



Newsjournal of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan

Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

December 2019
Volume 63, Number 12

Christmas gifts

PLYMOUTH, MI – It's about this time of year that I begin to get a bit anxious and experience a constant gnawing in my subconscious self. Some might describe this as "being on edge." There seems to be this ominous gray cloud of concern and worry that envelops my soul and takes control of my emotions. With each passing day it grows more prominent and debilitating. Like the first tell-tale signs of the flu, bit by bit it wedges its way into my personal space until it has affected, or should I say, infected the whole of my being. What could cause such an abrupt and decided change in one's psyche? I don't know about you but for me it is the Christmas season, and the ever pressing need to buy that special gift for my wife.

From the past experiences of 45 Christmases, I can tell you that if I mess up and don't get it right, then there is a distinct possibility that jingle bells will not be ringing in my house for this season and possibly the rest of the year. I have learned that listening carefully during the weeks and months leading up to Christmas and proper planning go a long way to make my life "merry and bright." To neglect doing so has, on a few occasions, produced a long cold winter.

Buying something for my wife has been a learning process and I have discovered that "most" women are very similar in their likes and dislikes. Now, of course, there may be that rare occasion where one will deviate from the flock so don't hold this as absolute truth.

Here is a very short list of gift buying guidelines for your sweetheart.

1. Never buy your wife something that plugs in and takes effort to use. (Unless she specifically requests it!) Electric cords can be easily formed into a hangman's noose that could be used to greatly reduce the flow of oxygen to one's brain. And according to some, I can't afford to lose one more neuro cell.
2. Never buy her underwear or lingerie. What you like and what she will wear are at opposite ends of the spectrum, and could force her back into that fleece sweat suit or nightgown that looks like the dogs have fought over it. (But it's comfortable!) Besides, just going into Victoria's Secret can give a man a severe rash or worse. I always feel like I am doing something wrong when I go in there. (*Editor's note: You probably are*)
3. Never buy clothes. You will inevitably buy the wrong size. If it's too small, she will say, "What in the world are you thinking, I haven't been that size in 10 years. Or if it's too big. "Well, just how big do you think I am, mister?"
4. Never buy her jewelry. What you can afford and what she wants is not even on the same planet. (In later years I have learned there are exceptions to this rule. Big is always better.)
5. Never buy her an annual membership to Planet Fitness. (I don't care what she said, this could get your eyeballs scratched out.)

All kidding aside guys, what you purchase for the most important person in your life has little to do with cost, and a great deal to do with care. She wants to know that you see her for the

whole person she is, and that you have thoughtfully considered her emotional, spiritual, and physical needs in your gift giving.

For some of you, a handwritten letter that expresses your true feelings about her would be treasured more than the jewels of the Royal Family. The gifts that I have given and received that are most treasured, could not be considered to possess much intrinsic value. Real, true Christmas gift giving must be from the heart and not just based on monetary worth.

When our Heavenly Father gave us His Only Son, the spirit and standard of giving was established. The gift of Jesus truly meets the emotional, spiritual, and physical needs of our lives. And though trite as it might sound, without Him there would be no giving of gifts, or for that matter, Christmas. So, before you rush out on that gift buying adventure, take time to prayerfully consider to whom the gift shall be given and follow our Father's example. It is His Gift that we celebrate.

John 3:16

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

89,437 reasons why

PLYMOUTH, MI – I will give you 89,437 good reasons why the church and you should give to International Missions during the month of December!

- 52,586 people were baptized, this past year, after they abandoned their old way of life and started living for Christ.
- 13,898 churches were planted overseas by our personnel, last year, in places where their lives are in peril and daily living is tough.
- 18,428 pastors were trained in ministry, evangelism and discipleship.
- 3,678 total field personnel are overseas, away from family and America, sharing the good news of Christ while we snuggle with one another at home and eat too much food.
- 847 people groups are engaged by our personnel who learn to speak languages they never knew until they arrived in their adopted country

Are those numbers enough to make you pray, give and go? They should be. The results speak for themselves. You cannot receive a better return on investment during Christmas than by giving to international missions.

Since before Thanksgiving and up until Christmas Eve, gifts will be purchased, wrapped, opened, used then tossed aside within months, weeks, days and even hours. What was once so important to us that we searched the town looking for it will collect dust, be tossed in a pile or break before New Year's Day arrives.

Yet, the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention offers us a pathway of generosity that spans the globe. The IMB's method far outweighs that alleged guy in a red suit, riding in an animal-pulled flying craft. The IMB's method is real and eternal. Why not ask your church to give the equivalent of one month's undesignated offerings to this year's international missions offering? During December share the free videos and free resources found at this link: [International Missions Offering Resources](#).

Pathways of Service Are Open Now

I heard it firsthand sitting twenty-feet away from IMB President Dr. Paul Chitwood who said, "We need 500 more missionaries by 2025." I thought, "Lord, how many will you call from our churches?" I then said in a silent prayer as Chitwood continued speaking, "Lord, call 50 of our people to serve you in other countries, speaking new languages among people ready to hear the good news of Christ."

- University and high school students can find pathways of service lasting 1-8 weeks or longer.
- Baby-boomers who are bored with golf and TV can find meaningful ways to serve missionaries and people in other countries through support roles lasting 1-3 years.
- Some adults who feel a divine call from God to surrender all of their lives in complete service overseas will be awed at how God can call you to a people you never met, to a country you never visited, to learn a language you never heard in order to express the good news of Christ in ways they can understand and respond to God's love.

Contact a helpful guide at the International Mission Board as soon as you sense God is calling you to overseas service. Click on this link for a convenient connection to someone who can guide you on your pathway to overseas service. Reach out to an [IMB Contact](#).
Overseas in a Heartbeat Again

I would serve again overseas if God called us to do so. We have no regrets. Some of the best years of our children's lives were overseas sharing life with an elite group of children whose parents were missionaries. Our children were missionaries! All of us, displaced from America, but certain of who we were as we shared the good news of Christ in Africa and in Europe.

Will you pray, give and go?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Christmas ornaments

Christmas music was playing on the radio station recently as we headed toward the airport. Shar asked, "Have I ever told you about the time my brother woke my sister and me up in the middle of the night Christmas Eve?" Then she told me about how her older brother had her and her sister looking out the windows because he thought he saw Santa's sleigh. They excitedly looked, but didn't see the sleigh. She concluded the story by saying, "that stinker." To which I responded, "I'll bet that's a special childhood memory for you." "Yea, it is" she replied.

Memories surround Christmas. Hopefully, all of us have a treasury of good Christmas memories. Soon, Shar and I will decorate our house for the season. Almost every Christmas ornament in our home tells the story about a special friend or time in our lives. It's an odd collection of pieces that only has value to us. As we take these family treasures out of the boxes and wraps that guard them, we remember fondly the stories behind them.

Some have not been on the tree for years, perhaps decades, like the aluminum pop can string from our first Christmas as a married couple. Like many newlyweds, we couldn't afford enough ornaments to decorate the whole tree. To fill the empty spaces, every night as I was stocking the pop machine at the grocery store where I worked, I emptied the pop off tops into a bag and took them home. We strung them together to make a shiny, long aluminum rope to wrap around the tree. My creative decoration, along with a single strand of lights, one box of bulbs, and popcorn rope that Shar made began our Christmas decoration collection.

One of the decorations we cherish was given to us by a missionary kid in Brazil. We had the privilege of celebrating Christmas that year with several other missionary families. He used a scroll saw to make every family a sign that says, "Feliz Natal," (Merry Christmas). It was such a thoughtful gesture. Our hearts were broken for him and his family several years later when we got the news that his dad had been tragically killed in a car accident in Brazil. That ornament reminds us of his family and the sacrifice they made for Jesus. It also reminds us of our missionaries serving in far away places and our responsibility to "hold the ropes."

As we go through the boxes, it's like rediscovering the stories all over again as we take each ornament out. There are little crocheted mailboxes that Shar's grandmother made for each of us and our children. We have popsicle stick ornaments that our boys made when they were in elementary school, not exactly works of art, but precious to us. There's something in those boxes from just about every member of our family. Several years ago, we bought an ornament that reminds us of Shar's dad who is with the Lord. Our collection has grown to include ornaments are grandchildren made for us.

From the boxes, we will take out ornaments given to us from people in the various churches we've served. Each reminds us of a period of our lives and the rich relationships we have had with God's people during our lifetime together.

There's one ornament given to us by a deacon and his wife that reminds us of what holds all of our Christmas' together — a long spike. We hang it on the tree every year as a reminder of what Christmas is really about — Jesus. The real tree of Christmas is not the beautiful Evergreen that adorns our homes, but the old rugged cross of Calvary on which Jesus died. The spike is tucked away in the branches of the tree, but we know it's there. We show it to our grandchildren and tell them the story of Immanuel - God with us!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Christmas bread

ROSCOMMON, MI – I like bread. For real, I like bread! I love how it tastes, how it smells, even how it feels - its texture. I love how you can pull it apart and eat it one piece at a time, or just take a bite right off the roll or loaf. I love all the different types of bread: Italian, French, pumpernickel, banana bread, ciabatta, pita, cornbread, brioche, bagel, potato bread, biscuits - I think you get the picture, and hopefully you are still reading this article and not running to the bakery. I especially love all the different breads that are baked around the Christmas Holiday. The smells are amazing and the tastes are even better, minus the calories, of course. Nevertheless, fresh, baked breads have become synonymous with the Christmas season.

Fresh baked bread at Christmas is an excellent pairing because it can remind us of the "true" reason we celebrate Christmas - the birth of Jesus Christ, the "Bread of Life." John 6:35 states,

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”

What an amazing promise! No matter how much cornbread or biscuits I physically eat I will always be hungry for more. In the same way, no matter how much bread of the world I try to fill myself with I will always stay spiritually empty.

All the tempting treats this world has to offer will never compare to the tasty “Bread of Life.” Only Jesus can fulfill the hunger of our soul for truth and lasting nourishment. Jesus came to earth to bring us life - to be the sole supply for all we need.

In John 6:33 Jesus said, *“For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

Jesus is forever asking us to trust Him in every circumstance and need. He is calling us to feast on Him - reading His Word, dwelling in His presence, worshipping Him through every situation - He will not leave us hungry.

Enjoying fresh baked breads at Christmas is also appropriate for a reason you may or may not have known. The Old Testament book of Micah chapter 5 verse 2 reads, “You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me One who is to be ruler of Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”

Bethlehem is two words made up in the Hebrew. You are going to love this. Beth-lehem. Bet Lechem. Bet is the Hebrew word for House. Lechem is the Hebrew word for Bread. It is no accident that God sends His Son to a bread factory to be born. Jesus is born in the city called the “House of Bread.” How cool is that? It reminds us that the seemingly insignificant can be hugely significant when God touches it. It reassures us that little is much when God is in it. I think God is sending us a message - His son, Jesus, is the Way, the Truth and the only sustainer of our Life!

This Christmas celebrate with delicious breads, but remember to feast on God’s gift to us - His Son Jesus, the Bread of Life!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Christmas bells

MONROE, MI – The year of 1861 proved to be a dark year for our nation as it marked the beginning of the American Civil War. It also proved to be the beginning of a very dark time for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (February 27, 1807 – March 24, 1882) who was the most popular American poet of his day. On July 10, 1861, Longfellow's wife, Fannie, died tragically from severe burns after her dress caught fire the previous day. As Henry tried to extinguish the flames, he was burned so badly on his face that he was unable to attend her funeral. Longfellow would carry the physical and emotional scars of that event for the rest of his life. He grew his trademark beard to cover the physical scars. In his December 1862 journal entry, the emotional scars could not be hidden, "A Merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me."

The following year brought more heartache. On November 27, 1863, Longfellow's oldest son, Charley, was shot and severely wounded during the Battle of New Hope Church. Longfellow sat by Charley's bedside for weeks as he recovered. Robert J. Morgan writes; "On Christmas Day, December 25, 1863, Henry gave vent to his feelings in this plaintive carol that can only be understood against the backdrop of war" (*Then Sings My Soul, Book 2*, p. 97). The plaintive carol that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote eventually became the hymn, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*. It conveys the deep emotions of a 57-year-old widowed father of six who observed the darkness of the world around him and the effects it had on his family.

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned*

Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

*It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men."*

At the point when Longfellow felt like dropping his head in despair, he heard the Christmas bells sing louder and he penned one final verse...

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."*

How much do we need that reminder ringing in our thoughts! Despite the darkness of sin in this world, our hope is secure in the eternal purposes of God to bring peace through Jesus the Christ. It was the hope God promised at the fall (Genesis 3:15). It was the hope God proclaimed through Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 9:1-7). It was the hope celebrated by the angelic multitudes at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:14)! It is a hope that will be fully realized for believers when Jesus returns (2 Thessalonians 1:7). I am no Longfellow, but please graciously allow me to submit a few more lines to take us from the cross to the second coming...

*The Prince of Peace has entered in
To glory having conquered sin
Christ gave His life,
A sacrifice
For peace on earth, good-will to men*

*Repent now and count the cost
Apart from Him your life is lost
His grace imparts,
Faith in our hearts
His peace on earth, good-will to men*

Soon comes the day Christ will appear

*The Prince of Peace His power clear
Witnessed by all,
In worship fall
With peace on earth, good-will to men*

Grace and Peace,
Jay

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.

The improbable pastor

SAGINAW, MI – I will never forget sitting across the desk from my pastor waiting to hear his response. I was not raised to be a godly man. When I was grown and went to college, I did not live a godly life. Yet, here I was by the mercies of God a saved man searching for God's will in my life. I was waiting to hear my pastor's response to the bombshell I had just dropped on him, "I think God is calling me to be a pastor." I'm not even sure if I knew what that meant back then, but I was convinced that's what I was supposed to do. So, when my Pastor uttered the words, "I don't think that's possible," I was crushed. "You're too unconventional. No church would accept you like you are," he went on to explain as my thoughts drifted to sorrow and confusion. I sat and waited on the Lord for 10 years wondering if he was right. I thought maybe God had no place for a guy like me leading His people.

Fast forward to a few years ago, and I can tell you that my old pastor may have been absolutely right and I'm so glad he was. I'm not a traditional pastor. Of course, I wear that hat now and then, but I was created to be a church re-planter and God was preparing me for The Valley Church the whole time. When I found The Valley, they were just like me, lost in the search for God's will, unsure of themselves with a closet full of skeletons, and convinced they weren't good enough to carry out the will of God. But so much has changed.

As we tried together to take stabs in the dark for what God had for us, we grew together. As we tried new things, we failed together and then regrouped always together. Then we realized something. We needed the Gospel. I know this sounds like a no-brainer to most, but what I'm talking about is the REAL GOSPEL. Not just church, the plain and simple Gospel. No fluff, no watering it down, no pulling punches, no excuses, no legalism, no lasciviousness, no

commandments of men, no additions, no special sauce, just Jesus Christ and all that He is, all that he has done and all that he still has to do. We needed the Gospel of grace and freedom while embracing love, duty, and service. Jesus' Gospel!

Since we have found The Gospel we have found purpose. People that have sat in church pews for 30 and 40 years have come to the Lord, others have repented of their wayward lives and refocused on the Lord. People have begun to dig into their destroyed families and love again. Jesus has begun to raise up leaders in a church that hasn't had strong leadership for years. There have been bumps along the road, but Jesus has been faithful to keep us as we continue to boldly grow in His leadership, and as we yearn for nothing more than the Gospel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Metz is the Senior Pastor and Church Replanting Missionary of The Valley Church in Saginaw, Michigan where he serves along side his Wife Shannon and five kids; Irelynd, Tara, Ashtyn, Madelynn and Tommy.

Tools of the trade

JACKSON, MI – It's an early Monday morning in September, and the sun is just rising over the horizon casting cool shadows over the empty parking lot of Grace Church in Jackson. Honestly, part of me dreads the twelve-hundred-mile trip in front of us. But along with the rest of the crew from our church, we decide to be joyful as we finish loading the van and trailer. We're driving to Texas to remove mud from homes after a devastating flood brought on by a recent storm. As I start to close the trailer doors, my eye catches the shovels, hammers, and saws in the corner. Tools of the trade I remind myself. But next to those tools, I see the tools of another trade, a trade that removes mud from the souls of men- a stack of Bibles for children and adults. It's a beautiful picture of the work we do in Southern Baptist Disaster Relief.

For a moment, I stop and reflect on all the places Jerry and I have gone over these last fourteen years, places where these tools have made a difference. Recent memories of Granite City, Illinois come flooding back. A major thunderstorm flooded the town causing families to abandon their homes and cars. The water damage was extensive. The heat oppressive. The mold dangerous. The impact on families in the area was almost indescribable.

I think of one young family's home that was flooded, mold was setting in, and they had lost nearly every possession they owned. Most of their belongings ended up on the curb to be hauled away unceremoniously. But this family had something more precious than those disposable possessions. This young mom was expecting any day. I'm a mom, too, and I feel the desperation in these young parents' eyes as they stare at their home. In an instant our team

knew what needed to be done. We grabbed our shovels, hammers, and saws from the trailer, and went to work mudding and cleaning their home. Later, as Jerry and I were falling asleep on the floor of the local church that hosted us, we prayed.

We prayed for that young family, our team, and us. It took three days of strenuous labor in the summer humidity and many trips to our knees in prayer to complete the cleanup. Using the Bibles in our trailer, we ministered to them, cried with them, and then a week later said good-bye. It's usually like that, we minister to people for a week, maybe two, and then we return home. We often never hear how God blessed the families after our work is complete. But then, my thoughts return to that young family. A few days after getting home, Jerry and I got an email with an attached picture. I still have the photo of that young dad holding his newborn, his eyes full of hope.

As I closed the trailer with Jerry, and we gathered for prayer in the parking lot before heading to Texas, I thought about how God uses those tools. He uses them to change disasters into His glory, tragedy into Divine hope. Like other Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams across the state and throughout the nation, our team from Jackson does this because each one of us is called. The work is far from easy, the time away from home difficult, and the work, well, it physically wears us down. But our hearts remain strong because Jesus' love is stronger.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerry and Jeannie Dolson live in Jackson, Michigan where they attend Grace Church. They have been married for 58 years, have six children, fourteen grandchildren, and fifteen great-grandchildren. Jerry is a Navy veteran and Jeannie a former salon stylist. For nearly fifteen years the Dolsons have been actively involved with Michigan Southern Baptists in the Disaster Relief ministry. Their ministry has taken them throughout the country to feed others, mud-out homes, clean up neighborhoods, chainsaw fallen brush and trees, assess the needs of communities, and comfort others as chaplains. Jerry and Jeannie are 77 years old, still active in Disaster Relief, and continue to serve the Jackson community and Grace church.

Tony Evans publishes historic study Bible and commentary

NASHVILLE, TN – After 50 years of pastoral ministry, Tony Evans has released "The CSB Tony Evans Study Bible" and "The Tony Evans Bible Commentary" with LifeWay's B&H Publishing. In doing so, he became the first African American to publish a study Bible and one-volume Bible commentary.

"I'm humbled. I'm from urban Baltimore. I would never have thought I would be in this place," said Evans. "I know God could have used someone else. The fact that He's allowed me the

opportunity to do this with my weaknesses and with my flaws, it shows me grace, it shows me mercy, it shows me gratitude."

Due to the historic nature of the study Bible and commentary, the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., has informed Evans they will be placing the publications on display in the future.

Evans said he wanted to create "The Tony Evans Study Bible" and "The Tony Evans Bible Commentary" to "show the kingdom thread throughout all the books of the Bible and to help readers see how eternity and history are connected by this unifying theme of the glory of God through the advancement of His Kingdom."

For Evans, "you should study the Bible to find out what the King is up to and how you fit into this Kingdom program," he said. "Now you're not just studying the Bible, you're finding out how you fit into the Bible."

He is the senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas and the founder of The Urban Alternative, a media ministry whose radio broadcasts are heard by millions each week on more than 1,400 radio outlets across 130 countries.

Evans has been breaking racial barriers for much of his ministry. In 1982, he became the first African American to graduate with a doctoral degree from Dallas Theological Seminary.

"To be the first of anything is an honor," said Evans. "But you want to handle honors in the right way -- to carry yourself in a way that recognizes you are a tool that God didn't have to use. You are privileged because He used you. That ought to make you a better servant, not a bigger star."

Evans also noted there being a "downside" to being the first African American to reach certain milestones because it means "it took a long time before African Americans were allowed in our major institutions of biblical learning due to segregation."

He said that while he is excited, it's also "disappointing that I had to be the first because it took that long for Christians to catch up to righteousness when it came to justice and the issue of race."

Evans said the root of divisions, like those surrounding race, come from people not having and exercising a worldview driven by God's Kingdom. He recalled being rejected by a church because of his race. "That's an illustration of how I was hearing something preached and wasn't seeing it worked out in society," he said.

Helping people grasp a Kingdom-oriented mindset has been part of Evans' ministry and is a reason he developed his study Bible and commentary. If an individual develops a "comprehensive Kingdom approach" to life, Evans said, they can see how the Bible addresses

everything they face. "I've not found an issue yet that a Kingdom approach will not address in a simple form."

"The Tony Evans Study Bible represents five decades of Dr. Evans' faithful Bible study and teaching," said Trevin Wax, director for Bibles and reference at LifeWay Christian Resources. "Tony Evans is well known and respected for his practical teaching and application of Scripture. My prayer is that Dr. Evans' study Bible will equip and empower readers of God's Word, so they better understand what it means to live according to God's Kingdom agenda."

Evans has served as the chaplain of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks for three decades and counting, the longest standing NBA chaplaincy. He is also a former chaplain of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys.

In addition to the study Bible and commentary, Evans has authored more than 100 books, Bible studies and devotionals, including "The Kingdom Agenda," "Pathways," "Detours" and "No More Excuses."

The Tony Evans Study Bible from the Christian Standard Bible includes extensive notes and resources crafted and curated by Evans from his sermons, teachings and writings; 40 articles; 50 "Lessons of Kingdom Living;" and additional online resources that feature 170 videos from Evans.

Discovering Advent

MONROE, MI – I had the privilege of growing up in the church that I now pastor, Monroe Missionary Baptist Church. I remember always looking forward to the Christmas program our church would put on. Every year our building would be crammed with people from our community celebrating the birth of Jesus along with us. We would have the manger scene, wisemen, shepherds as well as the occasional live animal. Thinking back, those moments were essential for me and my walk with the Lord. I guess I didn't realize it back then, but God was using those plays as well as my parents, Sunday School teachers, and pastors to help me grasp what Christmas was all about. I will forever be thankful for that.

It wasn't until I was studying at bible college that I was introduced to Advent. At first, I was pretty skeptical about it. It sounded old fashioned and archaic. As I began to study what advent really was, I felt a sense of freshness within the Christmas season. I first started having my family observe the Advent season. We would light one of the candles on Sunday, and then spend that week discussing passages concerning the theme for that week. We would normally use Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. It was such a wonderful way for our family to keep focus on the blessedness of Christmas.

Some years later I found myself back at MMBC, but this time as a pastor. I was given permission to walk our church through the Advent season. I was a little nervous because I wasn't sure what everyone would think about it. Regardless of my nerves, I found a couple ladies to help me buy a wreath, candles and table then we set it up in the front of the church. Then on Sunday mornings we would have different church members come and read some selected verses for that day to go along with the theme. We would light the candle and have a time of prayer, thanking God for the hope, love, joy, and peace that is found in Jesus. After that, we would have a sermon focusing on our theme.

I know all of this sounds so simple, but for me it was a big deal. As a pastor I can sometimes feel the pressure of being creative and unique, especially during the holiday seasons. One of the best pieces of advice I ever received concerning preaching at Christmas and Easter was simply, "Tell them what they came here to hear because it is the best story you can tell them." Advent helps me remember this. We don't have to come up with some special service or creative form of media to be effective this Advent season. We just need to be faithful to tell the good news to those that God brings to our services: God wrapped himself in the flesh, came to this earth to free us from our sins so we can know what true hope, love, joy, and peace really are.

I'm thankful for pageants, plays, concerts, movies, and other types of delivery to get the message of Christmas out to the world. We need to remember the power of God is not in our creativity, but in His activity. This Advent season let us be faithful to trust God with His word. Let us boldly proclaim the truths of this Advent season not trusting in our creativity, but in His power through His Word! Pastor friends, tell them the story they came to hear, and trust God to change their lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim locoangeli is Lead Pastor at Monroe Missionary Baptist Church which is in the Southeastern Association. He is married to Amanda and together they have 4 children.

Keeping the lights along the shore

REDFORD, MI – I remember when it all changed, the exact moment when I gave my life to Christ. Sitting in a home Bible fellowship I remember everything about that day, but most importantly I remember the hymn we sang, "Let Your Lower Lights Be Burning" a Phillip Bass hymn written in 1871. Nearly 125 years later, it would be made famous by Johnny Cash. It spoke volumes to me as a new believer, and is still speaking volumes to me as a church planter here in Redford. Something about the illustration of the lighthouse still speaks to me. Maybe it's because I'm a native Michigander and my family loves nothing more than spending our

summers in towns like Spring Lake or Beulah. The imagery of GOD's mercy beaming brightly from His lighthouse to us still gives me chills. The hymnist goes on to say, "But to us He gives the keeping of the lights along the shore."

Heeding that call to be the keeper of the lights along the shore is what led me along with our team to plant The Commonwealth of Faith Church here in Redford Township, Mi. Our aim was never to become just another church in the community, but to be the *community's* church. Since our launch we've hosted several community events leading to tangible physical and spiritual needs being met. At our Harvest & Community Resource Night, we hosted more than 300 families and partnered with several community-based organizations such as THAW who gave out over \$35,000 in assistance to families who are facing hardships keeping their homes warm during the winter. We've even had the misfortune of actually physically rescuing a member of ours who was in an abusive relationship and being held along with her children in dog cages by a former lover.

As dark as that was, we're ever so thankful for the opportunity to shine bright. Redford and the surrounding area of Detroit has changed quite significantly in the past few years. For those seeking safer schools and a stronger neighborhood we've become a "safe haven" positioning us to reach them in a greater way. Since we've "started" we've had the pleasure of partnering with 3 schools providing them with a stronger sense of community by stepping up and filling the gap when and wherever our presence could help. Now as a Christian community, we stand ready to tackle another project in our community, and need your prayers and assistance to do so.

We've been given the opportunity to make the former St. Robert Bellarmine Catholic Church our home. The building was sold to a charter school operator who had no interest in operating a church. It was later confirmed that they had made plans to raze the edifice. To be honest with you, it broke my heart to know that a business could tear down a facility that was built to boldly beam the Gospel. This November, literally a year since the church's closing, we're happy to announce that GOD is moving us forward in our effort to restore this lighthouse.

This campaign isn't just about a Sunday service, it's about recommissioning this facility, dedicating it back to God's service to serve our neighbors. It's ensuring that the families in this community have access to at least one hot meal a week through our planned Mercy Kitchen, and that children have a safe place to do homework through our Safe Haven Homework Help Program. Through our ROOTED IN REDFORD, ROOTED IN CHRIST campaign (COLO 2:7) our plan is to restore this facility so that others can lay ROOTS and grow stronger in Christ.

With your prayers, elbow grease, and donations we can bring this vision into fruition and ensure that our lights will beam BRIGHT. For more information on how you can help and commit yourself to the campaign visit www.rootedinredford.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Torion Bridges is the Lead Pastor of The Commonwealth of Faith Church in Redford, he and his wife Jasmine are the proud parents of Hunter (age 2) and Hannah (7 months). Torion is a bi-vocational church planter serving who loves using the art of story-telling to WIN souls for the Kingdom.

New SBC guide released to help churches prevent abuse

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Churches may access a new resource produced by a Southern Baptist partnership to provide guidance on preventing sexual abuse and providing care for survivors of such abuse.

The Sexual Abuse Advisory Group and the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) unveiled Tuesday (Nov. 19) "The Introductory Guide to Caring Well: A Resource to Help Churches Care Well for Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Implement Policies and Procedures to Prevent Abuse." It is available at <https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Introductory-Guide-to-Caring-Well.pdf>.

The new guide is the latest in a series of resources produced by the Sexual Abuse Advisory Group and the ERLC as part of a multi-faceted effort in the Southern Baptist Convention to address the failure of some churches to protect and care for hundreds of sex abuse victims and to prevent perpetrators in many cases from continuing their abuses.

"The Introductory Guide to Caring Well" was designed to help churches fulfill the Caring Well Challenge's sixth step, which is to enhance church policies, procedures and practices related to abuse. The Caring Well Challenge -- which was announced in June by the Advisory Group and the ERLC -- is a yearlong, eight-step effort in which about 750 churches are currently participating.

The new guide provides information on such topics as preparing church leadership for disclosure by a sexual abuse victim, screening and training volunteers and staff members, implementing policies to protect the vulnerable in the church and establishing a Caring Well team.

"The Sexual Abuse Advisory Group encourages every church to do all it can to prevent abuse," ERLC executive vice president Phillip Bethancourt told Baptist Press in written comments. "This resource is one step toward pointing our churches to be safe from abuse."

Faye Scott -- minister to children at First Baptist Church in New Orleans -- reviewed the guide before publication and said it "provides an educational and practical venue for church leadership in the prevention of child sexual abuse in the church."

"Education of church leaders, volunteers, parents and children is key to the elimination of child sexual abuse," she told BP in email remarks. "Implementation of preventive measures and effective screening tools will help to safeguard the children the Lord entrusts to us.

"When church leaders learn the statistics of child sexual abuse and hear real stories of abuse in churches, they often gain an understanding for the need of preventive measures," said Scott, who defended in early November her doctoral dissertation on child sexual abuse in the church. "Many times churches do not know where to obtain the type of resource the ERLC and Advisory Group has created. This resource will no longer allow churches to claim they did not have access to information required to create and implement policies."

Chip Dean, global student pastor at Liberty Live Church in the Hampton, Va., area, also reviewed the guide and said it is "well designed for every student ministry size."

"Every student pastor needs to not only read this guide, but also adopt, apply and train their leaders with these important principles and guidelines," he told BP by email. "We not only live in a new world today, but the new world of today will be an old world tomorrow with new issues coming every day. Student pastors must be wise and equipped with the tools needed to protect their students, leaders, families and themselves from the strategies of the evil one."

Dean also encouraged every student pastor "to make your student ministry a safe place for those who have experienced abuse. The only way to do this is by first protecting your ministry, and then teaching your ministry (including your students) that your ministry is a safe place that they can bring their friends for love, safety and healing through the power of Jesus."

"The Introductory Guide to Caring Well" acknowledges it is "a starting point" for helping leaders guide their churches in ministering to survivors and prevent abuse.

"Whether you are reviewing existing care policies or creating them for the first time, this guide will walk you through practical steps to take as you seek to prevent abuse and care well for survivors," according to the introduction. "It provides a foundation of topics to think through, provides sample language and policies provided by leading sexual abuse prevention advocates, and links to further resources to help you dive deeper into each area of prevention and care."

After the enhancement of its policies, a church currently participating in the Caring Well Challenge is committed to two more steps:

-- Dedicating Sunday services on May 3, 2020, or a similar date to address abuse.

-- Reflecting on the Caring Well Challenge at the 2020 SBC annual meeting.

The Sexual Abuse Advisory Group and the ERLC began their collaboration when J.D. Greear -- pastor of The Summit Church in the Raleigh-Durham, N.C., area -- formed the fluid study group shortly after his election as SBC president in June 2018. In cooperation with the ERLC, the group has received input from hundreds of people, including abuse survivors and their advocates, lawyers, pastors, law enforcement officials, counselors and denominational leaders.

The Advisory Group and the ERLC worked with LifeWay Christian Resources to produce "Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused." The free multimedia resource released in June is a comprehensive training curriculum that consists of a handbook with 12 video lessons from experts in a variety of areas.

The Sexual Abuse Advisory Group issued a 52-page report, also in June, that recommended several steps of action intended to help combat abuse and to care for survivors.

These and other resources are available at <https://caringwell.com>.

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.

Shining the Light this Christmas

HOLT, MI – I have a confession to make. I love the Christmas season. All of it. The decorations and lights, the songs and carols, the festive sweaters and parties, the trees and gifts. Most of all, I love setting aside time each year to slow down and focus on the true reason for the season: the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a truth worth celebrating that our God has come to us. Oh, what wonder and glory! The Son stepped out of heaven, took on flesh, and walked on this earth so that He could die to save sinful rebels, like you and me. There is something about the Christmas season that softens the hearts of people to this truth.

Yet, while the truth of Christ's first coming reverberates through our celebrations, many people will miss it. Yes, the light has come, but they dwell in deep darkness (Isaiah 9:2). In that darkness sit the weary souls of neighbors, coworkers, classmates, friends, and family members burdened by sin and the cares of the world. These are not faceless strangers, they are people we know and love. This Christmas they will seek relief from the darkness in parties and sales, in neatly wrapped gifts, and overflowing stockings, in twinkling lights, and Hallmark movies. While these things offer temporary hope and joy, they are like flares that burn brightly for a moment,

but quickly fade away. As Christians we offer what they really need: Jesus, the True Light, who has come into the world (John 1:9).

Our church is doing several things to leverage this Christmas season for the sake of the gospel. We will deck our halls and make the building merry and bright. I'll be preaching an Advent series that highlights God's great plan, and promises to save His people through sending His Son Jesus. Over the past year, several of our members have led an effort to reach out to the neighborhood around our building. We began with an invitation to our Easter celebration and now will carol and invite our neighbors to join us on Christmas Eve. I am also encouraging each person in our church to pray for one person they can invite to our Christmas Eve service. We don't have all the answers, and this certainly isn't the only way to do things, but we want to do all we can to point others to Jesus this holiday season.

Let me encourage you to consider ways you and your church can make the most of this Christmas season. As the world around us tunes in to the message we celebrate all year, how can we tap into that? Let's be bold and creative as we seek to punch holes in the darkness. Let's not forget that we were once darkness before the light of Jesus shone in our hearts (Ephesians 5:8-14). With all the hope and joy of the shepherds on the night of our Lord's birth, let's take the message of Jesus far and wide. "Arise and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you," (Isaiah 60:1).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Carter serves as the Lead Pastor of Cedar Street Church in Holt. Prior to coming to Cedar Street, he served in various roles at several churches in North Carolina. He holds an MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Matt and His wife Anna have four kids and two marginally tolerable dogs.

The only gift that lasts

SOUTH LYON, MI – Christmas is upon us again. Even as you are reading this, no doubt many of you are still wrapping your head around what to get that significant other. Or you are taking inventory to make sure each child has the same number of gifts. Isn't this a wonderful time of the year? Christmas has always been my favorite time of the year. Nothing was more momentous as a child than waking up on Christmas morning to a tree skirted with packages all wrapped in various colors. It was one of the few times that our family would get together without any fussing or fighting. It was truly a time of peace and goodwill for all the Meauxs. Yet, as soon as those gifts were passed around and opened, we would go to our predetermined corners of the house to play privately with our newfound toys.

Many decades later, I couldn't tell you which public land dump to find those discarded toys that meant so much to me those first few days following Christmas. What I am able to tell you are the many joyous memories of Christmas that I have. When people ask me what I want for Christmas, I hear my grandparents in my own voice when I answer, "I only want my family to be together." I want you to think about that last term...TOGETHER.

I believe many of you reading this will spend Christmas at some point with family, friends, neighbors or coworkers. You will be together with others because of Christmas. So, while you labor looking for the perfect gift, the funniest greeting cards, or decorating your house, do not fail to take advantage of the curiosity and openness of all those that you will spend time with this Christmas.

Christmas has a tendency to cause people to drop their guard toward spiritual matters. We all have a great opportunity to give the only gift that will never be discarded or found in a trash dump. In fact, this gift has eternal significance. It is the gift of the Gospel. What better time to explain to your loved ones and friends that the greatest gift ever given for mankind is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not simply come to give us a sweet and humbling birth story. His narrative continues in that Jesus Christ loves humanity so much that He stooped down from His Holy throne to walk with mankind. He loves humanity so much that He walked in our shoes and experienced temptations, struggles and this broken world in which we also live. He loves humanity so much that He shared daily the will of God the Father with all that He would meet. He loves humanity so much that He voluntarily, from eternity past, marched Himself to the cross to be offered on the altar to appease a holy, righteous and just God who must punish the disobedience of mankind. Jesus Christ took the full brunt of God's wrath and was found worthy. Because three days later, God revealed His pleasure with Jesus' offering and raised Him from the dead.

Jesus came to earth in lowly form, but now He sits on the throne of all creation. As sweet as it is to see the many nativity scenes, and to observe little children acting out the Christmas narrative, we must not stop at His birth. Jesus Christ is fully grown, fully glorified and ruling the known universe. Take time this Christmas season to share with family and friends the greatest news that mankind longs to hear, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Meaux is Lead Pastor of FBC South Lyon. He recently moved to Michigan from Mobile, Alabama where he served as Pastor and many other ministry positions over the years. He is married to Aimee and they share three children.

Maasai in Tanzania touched by Kansas teens' testimonies

TANZANIA (BP) – The Kansas youth wiped away tears and looked out over the church congregation. Men wrapped in red blankets leaned forward on the roughly hewn boards that served as pews, listening intently to the teenager. Women adorned with bright jewelry nodded their heads and encouraged them to continue talking.

"My parents left my life when I was young," Izzy D. told the small group. "I've had a lot of abandonment in my life. I was afraid that people would leave my side until I came to know Christ earlier this year."

Heads nodded and verbal approval echoed. Another Kansas teen stepped up and told how she didn't have anyone in her life to tell her to be a Christian. She was on her own. A third teen told the group that her father had died in a car accident a few months ago. One after another, the youth group from Sublette Southern Baptist Church in Sublette, Kan., shared testimonies of hardships and Jesus' love.

It wasn't the "normal" kind of church service that the rising college freshmen were used to attending back in Kansas. This church was more than 8,000 miles from home in the bush of Tanzania. The service lasted four hours and included a lot of joyful dancing. This mission trip was anything but normal for the young Americans and Tanzanians alike.

It was originally a "busted" mission trip -- the plan to go to Haiti fell through. But according to Annie Tidenberg, Tanzania was exactly the place the short-term team was meant to be. Annie and her husband Tim both grew up in East Africa.

After retiring from the International Mission Board, Tim became the pastor at Sublette Southern Baptist Church. They decided to salvage the youth mission trip by taking the students to Tanzania where they used to work. The goal was to help with a pastor training workshop and host a Vacation Bible School.

"I've never seen anything like it in all of my years there. When our youth shared their stories at church, the Maasai pulled out their phones and videoed," Annie said, noting that the Tanzanians wanted to capture every second to replay later.

"The Maasai church leaders were shocked and moved that American teenagers had hardships too. Those Maasai men and women opened their arms and loved on the American youth as only God could."

Mercedes M., a college freshman, couldn't believe how the Maasai opened up their lives and accepted her just as she was. She didn't realize that bonding with the Tanzanian church leaders was so unique. She thought it always happened that way for short-term teams.

"I think we all related to each other because we were first-generation believers just like them," Mercedes said. "A lot of us on the youth team didn't grow up in church or with someone who could show us the way. It's up to us to go to church and follow God. From the beginning, our faith is our own and it's hard. I think that we are going through the same Christian journey as those Maasai leaders. It bonded us together."

For information about sending a team from your church on mission, email info@imb.org. For information specific to student trips, visit imb.org/students.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Sprenkle is a journalist who writes from southwest Kansas. Visit suesprenkle.com to read more about her storytelling from around the world. This article was first published by The Baptist Digest, a publication of the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists.

2019 BSCM Leadership Conference & Annual Meeting: A time of re-envisioning God's desire for Michigan

PLYMOUTH, MI – The 2019 Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) Leadership Conference (formally known as the Pastors' Conference) was a strong day of hearing passionate men of God preach the Word. Mile City led worship music. They brought the pastors from all over the state into a united group that shared their mutual love for our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. There is something deeply stirring about fellow Christ followers singing praises to God in one voice.

Church Planter Pastor Roland Caldwell Jr. from The House Church Detroit began the preaching time of being overwhelmed by the Spirit of God. Dr. Barry McCarty, Professor of Preaching and Rhetoric at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary spoke the Word with authority. Ken Pierpont, Lead Pastor at Bethel Church Jackson, MI, and author of Finding Bittersweet. Through humor and self-disclosure, he led us his painful ministry story to finding hope and joy in Christ. The day ended with Felix Cabrera, Director of SEND Puerto Rico and Executive Director, giving a powerful word of how God is moving in Puerto Rico even through a tragedy, the opportunity to express God's amazing love.

The BSCM Annual Meeting was a great success! Huge thank you to church planter and pastor Travis Whittaker and Mile City Church (4 years old) for hosting the Annual Convention Meeting. With the BSCM offices being in the adjacent building, people who attended the Annual Meeting were able to come to an Open House of the new offices (with coffee and cookies too!)

The 200+ messengers and guests from Michigan churches, representing 55 churches, were given a new BSCM sling backpack, journal, and book. Everyone was heartened as they worshipped with Mick Schatz and band. All Pastors received a bag of resources to help strengthen them and their church. BSCM President Scott Blanchard led the opening session which included business and ministry reports. Pastor Tim led a panel discussion of ministries that included Mick Schatz for Bambi Lake, Bob Kiger for MI Disaster Relief and Sue Hodnett for Women's Ministry/WMU. President Scott Blanchard preached emboldening Michigan pastors. The SBC Executive Committee for Cooperative Program hosted a free luncheon for all in attendance.

Roy Henry, BSCM 1st Vice President and pastor of Faith Baptist Church Battle Creek, directed the 2nd session. A Filipino Worship team led in praising God through music. The following BSCM Officers were elected: President – Scott Blanchard, 1st Vice President – Roy Henry, 2nd Vice President – Ed Emmerling, Recording Secretary – Jerome Taylor, and Assistant Recording Secretary – Roland Calwell Sr. Nate and Jenni Scheon IMB missionaries to Mozambique shared how God is using them to reach the people with the Gospel of Christ. Pastor Tim Patterson preached the Executive Director's Challenge on his vision for the BSCM – 500 Michigan churches by 2025. He laid out True Vision/Re-envisioning: Ability to See, Faith to See, Courage to Do, and the Willingness to Change.

Ed Emmerling, BSCM 2nd Vice President and lead pastor of Westside Church Flushing, directed the last session after a time where pastors, lay leaders, and others were able to reconnect over dinner at some local Plymouth restaurants. Mike Durbin, State Director of Evangelism, led a panel discussion for evangelism grants with Stan Parker, Faith Fellowship Lansing, John Trott Hillsdale Baptist for Church Equipping Conference, Dr. Michele White, Middlebelt Baptist Inkster for Caring Well, and Ed Emmerling, Pastor Westside Church Flushing for Who's Your One? Jerome Taylor, Chairman of Executive Board Strengthening Team and Billy Walker, Chairman of Sending Team, called out several of the events from this last year and asked those who had benefited from the events to stand. It was a very visual presentation of all the strengthening, inspiring, training events that had been offered to Michigan pastors and churches this year.

Tony Lynn, State Director of Missions, Wayne Parker, SEND Detroit Missionary, and Ken Render, Executive Board Chairman of Church Starting Team, gave the Church Starting presentation. It was uplifting to see many of the Michigan church planters march through the auditorium and on-stage holding signs introducing their new church start and the city. Everyone gathered around the church planters, and prayed for their strength, armor of God, and wisdom as they reach their communities for Christ.

Dr. Johnny Hunt was scheduled to preach. He was flying from Washington D.C. and his plane was delayed 3 times. Host pastor, Travis Whittaker, stepped up and preached a challenging message on the encouraging growth in Michigan churches in the following areas this year: Share, Shape, and Send (Evangelism, Discipleship and Multiplying). The 2019 Annual Meeting concluded with prayer for continued courage and passion for the work of the church of God.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with his own blood. Acts 20:28

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie Lynn works at the Baptist State Convention of Michigan as the Executive Assistant/Communications Coordinator. She and her husband, Dr. Tony Lynn, were IMB missionaries to Niger Republic West Africa and Paris, France for 13 years. They now live and serve in Plymouth, MI. The family includes 3 children, their spouses and 9 grandchildren.

Affirm kid-safe TV with holiday shopping, advocate urges

LOS ANGELES, CA (BP) – Parents can use their Christmas shopping dollars to tell television advertisers which shows to promote, the Parents Television Council (PTC) said in releasing its 2019 Best and Worst TV Advertisers.

Christmas shopping affords an added opportunity to discourage advertisers from promoting television shows that are damaging to children, PTC Program Director Melissa Henson said in releasing the latest list.

"Although we've never called for boycotts, I think it's important for us to vote our values when we shop." Henson told BP Thursday (Nov. 21). "So if there are companies out there that are really making a conscientious effort to do the right thing, to put their ad dollars behind responsible family-friendly programming, we should be applauding and supporting that by buying from those companies.

"On the flip side, if there are companies out there that go out of their way to underwrite some of the most problematic content you're ever going to see on TV," she told BP, "then we should also try to avoid shopping with those companies, and there certainly are several companies that fit that category on our worst list."

Advertisers change their sponsorship behavior based on consumer feedback including purchasing behavior, Henson said.

"Where we have an opportunity to influence Hollywood is not necessarily in appealing directly to the people that are creating and distributing the content, because they don't care as long as they're getting their money," Henson said. "Where we have an opportunity to have an impact is by influencing the advertisers, because if the advertisers alienate consumers or potential

consumers, that affects [these advertisers'] bottom line and that's when they're going to get nervous."

The annual list is not a product endorsement, but an indication of the types of programming advertisers promote or the types of products they offer.

Dropped from Best list in 2019 is AT&T, which lost standing by purchasing Time Warner, which includes HBO. The network offers programming that PTC deems problematic for children, like the sex- and violence-laden *Game of Thrones*, and *Euphoria*, a teen-targeted drama glorifying teen sex and drug use. The cell provider is on the Worst list for 2019. Also, Limited Brands has been on the Worst list since 2017, based on its purchase of Victoria's Secret lingerie company, which produces advertising that PTC deems problematic for children.

Wendy's and Verizon are new additions to the Best list.

Consumers don't realize their power, Henson said.

"A lot of us assume we are the final customer, and as long as we're happy, the networks are happy, everybody's happy," she said. "I think actually we are the product being sold and we are being sold to the advertisers. The advertisers are the ones the networks ultimately need to keep happy. If the advertisers aren't happy, [the networks are] not getting their money."

The PTC cited a 2016 study commissioned by Scripps Networks Interactive and UP TV which found that "ads seen in TV-G rated programming score substantially higher in generating attention and purchase intent than commercials appearing in television shows with TV-14 and TV-MA ratings."

The list, released Tuesday (Nov. 19), categorizes companies by industry and is based on television advertising and programming alone.

The 2019 Best list includes, in cars, Ford, GM and Chrysler; fast food, Dairy Queen and Wendy's; discount retail, Walmart; department and clothing stores, TJX and Jos. A. Bank; consumer electronics, Apple and Google; food and beverage, Coca-Cola and Smuckers; telecom, Verizon; consumer products, Proctor & Gamble; and insurance, State Farm.

The 2019 Worst list includes, cars, Subaru, Toyota and Nissan; fast food, YUM! Brands and Subway; discount retail, Target; department and clothing stores, Kohl's and Limited Brands; consumer electronics, Microsoft and Samsung; food and beverage, Pepsi and Mars Inc.; telecom, T-Mobile; consumer products, Unilever; and insurance, Geico.

"Sometimes advertisers don't even know where their ads are showing up," Henson said. "Many of these companies go through third-party media buyers" who are instructed to reach a particular demographic. "Many times they don't know anything about the content that their ads are appearing alongside."

Christian-owned companies such as Hobby Lobby and Chick-fil-A are not mentioned on either list, Henson said, because they don't advertise on television. The list is based on PTC research.

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: The Manhattan Declaration - Ten Years Later

TIGERVILLE, SC (BP) – Today marks the 10-year anniversary of the publication of "The Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience." The document was originally drafted by two Southern Baptists, the late Charles Colson of Prison Fellowship and Timothy George, then dean of Beeson Divinity School, as well as the Roman Catholic legal scholar and philosopher Robert George.

Almost 150 leaders from various Protestant, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions were charter signers of The Manhattan Declaration. Over the past decade, over 550,000 individuals have added their signatures. I was not a charter signer of the document, but I signed The Manhattan Declaration the day it was published and shared it publicly from my social media accounts.

The Manhattan Declaration outlined three issues that were under assault in American culture in 2009: the sanctity of every human life, the traditional biblical understanding of marriage and religious liberty for all people. The statement addressed each of these three issues from the complementary standpoints of holy Scripture (our ultimate authority), the best of the Christian intellectual tradition and human reason.

While The Manhattan Declaration offered a brief exposition of each of its three priorities, it was also a call to action. As the signers confessed,

"We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences to affirm our right -- and, more importantly, to embrace our obligation -- to speak and act in defense of these truths. We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers, that no power on earth, be it cultural or political, will intimidate us into silence or acquiescence. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness, both in season and out of season. May God help us not to fail in that duty."

The Manhattan Declaration issued a clarion call that was clearly necessary 10 years ago. Subsequent events have shown this call is even more important in 2019.

Abortion-on-demand remains legal in the U.S. Since Roe v. Wade legalized the practice in 1973, an estimated 62 million pre-born human beings have been killed in their mothers' wombs. Though abortion rates have dropped significantly -- a trend for which we should give thanks -- there have also been setbacks to the pro-life cause in recent days.

In January of this year, the state of New York passed the Reproductive Health Act, which among other changes guaranteed a right to an abortion at any point during a pregnancy and removed criminal charges against harming a child in the womb. As reported by Baptist Press this week, a San Francisco federal jury awarded Planned Parenthood almost \$2.3 million in its suit against the Center for Medical Progress, a pro-life organization that had used secret video recordings to demonstrate that the abortion provider was trafficking in fetal body parts.

Traditional marriage has suffered a number of significant blows since The Manhattan Declaration was published. In 2011, the Obama Administration instructed the U.S. Justice Department to cease defending the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act (1996) in court. In 2012, California courts declared unconstitutional Proposition 8, a ballot initiative that had banned same-sex marriage in the state. Most notably, in 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court's Obergefell decision legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states.

During this same period, LGBTQ activist organizations, corporations, and progressive politicians have partnered together -- mostly successfully -- to further normalize homosexuality, transgenderism, same-sex marriage, and other unbiblical understandings of gender and sexuality in popular culture. Christians and others who reject revisionist understandings of gender and sexuality have increasingly been ostracized and even penalized for their convictions, which leads to the third issue addressed in The Manhattan Declaration.

Increasingly, the religious liberty of individuals who oppose same-sex marriage for religious reasons is under assault. LGBTQ activists have sued the owners of bakeries, floral companies, advertising agencies, apparel companies and others for refusing to provide services that would compel them to affirm same-sex marriage. The Equality Act, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives in 2019 but has not yet been acted upon by the Senate, would declare homosexuality to be a civil right and further discriminate against people of faith for their religious convictions.

Other issues have also provoked threats to religious liberty. Both businesses and non-profits have been sued for refusing to fund abortions through their health care policies. The free speech of religious and/or conservative collegians has been threatened by the growth of "free speech zones" on many college campuses. Churches and other ministries in many communities continue to struggle with discriminatory prohibitions about the use of certain pieces of property or rental agreements. Organizations such as Alliance Defending Freedom and the

Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission are standing in the gap for Christians (and others!) whose religious liberty is under fire.

Life, marriage, religious liberty -- three biblical ideas that have significantly influenced American culture yet are under assault as never before in 2019. The Manhattan Declaration has proven to be a prophetic document, and believers need to heed its call now more than ever. I would encourage you to read today and consider anew the call to discipleship in an increasingly post-Christian culture. If you want to read thoughtful contemporary reflections on The Manhattan Declaration and its legacy, check out this on the statement, published earlier this year on the Breakpoint website, as well as the collection of essays "Life, Marriage, and Religious Liberty: What Belongs to God, What Belongs to Caesar," edited by David Dockery and John Stonestreet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathan A. Finn is provost and dean of the faculty at North Greenville University in Tigerville, SC. He also serves as a research fellow for the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.