, compelling, visionary leadership [needed] because we can't stay the same. There are some areas we're just not doing real well in, but there are some areas we are doing exceptionally well in."

Floyd's comments came as this week's Annual Church Profile report showed decreases in baptisms and attendance, while also showing an increase in giving. See related BP story.

"As we look forward," Floyd told Baptist Press in a statement after seeing the report on Thursday (May 24), "it is time to press reset spiritually and strategically in the Southern Baptist Convention. Prioritizing and elevating the advancement of the good news of Jesus Christ into every town, city and county in America, as well to every person across the world, must be recaptured by every church."

Bring Southern Baptists together

Floyd acknowledged there is too much division in the nation and Southern Baptist life. And Southern Baptists, he said, need a "refocusing of our mission" to spread the Gospel.

"I don't remember a time when the American culture has been so divided, so at each other, so troubled from what this person says to that person says," Floyd told BP.

"... I'm seeing a lot of disarray in the nation, a lot of division," he noted. "And rather than many of our churches leaning towards a New Testament model of unity that is built upon the Great Commission and Christian love -- taking the Gospel to the world -- we've kind of entered into that discussion about how we're just as divided at times as what the country is, and that's not our role."

He added, "We need to understand we need each other and if we really believe that people need Jesus then we had better come together to do everything we can to present the Gospel of Christ to every person in the world and make disciples of all the nations."

Confronting sexual abuse

Another issue Floyd faces in his new role is helping lead Southern Baptists in their ongoing response to the sexual abuse crisis, reported on in the Houston Chronicle in February and in other media reports.

Floyd said he is focusing a lot of time and energy on how the issue will be addressed by Southern Baptists during the SBC's annual meeting in Birmingham, June 11-12.

The response, he said, needs to be delivered in the most "Christ-honoring way to build the safest environment we can in our churches and stand boldly and courageously against all sexual abuse."

"We need to leave Birmingham with there being no debate about where we are, where there are definitive actions that everybody knows ... this is what we are going to do," Floyd said, noting weeks of preparation before officially beginning his duties this week. "So, I've been after it ... I believe deeply we've got to deal with that in the right way."

A pastor's heart

Floyd shared how he and his wife Jeana are both committed to the calling that the Lord has put before them to serve in their new roles.

Ultimately, Floyd said believes in the mission of Southern Baptists and wants to "give the best I have towards that," he said. "God has called me here. I know that. And I'm walking by faith in that."

He also expressed his support of the Cooperative Program -- the SBC's giving channel for missions and ministry -- and how each church can elevate that support in some way. Cross Church has given nearly \$11.5 million through the Cooperative Program during Floyd's pastoral tenure, according to ACP data.

"Every church can do something," he said. "We can do more. And I want to be faithful to whatever that more is. The Cooperative Program is the fuel that literally lifts and energizes and empowers everything we do."

And Floyd shared his desire to influence younger generations and show them positive, strong leadership and to help lead an SBC they can be proud to cooperate with in the years to come.

"I get excited about the next generation ... to hand them a convention that they will embrace and they will forward and they will love, they will want to pass it down to their kids," he said. "Because of what? Structure? No. But because of a mission that is so worthy that it calls us to do whatever it takes."

Floyd noted, "I'm a pastor. I'm going to lead from a pastor's heart and I'm going to work hard in trying to bring us together and move forward together. And that's what I'm going to do."

Sexual abuse perceptions studied by LifeWay Research

by Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE (BP) -- Many Southern Baptist churchgoers believe still more revelations of sexual abuse and misconduct by pastors and other church staff will be exposed, but few know of specific individuals in their church whose misconduct is still hidden, according to a new study from LifeWay Research.

The 2019 Sexual Misconduct and Churchgoers Study by LifeWay Research and sponsored by LifeWay Christian Resources explored the perceptions and experiences of Southern Baptist and Protestant churchgoers.

Brad Waggoner, acting CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, commended SBC President J.D. Greear on the way he has led the convention to view the issue of sexual abuse. "Protecting people from abuse of any kind should be of utmost importance to churches and our convention," Waggoner said. "LifeWay decided to sponsor this research because it's imperative we make our churches safe places for people to hear the Gospel and grow in their walk with Jesus Christ."

The study found 1 in 3 (32 percent) Southern Baptist churchgoers believe many more Protestant pastors have sexually abused children or teens than have been currently exposed. More disagree -- 43 percent -- while 25 percent say they don't know.

Fewer Southern Baptist churchgoers say there are many more undiscovered instances of Protestant pastors who have sexually assaulted adults -- 29 percent -- while 46 percent disagree and 25 percent don't know.

Relatively few, however, know someone attending their church who has sexually abused a child (3 percent) or sexually assaulted someone (3 percent) but has not yet come to light.

"Perceptions are reality," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, based in Nashville. "When almost a third of churchgoers sense there is an avalanche of abuse and assault cases coming, churches must address this head on even if few say they actually know someone whose abuse is still hidden."

Room for improvement

More than a third of Southern Baptist churchgoers (37 percent) say they have been victims of the following types of sexual misconduct: unwanted sexual joking, unsolicited sexual messages, unwanted compliments and inappropriate glances.

Researchers asked those victims where the misconduct took place. Seven percent say the misconduct occurred at church.

Six percent of those Southern Baptists who say unwanted sexual joking was directed at them say it happened at church. The same is true for 7 percent of those who received unwanted compliments that implied the person viewed them sexually, 3 percent of those who received unwanted pictures or sexual advances via text or direct message, and 6 percent of females who experienced prolonged glances or staring at their chest.

When asked if they received compliments that implied the person viewed them sexually, 6 percent of Southern Baptist churchgoers say they heard such remarks as a child and 15 percent as a teenager. When asked from where the person had given the sexually-insinuating comments, 36 percent say school, 34 percent say their home or family and 10 percent say church.

Similar issues continued in adulthood. Southern Baptist churchgoers are more likely to say inappropriate behavior occurred in settings other than the church, but some still reported occurrences in church.

Some churchgoers expressed wariness over the greetings they receive from others at church. Around 1 in 6 (18 percent) say some attendees express physical greetings in ways that seem to go beyond a simple gesture.

A 2018 LifeWay Research study found 1 in 8 Protestant pastors said a church staff member had sexually harassed a member of the congregation at some point in the church's history. One in 6 pastors said a staff member had been harassed in a church setting.

Overall, in the 2019 study, most SBC churchgoers (86 percent) say the church is a better environment when it comes to encountering sexually inappropriate comments compared to other places where they socialize with people. That's slightly better than the 75 percent of all Protestant churchgoers who say the same. Few Southern Baptist churchgoers (1 percent) believe the church is a worse environment, while 6 percent say it is the same as other places and 7 percent aren't sure.

"The findings of this study are similar to previous research through the years," McConnell said. "Churchgoers and the church setting have statistically fewer cases of immoral behavior, but those issues still have a very real presence."

Church preparation & optimism

Most Southern Baptist churchgoers believe their church is prepared to handle issues of sexual abuse and trust their congregation to respond appropriately if confronted with instances of misconduct.

A majority say their church would respond to someone who had experienced sexual abuse, sexual assault or rape with respect (73 percent), sympathy (70 percent), privacy (62 percent) and protection (56 percent). Few believe their church would ignore the person who shared their experience (2 percent), see them as an attention-seeker (2 percent) or as partly to blame (2 percent).

Nearly 8 in 10 Southern Baptist churchgoers (76 percent) consider their congregation at least somewhat prepared to help someone who has experienced sexual assault, with 38 percent saying their church is very prepared. Fewer than 1 in 10 (7 percent) believe their church is unprepared. Eighteen percent aren't sure.

The vast majority of Southern Baptist churchgoers (95 percent) agree their church is a safe place where adults are actively protected from sexual assault in the church; 3 percent aren't sure and 1 percent disagree.

More than 8 in 10 (86 percent) believe their church is at least somewhat prepared to protect children from sexual abuse in ministry programs, with 62 percent saying their church is very prepared. One in 20 (5 percent) say their church is unprepared and 9 percent are unsure.

Virtually all Southern Baptist churchgoers (96 percent) say their church is a safe place where children and teenagers are protected from sexual abuse. Few aren't sure (3 percent) or disagree (1 percent).

Southern Baptist churchgoers believe safety measures have improved in the last decade. Three in 4 (74 percent) believe their church is more prepared to protect children from sexual abuse than 10 years ago. Few say their church has had no additional preparation (6 percent) or was doing well then and now (7 percent). Thirteen percent say they don't know.

"Those in the pews are noticing progress in the prevention efforts at their own church," McConnell said. "Additional steps need to be taken and clearly communicated, however, so that more can say their congregation is very prepared to protect those who attend from sexual assault and child sexual abuse."

If someone did experience sexual abuse, Southern Baptist churchgoers feel confident their church would be a safe place for victims.

More than 9 in 10 (92 percent) say someone who experienced sexual abuse as a child or teenager would find healing at their church; 4 percent disagree. Similarly, 94 percent say their church would be a place of healing for adult victims of sexual assault; 2 percent disagree.

Eight in 10 Southern Baptist churchgoers (80 percent) say an adult attending their church could share that they have experienced sexual assault by a fellow attendee and be believed. Fourteen percent aren't sure and 6 percent disagree.

"When a church communicates it is a safe place for those who are hurting to find healing, it teaches truths about the identity and worth of every individual," McConnell said. "More importantly it answers the fundamental question of whether God cares."

If sexually inappropriate things happened within the church, 5 percent believe church leaders would try to cover it up. Nine in 10 (90 percent) say their church is likely to report suspicions of abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities.

Churchgoers also have faith in their leaders to correctly address sexual misconduct that may occur in the church even if it is costly or hurts the congregation's image. Around 8 in 10 (83 percent) agree their church would respond appropriately, regardless of the cost.

If sexual misconduct allegations were made against a pastor, most Southern Baptist churchgoers say they would want a careful investigation of the facts (79 percent), the truth to be made known (66 percent) and the alleged victim protected (54 percent). Four in 10 (40 percent) would want the police involved. Fewer say they would want the pastor protected (17 percent), doubt the validity of the accusation (11 percent) or want the situation dealt with quietly (9 percent).

Most Southern Baptist churchgoers feel safe attending their church. Few current churchgoers say they have ever attended less frequently because of advances from

other attendees (2 percent). A similar number of churchgoers say they have ever stopped attending a church because they felt sexual misconduct was not taken seriously (3 percent) or because they didn't feel safe from sexual misconduct (2 percent).

"Among people who are currently attending church, few said they stopped attending because of issues related to sexual misconduct," McConnell said. "This does not measure, however, any who left due to these problems and have not returned to any church since."

McConnell said although the research indicates churches are suffering from negative perceptions with many churchgoers bracing for more pastor-related sexual abuse stories to emerge, it hasn't worsened churchgoers' opinions of their own church or caused them to attend less frequently. But they still see areas church leaders should prioritize.

"From the perspective of the pew, there is room for churches to improve their process to prevent sexual abuse and assault, their communication of what is being done, and their handling of investigating accusations," McConnell said.

For more information on the study, visit LifeWayResearch.com, view the complete report or a video summary.

Methodology:

The online survey of 1,815 Americans was conducted Feb. 27 to April 8, 2019. Respondents were invited to participate from a large national panel. Respondents were screened to only include adults whose religious preference is Protestant and who attend church services once a month or more. Southern Baptists were oversampled (457 completes) to provide reliable estimates for this subgroup, and subsequently downweighted. Maximum quotas and slight weights were used for gender, region, age, ethnicity, education and Southern Baptist affiliation to more accurately reflect Protestant churchgoers using statistics published by Pew Research. The completed sample of 1,815 surveys provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 2.9 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups. Due to mandatory reporting requirements, respondents could not be asked if they personally had been a victim of child sexual abuse or sexual assault.

So. Baptists respond to Midwest tornadoes, flooding

by Tobin Perry

CARL JUNCTION, Mo. (BP) -- Just days after devastating storms hit the Midwest earlier this week, Southern Baptists have mobilized to help homeowners and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the impacted areas.

On Monday and Tuesday (May 20-21), a violent storm system swept through the central United States producing 97 tornadoes and leaving at least eight dead. The storms have led to extensive flooding throughout the region, too.

Missouri Baptist Disaster Relief teams are set up in the state's capital, Jefferson City, and Carl's Junction. Carl's Junction, near the Oklahoma and Missouri border, was hit Wednesday night (May 22) when a tornado started southwest of town and moved northeast through Carl Junction, Oronogo and Golden City.

Carl's Junction is about 4 miles north of Joplin, Mo. The storm came eight years to the day after an EF5-rated tornado hit Joplin killing 158 people.

"What happened [in Carl's Junction] is a tornado came in and over a hill and hit a very populated area," said Ron Crow, pastor of First Baptist Church of Diamond, and a part of the Missouri Baptist Disaster Relief team ministering in the area.

"It wasn't a widespread area, but it was very populated. There were a lot of mature trees. It didn't do tons of structural damage, although it did some, but it did a lot of tree damage, a lot of limbs everywhere."

Crow, who is the incident commander, and others on the Missouri Baptist chainsaw teams are helping impacted homeowners remove trees and other debris from properties. When they have the opportunity, they are also sharing the Gospel.

Crow and his team from the Spring River Baptist Association in Joplin were able to help the principal of the school where his wife works remove some large trees that were down in the yard. After their help, the principal sent a grateful text message: "Oh my! There are no words for what a blessing your crew was to the Shelleys today. That's something you truly have to see in action to understand. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. You were truly the hands and feet of Jesus today."

Crow says that other homeowners have been similarly appreciative of Southern Baptists' ministry in the area.

Another Missouri Baptist chainsaw team is serving in Jefferson City, helping homeowners remove debris and fallen trees.

"It's a 19-mile long stretch of damage and three-quarters of a mile wide," said Gaylon Moss, the director of Missouri Baptist Disaster Relief. "But it also contains a number of commercial and industrial properties. Some of the houses we've seen have been completely destroyed and others just have some tree damage, no structural damage. It really runs the gamut as far as types of damage in this area."

Moss says Missouri Baptists hope to point people to Jesus through their response to the tornadoes. He notes an interaction yesterday between a volunteer and a homeowner who was surprised to see help so quickly.

"Wow! You're Christians and do that?" the man told the volunteer.

Moss says that interaction illustrates their desire to move people one step closer to Jesus through their ministry.

"For some people, that means, 'Wow, there's a God!' For others, it's praying to receive Christ. You're always trying to move people forward," Moss said. "There are little small seeds that get planted all along the way, and you never know what will come from it."

Over the last 36 hours, 36 tornadoes have hit Oklahoma, which has led to record flooding throughout the state and numerous evacuations, particularly around the Tulsa metro area.

Don Williams, the Oklahoma Baptist Disaster Relief Director, says Oklahoma Baptists have mobilized chainsaw teams to a number of locations throughout the state, including Peggs, Leach, Jay, and North Tulsa.

"God can make something good out of a disaster," Williams said. "Southern Baptists are known for working through disaster to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We have a great opportunity to do that in Oklahoma, Missouri, and Arkansas at this moment."

Williams added that Oklahoma has already contacted the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and Arkansas Baptists about helping with these recovery efforts. He expects the efforts to continue throughout the summer.

Sam Porter, the national director of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, says there will be additional needs in southeast Kansas.

"They are going to need a lot of help," Porter said. So any teams, even high school or college teams, that would like to go and help, they really need it. It's flooded all the way from the Kansas City border down to the Oklahoma border and all down southeast Kansas along the Missouri border."

The North American Mission Board is responsible for coordinating national responses by Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, which is one of the three largest providers of disaster relief volunteers in the United States.

NAMB utilizes partnerships with 42 Baptist conventions that operate in all 50 states to gather volunteers and respond to disasters, providing hot meals, chainsaw and mud-out relief work and other services.

The Day I knew I was Called to Be a Father

By John Adams

Battle Creek- I will never forget how the sky looked that day. Puffy white clouds sat on a bright blue sky. It was a warm July day and my wife, Melissa and I, were about as excited as a young couple could be as we drove to our obstetrician's office on the day our little girl, Alexandra was due. It had been a long nine months, and especially so for Melissa with morning sickness, cravings, and the discomfort that often comes with pregnancy. We had followed every direction of the doctor, took every class in birthing and child care we could, and even Alex's room was ready for her. I will never forget the distressed look on the doctor's face as he tried for twenty minutes to find a heartbeat during Alex's last ultrasound. In tears, he told us that something had gone wrong and we were directed to go to the hospital to induce labor as soon as possible. And I will never forget making all of the required phone calls to family and loved ones, all of whom were expecting a very different message.

Later, as Melissa began to give birth, I momentarily forgot that Alex had already passed. Along with the anger and despair that quickly followed, something else began to grow deep inside my spirit. While I cannot explain it, I knew from that moment on God had created me and called me to be a father.

With God's blessing, Melissa and I went on to have three, healthy boys that we are very proud of and have had the honor of raising. Unfortunately, just like Alex, we lost two other children as well. One was a boy named, Brody, who was born with an undetected heart defect. He fought to live for 33 hours. And lastly, was a girl named, Morrigan, who died like her sister in the womb when she had an umbilical cord accident. My boys were her pallbearers.

I believe our children in heaven have given Melissa and I a particular understanding of what matters in this life. Getting ahead, taking pride in our accomplishments, possessions pales in comparison to the importance God has placed upon us as parents. For us, being a faithful parent is only second to, and an extension of, being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We have often been criticized and even mocked by others, including some of the churches we have served, for being so dedicated to parenting our children. Over the years, I have come to realize that none of our children's deaths was God's will, we were both robbed by the curse of the Fall, and I am sure it broke God's heart even more than it did ours. But by God's grace, all three of our boys have been raised in the church, been born-again, and display the kind of heart only Jesus can give. I believe the world and the Kingdom of God better places because of them. If you feel

called of God to be a father, I hope you will take that privilege and responsibility seriously. The world and the Kingdom need sons and daughters who love others with Jesus' heart. I believe there is no other higher aspiration for one who is called by God to be a parent.

"Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, offspring, a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one's youth. Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them. They will never be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the city gate," (Psalm 127:5, CSB).

John Adams

Senior Pastor, Grace Fellowship Baptist Church

John is from Southern Illinois and has been a pastor for 30 years. He and his wife, Melissa, live in Battle Creek, Michigan with their three boys, Connor, Riley, and Aidan.

The Impact of a Faithful Father

By Jay Anderson

Monroe- John G. Paton (1824-1907) was one of the great pioneering missionaries of the 19th century. Paton spent more than four decades (beginning in 1858) ministering on the South Seas islands of Tanna and Aniwa in the New Hebrides (present-day Vanuatu) as well as tirelessly promoting the cause of missions around the world. According to Paul Schlehlein, “Well into his seventies he continued to write Aniwan catechisms, hymns, and Scripture translations. At seventy-nine, he was still on Aniwa doing the Lord’s service.”[1]

However, Paton’s long and fruitful ministry came with many hardships, which are well documented in Paton’s autobiography. There was severe criticism at home in Scotland from respected Elders like Mr. Dickson who famously proclaimed, “The Cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals.”[2] Within months of arriving on the island of Tanna, Paton’s young wife, Mary, and newborn son both died suddenly. Paton pressed on through the sorrow. Paton pressed on while suffering serious illness fourteen times in the first four years on Tanna. Paton pressed on through constant threats of being killed and eaten by cannibals. Paton and his second wife, Margaret, pressed on through the loss of four of their ten children. They pressed on through the struggle of learning the language. They pressed on in proclaiming the gospel as the islanders practiced infanticide and widow sacrifice. They pressed on with courage and God graciously provided a great harvest of souls from those islands.

While Paton’s courage for the cause of Christ was firmly anchored to his unwavering faith in Christ, and his trust in the Lord’s providential control over life, Paul Schlehlein also reminds us, “The agency foremost in sending him to the islands of the South Seas was not his church or missionary society, but rather the godly home in which he was raised. From here a loving father set the footings of courage that would support a life of danger.”[3] Paton’s father set a godly example for his children in daily family worship, which included Scripture reading and reflection, singing of psalms, and prayer for the salvation of the nations. Paton’s father (and mother) supported him in going to the South Seas when most tried to discourage him. Paton watched his father’s life and credited his father’s example with helping him remain courageously faithful during those many years of missionary labor.

Many have not had the privilege of growing up in such a godly home led by a father who set a Christlike example for his children. However, every Christian father is entrusted with this great responsibility (Ephesians 6:4). Teach your children about the worth of

Jesus from His Word. Pray with your children for the work of Jesus in this world. Show your children in your actions that Christ is your greatest treasure. Encourage your children in their actions to serve Christ as their greatest treasure.

Near the end of his life, Paton wrote of his desire as a father for his own children to be given wholly to the cause of Christ. May it be the confession of all Christian fathers, “Nothing that has been endured, and nothing that can now befall me, makes me tremble — on the contrary, I deeply rejoice — when I breathe the prayer that it may please the blessed Lord to turn the hearts of all my children to the Mission Field; and that He may open up their way and make it their pride and joy to live and die in carrying Jesus and His Gospel into the heart of the Heathen World! God gave His best, His Son, to me; and I give back my best, my All, to Him.”[4]

Short Bio: Jay Anderson serves as Lead Pastor at CrossPointe Church in Monroe. Jay and his wife, Kristie, are blessed with four active children (Noel, Deacon, Anna, Selah). Prior to coming to Michigan in November 2016, the Andersons served as church planters in Iowa and cross-cultural workers in East Asia.

[1] Paul Schlelein, **John G. Paton, Missionary to the Cannibals of the South Seas** (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), p. 73.

[2] John G. Paton, **Missionary to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu)** (repr. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), p. 56.

[3] Schlelein, **John G. Paton**, p. 79.

[4] Paton, **Missionary to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu)**, p. 444.

Weak Knees and Weak Arms

By Alin Patularu

Windsor, Ontario- There I was, sitting in the car with my wife in the grocery store parking lot, terrified out of my mind. We were discussing having children, and if I'm honest, nothing terrified me more than the prospect of having a tiny little human to care for! I knew I had to renew my mind in what the Bible says about children, and so that's what I did. I identified the lies I had believed about family, and began to choose to believe what God says about family.

After some time, and a very challenging rebuke from a local pastor, we decided it was time. I figured, "we'll start small, one baby, see how that goes and then discuss having more when the time comes." Fast forward a few months and we're off to the clinic for our first ultrasound. Throughout the pregnancy I would joke (but not really, I believe God gave me prophetic insight) that we were having twins, and the ride to the clinic was no different.

Well, as the story goes, I walked into the room where my wife is laid back with jelly on the belly, and to our disbelief, it appeared as if there were 2 tiny humans for us to contend with. You know when people say, "my knees got weak" upon hearing some life changing news? I thought that was a myth. It's not, my knees got weak, and if it weren't for the wall to lean on, I may have taken a spill.

The plan was to have one kid, then reassess the prospect of any further down the road, you know, when I was comfortable. As is often the case with God, He doesn't much care about our plans. Instead, He gave us two energetic, crazy, smart and wacky boys named Jack and Henry.

I was unsure what my reaction would be when they were born, but the day of their birth I was surprisingly calm and excited. Jack was born first, and they immediately handed him to me. "This isn't so bad." I thought, then they handed me Henry and I thought, "Oh my, what now?" I had no more hands, I couldn't even scratch my nose! My wife and I were both tearful with joy. They were finally here, and they were healthy. What more could you ask for? Well, maybe for a nurse to scratch your itching nose.

Then they brought me to a separate room with both of them while they finished up with my wife in the OR. As I sat there in that quiet room all alone, with my boys on each arm, I was overwhelmed with my inadequacies. What do I do? How do I do it? So I went to my Father in prayer, and together with my boys I prayed, "Lord, help me raise these

boys for you. Bless them and bless us as we raise them.” I’ve never felt closer to the Father, then when I desperately pleaded with Him for Fatherly advice. From one unqualified father, to the perfect Father.

In that moment I realized, we’re all just broken children. And in that is the greatest hope for Father’s like me who don’t know what they’re doing. Because my Jesus makes me a child of God, and He promises to never leave me or forsake me. As I held my babies in my weak arms, with tears rolling down my cheek falling onto their swaddling clothes, God held me in His strong arms, strengthening me for the eternally significant task of being a Dad.

Pastor Alin Patularu

Alin Patularu is from Windsor Ontario Canada and planted Life-Giver Church in 2016 with the Send Network. He’s been married for 8 years to Shelly and is the father of twin boys, Jack and Henry.