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# Punching Holes in the Darkness sits down with Ronnie Floyd about the state of the SBC

by Staff

PLYMOUTH, MI – [In a recent episode of Punching Holes in the Darkness](#), host Tim Patterson sat down with SBC Executive Committee CEO, Ronnie Floyd. Floyd shared his heart about some of the challenges facing the Southern Baptist Convention, and the goals he has set for the coming five years.

In a recent column in the Baptist Press Ronnie Floyd shared what messengers will be facing at the upcoming Convention meeting in Nashville. He discusses the unprecedented challenges and the season of struggle, but he also brings a hopeful outlook of the many great things the SBC is doing together. **You can read all of his thoughts below.**

Punching Holes in the Darkness is a podcast by the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM). Over the past year, Punching of Holes has shared conversations with Baptists across the state, as well as leaders in the national scene. Just recently, guests have included Danny Akin from Southeastern Seminary, and Randy Brandon in Alma, Michigan.

You can go to [www.bscm.org/podcast](http://www.bscm.org/podcast) for a complete list of episodes or subscribe at Apple Podcasts or Spotify to have new episodes delivered directly to you.

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## The present state of the SBC

by Ronnie Floyd

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Before we come together for our 2021 SBC Annual Meeting in Nashville, I want to share a few thoughts on the present state of the Convention.

**This is not an easy task and time.**

Serving our churches across the nation and world daily, I do all I can to lead us as a Convention with consistent biblical leadership focused on advancing the Gospel and fulfilling our Great Commission work together.

For more than 32 years, I pastored one of our Southern Baptist churches that was a loving, unified fellowship of believers, committed to reaching its region, our nation and the world.

When God called me here two years ago, I knew I faced an enormous challenge; but in all reality, I find that this task is difficult each day.

I remain astounded by what others perceive us to be and the direction some believe we are going. Please know that I will not fabricate a narrative, but I will be honest. As we come to Nashville for the first time in two years for an annual convention, we need to come with great expectation that God will meet with us, that God will lead us to face our challenges with objectivity and hope, and God will empower us to rally around our shared mission in a Christ-honoring manner.

Therefore, today, I would like to share with you four matters.

### **1. Our Convention is facing unprecedented challenges.**

We are a large and diverse network of churches located across the entire United States. Coming out of a global pandemic, our personal lives and churches have been affected in every conceivable manner. All of this is converging with an ongoing godless culture that saturates our lives and operates in a way that conflicts with our Bible-based, Christ-centered worldview as Southern Baptists.

The global pandemic has revealed that environments and mindsets are different depending on where you are located geographically. Therefore, an unhealthy collision is occurring.

When a diverse national organization like ours is constantly saturated with this godless culture, the challenges are immense. Some even appear to be insurmountable.

In this unhealthy culture, we are called on by our Lord to love one another and to advance His Good News to the whole world. *The question this generation of Southern Baptists must answer is: Will we do this?*

### **2. Our Convention is struggling through this season.**

With these unprecedented challenges piled upon us during this season, our Convention is struggling. Some predict we will decline our way into irrelevance, while others say we will destroy one another.

Some of our churches question their trust in us because of statements made or persuasions shared in news accounts or conduct on social media. Some of these things may be true, but we must also recognize some is rhetoric, and perhaps some of it misrepresents the situation. Regardless, we need to operate always with the highest level of integrity and with the highest skill possible.

Baptist associations, state conventions and national entities are accountable to the churches. These Baptist bodies should be representing our churches.

The Southern Baptist Convention is much better when pastors and laypersons are involved in every segment of Convention life. We need to work diligently and continually to build trusting relationships.

I pray our pastors and laypersons will clearly understand that our [Baptist Faith and Message](#) is still our confessional statement. ***Nothing has changed.*** This is who we are and what we stand upon as we move forward in our cooperative efforts. Additionally, we are still very committed to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations.

### **3. Our Convention is doing many great things together.**

Even in this pandemic year, our churches, working cooperatively, still:

- Sent 422 missionaries through our International Mission Board, planted 18,000 new congregations, and had no less than 144,000 professions of faith in Jesus Christ from people outside the United States.
- Planted 588 congregations across North America.
- Equipped more than 24,000 God-called servants through our six seminaries.
- Baptized more than 123,000 people when our churches were shut down for months beginning March 2020. Once things began to open, ministry was limited due to COVID-19 protocols – there were little to no events for children, teenagers and others, which can be great experiences of harvest evangelism. This baptism figure comes from only 69 percent of our churches reporting. Additionally, the professions of faith exceeded the numbers we have recorded, as significant numbers of people participated online.
- Gave \$683 million through our Cooperative Program, our Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, and our Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions.
- Gave more than \$11.5 billion for their church's work regionally, statewide, nationally, and globally.

Imagine what else God has done!

While we are facing unprecedented challenges, and at times struggle through this season of Convention life, God is still doing great things through our churches and the work we do together.

### **4. Our Convention is pressing forward with a unified Great Commission vision.**

At the time of this article's release, we have 12,542 preregistered messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting on June 15-16 in Nashville. Since the year 2000, we have only had four conventions with at least 10,000 messengers. This year appears to be above all of these, if indeed the people come. This could be one of our largest gatherings since 1995 in Atlanta, when we had 20,654 messengers.

On Tuesday afternoon, June 15, at 2:30 p.m., we will unveil our unified Great Commission vision that will carry us through the year 2025. We believe deeply this vision is what our churches care about and will greatly represent their heart. We will request the Southern Baptist family support this vision in every way. We will also begin a major initiative in prayer across our entire Convention inside our nation and beyond.

When we get our eyes back on sending missionaries, planting churches, mobilizing people and reaching the next generation, we will not have the time nor the desire to chase after every whim or debate one another over every detail before a world that needs Jesus.

Southern Baptists, please hear me clearly: Nothing is more important than reaching every person for Jesus Christ in every town, every city, every state and every nation.

To this vision, we give our lives.

Now is the time to lead.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ronnie Floyd is the president and CEO of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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## **The miracle man of Traverse City**

by Ricky Pearson

**TRAVERSE CITY, MI** – I want to tell a story of the marvelous, unexpected grace of God in helping to start His church here in Traverse City. This is not a strategy you will read in a church planting book. Only God could do something like this.

This story begins back in 2011 here in Traverse City. I was here to marry my son and his bride Sara. Sara's maid of honor was Kelly. They were roommates while playing softball in college. Kelly's parents, Roger and Janice, came to the wedding because they knew Sara.

After the wedding, Roger mentioned to Kelly that he had not been in church in many years. However, he said he liked the pastor who performed the wedding and would go to the church he pastored. Little did he know what he was saying. Fast forward seven years. God calls Sandra and me to start a church here in Traverse City. By now Kelly had married and moved to Traverse City, as did her parents. Sarah invites Kelly to come to church and she does. Kelly remembered what her dad had said seven years earlier and invited him to church.

She said that the pastor who performed the wedding was now pastoring here in Traverse City. I think you can begin to see what God was doing. True to his word, Roger started coming and has been faithful ever since. He was not a follower of Christ at the time, but kept coming and had all kinds of questions. He was hungry for God, but not a religion. After a year, he committed his life to Christ on his own. Janice still weeps to this day when she tells the story of Roger's decision.

The story does not end there. Now, fast forward to this past Christmas. Covid was spiking here in Traverse City and Roger came down with it. It hit him hard and fast. He was immediately admitted to the hospital. The outlook was not good. His oxygen numbers were rapidly going down. They thought their only option was to put him on a ventilator.

That evening after Roger was admitted to the hospital, our church called a zoom prayer meeting. Many of Rogers' friends and relatives joined us, but did not participate. We prayed and God in His grace answered our prayers. The doctors were about to put Roger on the ventilator when they noticed his numbers began to stabilize. Later the doctors told Janice that it was at the exact time that we were having our prayer meeting.

As Roger was recovering in the hospital, the doctors and nurses said that they were certain Roger would not make it. They had no explanation of how he survived. We do – God! When he was finally released from the hospital, the doctors and nurses came down and gave him a standing ovation as he left.

This trophy of grace has been the platform for many conversations about Christ. The end of the story is still yet to be written with transformed lives as a result of this miracle of grace. This past week in our men's discipleship group, Roger said that he was finally beginning to feel as if he were connecting with God as he is learning to pray.

We all know that God is powerful, and nothing is too big for Him. Why are we so surprised when He shows up? If God can work in such unexpected ways, maybe He would do this for you. I pray you would experience the wonderful, unexpected grace that God loves to show when we cry out to Him.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ricky and Sandra Pearson are church planters for Cornerstone Fellowship in Traverse City Michigan. Ricky got his MDIV from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth Texas. They have three married children and five grandchildren.

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# A season of planting

by Ben Klaus

**NOVI, MI** – As a “newbie” at Legacy Church, I have been thinking a lot about planting. To be clear, I am not good at planting. I know this because of my agricultural background from the countryside of Wisconsin, where I grew up. Back in high school and college, I worked a job at a plant nursery. This taught me a lot about life and agriculture and convinced me that ministry was infinitely superior to farming. However, I did not realize that ministry and farming are the same thing!

The Bible has a lot to say about the relationships between agriculture and ministry. There are six important connections between agriculture and ministry, so let me step through the biblical guide to spiritual planting. People plant crops for a reason. They have a reasonable expectation that there will eventually be a harvest, and the harvest will make all of their horticultural efforts worthwhile. It is exactly the same in ministry- we believe that one day there will be a harvest, and our harvest will be worthwhile. So we plant with the harvest in view.

With this in mind, the Bible lays out six important steps to spiritual planting:

1. **Plant good seed.** In Mark 4:14, Jesus explains that the seed which the gospel worker plants is the word of God. The kind of seed we plant will ultimately produce the kind of fruit we harvest. To the serious student of the Scriptures, this seems like an obvious truth. But we live in a time when churches are planting all kinds of other seeds; seeds of good works, seeds of self-help, seeds of charisma, and in many cases, seeds of pragmatism. The goal of gospel seed-planting must not be so shallow as to merely compel people to fill the seats of our churches. Rather, our goal is to see people truly regenerated by grace through faith, and thus become true disciples of Jesus Christ. As Paul points out emphatically in Romans 10, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. The seed is the WORD.
2. **Plant in good soil.** In the parable of the sower in Mark 4, Jesus explains that the soil represents the different kinds of hearts where the Scripture seed falls. Some will accept the seed, and some will reject it. But when we cross-reference this agricultural concept with Psalm 1, we discover that the soil may also be the word of God! The one who is planted and rooted in the word will be the one to grow strong and fruitful. As ministers of the gospel, we have no power over the hearts of men, other than our relentless prayers on their behalf. But we certainly can choose to be Bible-saturated ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and this choice largely determines the fruit we will harvest in years to come.
3. **Weed and water the field.** Jesus alludes to this principle again in Mark 4:18, and I learned this the hard way from my agricultural background. The gospel minister

must not only plant the seed, but he must also nurture an environment where gospel faith may blossom. We see this again in Jude 20-21. The gospel minister cannot create faith; this is the work of God. But we may create a positive environment for faith to flourish, so we must go about weeding and watering. False teaching and distractions must be removed, so that the gospel may take root and grow without harmful impediments.

4. **Remove parasitic insects and animals.** Jesus alludes to this principle by his comment regarding the birds of the air in Mark 4:4 and 15. Desirable plants compete not only with weeds, but also insects and vermin. Many gardeners may put out a scarecrow in their garden, to scare off the birds; others use pesticides on their plants, to keep away parasitic bugs. It is very disheartening to grow strong and fruitful plants, then discover that the harvest has been eaten by deer or rabbits! So there is a constant defense of the integrity of the harvest.
5. **Be patient.** Jesus doesn't explain this point directly, but it is a self-evident principle of farming: a farmer never plants one day and harvests the next! There must always be significant time involved; for plants, this usually takes many months. But people move at a slower pace than plants. In fact, gospel outreach has actually been handicapped in many areas because ministers of the gospel tend to be impatient. We want our fruit, and we want it now! Because of our desire for instant results, the substance of the gospel has been altered; and many have turned to pragmatic, self-centered means to create the illusion of fruit. But illusion and substance are very different things.
6. Finally, **harvest with gratitude.** Paul stated this point most clearly in Galatians 6:9 *"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."* In light of the Great Commission, this promise is actually an absolute guarantee for the minister of the gospel. Where the seed of the word has been planted, and the biblical process has been patiently and carefully followed, we have a divine guarantee of fruit "in due season." There will be a reaping. There are always those whom God is calling and drawing, and we will be blessed to help them take the final step into the kingdom of God.

Harvest time is what this is all about! But to get there, no step can be skipped. We cannot speed up the process, we cannot skip steps, we cannot ignore our plot of ground, we cannot rest on our laurels; we have got to keep working, with biblical tools and biblical process and biblical fortitude, until God graciously blesses us with fruit from our labors.

Right now, I am in a season of planting. What about you?

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ben Klaus is the lead pastor of Legacy Church in Novi, Michigan. He is married to Rachel (14 years), and is dad to Matthew (12), Katelyn (9), and Christian (3). They are a family of musicians.

All play the violin, and his wife is employed as a first violinist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. After nearly 8 years of ministry in downriver Detroit, God has recently moved Ben to a new ministry - Legacy Church in Novi. They have been there for less than a year, and are very excited at the gospel prospects in our church and community.

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## First Person: It's just not your turn

by Dawn Reed

**PRESTONBURG, KY** – “Maybe it just wasn’t your turn,” I told the young lady. “Maybe it wasn’t for you.”

Upset about being left out of a non-church-related project, she was surprised at my comments, expecting something a little warm and fuzzy. Still, my words were true.

We often yearn to be connected, included, involved. We fear missing out on a good time or even a bad time. We don’t want to be left out.

I get it. We pray for God to open and close doors in our lives. Sometimes we don’t get to do the things we want ... and it’s OK. He still has a plan; it’s just not our turn.

It’s a lesson I’ve learned myself. My plan is not always the *best* plan.

Several years ago, our church was planning a mission trip to Haiti. All the slots had been filled, except one. I had signed up to go. So had Stacy. Two women, one slot. My beloved, the pastor, was going to flip a coin to see which of us got to be on the team.

Before he did, I came to my senses. I had been on several trips before; Stacy had not. I was concerned that it might hurt her deeply if her pastor’s wife knocked her out of going. I could go another time. It just wasn’t my turn.

My beloved told Stacy she would be going. She was ecstatic!

Because Stacy went to Haiti and I did not, a baby’s life was saved. No kidding!

Stacy is a baby-holder. I am not. If she saw you this minute and you held even an ugly baby, she would beg you to hold it. I would not.

One day while that mission team was serving in Haiti, a long line waited to see the doctors. Stacy had finished with Bible school activities and had returned to the clinic to help. As she passed the long line of people waiting to be seen, sure enough, she spotted someone with an infant. She automatically asked, "May I hold your baby?"

As she took the baby boy in her arms, Stacy learned that it was actually his aunt who'd held him. He had been abandoned by his mother. He wasn't there to see the doctor; the aunt was. Stacy knew right away that something was wrong with the baby. He was lifeless. She told the aunt through an interpreter that the baby was extremely sick and would need to be seen right away. Making her way through the crowd, Stacy presented him to the doctors. They found that he was dangerously dehydrated. IVs were started STAT. He had IVs that day and several following days. Many prayers were uttered. Though it was unlikely at first, he survived! Praise the Lord! Because it was *Stacy's* turn to be in Haiti and not mine.

God has a plan for us. It is unique and specific for us. It's not someone else's plan. He will open doors for us. When He does, we will praise His Name and probably share it on social media.

When God closes doors, let's stop knocking on them, trusting He is up to something else.

Of course, it's disappointing when we don't get to do what our heart desires. Knowing that God is a kind and gracious God who puts our daily puzzle pieces together can help alleviate the frustration and give us a heavenly perspective.

Moses didn't lead the people into the Promised Land. Daniel wasn't in the fire with his three friends. David did not build the temple. It just wasn't their turn, and it was OK. God had a different plan.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dawn Reed is a newspaper columnist and pastor's wife in Prestonsburg, Ky.

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## **Send your pastor away**

by Dr. Tony L. Lynn

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – Churches, would you please make it a priority to send your pastor and his family away to the annual, national Southern Baptist convention every June? I urge you to set aside some specific designated funds in the annual budget that do not take away from the pastor family's income or benefits. Would you think about starting with \$1,000-\$2,000?

Conventions and gatherings for pastors encourage and refresh in ways that cannot be explained.

Let the pastor and his family represent the church then return home and give a first-hand report to the church during the summer about their experience. There is so much that takes place during the two-days of convention and the previous two-days of secondary meetings. This annual event is the only time Southern Baptists/Great Commission Baptists gather, as one voting body, to conduct business and address contemporary challenges.

Who else meets? The Woman's Missionary Union, associational mission strategists, evangelists, pastors, and ethnic fellowships discuss important matters and spend time in fellowship. The six seminaries host meals and share visions about their futures. Agencies and entities of the convention host meals and give away bags of gifts. New friendships develop among messengers and relationships from the past are refreshed during free times like Tuesday evening.

Let the pastor's family be your first messengers to the convention. Did you know that, based on the churches contributions to the Cooperative Program, that each participating Southern Baptist church may be allowed from 2 to 12 voting messengers. Other members from the church could travel with the pastor's family for the convention then allow the pastor's family to arrange a much needed family vacation on either side of the annual convention near the site of the convention.

Here is where the upcoming conventions are taking place:

- 2021 June 15-16, Nashville, Tennessee
- 2022 June 14-15, Anaheim, California
- 2023 June 13-14, Charlotte, North Carolina
- 2024 June 11-12, Indianapolis, Indiana
- 2025 June 10-11, Dallas, Texas
- 2026 June 11-12 Orlando, Florida
- 2027 June 8-9, Salt Lake, Utah

Why would I make such a bold recommendation to your church? It's because I believe that the members of our churches, in Michigan, will be emboldened when they see and hear from the pastor's report what we attempt to do as we follow the Lord as a national convention each June and as a state convention each November.

It was 1984 when I attended my first annual convention in Kansas City, MO with a group of students from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The ludicrous Ghostbusters film came out that same month while what is known as the Conservative Resurgence was taking place within the national convention. I was sitting front and center having face-to-face meetings with key players at the actual convention, asking questions, and learning all I could take-in about how we functioned. It was exhilarating! Our host professor had arranged meetings with

influential leaders from both extremes of the convention. I saw Christian statesmen who disagreed with one another exhibit respect and kindness despite their differences of opinion.

Here are some closing, personal thoughts. In recent years while at conventions, I have been impressed with the brotherhood I see during casual moments expressed in hallways, in restaurants, and on city sidewalks. On one occasion I watched as a pastor from a humble church in Missouri realized he was standing next to a well-known seminary president in the messenger registration line. The pastor fidgeted motioning silently to his wife trying to draw attention to the seminary president and his wife. I believe the president could tell the pastor was afraid to strike-up a conversation so the president squared-up and faced the pastor and his wife then warmly said, “Brother and sister, where are you from?” and after 4-5 minutes of conversation ended with a “Thank you pastor for all that you do. There is no greater calling than to be a pastor of a local church.”

I wish you could have seen the change in that pastor and his wife. The Missouri couple walked away from the registration table walking lighter and beaming with joy. It was not about who they met; it was about how they were valued by someone else for being recognized as a pastor and wife.

Churches, I hope you will find the resources to make it possible for your pastor and his family to attend the upcoming annual meetings for the national and state conventions.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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## **When facing the unknown**

by Mike Durbin

**“...for you haven’t traveled this way before” Joshua 3:4.**

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – These words were spoken to the people of God as they prepared to cross the Jordan River. Nearly 40 years earlier, God powerfully delivered them from Egyptian bondage under the leadership of Moses. They started toward the Promised Land, but the people rebelled against God and ended up spending four decades wandering in the wilderness. The

entire generation who left Egypt, everyone who was over the age of 20 at the time of the rebellion, passed away in the wilderness except for Joshua and Caleb.

A new generation of the people of God are on the bank of the Jordan River in this passage. They can see the Promised Land, the land that flows with Milk and Honey, but they're on the wrong side. The Jordan River is between them and the Promised Land.

The people of God are about to go a way they have never gone before, following a leader who had not been tested into a land they did not know. They are about to experience a life unlike any they have ever lived. They are entering uncharted territory. They are on the edge of a new reality looking into the unknown.

That's a pretty good description of what we are facing. We've come through challenging times. Life is different and we're not sure what it will look like in the days to come. Like the people of God in Joshua's day, we "haven't traveled this way before." They had to move forward when everything was changing, but the reality of the Promised Land - the land that flowed with milk and honey was before them. As I read the story of the Conquest, I wanted to see how God leads His children when we face the unknown.

### ***When facing the unknown - follow.***

The people are commanded, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God carried by the Levitical priests, you are to break camp and follow it."

The people are told to keep a distance of about 1,000 yards between them and the ark so everyone can see as Levitical Priests carry it into the Jordan River. They follow the Ark, because it represents the presence of God. It's really an incredible picture - an estimated two million people all looking together and moving together as they follow the Ark of the Covenant.

As God's children today, we move forward, not following an ark, but with our eyes fixed on Jesus - the author and perfecter of our faith. "Follow me" is the invitation of Jesus as we face the unknown before us. We follow His teaching, His example, and the words He has given us in Scripture. The way forward is not a path, but a person.

### ***When facing the unknown - discover.***

Crossing the Jordan River was going to change all their lives, especially Joshua's. Moses died before they crossed, and Joshua is the new leader of the people. We know Joshua felt insufficient for the task because several times in chapter 1 God tells him to "be strong and courageous."

Sometimes the most difficult land to conquer is not what lies before us, but what lies within us. Joshua knows great truths about God, but as he leads the people into the unknown, he is going to discover God in ways he never imagined. Head truth becomes heart truth as he personally

discovers: “No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you” (Joshua 1:5).

By stepping into the unknown, into that which he was most afraid of, Joshua discovers God is greater than his fears, his insecurities, and his insufficiencies.

***When facing the unknown - remember.***

Joshua tells 12 men to each pick up a stone from the Jordan’s dry riverbed and carry it to where the people of God will camp for their first night in the promised land. They set the stones up as a reminder of God’s deliverance.

“...In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ you should tell them, ‘The water of the Jordan was cut off in front of the ark of the Lord’s covenant. When it crossed the Jordan, the Jordan’s water was cut off.’ Therefore these stones will always be a memorial for the Israelites” (Joshua 4:6-7).

The stones were set up to remind the people of God’s great deliverance. They were reminders that God brought them through the very unknown they feared. What they feared turned out to be a great deliverance from God and the beginning of life in the Promised Land. There would be more difficulties, battles to be fought, and other unknowns, but the stone memorial set up at Gilgal reminded them of God’s power, presence, and peace as they faced the unknown. “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God” (Corrie Ten Boom).

**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.

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## **Chevy, Ford or Mopar?**

by Mick Schatz

**ROSCOMMON, MI** – When I was in middle school and high school this seemed like an extremely important question (maybe for some it still is). My friends and I would have friendly arguments stating our opinions and justifying our choices with all the knowledge we had gathered from Popular Mechanics and other such magazines.

Some of my friends were actually car junkies - enjoyed working on cars, knew how engines worked, and could fix various car problems. I knew nothing, but it did not matter I was a Chevy man because it was the best car or truck to own and that was fact!

It's funny to look back and realize ultimately whatever I could afford became my vehicle of choice. As a kid, divisive issues were questions like Coke or Pepsi, Jeans or Huskies, Dolphins or Buccaneers (I grew up in Florida), Larry Bird or Magic Johnson, and other great life altering questions which I am sure you could add your own. But, as an adult...

Politics, religion, climate change, Dr. Seuss, sexual orientation, Covid, mask or no mask, ethnicity, hybrid or gas, hymns or songs, abortion, vegan or carnivore, social media and on and on. What does not divide us?

Some of these issues are extremely important and deserve to be treated as such so I'm not trying to marginalize them. It just seems more things divide us than unite us. The culture is continuously flooding our senses with opinion and hyperbole. So how do we navigate these treacherous waters? How do we not drown in the tidal waves of rhetoric?

Our culture says turn to psychology, social and political science to answer these questions. Even in our Christian culture timeless truths and Godly values are being jettisoned for more "modern" thought and ideas. We are being told to interpret and discern eternal truth through the lens of modern philosophies, theories and opinions.

As Christians God's Word is the lens through which we see, interpret and engage the world. God's Word is the filter through which we sift every philosophy, theory and opinion to see if they hold true. We will never discern truth apart from the Bible and apart from Jesus' Gospel we will never have reconciliation. Hopefully I'm not setting off any alarm bells that have not already sounded in your heart as a Christ follower. However, we must be vigilant...

We must be vigilant in our God-given mission to share the Gospel and be ambassadors of reconciliation and peace. It's easy to become so distracted and frustrated with the divisions in our world that we forget Jesus is truly the answer. He is sufficient for the whole of life, every sociological, psychological, economical, philosophical, and spiritual realm of our lives.

Sin is the root of all our divisions-the number one divisive issue in all humanity-but Jesus is the remedy. On the cross, Jesus bridged the divide. Only the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, can redeem, restore, recreate and reconcile that which separates us from Him and each other.

The human heart will never produce solutions to human division apart from Jesus. The answer is simple, living it out is the work. Don't live in discouragement, defeat or frustration. Stay the course-live the mission-share the Gospel of Peace with a divided world. Jesus is sufficient! Now, I'm pretty sure my childhood friends are still Mopar fans, but that's okay because they love Jesus so I'll still follow them on Facebook.

## **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.

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## **Send Detroit Update**

by Wayne Parker

**DETROIT, MI** – We are praising God that churches are being planted in Detroit despite being one of the hardest hit cities in the country by the COVID 19 virus. In the last year we saw 3 new churches launch: Rhiza Church in Ann Arbor (Pastor Tito Diaz) People’s Fresh Start Church, Detroit (Pastor Robert Lodge, Jr.), and Trials Church, Farmington Hills (Pastor Phil Box). We are looking forward to new church launches this fall including: Heart & Soul West Bloomfield (Pastor Cornelius Roberson), Reformation Church, Detroit (Pastor Malcolm Griswold), and Reaching Out Church, Windsor (Pastor Sameer Kabul\*).

\* name changed for security

### **Mission Partnership Opportunities**

As summer approaches we want to let you know of just some ways that you and your church could partner with church planters and their new churches as they serve Christ in Send Detroit. Several of our church planting missionaries have projects that can use your support. See the different ways that you can help by sending a team to assist with needed work.

### **Heart and Soul Community Church, West Bloomfield**

Pastor Cornelius Roberson shares a blessing from the Lord that Heart and Soul has recently acquired property in West Bloomfield. It is their desire to begin an additional church location and get this property ready to facilitate Sunday worship services, church gatherings and other activities in order to bring the gospel to this community. There are needs to help with a new roof, interior renovations and exterior clean up. Select the picture above to watch a video from Pastor Corn and hear more!

### **The House Church, Detroit**

Roland Caldwell Jr serves as pastor of this East Detroit church who just celebrated 4 years of public ministry. This is a church passionate about bringing the gospel of Christ to their community and meeting tangible needs. They are in need of help with replacing exterior windows, painting throughout the building and replacing and securing ceiling tiles in the sanctuary.

## **The Church at Clawson**

Pastor Bob Morrissey leads this church who has just celebrated 5 years of ministry in the Clawson community. As they seek to move forward following Christ they have endeavored on a renovation project of the former VFW hall location where the church meets. Some needed renovations include:

- Replacing of exterior windows and refacing the exterior walls
- Demolishing and relocating some interior walls, carpeting and painting to make a new and usable space for a teen gathering area.
- Stripping an existing bathroom to renovate and update.

## **On Mission Church, Inkster**

Pastor Antonio Wimberly is preparing for a summer of community engagement and One Mission Church will be out in the neighborhoods to make Christ known. They could use assistance with outreach in Lemal Gardens Park in several ways: • Park clean up • Painting the corridor walls • Gospel outreach to people present One Mission is also planning Vacation Bible School June 24-26 and a Block Party later in August that teams could easily jump in to help with.

## **Send Network Gathering Report**

March 17, we were able to host a local gathering of church planters, wives, pastors and church leaders to encourage and equip gospel work through church planting in Send Detroit. Mile City Church was a gracious host to nearly 200 guests. These were greatly encouraging times through the preaching of Ken Nether, Shea Prisk and Brian Bloye. Three break-out session discussion panels that were lead including restorative ministries, soul care for planter wives and evangelism in a COVID era. We are excited about how this event will further catalyze church planting in Michigan and beyond.

## **Heading to Nashville?**

If you will be in Nashville during the Send Conference and the Annual Meeting (June 13-16) and would like to connect with myself or perhaps some Send Detroit church planters, please reach out to me. You can contact me at [wparker@namb.net](mailto:wparker@namb.net).

Yours in Christ,  
**Wayne Parker**  
Send Detroit Missionary

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# Generational merger made a church older and healthier

by Scott Barkley

**WORCESTER, MS (BP)** – At first glance, the merging of Burncoat Baptist Church and The Church on Seven Hills may have appeared to benefit one congregation more than the other. Burncoat’s membership and building were both showing their advancing years. The Church on Seven Hills was energetic, four years removed from its founding and full of college students.

But that merger, said Pastor Andy Haynes, has brought about a singular body of believers where life experiences mingle with discipleship every day. Haynes, who also serves as the state director for collegiate ministries for the Baptist Convention of New England, said the dynamic has led to deep growth among church members.

Members of The Church on Seven Hills take part in a food giveaway during Easter weekend last month. Photo courtesy of The Church on Seven Hills

“Being multi-generational has been a big part of it,” he said. “We have an active college ministry and are continuing to grow through connections with our neighborhood. But we’re pretty evenly represented among different age groups.”

The Church on Seven Hills began as a prayer group made up of several local college students – there are nine schools in the area – young professionals and families from their sending church, Hope Chapel in Sterling, Mass. Shane Colwell, Seven Hills’ pastor at the time, led the congregation to meet at rented spaces along the way, including an Episcopal church on Sunday evenings and later the hall of a Lutheran church on Sunday mornings.

About four years ago Burncoat Baptist Church and The Church on Seven Hills merged under Colwell’s leadership. At the start of 2020, Haynes became pastor. Already known in the area for his work among college students, he continued to prioritize intergenerational relationships.

Omar Cordova, a student at Worcester State University, shared the importance of those relationships prior to his recent baptism. The mathematics major who plans to become a teacher attended church until he was around 6 years old. From there, his sense of right and wrong largely depended on his friends’ opinions, and he described himself as very self-involved.

One day Kevin Cox, a member of Seven Hills and full-time campus minister with College Students New England of the BCNE, was walking the Worcester State campus when he passed Cordova and his friends playing Ping-Pong. He introduced himself and invited Cordova to the church. Cordova ended up attending Fusion, a collegiate ministry conference hosted each fall by New England Baptists and said that’s where he said Jesus “became real” to him.

That realization grew into something else after one of Haynes' sermons. "Andy was talking about how if we don't fully put our hearts into Jesus then we're being sinful for rejecting Him," Cordova said.

After the service an elderly member of the church approached him and asked what was stopping him from believing in Christ. Apparently, nothing, because Cordova prayed for Jesus to be his Savior.

Cordova and others at the church take part in small groups, many of them representing various generations or those in different stages of life. Last year Seven Hills members left a major footprint in the community through ministries such as grocery distribution and providing school supplies. Recently, two high school students from the church qualified for the [BCNE-sponsored missions opportunity Quest](#), which requires participants to have a mentoring relationship. One participant is being mentored by a retiree, the other by an older adult.

The church's older members say the sight of 20-somethings leading the worship team or welcoming guests is encouraging. "They love the energy and passion," Haynes said. Moreover, younger attendees and a loosening of pandemic-related restrictions means a return to the sounds of children in the sanctuary during the service. Far from a distraction, Haynes called it "a joy."

The merger made The Church on Seven Hills older, and Haynes said that was a move in a healthy direction.

"Early on we were very young, but one of our prayers was to be multigenerational," he said. "We wanted more of that wisdom that comes with life experience. God answered that prayer and brought in another generation to supply what we'd been lacking."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Scott Barkley is national correspondent for Baptist Press.

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## **An uncomfortable calling**

by Belafae Johnson

**MASCOUTAH, IL** – My wife and I, along with our three boys, moved to Mascoutah in 2014, believing that the Lord had called us to start a church in a small southern Illinois town. I had not been introduced to the process of church planting yet. All I had was a burden for the lost and a

yearning for a church to be a place of peace for those from various ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds.

For the next four years, the Lord moved in amazing ways. Quite honestly, he moved at first in ways I thought I wanted no part of—the prospect of our new church and me as a Black pastor becoming part of the Southern Baptist Convention.

My reasoning was rooted in fact and ignorance. What I knew about the Convention and its early history was enough for me not to join. But over the course of two years of praying, seeking, and building relationships, the Lord made it clear that I would be operating in disobedience if I didn't yield to what he wanted to do for me and through me in the SBC.

The Lord placed Southern Baptists in my life who loved, cared for, and encouraged me, my wife, and my kids to the likes that I've never seen before. I met several church planters, including one man I hired at the company where I worked. It seemed accidental when I first encountered Nick Volkening. He was a student at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, looking for a job. He was also helping Rayden Hollis plant Red Hill Church. Nick gave me the book "Church Planter." Today Nick pastors New City Church in Champaign.

We visited traditional SBC churches in some of the most rural and southern parts of this country. We found them to be kind and supportive. An older white couple, Steve and Shirley Ernest in Cunningham, Kentucky, took us into their home and hearts. The financial support of their church is amazing, but the respect they give me as a pastor and preacher is what brings tears to my eyes. I'm valued there!

On Easter Sunday of 2018, the Lord so graciously allowed Purposed Church to launch. Three years later, I'm still part of the SBC. Due to infighting, controversy, and at times downright divisive rhetoric, many Black pastors have wrestled with whether or not to stay. I must be honest, I am troubled too. At times I feel defeated by what I read and hear coming from the huge family that I'm a part of.

I have no ill will towards any of my brothers in Christ who made the decision to leave the Convention, but I must be clear: While I do not speak for all Black pastors, I desire first and foremost to be obedient to what the Lord has called me to. I want to be a part of the change that I want to see.

We face problems as a nation and as a denomination. Our Black brothers and sisters are hurting and fatigued by what we've had to endure simply because we were born Black in this country. And while I intentionally will not name specifics regarding discord in our denomination, words have become the bricks that are building a wall.

How can we preach from Ephesians 4:1-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 and continue to use our platforms and voices to cause division? Do we believe Galatians 3:28? "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus."

We serve the Jesus who tore down the wall of hostility to bring us to himself—all of us—in order for believers to be unified, to be of one mind and of one accord. I believe our convention should be a place of refuge and rest from the fighting.

It is my heart's desire for the Holy Spirit to convict each and every one of us about our conduct and our speech. I pray that repentance becomes the cry of our hearts.

It's my heart's desire that we not think more highly of ourselves than we should. I pray that we lay down our preferences, so all our brothers and sisters feel welcomed and appreciated in all of our churches, at all of our conferences, and throughout our Convention.

It's my heart's desire that we become The Church that Jesus died for us to be.

If you desire to know how pastors who look like me feel, to learn how we are processing these events, I welcome you to join me in the humbling and hard work of seeking out and building relationships with Black pastors in our convention.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Belafae Johnson is planter and pastor of Purposed Church in Mascoutah.

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## **Worship is warfare**

by Eric Stewart

**GRAND BLANC, MI** – Worship has historically been one of the chief instruments of God for defeating His enemies. The psalms and the Old Testament prophets recount the stories of God responding in power to faithful worship. Remember Jericho, the city delivered into the hands of God's people through trumpets and a battle cry. After obeying the Lord's orders to march around the city for seven days, Joshua said, *"Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!"* and the walls came down, and all that was promised was given to them (Joshua 6:16-21).

King Jehosaphat was another who recognized the necessity of worship. 2 Chronicles 20 describes Judah's victory over the armies from Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir. When he heard that these numerous enemies were approaching, Jehosaphat's response was to call a fast for all of Judah to seek the Lord. Recognizing his complete reliance on God, Jehosaphat prayed, *"For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."* (20:12). In response, the Lord used the prophet Jahaziel to tell the king

*“the battle is not yours but God’s”* (20:15-17), recalling the words of Moses with his instructions to *“stand and see the salvation of the Lord”* (Ex. 14:13).

Jehosaphat trusted and believed his God, and he led his people in humble worship to the Lord (20:19,21). While the army of Judah went out, singers in the lead, the Lord set ambushes for the Ammonites and the Moabites, causing them to turn and fight amongst themselves (20:22-23). Judah went to see the outcome, and they found a valley full of corpses and enough goods to plunder for three days (20:24-26; see Ex. 12:35-36). The Moabites and the Ammonites had come to pillage Judah, but the sinner’s wealth was laid up for the righteous (Proverbs 13:22).

In both of these accounts, the people of God only had to glorify His name, and then step back to let Him fight. Worship is warfare, a crucial weapon in the persisting Christian battle. But today, in our world divided into essentials and non-essentials, we’ve placed corporate worship as a body in the latter category.

The powerful, world-changing worship that took place in the Old Testament still exists, and is relevant for us today as New Covenant believers. Ephesians 2:6 says that, in Christ, we have been seated in the heavenly places. The phrase “in Christ” is one of the most important expressions in the Bible. It symbolizes our union: we are in Christ, and Christ is in us. He currently sits at the right hand of Father in Heaven, and by faith, we join Him there. By faith, we have been crucified and buried with Him, have been resurrected with Him by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, have ascended into Heaven with Him, and can join Him there for worship. That is how we bring Heaven down to Earth.

The church is the ‘worshiping assembly’, and her mission is to call the nations to worship God. But worship is not only our goal; it is also one of the chief means assigned to achieving that goal. Worship is not a retreat from the church’s work of conquest. Worship is a fundamental ‘strategy’ of the church militant. Worship is not a retreat from cultural engagement; rather, worship is the driving engine of all true cultural engagement. For too long, we have treated worship as a supplement to the Christian faith when it is our greatest weapon. Our prayers and praises ascend before God, and He thunders from the heavens, shakes the earth, and scatters our enemies before us (Rev. 8:1-5). The Lord of Hosts was with His people back in the Old Testament, and He’s still with His saints today, wielding the same power and might.

It is never a matter of if we worship, but who we worship. Every week is our opportunity to declare that our praise belongs to God. The most essential thing we as Christians can do is to weekly, publicly, and corporately worship the Lord. Our children, the lost and unbelieving, and even our brothers and sisters need to see us worship Him in Spirit and truth. King Jehosaphat responded to the looming threat of war by praising God. It should be no different for us. When we bring to the house of God glory, laud, and honor, He will respond by striking down our enemies.

“Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;

he lifts his voice, the earth melts.  
The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.”  
Psalm 46:6-7

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Pastor Eric Stewart is the chief pen scribbler of this article. His mission is to declare all of Christ for all of life. He joyfully carries out this mission with his wife Lori and his three children that make him the right kind of proud. He currently is one of the Pastors at [One Life Church](#), President of [One Life for Life](#), and a Church Planting Catalyst for the [North American Mission Board](#).

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## **What a difference a year makes**

by Art Werry

**FRASER, MI** – What a difference a year makes. Last Father's Day, Brandon was caught in the throes of a drug addiction that was taking him down the path that kills tens of thousands each year in America. Brandon's life continued to fray as his heroin and alcohol addiction led to more and more family conflict. Continually forced to choose between caring for his family and feeding his addiction, he repeatedly chose the latter. His children faced the very real possibility of growing up without their father. When he wasn't distracted by the drugs, Brandon was too ashamed, so he would simply stay away from the children he loved.

What could change the course of this troubled man? Was it the fear of becoming another statistic – one more number along with the mother of his 14-year-old daughter, who had already succumbed to overdose? Desperate to change the course of this all too familiar drama, Brandon's wife, Patty, stepped in. Gathering the family together for an intervention, she gave Brandon a choice, get help or get lost. Running short on options, Brandon went into treatment, but he dropped out before completing the program. After walking to Patty's house, he hoped she would relent and take him back, but that was not to be. Firmly standing her ground, she insisted he get help.

Stunned, Brandon decided to break the downward spiral and get serious about recovery. He entered and successfully completed a 45-day program. As part of his exit strategy, Brandon began investigating longer term 3/4 housing options. The name of our program, *Pathway To Freedom*, caught his eye because it sounded hopeful. After an initial phone call, Brandon entered the program, and the rest is history. We began praying for him and pointing him

toward Christ, the only hope of lasting recovery. A few months later, Brandon prayed to receive Christ and was baptized with Patty and the children watching. He is not only staying clean and sober, but he is also holding down a steady job. Brandon readily admits, “I used to be impressed by the big, shiny things in life. Now with God in my life, I’m so grateful for what is right in front of my eyes – my family”.

New Life has operated this residential program for men for many years now. Participants are given a safe place to live and a structured environment in which to combat the chaos that is a by-product of addictive behaviors.

*Pathway* is a long-term program that allows the opportunity to share Christ with men who are desperate for something to break the chains of addiction that they have battled in many cases for decades. New Life shares a partnership with the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) as they support the ministry. Sadly, the scourge of addiction that is ravaging our country shows no signs of letting up any time soon. Pastor Art Werry regularly encourages pastors to consider starting a recovery program in their church – even if it is only a 12-Step table that meets in their building. The heartache of addiction resides on every street in every city.

Pastor Werry says, “*Pathway* is by far the most rewarding ministry I have ever been involved. Our recovery ministry is based on the belief that lives can be restored through the power of Jesus Christ.” He regularly tells the men in recovery that he does this ministry as much for the sake of their children as for them. He adds, “Our heart’s desire is to see the multi-generational cycle of addiction broken by the power of Jesus.” It is such blessing to hear a spouse like Patty say, “I enjoy seeing the relationship being built between the children and Brandon. The kids adore him.”

This year, Father’s Day will look remarkably different for Brandon from last year. Sitting in church with his children, he can focus on a future that is much brighter than it was just a few months ago. What a difference a year makes. What a difference Christ makes.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Art Werry has been pastor of New Life in Fraser for over thirty years and executive director of *Pathway to Freedom* for over 25 years. He also handles the technology needs of the BSCM. Art and his wife Tricia are raising their teenage daughter, Hannah.

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# The power of spoken words

by Coye Bouyer

**LANSING, MI** – Words have incredible power, sometimes we forget just how much power spoken words actually have in and over our lives. A life-giving positive tongue creates a positive community, creating greater joy in one's own life and within the life of their community.

Proverbs 15:4 says, *"A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit."* Here, Solomon is saying that your mouth possesses the power of medicine to bring back the life of its listener. However, just as gentle and soothing speech can rejuvenate and revive; harsh speech, coarse, callous or critical conversation from a mean mouth, possesses the power to crush or BREAK the MORALE (spirit) of its hearer.

In a recent sermon series, I tried to remind myself and our church of how reckless words wreck, and how we must be careful to cautiously consider our conversation.

So how about you today? Are you carefully calculated in your conversation. Are you tactfully taming your tongue, or are you tackily traumatizing others with it? Remember just as a mean mouth can crush the morale of another it is also true that your mouth can minister medicine. Think about it.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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# A cure for despair (or a hack for hopelessness)

by John Adams

**BATTLE CREEK, MI** – Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, don't panic. Don't obsess over the details about what is going on. Don't argue with each other. Don't fret over canceled plans. Don't worry about how crazy some people are acting. And don't despair over how hopeless things

might look. Nothing about your circumstances has taken God by surprise. He knows what He is doing and what He wants to do through you right now too."

I wrote these words a little over a year ago as the pandemic began to grow in the United States. That was a hundred plus online sermons and services ago. And many crises and deaths ago. It has been challenging, but the Lord has been with us, every step.

In Luke 24:13-35, two of Jesus' disciples are in the midst of what seems like overwhelming circumstances. They are on their way home from Jerusalem, the third day since Jesus' death. As they walk, they are discussing and arguing with each other. They are also very discouraged. It looks like every hope they had for Jesus was over, and it all seems to amount to nothing.

At some point in their journey, Jesus comes up and begins walking with them. The text says they "were prevented from recognizing Him," but it was also true they were not looking for Him nor expecting Him. Jesus joins their conversation by asking them what they are discussing. His two traveling companions are so stunned, they stop in their tracks, and I bet their mouths dropped open too. They ask Him if he is the only person who doesn't know what has happened recently. Jesus replies by saying, "What things?"

I wonder if He was able to keep a straight face or if He shed a little grin? I imagine that for the next hour or more, they unloaded on Him all the details they knew about Jesus, His ministry, betrayal, death, and burial. They even shared their hope that He might be God's coming king who will rescue and rule over His people. Surely they also had dreams of participating in the Messiah's kingdom too. But now it has been three days since Jesus' death, and nothing has happened, except a few disciples claimed to have a vision of angels who told them that Jesus is alive.

Jesus spends the rest of the trip clearly explaining how the things that happened to Him were all part of God's plan. When they reached their destination, they ask their mystery guest to stay with them. And when they give Him the honor of blessing the meal, their eyes are opened, and they can recognize Jesus. The One they were so upset and worried about had been walking with them the whole time!

Suddenly, everything began to make sense to them. Jesus Himself had explained the spiritual significance of recent events and their experiences. Now they know how to think and feel about their circumstances the way God does. All it took was a little time with Jesus to turn them from being upset and discouraged to being excited and full of hope. They could not wait to share their good news with others!

It is often easy for us to let our circumstances overwhelm us. Today is the perfect time to remind ourselves that we walk with the Lord by faith regardless of our events. When things change, and especially when they seem so beyond our control, we must remember that our relationship with God has not changed.

We still have all of the constant, never-failing love, favor, and presence of the Lord we had before. And as we continue to walk with and trust the Lord, He will open our eyes and touch our hearts about what He is actively doing in the middle of our circumstances. As life slowly begins to become the new normal, let's not forget to trust Christ every day. Even on the good days.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

John Adams is the Pastor of Grace Fellowship Baptist Church in Battle Creek Michigan. He loves his family, wife Melissa and three sons, Connor, Riley and Aiden.

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## **Tale of three Marys**

by Kevin Finkenbinder

**DEWITT, MI** – The following is a fictional account, but in every way possible I have endeavored to build it based on what the Bible said actually happened. As with any historical fiction, I have filled in the blanks with my thoughts, but it is my goal and belief that the following is faithful to the Gospel narrative. Should there be any discrepancies, rest assured that the mistakes are mine and not because of any error or contradiction in scripture.

Our first Mary was born in the small town of Migdala on the Sea of Galilee about 4 days' journey from Jerusalem and a full day's journey from Nazareth. Migdal was known for only a few things. First, Migdala pickled fish that was shipped along the trade routes to most of the known world so it had a positive reputation among the gentiles.

It was the first city Rome invaded in 54 B.C. so it had a negative reputation among those of Israel. She would rather forget her life before. As a firstborn child, she was considered a curse to her father because she was not a boy. Rather than a source of economic strength and family honor, she was seen as a burden on the family.

By the standards of her village, her father had likely not treated her poorly, but he had probably not shown her love, seeing her as little more than a household servant by the time she was eight. Around the age of 14, her father married her off to the owner of one of the pickling businesses. Though he smelled of pickled fish, he did provide for her needs. It was through her husband's business that she first met Simon and Andrew and (as much as was legally possible between a woman and two men) become their friend, but when they moved their families to Bethsaida, she lost track of them.

Though a good man, her husband was significantly older than Mary, so when he died, she was left young and alone. With no legal right to his property, no children and no prospects, she turned in desperation to immoral activity. She then covered her shame by indulging in wine and occasional intoxicants made from the hemp and poppy plants that grew abundantly. This led to other choices, eventually ending in her becoming demon possessed. This would have been the end of Mary of Magdala, also known as Mary Magdalene, if it had not been for her friendship with Simon and Andrew.

Our Second Mary was Jacob's second child. Since Jacob was a carpenter, she grew to love fine wood products and the earthy smell of freshly sawn timber. Her household was happy and when she got old enough she was wed to Cleophas. Like her father, Cleophas was also a carpenter, though unlike her father, he specialized in fine furniture instead of buildings and barns.

They were a happy couple, worshiping together in the synagogue and spending time in a lively community. Because of the nature of his sales, Cleophas regularly travelled between his home in Nazareth and his ancestral home in Bethlehem, just outside of Jerusalem. Mary often accompanied him in his travels and, surprising for the time, he encouraged her to learn from the religious and philosophical teachers in Jerusalem.

Mary of Cleophas's older brother, Joseph, ended up marrying our third Mary. This Mary's mother was Anna and her father Heli. Heli and Anna were well known in the community for the compassionate way they cared for others, a trait that they instilled in Mary's heart. By the time she was old enough to be engaged, she too was known for her compassion. It was this pious compassion that attracted Joseph to her in the first place, and it was Joseph's strong, yet forgiving nature that made Mary leap for joy when her father announced the marriage arrangements had been made.

Everything in Mary's life became more complex shortly after she was engaged to Joseph, when an angel told her that she would bear a son who is God's son and that she was to name him Jesus. Joseph threatened to divorce her, but then the angel visited him as well. While everything was good between Joseph and Mary, she still had to live with the rumors surrounding how she came to be pregnant.

As Jesus grew, Mary watched Him. She loved the memories of Him lying on her chest as an infant. She still smiled when she thought of the compassionate way that he treated his friends. She was proud of the way he had learned the carpentry trade from His step-father Joseph while never failing to learn more about God.

Mary watched as he began to teach. At first, she was proud, but then she became concerned. At one point, she and her other children had even tried to pull Him away from His itinerant ministry because they were afraid He had lost His mind. In spite of her early encounter with the angel Gabriel, Mary's doubt in this situation was largely influenced by the doubt of her children and family. Joseph had died and her family was all she had. In fact, the only one in the family

that didn't have this fear was her sister in law Mary of Cleophas, who early on started using her business travels with Cleophas as a way to accompany and support the travels of her Nephew Jesus.

Mary of Cleophas often told her sister in law of the amazing way that God was working. Shortly before Mary started to follow His ministry, He had called several men to follow His teaching and be His disciples. Among these were Simon and Andrew. They traveled with Jesus, and Mary of Cleophas had been there with them as their troupe ran into an old friend of Simon and Andrew, Mary Magdalene. When they encountered her, she was in a terrible state, being controlled by the demons who possessed her life.

Simon and Andrew were heartbroken at this encounter. They told Jesus about what a wonderful person Mary had been and about the hardships she had survived. They questioned how God could allow this to happen. But rather than directly answer their question Jesus cast the demon out of Mary Magdalene's life. It was at this point that Mary Magdalene began to follow and support the ministry of Jesus, and shortly thereafter Mary Magdalene and Mary of Cleophas were fast friends.

When Mary heard the stories of what her son was doing, including stories like the change in Mary Magdalene's life, it started to overcome the doubts, and she too began to see that what her son was doing was ordained by God. She began to believe in Him and to grow closer to both her sister in law, Mary of Cleophas and to Mary Magdalene.

All three Mary's were devoted to Jesus and so all of them were heartbroken when He was arrested, tortured and led to be executed on a criminal's cross, but none was quite as devastated as His mother. No woman should have to see this happen to her son, even more so when He is totally innocent. The three women went to the foot of the cross. Mary, heartbroken over what was happening to her son, needed the support of the other Marys. They all needed each other.

There from the Cross Jesus looked at His mother and His disciple John, and told John to take care of her as if she was His own mother. Shortly thereafter, Jesus cried out committing His spirit to God, He declared, "it is finished" and then died.

The three Marys would have stayed to take care of His body, but the soldiers forced everyone away. It was their intent to kill the condemned men so that they wouldn't be alive on the Sabbath, but were afraid that if the crowd watched it could cause a riot. Thankfully Joseph of Arimathea had enough clout to redeem Jesus's body, or else His body would have been dumped into the trash heap in the valley of Gehenna, a place so terrible that its name was also used for hell. Joseph quickly wrapped the body for burial, and put it in his own tomb, but could not add the traditional spices and perfumes because the Sabbath was quickly approaching.

With the Sabbath restrictions, the Marys could do nothing for Jesus's body until the Sabbath was over on the first day of the week. As soon as they could, the women went to the tomb to

anoint the body with the ritual spices. They arrived just as the sun was rising, unsure how they would get the tomb open, and uneasy about the inevitable smells from a body that had been dead for three days and three nights.

When they got there they found the tomb already open. Jesus's mother Mary and Aunt Mary stood there perplexed, but Mary Magdalene ran to find the disciples in a panic. She was sure that someone had stolen His body. A short time later the disciples and Mary Magdalene arrived. The disciples went in to inspect the empty tomb, but Mary stood outside weeping with the others. After inspecting the tomb, the disciples left to share the news with others, not fully understanding what was happening.

The women, however, stayed at the tomb. Angels appeared to the women and said, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has arisen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

In her grief, the words of the angels had gone right past Mary Magdalene's head. She then turned and saw Jesus, but in her grief she did not recognize Him and thought He was the gardener. She asked Him where He had taken the body so that she could go see it. Jesus then said her name, "Mary," and at His voice she recognized Him and embraced Him in a hug. Jesus lovingly told her to let Him go as He was ascending to the Father. Mary now believed.

Later that afternoon, Mary's Husband Cleophas and another disciple were walking on the road to Emmaus. They were joined by Jesus, but did not recognize Him. Jesus asked what they were discussing and Cleophas told Him about the things that had happened to Jesus. Jesus then explained how everything that happened had fulfilled prophecies of the messiah. They still didn't recognize Him until He lifted his hands to break the bread at the meal. The view of His nail pierced hands opened their eyes and they recognized Jesus, but then He disappeared from their sight.

Over the next several days, Jesus appeared many times, in sealed rooms and open spaces, in public crowds and in small gatherings. The ones who treasured His appearances the most were likely the three Marys.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Kevin Finkenbinder is the Pastor of First Baptist Church in DeWitt, Michigan since June 28, 2020. Pastor Kevin and his wife Amy have three children: Isaiah, Asa and Hannah. Pastor Kevin graduated from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and has worked in University Student ministries.

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# Cooperatively engaged ::

by Jerome Taylor

**BURTON, MI** – Years ago, I was enthralled by episodes of *Star Trek :: The Next Generation™*. Viewing the sci-fi phenomenon, I was captivated by Capt. Jean-Luc Picard's command to engage, and the blazing special effects of "warp speed." At this point the Starship Enterprise was fully engaged in reaching the desired destination.

Now, looking back on my life actively engaged in the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) cooperative labors... this sci-fi moment seems relatable. Not because it has been other worldly, but because once introduced & initiated, the days moving forward have flown by.

More than a decade ago, I attended the SBC Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona as a messenger from my local church. I was able to see first hand why active cooperation matters, but this wasn't my first encounter with cooperative work. I am a product of the laborers that partnered to pour into the lives of many.

Here are some of the examples.

- Growing up in the southern U.S. in the 80s-90s, the potential for connecting with churches that were Southern Baptist in their affiliation would have been likely. But the churches that connected with my family were highly engaged in teaching the Bible to multiple generations. I am a product of their partnership.
- Going to the community college, the local Baptist Student Union, ministered to my life and became a place where I recognized the Lord's calling to be a minister to the lives of others. It is here that leadership took time to come alongside a lanky nerd, and encourage me to be a learning disciple. I am a product of the partnership that supported this work on my local campus.
- Continuing theological undergraduate work, the opportunity was provided to attend William Carey College. Due to the partnership the university had with the Mississippi Baptist Convention, the education I received was not as costly and as burdening as it could have been. I am a product of the partnership that provided a way for ministers to be trained.
- Serving as a youth pastor, an invitation was extended to serve on the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention, Student Evangelism Team. This moment welcomed a young and relatively inexperienced young man to the table and opened my eyes to see the value of collaborative labors to reach the multitudes.

It would be easy to brag on the Lord for His gracious work and how a relatively odd duck like myself can be involved. All of this both encourages and invigorates my soul in such a way, that I am resolved to remain actively engaged in cooperation.

And here are the reasons that such a decision to be cooperatively engaged remains an imperative.

**1 :: We see that important decisions are made by those who show up.**

Being involved helps the voice of the local church be heard in our local, state, and national mission strategies.

**2 :: We can be reminded of what we have received.**

It is easy for missional amnesia to creep in and forget what has been accomplished, but being involved produces gratitude.

**3 :: We are able to share in mutual fruit.**

We are brought to work together in a way that produces greater fruit than could be accomplished alone.

**4 :: We are accountable for our partnerships.**

As local churches we are called to be good stewards over that which has been entrusted to us. Being good stewards requires accountable evaluation.

**5 :: We are reminded of how to pray.**

When we are involved, we can actively see how our prayers matter, how prayer works, and how to pray even further for the collaborative labors ahead.

**6 :: We are moved toward greater generosity.**

When local churches and leaders get involved, we see God using our time, talent, and treasure for greater effectiveness. This encourages cheerful giving and service.

**7 :: We are able to celebrate how the Lord Jesus does immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.**

Let us be renewed in our faith and worship as we see the greatness of God working as only He can. **Engage!**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jerome Taylor is the Pastor of Eastgate Baptist Church in Burton Michigan. He loves his family, wife Melinda and 4 children.

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# Curiosity breeds creativity

by Nate Click

**MONROE, MI** – Recently, one of my kids began driving his mother crazy in a new way. He will innocently start by asking her, “Mommy, what are you doing?”

After she answers he always responds with the classic “Why?”

Pray for her patience as this happens every five minutes (or less). While I hope that he eases up on my wife’s sanity, I can’t help but love his curiosity. Right about here I’m hoping you learn a lesson from my two-year-old and ask “why?” Because curiosity breeds creativity.

Through the Bible, there are more than 2,500 questions with many of them being asked by God Himself. From the very first “Where are you?” in Eden to Jesus’ famous “Who do you say that I am?” God uses questions to help men to examine themselves and to cause them to turn their attention to the areas that need to be addressed. He channels their curiosity.

As we develop curious minds, we should be curious in a few directions. Foundationally, we should be curious about the Word. Any of us who have engaged in basic hermeneutics were taught to ask questions of the text. This is the beginning of the process for creative teaching and preaching as well as continued spiritual growth.

The questions that we ask of the Word of God shouldn’t stop with our reading of Scripture. Rather, that curiosity should be brought into our churches. Like me, you may have heard that the first words of a dying church are “but that’s how we’ve always done it.” That’s not to say that we are not doing many good things.

By asking questions about our programs, ministries, and methods, we can strengthen the good things that are being done while also identifying (and possibly eliminating) the things that are taking energy away from the mission of the church. And these questions open the door to creativity.

A couple of years ago, I began to ask questions about how our church could do a better job at getting our message out digitally. This led to a few very successful social media campaigns and even discovering Google ad grants for non-profit organizations. (For those who are unfamiliar, Google offers ad grants for non-profit organizations including churches that can be used for up to \$10,000 worth of advertising each month. Search “Google ad grants” if you’d like more information.) This came about from asking the question “what tools are out there?” Creativity came through curiosity.

And this can bleed out into our communities and culture. We have some churches in our state that are doing incredible jobs in their neighborhoods. Most of their creative efforts started with a simple question like “what do our neighbors need?”

The beautiful thing about this question is that each community will likely have a different answer and God has placed you where you are to help meet these needs.

As you begin the journey of asking questions, some of them may be answered easily. But often, questions will breed more questions. And that's okay, because questions breed creativity.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Nate Click is the Lead Pastor at Heritage Baptist Church in Monroe, MI. Before moving to Monroe, the Clicks have served in churches in Ohio, Tennessee, and California focusing on church technology and next generational ministries. He and his wife, Cindi, have four beautiful, young children.

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## **Michigan Campers on Mission - May 2021 update**

Hello MI COMers!

We were excited to be a part of the 8th Annual National COM Work Week in April 2021! In fact, we stayed on for three more weeks to work there. We left home April 1, no fooling, it was great to be on the road in our motorhome, traveling to our first Hitching Post at Highland Lakes Baptist Camp, IN; the next night at Lake Sallateeska, IL. After driving about 7.5 hours, we arrived Great Passion Play. Several IL COM friends were already there: Don and Jan Kragness, Sonny and Sondra McKenzie, Chet and Debbie Whyers.

We quickly made new friends, Stan and Janet Casady, from MO COM. We got backed into our spot and they rushed us off to the cafeteria for dinner. To top the evening off, we attended The Great Passion Play at 7:30 pm. It seemed to be a long day and we were tired, but the play was fantastic and we were reminded why we're doing this journey. To share the gospel to a lost world is so necessary and by our physical labors, we are able to keep camps and places like this open to be on the mission of sharing Christ.

After a few hours of sleep, we woke early for an Ozark Mountain Sunrise Service. We met with other Christians at the foot of "Christ of the Ozark" statute which is with in walking distance of our campsite. At 6:00am, high on this mountain, it was a cool 54 degrees. The wind was cutting through our jackets and the sun was still hiding behind the mountains. But as we began praising God in song, we were soon rejuvenated to realize why we were doing this journey. We were ready to get to work bright and early Tuesday morning.

After all, we are Campers on Mission! We are “Sharing Christ as We Go”!

God bless you, Rick and Cindy

### **THE GREAT PASSION PLAY – THE LIVE PERFORMANCE**

The performance begins with the resurrection of Lazarus and continues on through the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem on the day known as Palm Sunday. During the performance you will witness the significant events leading to and including Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven. You will see the colorful spectacle of the marketplace, the pageantry of the chariot and camel caravan, and the hustle and bustle of the crowds as they go about their daily activities. You may especially enjoy seeing the live animals on the streets of Jerusalem, the poignant healing, the angel rolling away the stone at the tomb, and the dramatic and exciting ascension of Jesus into the night sky. Every effort has been made to be historically accurate and true to Holy Scriptures.

### **THE GREAT PASSION PLAY – COMers IN ACTION**

We have been so very blessed to be a part of this ministry. Christ of the Ozark stands around the bend, the Holy Land tour keeps you remembering the Word, and everyone’s focus is ministering to the world in drama and The Gospel Network Radio Station. It has been said, “Being here on Magnetic Mountain is like being on holy ground. “ We agree!

You can get tickets to the Great Passion Play Drama and the Holy Land Bible Tour. And there are free things to visit on the grounds: Christ of the Ozarks statute, Church in the Grove, Berlin Wall section, Israeli Bomb Shelter, Bible Museum, History Museum, Sacred Arts Museum, Noah’s Ark Petting Zoo, and the gift shop. Plus, there are over 20 miles of mountain biking and hiking trails for various ages and skills. There is a wide range of jobs you can chose from at this ministry opportunity. Before we got there, Janice and ladies had decorated the sets with flowers and greenery, which add so much to the reality of the play. Whatever your skills are, the warm and friendly staff will help you find the right job for you. We encourage you all to consider visiting and working at this ministry!

### **NATIONAL UPCOMING EVENTS & OPPORTUNITIES**

#### **COM National Rally 2021, Duquoin, Illinois June 8-11, 2021**

Registration online at [www.campersonmission.net](http://www.campersonmission.net) for the COM National Rally 2021 now! COM members bring their RV’s together, some stay in nearby hotels, and we all gather to share what COM is doing and get new ideas and motivation from each other. Here’s just a taste of what is offered at the COM National Rally:

Classes & Seminars can include topics such as: Basic Electrical Basic Plumbing, Drywalling: Hanging & Finishing, Fire Safety for RVs, RV Maintenance, Senior Heart Issues, Staying Connected Electronically on the go, Witnessing.

Entertainment such as a Christian Comedian and singers will be scheduled, as well as special Guest Speakers from various ministries such as missions, church planting, and camp directors.

Be sure to visit our National COM website for more information: [www.campersonmission.net](http://www.campersonmission.net)

## **CHAPLAIN'S CORNER**

In the few months that I have been privileged to be a part of MI-COM few and somewhat minor have been the opportunities for me to do physical labor. Yet, for most in this organization physical labor is and will be its mainstay. Without the work, all we have are well-formed bylaws which in the end become only empty words and vain good intentions.

I'm reminded of a parable of Jesus in Matthew 21: 28-31:

"But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, "Son, go work today in my vineyard." He answered and said, "I will not": but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, "I go, sir": and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first."

I have no doubt that sometimes some of you are not at first inclined to go work in the vineyard. But then you change your mind and go despite your misgivings. God bless you, friends, as you go!

To the Praise of His Glory,  
Chaplain Chip

## **PRAYER REQUEST & PRAISE REPORT**

### **Prayer Requests**

- Pray for those who have still had effects of COVID and reactions to the vaccinations.
- Pray for Bambi Lake Camp as they open to minister to children, youth, and various adults through retreats and conferences. May many come to know Christ.

### **Praise Report**

- Summer is coming! Some have experienced a late April snow and a lot of April showers, but sunshine is coming to stay!

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

Romans 6:6-8 NIV

If you have a prayer request or a praise report, please share it with us and we will post it on the website and include it in our monthly newsletters.

Keep checking at our online Website and Facebook for announcements!

Website: [www.michigancampersonmission.org](http://www.michigancampersonmission.org)

Facebook: Michigan Campers on Mission

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