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Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

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‘Here to serve new church planters’: Michigan church planting leader tells story

by Julie Redmond Donavan

In 1974, Tony Lynn heard the gospel from a bivocational pastor at [First Baptist Church in Swartz Creek, Michigan](#). As a result Lynn became a Christian, and in his youth he thought God was calling him to be an engineer and build buildings for the Lord.

“God called me to build people for the Lord rather than buildings,” Lynn said he learned later.

His girlfriend (now wife), Jamie, encouraged him in the call as a pastor knowing her life would look different as a pastor’s wife.

Lynn has since served 20 years in local congregations in Kentucky and Michigan, 13 years as a pastor overseas and now as state director of missions and a church planting leader at the [Baptist State Convention of Michigan](#) for seven years.

He believes his background has prepared him to serve in the role he has today — along with a doctorate in postmodernism.

“My life verse is Acts 20:24,” Lynn said. “But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus — the work of telling others the good news about the wonderful grace of God.

“My life is not centered on preaching directly anymore,” he noted. “I am not center stage, but others are so they can bring others to Christ. I am doing ministry from a supportive role now and I want to see others succeed in sharing the gospel.”

Why a need for church planting?

“Michigan is known for its factories, high production, pharmaceuticals, research, transportation and for the longest freshwater shoreline in the world,” Lynn noted. “Why not be a state that produces the gospel?”

He said many people travel through Michigan, especially international college students.

“So many people come to our universities, and they return to their countries as missionaries,” Lynn explained.

The international influence in Michigan combined with Lynn’s background in overseas missions has opened doors for people who speak different languages to come together and hear the gospel.

“Having been international missionaries in Africa and France made me and my wife more aware of the culture around us,” Lynn explained.

“We have seen accelerated growth of Spanish, Arabic and Asian people in the last few years, and now we are having language assessments for non-English-speakers to prepare them for church planting.”

Growing churches

As church planting grows in Michigan, the convention is seeing church plants grow other churches and become sending churches. As a result, preachers are coming together, interacting with one another, coaching and collaborating, Lynn said. More preachers are coming to Michigan to help plant churches and they are risking their lives by leaving secure jobs and moving their families.

“The process of church planting has been owned and it is important to all churches in Michigan — preachers want to see other preachers succeed,” Lynn declared.

Tasks and friendships

He said he helps more than 50 church plants and church planting families in Michigan, and wants preachers and church planters to know they are not alone.

“One of the beauties of my job is that it leads to close friendships that last a lifetime,” Lynn said. “This is surprising to most people. I am here, as well as the rest of the convention, to serve preachers and new church planters, not to direct their agenda.”

He noted that as the state director of missions and church planting leader his job is to help every preacher and church be successful at the calling God has placed on them.

To learn more about the [Baptist State Convention of Michigan’s](#) church planting efforts through the [North American Mission Board’s](#) Send Network , click [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julie Redmond Donovan writes for [The Baptist Paper](#), a national publication that gives you credible, balanced news you can trust from a Christian worldview. The Baptist Paper is a product of TAB Media Group, which has published The Alabama Baptist newspaper since 1843.

Shoes for Stebbins

by James R. Ellsworth

TECUMSEH, MI – Alaska Mission ministers to many villages in the Nome, Alaska region. One of these villages is Stebbins, Alaska on the Island of St. Michael's, population 700. Brenda Crim is the director of Alaska Mission. When asked, "What can the people of Michigan do materialistically for a group?" She replied, "Tennis Shoes."

In March of 2022 an eleven-member team from Michigan headed to Alaska led by Pastor Dan Russel. This team joined 30 others from around the country and headed to Nome, Alaska to help Alaskan Mission with the Iditarod dog sled race.

While in Nome, the team served the Iditarod itself as security for both the dogs and the race itself. Volunteers also helped at the homeless shelter, children's home, battered women's shelter. There was a local men's and women's double elimination basketball tournament. The mission team took turns at the basketball tournament cooking and serving concessions. The proceeds from all the sales went to the battered women's shelter.

The winters in Stebbins are long and hard. In the dead of winter, there is only 5 or 6 hours of sunlight. There are no shoe stores here. It takes 2 plane rides to get to a town with a Walmart. The cost of round-trip plane tickets alone can be as much as \$1,500, and on the return trip if you have more than 50 pounds in cargo the airline will charge you extra.

The school principal in Stebbins sent the Michigan mission team the sizes of all 238 students in the Stebbins school system from pre-K through the 12th grade. Tecumseh Missionary Baptist Church (TMBC) along with the Lendale Association spearheaded the mission project.

575 pairs of shoes were collected and shipped to Alaska. A local store donated 106 pairs of shoes. More were donated. Many were purchased. The shoes arrived this July and are being distributed to the kids in Stebbins as they start the new school year.

From Tecumseh to Stebbins, boxes and boxes of shoes. Sometimes the best mission trips start with a question.

Eureka moment

by Allen Ballard

VANDERBILT, MI – In 1867 on a farm in South Africa, 15-year-old Erasmus Jacobs saw a stone glistening in the sun. The shining rock was eventually reported to a neighbor, who wanted to buy it from the family. Not knowing its value, Erasmus' mother told the neighbor, "You can keep the stone, if you want it."

Eventually, a mineralogist determined the stone to be a 21.25 carat diamond and worth a great sum. It became known as the "Eureka Diamond." (The Greek word eureka means "I found it!") Soon the fields near the Jacobs' farm soared in value. Underneath the land was one of the richest diamond deposits ever discovered.

Jesus said that the value of being part of God's kingdom is like treasure:

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matt. 13:44).

When we put our faith in Christ, a spiritual "eureka moment" arrives. God gives us forgiveness in His Son. It is the greatest treasure that could ever be found. Now all of life can begin to center on the value of becoming a joyous member of His eternal kingdom. It's our joy to share that valuable discovery with others. God's kingdom is a treasure meant to be shared.

When my family and I moved here in September of 2009, we had no idea how much of a "Eureka" moment this would be. I remember sitting on a bench and asking the question "When I say the word Baptist what comes to your mind". The responses were shocking; many said bible thumper or cult or they simply had no idea. For me that was a true sign that the Gospel was needed in North Michigan.

This year we are slated to have another banner year. One of our successes has been the introduction of our live broadcast on Facebook and Zoom. During the pandemic we had the choice to slow down and give up, or we could see it as a different opportunity to get the message out.

In the last two years our church has seen an increase in giving and an increase in attendance both on-line and in person. Our on-line presence has allowed us to reach those otherwise missed by "traditional" methods thus our "Eureka" moment.

One person that comes to mind is Vic and Donna and his mother. Every Sunday they are faithful in both Sunday School and Worship as they are not able to travel very far to be with us in-person, but they are part of our church nonetheless.

How can you change the way you do what you're doing? We get stuck in a rut. You know what a rut is right? "It's a grave with the ends kicked out".

The church needs to find new ways to meet others, to reach out to people, and to stay engaged with our communities even during the worst times because that's when we'll find our diamonds. You see, If you're looking you too can find your Eureka Diamond moment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allen Ballard is Pastor of Pigeon River Baptist Church in Vanderbilt, Michigan. He and his wife, Jean and family, have served there since 2009. Pastor Allen says that he is serving as senior pastor to a church and a community that needs the love of Christ both preached and shown by example. He believes that we are called to lead by being a servant first and an example unto the life of Christ.

Bible story translators deliver gospel to least-reached peoples

By Myriah Snyder

Bir Bahdur is a simple animal herder. Sometimes he works as a day-laborer. He's quiet and meek. He's uneducated and soft-spoken. He doesn't consider himself qualified to share the gospel, let alone teach it. Many of his South Asian countrymen don't think so either.

But the beauty of the gospel is that it brings worth to those society considers not worthy.

Bir Bahdur became a believer by hearing Bible stories that were translated into his language by a coalition of International Mission Board workers, Omega Training Partnership translators and another international translation organization. Together, these three organizations form one Bible translation project.

After hearing and believing the truth, he knew he wanted to share it. With the encouragement of fellow participants and the trainers from the project's workshops, he learned to craft and share Bible stories in his heart language.

He started telling people he encountered each day the Bible stories. And people listened.

“He’s not trained; he’s not professional, but he knows the God that he serves,” Royce Alyward, an IMB worker who helps lead the translation initiative, shared. “And he knows how to tell these stories. It’s by sharing those stories that God’s Word has gone forth.”

Bir Bahdur reported that several of his friends professed faith in Christ after hearing the stories.

His influence didn’t stop at those friends simply believing, though. He intentionally discipled these believers, and now from Bir Bahdur’s influence, two house churches began in his remote area.

Bir Bahdur’s story doesn’t stand alone. Royce and his wife, Elsbeth, can tell story after story of churches being planted and lives changed because of this translation project.

The idea behind this massive Bible translation project is to engage least-reached places with the gospel. Getting the Word of God into the heart language of remote people has fostered healthy church planting and multiplication.

Since this coalition started in 2013, the Alywards shared that the project has seen:

- The completion of Bible story sets in 23 languages among many of the least-served people groups of South Asia.
- Multiplying of gospel-sharing and indigenous church plants across these 23 languages.
- The initiation and advance of New Testament translation in 16 of these 23 languages, with imminent plans to begin translation in four more.
- Ongoing discipleship and church enrichment interaction with growing churches in many of South Asia’s least-reached peoples.

The key to seeing a work of this magnitude accomplished has been not only the partnership between the three organizations, but the strategic discipleship and deployment of national believers.

“This task is too big for anybody,” Elsbeth said, “but it is certainly biblical to have this kind of collaboration between like-minded organizations.”

As the groups partnered, they ensured they didn’t duplicate each other’s work.

She continued, “We’re working on seeing every tribe, every language be able to have an understandable and appropriate presentation of the gospel in their language. This is such a huge need in this area of South Asia where you have so many harder-to-reach languages in harder-to-reach areas.”

“We’re working on seeing every tribe, every language be able to have an understandable and appropriate presentation of the gospel in their language.”

Sharing the burden alleviates the burden on cross-cultural workers to learn each of the 100+ languages spoken in their area.

Royce explained, “As a new worker is onboarding, learning the major language is a huge task. As we move forward, for a cross-cultural worker, that can be very intimidating.

“One of the things we’re helping them understand is that language acquisition is important. But we, as the expatriates, don’t need to learn every language from the area. We need to learn the main languages (such as Hindi),” Royce said. “We work with national partners who are bilingual. Once we can communicate with them in the main language of their area, we share the load with other believers and those who can help guide us in the language even before they come to faith.”

This intentionality in sharing the load, specifically with those who are not yet believers, not only gives the IMB worker some relief, but it sets the translator up to be saturated with the gospel.

“We can intentionally look into those relationships and see how God is working,” Elsbeth shared. “We see how God’s Word is so effective, especially when they hear it in the language that speaks to their heart.” IMB is a 501(c)3 charity. Your gift is tax-deductible as allowed by U.S. law. No goods or services will be provided in exchange for this gift. The IMB handles all gifts according to government regulations and is professionally audited each year.

**Some names may have been changed for security reasons.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Myriah Snyder writes and edits for the IMB.

Roe vs. Wade

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – There has been a great deal of talk about overturning Roe vs. Wade in the past few months and the matter of abortion has been a hot topic in almost every newscast. With the recent court ruling that corrected this terrible mistake of a law, the venom, hatred,

and violence that issues forth from those that oppose the decision is growing and will continue to do so exponentially.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle seize these windows of opportunity to grandstand for more attention “face-time” and to help garner more votes and support for their next campaign. Self-promotion is nothing new among politicians.

Most see the issue of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice as fodder to fill their personal promotion cannon so that they may hurl their names or favorite cause into prominence. They care little for the lives they play with like rag dolls, only to be discarded when their usefulness is gone. Sadly, the issue is being used instead of enlightening. Most of what is being said or done on both sides is doing more damage than good.

I want to be very clear, that I am overjoyed the with wise, logical, and morally correct ruling of the court. Life has been honored. I am a strong believer that actions speak much louder than words and as this is being played out in the media and main street, so much of what is being said is revealing the true nature of the proclaimers.

Their words seem to be nothing more than empty pedanticism that cares little for the people they impact or the lives they can damage. As Christians, we must be kind and redemptive in our speech. We cannot let a particular political persuasion be the mantra that we mimic. Our words must be guided by grace and full of mercy that is empowered by His Spirit.

Do I believe that we need to speak about the issues? Absolutely! I believe that we must speak clearly, concisely, intelligently, passionately, and compassionately because those who devalue pre-born babies will continue to militantly demand their selfish perspective and warped rights. The recent ruling did not “put the issue to bed”, but it merely moved it to our respective states.

Dr. Al Mohler, President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has very astutely summarized the perspective of most of us who revere and hold strongly to the sanctity of life. In a recent news release he said:

- Our nation celebrates financial abundance, but devalues human life.
- We have experienced an economic expansion, but a moral recession.
- We are obsessed with personal safety, but have made the womb a place of great danger.
- Our concerns for personal "rights" have eclipsed our understanding of what is right and what is wrong.
- Great advances in medicine have prolonged life for many, but we accept the most barbaric forms of the murder of the unborn.
- We have elevated convenience over conviction, and comfort over compassion.

- We have treated the blessings of parenthood as a burden.
- We have rejected the gift of life, and have claimed this as a "right to choose."

"We are living on borrowed time. A nation cannot long prosper in its economy when it has sold its soul for personal choice. A nation is not strong when it destroys its weakest members. Americans demand rights rather than righteousness, and we are reaping a harvest of unrighteousness unparalleled in its magnitude."

Stating our perspective and defending our position is the role and responsibility of all Christians of conscience, but to speak only with our mouths and pens with the absence of action in our lives is not only hypocritical, it is sinfully detrimental. We must live the Love we proclaim.

The best way to get our message across is share it with lip and life, as did a young girl named Alyssa. All through high school, Alyssa tried to share her faith in Christ with her four closest friends. In long late-night conversations, they'd talk about everything from heaven to abortion to the existence of evil in the world. Alyssa loved her friends and wanted them to know Christ the way she did.

After they graduated, the four friends tried to stay in touch. Even though they moved to different parts of the country, they e-mailed each other, got together at holidays, and even took vacations together during the summer. Sometimes they'd have conversations like the ones of old, with Alyssa talking about her beliefs and her relationship with God.

While Alyssa's friends always treated her with respect, they never became Christians. Their decision—or, rather, their lack of a decision—was a real disappointment to Alyssa. After college Alyssa accepted a job across the country and soon lost touch with her friends. When she came back home for Christmas one year, she ran into one of them at a local department store.

Her friend was pushing a baby stroller and proudly introduced her new baby to Alyssa. When Alyssa found out that her friend wasn't married, she thought, a lot of good all that talking about God did. Look what happened to her. She ended up getting pregnant before she got married.

Toward the end of their conversation, Alyssa asked if she could hold the baby. As her friend handed the infant to her, she said, "You know, Alyssa, you're partly to thank for this baby. If it weren't for you, I would have had an abortion. But I kept remembering all we had talked about and just couldn't do it."

Keep telling the story and living the life. It has and does make a difference.

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.

Meet my parents

by Dr. Tony L Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – My wife's parents are with the Lord. Jamie's father went to be with the Lord in 2011, and in 2020, Jamie's mother joined her husband and the Lord in heaven. Both were strong examples of devotion to the Lord, to their family, and to their church.

My parents are still with us. My father is 84 years old, and my mother is 83 years old. My father lives in the white, two-story, country-house my parents have shared for decades. North of Lansing, my father is surrounded by corn fields, deer grazing as the sun rises and falls, and he still tinkers on projects. My mothers, affected by dementia and Alzheimer's, is settled into a residential facility where the kindest of professionals call her by name and energetically love on her all day long. She has been in residential care now for almost three years.

Today on a Monday due to my weekends becoming busier with ministry and little time for family, I devoted a long lunch break to spend time with my parents.
Enjoy the images.

In this image, we were both restraining our chuckles. Moments earlier, I was walking down the hallway to get closer to Mom before calling out to her. Before I could get close to her, I heard my mom say to her caregiver who was pushing her wheelchair, "That man down the hallway looks a lot like my son. Upon hearing that, I called out, "Hi Mom." To which she responded, "That's my boy. He's a preacher." Then as she got within the reach of a hug she gushed, "It makes me so happy to see you."

This image reveals one of our traditions. Normally upon arrival to see Mom, I find her either rubbing her hands together, or rubbing her hand on a soft fabric of her clothing. These past three years, I move close enough to put our hands together and the constant movement of her hand rubbing settles down and her concentration then focuses on the conversation between us. It's a connection I cherish, and I don't take for granted.

My father and I were beside his garage just after looking at all the things he has been doing. Little projects. One after another. In their own time. No hurry on anything. Dad likes to reflect before he starts and before he completes his projects. His latest creation is restoring an old golf cart. No, he does not play golf. He never has. Nevertheless, he is customizing the cart to match his style, his imagination, and the theme he has constructed. We ate lunch together. We filled

his water softener, and I delivered more salt to keep that hard Michigan water softer. Men share love best when they share projects.

In between visiting my parents, I stopped by to see the headstone my father and mother designed and had installed recently on their plots, just one mile from their farm home. There are two images that say a lot.

First, Dad with a sense of humor will remind me that the passing dates are yet to be finished on the headstone. He says, "We'll fill in the blanks later." Dad is practical and has for years taken care of these sorts of things for family and friends most of his life. No one could stop Dad from making decisions easier for my two sisters and me. That is who he is. He expresses his love for others by doing for others.

Second, Dad designed the stone with an image of a tree and a reference to Galatians 4:1-7. My father is the family genealogist. He has recorded stories, searched archives, interviewed people, and collected data on our family that would rival the FBI. I loved that moment today when I asked Dad about the tree representing genealogy and his reference to Galatians 4:1-7. Dad replied, "It just goes to show that no matter where you come from, the most important thing in life is to be adopted by the Lord." He explained that the Apostle Paul was pointing that lesson out to the Galatians. Dad said he kept reflecting on this text after one of his daily Bible readings, "that we might receive the adoption," (v. 5)

I just thought I would share a testimony of my parents and their love for one another and for others.

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.

Rest

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – Drowsy, tired, fatigued, beat, spent, exhausted, depleted. These words describe a continuum of feelings that point to one continual need in our lives - REST. Rest is often sacrificed as the busyness, worries, and distractions of life demand our attention. In our drive to "get-er-done," we fail to establish the biblical rhythm of rest so necessary for life.

Howard Hendricks vividly describes what happens when we neglect rest, “Come apart; or you will come apart.”

The importance of rest stood out to me while reading the encounter between Jesus and His dear friends Martha and Mary. The two sisters welcome Jesus into their home and Martha immediately gets “distracted by her many tasks” (Luke 10:40). She is overwhelmed by all the things she must do as a proper hostess. Martha is busy doing all the work while her sister Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening to His words.

One sister is working while the other is sitting. You know this isn’t going to end well! Martha gets upset and criticizes her sister Mary to Jesus: “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So, tell her to give me a hand.”

Martha feels the weight, the pressure, of everything needing to be just right for this special guest she has welcomed to her home. She wants everything to be perfect. It was supposed to be all about Jesus, but she ends up making the moment all about herself. “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So, tell her to give me a hand.” The focus is not on hospitably serving Jesus anymore, but on herself - ouch! Busyness for Jesus is often more about us than we care to admit.

Some of us, like Martha, have a difficult time slowing down or stopping. We’re busy all the time. Rest, reflection, and realignment to what’s really significant, can be replaced with constant activity if we’re not careful. Before we know it, we have the potential to end up like Martha: “distracted, worried, upset.” It’s obvious that she is irritated that Mary is not helping her get everything ready. She starts thinking more about Mary than about Jesus. Martha gets so distressed that she complains to Jesus about Mary not helping and gets quite a wakeup call when Jesus tells her: “Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her.”

What is the right choice Mary made? Sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to His words.

It’s interesting that we are not told what Jesus was teaching as Mary sat at His feet and listened. His words are lost as Martha interrupts Jesus to complain about Mary’s lack of help. Whatever He was teaching was lost to her (and us). Jesus lovingly corrects Martha, and what emerges is the picture of Mary, a disciple of Jesus, consuming every word He speaks. Mary is resting in Christ and experiences peace, clarity of thought and focus.

Contrast that with her sister. Martha is distracted (v. 40), worried and upset (v. 41). With so many things that need to get done, Martha feels overwhelmed. Her mind and body are racing from one thing to the next. She has trouble concentrating. She is worried that things won’t get done and upset at having to do everything herself. Mary is in a flurry of activity, but little is being accomplished.

Jesus tells Martha that “Mary has made the right choice.” While Martha was distracted by this and that, Mary made a decision that the best thing she could do was sit at the feet of Jesus. She

had a moment, an opportunity that might not ever be repeated in her life. She was able to focus, to sit in the presence of Jesus, and listen to His teaching. She chose to come apart and rest in the presence of Jesus, while her sister just came apart.

Resting in Christ may not be on your to do list today, but it might just be the most important thing you do to experience the peace, clarity, and focus you need to accomplish what really matters in your life.

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.

Listening to ALL, but leaving some right where they are

by Coye Bouyer

LANSING, MI – As a pastor, I have encountered many people and over the years I have learned that people are very different with a variety of attitudes and actions just depending on who you're talking to. I have learned that when someone comes seeking biblical advice, I can listen to just about anyone even if I don't always agree with them. I have learned that while I can 'Listen to all, I must Leave some right where they are.'

The Consequences for Correcting the Incurable

Proverbs 9:7-9 communicates a caution to the wise individual who seeks to invite or impress insight and instruction (wisdom) to a scoffer. He writes, "whoever chastises or chooses to correct a scoffer..." The derivative of this word describes a superior correcting an inferior, further helping the reader realize that the one who is attempting to do the correcting has both the ability (knowledge) and authority to do so.

Secondly, the writer describes the type of person being corrected, 'a scoffer.' The Hebrew word for 'scoffer' describes one who is marked by attitudes and actions of corruption, discord and even gluttony. Throughout the O.T. the scoffer is one who is prideful, haughty, foolish and despises knowledge. He/she is described as one who is incapable of correction because their pride prevents them from gaining understanding, as if their pride insulates them from wisdom.

The writer closes this first clause out by saying, if the wise seek to correct a scoffer, brings dishonor upon themselves. The Hebrew word for dishonor includes concepts like blemish and defects in both a moral and physical sense. Moreover, this Hebrew word parallels the Hebrew word 'insults,' used in the second clause of this phrase, 'and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself.' Used as parallels, these two words together can also mean 'abuse.' In a sense, the writer says, 'when one with the appropriate ability and authority attempts to alter (correct) the attitudes and actions of the arrogant (scoffer), you're asking to be abused.'

Rationalization for Response

But why would the wise individual receive shame, insult, and even possible injury? The wise writer recognizes the potential question, and therefore proceeds with the reason for such a response; "Do not reprove a mocker or he will hate you." Now, with more of an imperative the writer says why it would not be wise to correct the mocker; it's because the mocker loathes/hates rebuke. Moreover, rebuke, even from a superior, causes him/her to reject the relationship. Here, the wise sage speaks to why correction cannot be given to everyone. For when the arrogant gets rebuked not only is the rebuke rejected but the relationship is ruined.

Jesus says a similar thing with His words, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces" (Matt. 7:6). Here Jesus is making the point that one must discern when presenting to others what is holy for it will elicit nothing but abuse when cast amongst the wrong crowd.

In instances like this, restraint is required. While God is the ultimate judge and we are not to judge people, we are to use proper judgment of the people we may be witnessing to. In other words, Jesus, just like Solomon says, the intelligent invite insults...if you're attempting to correct the incorrigible.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this encourages you by discouraging you from attempting to give wise advice to arrogant and prideful individuals. Why, because at times instruction invites insult, and our attempts to advise the arrogant are asking to be abused. Furthermore, when we do this, not only are our rebukes rejected, but relationships are being ruined because we are casting our pearls to swine. So, if you want to refuse to invite insult and injury into your life, one way of doing this is by learning to

"Listen to all, but leaving some right where they are.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Coye L. Bouyer is the founding pastor of Kingdom Life Church in Lansing, MI where he has served since March of 2010. Pastor Bouyer recently stepped into the Diversity Ambassador role for the BSCM and firmly believes that he was not only called to Preach the Gospel as part of the process of reconciliation of man to God, but also using any platform as a bridge of

reconciliation of man to man, and even more so amongst the brethren. Pastor Bouyer and his lovely wife Keturah (Gen. 25:1) have been married four over 20 years and have four children; Sierra, Seth, Cayla and Coye II.

Bambi is growing

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – There are many places in Michigan that one can view the creativity of our almighty God. One of these places is Bambi Lake Baptist Retreat and Conference Center. Especially during the fall, I am constantly struck with the beauty of the lake, the trees, and the night sky.

It allows you to begin to grasp the awesomeness of our Creator and marvel at His glory. However, the glory of God does not end at the tree line, and I would like to remind you how Bambi Lake ministers to our local community, all of Michigan and beyond.

A large part of the ministry at Bambi is providing an opportunity for groups and individuals to come and experience God in a way that is meaningful and unique. It is exciting and encouraging throughout the year to experience God's spirit move through the lives of adults and teenagers alike.

We provide summer camp opportunities such as Filipino Camp, Girls Camp, Mom and Me Camp, Wild Week Camp, and Through the Roof Camp. Every summer we see lives impacted by the gospel, and new believers birthed into the Kingdom.

Along with weeklong camps, Bambi Lake also hosts and produces weekend retreats throughout the year. You will find retreats for women, men, pastors, pastors/wives, leader training, married couples, and youth.

Themes can vary from being a simple getaway to a time of training and growing in your walk with Christ. Weekend retreats are a great opportunity for believers to come and be refreshed and rejuvenated in their walk with Christ.

Our hope is that Bambi will not only be a place to experience God, but a place for believers to be equipped for the ministry and create long lasting friendships that extend past their time at Bambi Lake.

Over the last few years, God has allowed us to begin having a greater impact in our local and regional community. We have been able to partner with four different schools for band and cross-country camps, and that number is growing as more schools discover what we have to offer.

Additionally, we have made major improvements in our campground and lake front areas to accommodate the significant increase in guests who love the great outdoors.

Over the Memorial Day weekend every room we had including the Campground was filled - there was no room left in the Inn! It was exciting to see the hard work and renovations in the campground, and lakefront being enjoyed by returning guests and many first-timers.

Bambi Lake truly has a lot to offer the churches and residents of our state and beyond. God is continually blessing us with new groups and guests who are excited about Bambi Lake. Our prayer is that God's presence would be tangibly known and experienced by all who enter our property.

Come join us!

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.

The change of a church

by Don Anderson

JACKSON, MI – At almost all of the church growth conferences I ever attended, I was told that a pastor would rarely be able to reach anyone ten years on either side of his age.

That was rather disheartening to me, and I decided that would not be the case at any church where I was to pastor. So, when I came to this church 29 years ago at the age of 43 and saw there were fourteen people attending regularly who were mostly over sixty years old, I determined that God wanted me to reach out to many who were much younger than me.

God reminded me through my wife Diana that we needed to pray for children and youth workers so we would have them ready when the younger people started to come.

As a result of those prayers, God opened the hearts of three of our older adults to volunteer as we started a van ministry to bring in children who were quickly followed by their older siblings and parents.

We had only been on the field here a little more than a month when we held a VBS with the help of a team from a Tennessee church. It was successful, and many of the kids who attended had their parents with them on parent's night.

Up until COVID hit, we had very good Bible Schools for years, and now, we have some young adults from those Bible Schools who bring their own children to Sunday school and church worship services here.

Through the years, we have done outreach in our community through neighborhood block parties, taking our VBS workers to other churches in the state to help them with VBS and other work projects, taking mission teams to Costa Rica, and delivering food during the COVID crisis to our community through the school lunch distribution program as well as the Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

The church has by no means become a large congregation, but we have more than tripled in size since my wife and I came on the field here. We have seen the congregation go from a mostly over 60 age group to a mostly under 40 age group. Meanwhile I have aged from 43 to 72. Jesus has shown us that no matter how old you are, he can reach any age group to whom you reach out.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don Anderson was saved at VBS at eight years old. He started preaching at the age of 16 and has pastored one mission and four churches since the age of 28. He has a Bachelor's Degree from Texas Tech and a Master of Christian Studies from Union University in Jackson, TN.

God's beloved

by Karen Blanchard

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MI – I grew up in Florida and to this day my favorite place is still the beach. Looking out at the ocean always mesmerizes me! I get lost in the vastness of how wide and long the ocean seems as I gaze at it from the shore. As I think about how great the ocean is, the following verses from Ephesians come to mind.

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. – Ephesians 3:17a-19

These verses are powerful! I think sometimes we know in our head that God loves us, but our hearts have a difficult time grasping the fullness of God's love. I have been on a journey this year learning about what it means to be God's beloved. Beloved simply means "to be loved by God."

Recently I was reading a book where the author compared two of the disciples: Peter and John.

The fascinating thing about John is that he never refers to himself as "John" in the entire book of John. He wrote the book in third person and five times he calls himself "the one whom Jesus loved."

There are a couple of other times where someone was identified as "the other disciple" and scholars believe this to have been John as well. To be honest, at first glance when I think of "the disciple whom Jesus loved," I begin to think that John was a little more special than the other disciples; that he was Jesus' favorite. That is far from being true! Jesus loved all the disciples the same -- the same way he loves you and me. It seems that John wanted his identity to be "the one whom Jesus loved" as an act of humility and surrender of his old self.

Peter, on the other hand, instead of accepting Jesus' love for him, often tried to prove his love for Jesus in what he said or what he did. One way we see Peter trying to prove himself was when he called out to Jesus to let him walk on water. Peter needed proof because his faith was weak. We see this striving for love in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested, and Peter pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. Peter took matters into his own hands by thinking the situation depended on him to do something instead of trusting that God was in control.

The following verses are all ways that Peter tried to prove his love in what he said:

Peter says in Matthew 19:27, **"We have left everything to follow you."**

Mark 14:29, he said, **"Even if all fall away, I will not."**

In John 13:37 Peter says, **"I will lay down my life for you."**

When the time came for Peter's words to be tested, the Scripture tells us he denied Jesus three times. It took Peter longer to realize his identity was not in what he did for Jesus, but in what Jesus did for him. John, on the other hand, came to a quicker understanding of his identity in Christ and therefore was able to live his life knowing he was loved by Jesus.

What about you? Do you tend to strive to prove your love for God because you think he expects you to do many things for him?

I love this letter entitled “My Beloved Child” written by Deb Worley. This letter is powerful because it was written as if God himself were saying these words over you. Below is a portion of the letter that is my favorite:

**I love you, my dear child because I created you.
I love you precious one, because there is no one else like you.
I love you, Beloved, simply because you exist-
because that is what Love does and Love is who I am.
I love you, now forever and always,
and there is nothing you can do to change that.
There is nothing you can do to make me love you any more,
and there is nothing you can do to make me love you any less.
I. love. you.**

Beloved, God loves you.

Even if you never do another thing for him.

He loves you simply because you exist.

It is time for you to see yourself as God’s beloved.

When we operate out of our belovedness in Christ, we can live in the fullness of God’s love doing what we know God has called us to do.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen is married to Scott Blanchard, pastor of Lakepointe Church, and moved from Florida to Michigan in the summer of 2009 to plant Lakepointe Church in Shelby Township. She enjoys mentoring and discipling women and also leads women’s life groups through her church. She is passionate about helping women find their purpose in who God created them to be. She is on staff at Lakepointe Church and loves being part of what God is doing in the Metro Detroit area!

GuideStone expands focus on helping pastors start well, finish better

by Scott Barkley

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Mark Dance remembers the time he lost focus – despite knowing better – and paying the price.

It was 1986 and Dance had just completed his business degree. Even back then, young people wanted to get the latest technology and his eyes were set on a new VCR. So, he drove to a Montgomery Ward department store and bought one on credit.

“I think it was about \$10 a month for it,” he said. “I don’t remember exactly how much I ended up paying for it, but it was at least twice as much as the sticker price. Even though I had a business degree, I didn’t think about it.”

That mentality can come back on pastors, he said. Not thinking ahead or considering how habits compound into a lifestyle tend to sneak up later in life.

Dance was a pastor for 27 years before starting Lifeway Pastors in 2014 and then taking on a similar role with Oklahoma Baptists. When Hance Dilbeck, Oklahoma’s executive director, was named GuideStone’s next president last July, Dance followed him to become the entity’s director of Pastoral Wellness.

His experience brings advantages for helping pastors with wellness concerns.

He learned how to assess the environment, then, work toward the best outcome while maximizing the virtue of patience – things he holds in common with a third cousin, famed fisherman Bill Dance.

“My focus is to help pastors start and finish well,” he said. “We want them to get healthy and stay healthy. Our work is to build upon the definition of health that GuideStone has established throughout its history.”

That includes addressing emotional health as well as physical and financial. Pastors are tempted by the appearance of a successful ministry and, naturally, want it as well. But the late nights and endless hospital visits can lead to ignoring others.

“No one wants to start ministry with the intention of having broken relationships with his wife and kids,” said Dance.

Maintaining a healthy relationship with Christ and family are priorities, he said. But there is also the matter of knowing and growing from peers.

In Oklahoma, Dance led that effort by establishing more than 100 cohorts [for a pipeline](#) to identify and develop others for called to ministry. Groups ranged from juniors in high school to those into their tenth year leading a local church.

“We initially hoped for a couple of dozen cohorts,” said Dance. “When Hance learned that 40 percent of Oklahoma pastors were going to be retiring in the next ten years, he felt we needed to ‘strengthen the bench,’ so to speak.”

During his career, Dance has noticed visible areas that affect pastor wellness.

“We want to live outside our means. That’s the typical top financial stressor,” he said.

“You don’t have to be proficient in everything, including money. Find someone who can teach you in that area not only for your own financial wellness but for the times you’re going to be at a finance committee meeting in your church.”

Physical health, perhaps the most visible wellness factor, has a history of being glossed over by ministers. “Our tribe doesn’t have the best track record for it,” said Dance.

Aside from pursuing a healthy devotional life, he also stressed the importance of pursuing your spouse.

“Our ministry will never be stronger than our marriage,” he said. “If our most important relationships are struggling, any applause we get for our ministry is empty.”

Discipline and maintaining guardrails are important.

Even though he hasn’t had credit card debt since paying off the VCR 36 years ago, Dance still uses them. He knows to not put more on a card than he can pay off at the end of the month.

There’s a metaphor to be considered – not bearing more than you’re supposed to handle.

“At GuideStone, our mental health claims have gone up 40 percent in the last three years,” he said. “We’re not here just for your physical and financial health. It’s all interconnected.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley is national correspondent for Baptist Press.

‘The money is gone’: Evacuated Ukrainians forced to return

by Cara Ana

POKROVSK, UKRAINE (AP) – The missile’s impact flung the young woman against the fence so hard it splintered. Her mother found her dying on the bench beneath the pear tree where she’d enjoyed the afternoon. By the time her father arrived, she was gone.

Anna Protsenko was killed two days after returning home. The 35-year-old had done what authorities wanted: She evacuated eastern Ukraine’s Donetsk region as Russian forces move closer. But starting a new life elsewhere had been uncomfortable and expensive.

Like Protsenko, tens of thousands of people have returned to rural or industrial communities close to the region’s front line at considerable risk because they can’t afford to live in safer places.

Protsenko had tried it for two months, then came home to take a job in the small city of Pokrovsk. On Monday, friends and family caressed her face and wept before her casket was hammered shut beside her grave.

“We cannot win. They don’t hire us elsewhere and you still have to pay rent,” said a friend and neighbor, Anastasia Rusanova. There’s nowhere to go, she said, but here in the Donetsk region, “everything is ours.”

The Pokrovsk mayor’s office estimated that 70% of those who evacuated have come home. In the larger city of Kramatorsk, an hour’s drive closer to the front line, officials said the population had dropped to about 50,000 from the normal 220,000 in the weeks following Russia’s invasion but has since risen to 68,000.

It’s frustrating for Ukrainian authorities as some civilians remain in the path of war, but residents of the Donetsk region are frustrated, too. Some described feeling unwelcome as Russian speakers among Ukrainian speakers in some parts of the country.

But more often, lack of money was the problem. In Kramatorsk, some people in line waiting for boxes of humanitarian aid said they were too poor to evacuate at all. The Donetsk region and its economy have been dragged down by conflict since 2014, when Russian-backed separatists began fighting Ukraine’s government.

“Who will take care of us?” asked Karina Smulska, who returned to Pokrovsk a month after evacuating. Now, at age 18, she is her family’s main money-earner as a waitress.

Volunteers have been driving around the Donetsk region for months since Russia's invasion helping vulnerable people evacuate, but such efforts can end quietly in failure.

In a dank home in the village of Malotaranivka on the outskirts of Kramatorsk, speckled twists of flypaper hung from the living room ceiling. Pieces of cloth were stuffed into window cracks to keep out the draft.

Tamara Markova, 82, and her son Mykola Riaskov said they spent only five days as evacuees in the central city of Dnipro this month before deciding to take their chances back home.

"We would have been separated," Markova said.

The temporary shelter where they stayed said she would be moved to a nursing home and her son, his left side immobilized after a stroke, would go to a home for the disabled. They found that unacceptable. In their hurry to leave, they left his wheelchair behind. It was too big to take on the bus.

Now they make do. If the air raid siren sounds, Markova goes to shelter with neighbors "until the bombing stops." Humanitarian aid is delivered once a month. Markova calls it good enough. When winter comes, the neighbors will cover their windows with plastic film for basic insulation and clean the fireplace of soot. Maybe they'll have gas for heat, maybe not.

"It was much easier under the Soviet Union," she said of their lack of support from the state, but she was even unhappier with Russian President Vladimir Putin and what his soldiers are doing to the communities around her.

"He's old," she said of Putin. "He has to be retired."

Homesickness and uncertainty also drive returns. A daily evacuation train leaves Pokrovsk for relatively safer western Ukraine, but another train also arrives daily with people who have decided to come home. While the evacuation train is free, the return one is not.

Oksana Tserkovnyi took the train home with her 10-year-old daughter two days after the deadly attack on July 15 in Dnipro, where they had stayed for more than two months. While the attack was the spark to return, Tserkovnyi had found it difficult to find work. Now she plans to return to her previous job in a coal mine.

Costs in Dnipro, already full of evacuees, were another concern. "We stayed with relatives, but if we needed to rent it would have been a lot more," Tserkovnyi said. "It starts at 6,000 hryvnia (\$200) a month for a studio, and you won't be able to find it."

Taxi drivers who wait in Pokrovsk for the arriving train said many people give up on trying to resettle elsewhere.

“Half my work for sure is taking these people,” said one driver, Vitalii Anikieiev. “Because the money is gone.”

In mid-July, he said, he picked up a woman who was coming home from Poland after feeling out of place there. When they reached her village near the front line, there was a crater where her house had been.

“She cried,” Anikieiev said. “But she decided to stay.”

At what cost? BCMs, churches invest in collegiate students

by Scott Barkley

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Early next month, Eddie Gilley will lead a group of 42 students from the University of Florida’s Baptist Collegiate Ministries on a leadership retreat in anticipation of the fall semester. Four days and three nights at Cocoa Beach will include fun in the surf, but also plenty of discipleship.

The goal is to lead students toward a fellowship that echoes John 13:35 and spills into serving not only those on the UF campus but the local church.

“Our stated aim is for them to know each other when we come back to campus,” Gilley said. “We intentionally have time for them to hang out ... and in the afternoon we have our sessions.” Those can cover training in small group leadership, evangelism, praise team and worship planning, among other topics.

As parents get ready for the emotional dorm drop-off, churches and on-campus collegiate ministries prepare to welcome students back. It’s a time for new beginnings and, leaders say, the opportunity to begin sowing the next generation of church leaders.

Success in any ministry requires consistency, though. That begins early.

“The first two to three weeks are important,” said Arliss Dickerson, who served 32 years as BCM director at Arkansas State University before two years as college minister at First Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Ark. “Whatever they do will likely have an effect because, after that, they’re going to start being busy.”

And what doesn't become part of their life will struggle to find a foothold.

"If they don't do things related to their faith, that will likely get squeezed out, even if they don't mean for it to," he said.

Gilley, in his 21st year at UF, worked with college students at West Side Baptist Church in Gainesville from 1987-1995, when he accepted the BCM position at Florida.

"It's a critical moment in life," he said. "There are so many decisions you make in college that set up how you're going to do as an adult. It's not just about getting a degree, but getting outside of your parents' direct influence and developing your own thoughts about who you are."

College ministries guide students through those times. On a secular campus where liberal ideology pervades, Christian students get support at a ministry such as BCM.

That connects with Gilley's second major avenue in his ministry.

"We want to tie those students to Southern Baptist churches," he said. "Sometimes, it feels like we have abandoned college ministry due to finances or other reasons. I get it; state conventions have to make decisions. But for me, I've invested my life on the college campus. So, I think it's the most strategic place where you can invest."

Dickerson, who formerly was also Leadership Development consultant for collegiate ministries when it was conducted through Lifeway, has written books on the subject and routinely posts at his personal blog, [College Ministry Thoughts](#).

"As different state conventions address their budget issues, I think we have to be strategic in our cuts," he said. "In letting BCM campus ministers go, it usually starts with the most experienced ones who are training and raising up others because their salary is larger."

"Collegiate ministry is a future investment. Where will our missionaries, pastors and other church leaders come from in 5-10 years? I fear we make cuts in collegiate ministry because it's least felt today."

On-campus ministries have an advantage to church-based collegiate ministries in attracting students. College comes to an end at some point for everyone, though. The goal for those ministries is to connect students with a local church where they can become active members into adulthood, a point made by Gilley and Dickerson.

The college ministry at Chilhowee Hills Baptist Church in Knoxville models this. Each week, students from the University of Tennessee, Carson-Newman University, Johnson University and Pellissippi State Community College crowd into the home of Matt and Dana Paradis for Bible study.

Matt Paradis, who is associate pastor of college and missions at Chilhowee, said the secret of attracting college students is ... well, not really a secret at all.

“They want deep relationships and we offer a family setting. Our house is always open for them,” he said.

At any time, students can be at the Paradis home doing laundry, eating a meal or petting Hank, their Aussie doodle.

“My wife and I consider ourselves rather boring,” he said. “We’re not program-driven. We have Sunday School and regular Bible study. We depend on our students to grow our ministry.”

The church’s ministry works alongside local BCMs in evangelism and other outreach efforts. Paradis, an occasional BCM speaker, and Chilhowee also partner with them on mission trips. Bible studies at their home run deep.

“I’m not great with being topical, so we do book studies, dive through Baptist catechisms – we’re going through some pretty meaningful stuff, Paradis said. “I’ve noticed that this group isn’t interested in what is big and flashy. They want depth more than anything.”

Churches looking to start or build their collegiate ministry have at least two national Southern Baptist-connected resources. SBCCalled.com was developed by Steve Masters, longtime director for the BCM at Louisiana State University. Another is CollegeMinistry.com.

In reaching students, it’s also important to get them involved, Gilley said. “Find ways to help them promote what the church is doing. Meet with them for lunch. Let them have committee roles.”

While this is a connected generation, he added, there are other connections to build. “They’re growing up and going to make mistakes,” Gilley said. “But we’re close enough to help them.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley is national correspondent for Baptist Press.

The Lord's My Banner

by Doru Radu

Costache Ioanid was a Romanian poet. He was born 1912 in Ukraine, and died in 1987 in Portland, Oregon.

Before WWII, Costache Ioanid was a successful sculptor, ballet director, sculptor and publicist for the sculptors magazine in Bucharest, Romania. He came to know Christ as his Savior through the testimony of a Romanian Jew—Richard Wurmbrand, founder of The Voice of the Martyrs—in the mid-forties. Costache's conversion to Christianity came as a shock to his friends and admirers for two main reasons: he was a non-religious agnostic and his career as a Christian was put in jeopardy due to the communists that came to power with the help of the Russians.

In spite of his many difficulties, Costache was willing to give up on all his ambitions for his Savior. As the communists were afraid of any publications, he was forced to work a very modest position in the graphic department of a printing shop and was not allowed to have a typewriting machine. The poet was under house arrest for over a year and had his correspondence searched constantly. He wrote Christian poems, but his readers had to copy them by hand, learn by heart or cassette record them when the technology became available. They were beautiful and soon became recited in churches and youth meetings.

Biography by Doru Radu

Golgotha Romanian Baptist Church, Warren, Michigan

The Lord's My Banner*
(Jehovah-nissi – Exodus 17:15)
by Costache Ioanid

The Lord's my Banner,
Hallelujah!
He's my Banner, my own life.
I am carrying it, though He's carrying me!
Let the storms howl,
All the greater flies the Banner.
Small and weak though I may be,
But the Banner is the Lord,
Hallelujah!

The Lord's my Banner,
Hallelujah!
The Banner is glorious,
bloodied, but full of honors!
Full of blood drops from Calvary,

full of Caesar's thorns.
Only dust and ashes am I,
But the Banner is the Lord,
Hallelujah!

The Lord's my Banner,
Hallelujah!
Six thousand years in the world
He has fought to guide us;
in the boiling sea,
midst the serpents in the wilderness,
surrounded by flames and lions,
now by men, now by gods,
now by ... my own blunders,
Hallelujah!

The Lord's my Banner,
Hallelujah!
Eyes if you have to see,
and a spirit to believe,
here's the Banner, like no other!
Bow to Him,
for thou are clay, and so am I,
But the Lord's the Banner,
Hallelujah!

(*) Translated from the Romanian by Dorin Motz who approved its publication in The Beacon. Mr. Motz is retired in Washington D.C. and used to work for the Voice of America, Romanian department. He had translated many Christian books into Romanian; the books were illegally introduced in the communist Romania and were crucial to strengthening the faith and equipping the pastors and Christian leaders.

First-Person: Why Roe is about more than just abortion

by Jason Thacker

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – In the hours following the historic Dobbs decision, which recognized that the states have the right to make laws regulating the practice of elective abortion, moral panic ensued. Almost immediately, pro-choice pundits took to social media and television news

decrying the decision by the nation's highest court and began to [sow panic](#) throughout our communities, claiming that the right to abortion represents much more than simply a woman's ability to choose to end the life of the preborn baby within her.

This same idea was also pointed out by Justice Clarence Thomas in his solo concurring opinion in Dobbs where he [stated](#), "In future cases, we should reconsider all of this Court's substantive due process precedents, including Griswold, Lawrence, and Obergefell," even as the majority disagreed with his assessment. The [majority opinion](#) in Dobbs sought to limit the scope of the decision simply to the practice of abortion and the overturning of the abortion precedents set by Roe and Casey. They stated, "Nothing in this opinion should be understood to cast doubt on precedents that do not concern abortion." Whether one agrees or not with Justice Thomas' rationale for reevaluating these past decisions, he rightfully pointed out what many on both sides of the debate have long acknowledged: that the right to an abortion was decided upon a tenuous reading of the Constitution by the justices, being built upon a discovered [right to privacy](#) and a mantra of self-determination that dominates the modern era.

The reality of this unstable foundation of a right to abortion was even [acknowledged](#) by Vice President Kamala Harris who noted in a Face the Nation interview that these protections were wrongly assumed to be secured by the court, never actually being codified by Congress. As of this week, Congress is seeking to do just that. With the midterm elections in view, Democrats in the House of Representatives have moved beyond bills explicitly focused on abortion and now are looking to codify rights to same-sex marriage and contraception in the law. Though these bills will likely pass the House with bipartisan support, it's unclear what outcomes they will face in the Senate.

The linchpin

Abortion on demand was a cultural fixture for nearly five decades in America but has always represented much more than simply the taking of a preborn life, since it became the linchpin for the wider sexual revolution rooted in self-determination and moral autonomy. Abortion became sacrosanct for many of our neighbors because it represented the longer trajectory of certain modern ideas that see the individual as the sole arbiter of truth and the "self" as the one who gets to ultimately determine the good for both the individual and society at large.

Abortion – along with the birth control pill – in many ways holds the modern project together since it represents a fundamental separation of our actions from their corresponding responsibilities and duties to others. Historian Carl Trueman makes this point in his recent book [The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self](#) by stating that in this cultural shift, sex became unmoored from the responsibilities and the "ideal of monogamous heterosexual marriage" which "has only recently become much easier to transact (with the advent of cheap and efficient contraception)". In short, abortion and the pill allowed for more promiscuous sexual behavior without the fear of an unplanned pregnancy or the duties of a family. Modernity promised that one could have moral freedom void of the natural consequences and the corresponding responsibilities of our actions. This opened a whole new world of sexual freedom

and moral autonomy that can be seen clearly in Griswold – which stated that the Constitution guaranteed the right of married couples to buy and use contraception without government restriction – and Roe all the way through the historic [Obergefell v. Hodges](#) decision which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide.

While it is important to recognize that not all who support abortion rights or contraception today buy into every tenet of sexual libertinism, we must remember that our culture of abortion is built upon the ideal of the individual. It is a rejection of the dignity of the most vulnerable among us and directly confronts God's design not only for sexuality and marriage but also for the moral order. Many of the visceral and raw emotional reactions to the Dobbs ruling show just how sacred abortion has become to the modern moral order. Indeed, it is the banner of the modern reign of the individual.

The revolt

In remarks after the Dobbs ruling, President Joe Biden [said](#), “Roe recognized the [fundamental right to privacy](#) that has served as a basis for so many more rights that we’ve come to take for granted, that are ingrained in the fabric of this country” which includes “the right to make the best decisions for your health. The right to use birth control. A married couple in the privacy of their bedroom, for God’s sake. The right to marry the person you love.” In the coming days and weeks, we will see a litany of bills in Congress – namely in the Democratic-controlled House – and increased political fervor around these issues with midterm elections around the corner as many seek to retain the Roe-like individual freedoms in a post-Roe world.

To the surprise of many, 47 Republicans voted alongside all Democrats in the House to [codify marriage equality](#), which would repeal the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act that recognized the historic definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. The bill would also require all states to recognize same-sex marriages, as long as it was valid in the state in which it occurred. The “Respect for Marriage Act” is headed to the Senate, where Democrats will need 60 votes to overcome the filibuster and call for a vote.

Another bill being considered in the House concerns the [right to contraception](#), which includes possible abortifacients being mislabeled as birth control and “emergency contraception,” an alarming section that carves out conscience protections enshrined in the [Religious Freedom Restoration Act](#) – a law that protects our bedrock principle of religious liberty – as well as troubling language that could give the government authority to supersede the beliefs of religious employers. And in recent weeks, we have also seen the House approve bills designed to guarantee access to [elective abortion for all](#).

As Christians seek to navigate a culture reeling from the pains of rejecting the created order as well as the details of each of these bills, we must do so with eyes open to the reality of what is being revealed. Abortion was never simply about abortion; it represents an entire way of viewing the social order through the lens of individualism and moral autonomy. It is at the very heart of the modern project of crafting our own meanings and realities – “my truth” – based on our own feelings and desires rather than recognizing that meaning and truth is rooted in a

transcendent order given by our Creator. While these particular bills may be primarily about politics in light of the upcoming election and a direct reaction to the words in Justice Thomas' concurring opinion in *Dobbs*, Christians should take these votes seriously as major cultural shifts are happening throughout our culture.

The coming days, weeks, and months will likely not be easy nor will the next steps always be clear. But one thing is clear for Christians: True freedom and happiness are never found in ourselves nor in the pursuit of self-determination. They are found in a relationship with God as our Creator and by recognizing His good design for marriage and sexuality. Human beings simply were not created to bear the burden of crafting our own realities but were made by God to derive our meaning and identities from outside ourselves.

True freedom is found in the One who is not reeling in fear or surprised by our arrogance and pride. Our God is reigning over all people, nations and even our governing institutions. Christians, from the place of hope and peace, must seek to love our God and love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31), recognizing that the sins of this age may seem novel at first but at their core are the same issues we have always dealt with in social ethics. Let us be found proclaiming the truth about our shared human nature and our created realities, while at the same time opening our arms to those who have been cast aside and left in the wake of a failed pursuit of individualism and the empty promises of moral autonomy from the sexual revolution.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Thacker serves as chair of research in technology ethics at the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

What is freedom?

by David Thompson

NASHVILLE, TN – What is Freedom—really? And what are we supposed to do with it?

Robert Frost noted, “Freedom lies in being bold.” That is saying a lot. It also does not imply that freedom is the license to do whatever you want, (even at the expense of others), or the right to be cruel or hateful. This is what “Freedom” is to me, and I pray for most of us. (Even though I am very willing to stand up for your freedom to disagree).

You can probably venture to guess who said these words, “I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives—I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him.” – President Abraham Lincoln.

This is the first axiom I wish to espouse is that it should be universally true and worthy of acceptance. It once was in this land...it may be waning now. Since we are free to live over here or up there—do tell me why one would not live where one is proud.

Parenthetically, freedom does not demand you are always safe. Aesop is attributed to this, “It is easy to be brave from a safe distance.” We are the “land of the free and the home of the brave”—are we not? The point is that Freedom does mandate bravery; it does not imply complete safety. By the way, the government was never created to make us feel safe, but only to restrain evil!

It could easily be argued that Frederick Douglas knew something of freedom’s purpose. Said he, “people might not get all they work for in this world, but they must certainly work for all they get.” Thank you, Mr. Douglas, for the reminder.

God told Adam to work 6 days—then rest. For me, one of the greatest things about freedom is that anyone can work as hard as they want, and are almost guaranteed some measure of success. Some of us (in each age group), including mine, need to get off our “Blessed Assurance” as one pastor noted—and get out there and WORK! It is what makes “FREEDOM”—RING!

This may sound like an oxymoron but what makes freedom beautiful to me is the reality that we are still accountable to one another. If you don’t like or agree with this next quotation, then you are just un-American and hate freedom. Here it goes, “You find sometimes that a *Thing* which seems very *Thing-ish* inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it.” Pooh—the house of Pooh!

See there—who can disagree with that? Stop being brainwashed by pundits, false preachers, and whacky politicians. (No one is entitled to their own private reality.) Freedom is never stifling the truth—WHY? Because Jesus said it best, “you shall know the truth and the truth shall SET YOU FREE.”! Also, Freedom does not exist so you or I get our way. C.S. Lewis said, “All get what they want; they do not always like it.”

Our blessed freedoms exist not to make everyone happy, but to give all the opportunity to change—until you are.

Lastly, and this is the absolute greatest thing about freedom, it allows any and all to dream the impossible and achieve the unimaginable. I love what Ellen Johnson Sirleaf expounds, “If your dreams do not scare you...they are not big enough.”

We are a free people of (historically) great dreamers. These brave men and women had an uncanny faith—a faith that could seemingly move mountains. Could that also be because we not only feared our Lord more (then than now), but we believed all His promises at the same

time? God told Mary and us, “With God—nothing shall be impossible.”

May a new generation arise that grabs the horns of freedom and never lets go—and once again will stand on the precious promise of almighty God!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. David L. Thompson holds an undergraduate degree from Belmont University in Psychology and Religion, a graduate degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Education, and a doctorate in Counseling and Pastoral Psychology. He has served as a chairman of the Church Planting Group and Executive Committee Chair at the North American Mission Board for 10 years. He has been a Police Chaplain since 1991 and served as a Corporate Chaplain to the Coca Cola Bottling Company in Nashville, Tennessee where he resides with his wife. He has six children and five grandsons.

Americans divided on who should lead healthy conversations on challenges in America

by Marissa Postell

NASHVILLE, TN – Although Americans need to have productive conversations regarding challenges in our society, there is no consensus on who is in the best position to generate healthy conversations around these issues.

According to a [study from Lifeway Research](#), fewer than 1 in 5 (18%) Americans say their elected president is in the best position to generate healthy conversations on challenges facing society. And 14% believe local church pastors are.

“A beautiful thing in America is that anyone can seek to lead productive conversations about problems in our society,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “Sadly, very few Americans agree anyone is well positioned to do so.”

Fewer than 1 in 10 say elected members of Congress (9%), business leaders (8%), professors at universities (8%) or members of the media (6%) are most positively positioned to lead Americans in having healthy conversations about challenges in society.

Even though professional sports players and musicians often receive attention for public statements they make about issues Americans are facing, few Americans view athletes (3%) and musicians (3%) as thought leaders.

Nearly 1 in 3 Americans (32%) say none of the roles considered in this study are best positioned to lead healthy conversations on challenges in America.

Opinions have shifted slightly

Compared to a [2016 study conducted by Lifeway Research](#) in September and October leading up to a major election, fewer Americans today say the president is in the best position to generate healthy conversations on challenges facing society (18% v. 23%). However, compared to the previous study, more Americans say elected members of Congress (9% v. 6%), professional sports players (3% v. 1%) and musicians (3% v. <1%).

And today, compared to 2016, there are a similar number of Americans who are looking to local church pastors (14% v. 11%), university professors (8% v. 10%), members of the media (6% v. 8%) or business leaders (8% v. 7%) to lead healthy societal conversations.

“Anticipation of a new president in 2016 likely led to more people hoping the elected president could lead healthy conversations,” McConnell said. “Midway through the next president’s first term, hopes for that office have faded with even less agreement on who could start or moderate needed discourse.”

Americans hold varying opinions

There are several key indicators of who Americans will view as holding the best position to generate healthy conversations on challenges in society. Males are more likely than females (10% v. 6%) to say business leaders are best positioned to lead these conversations, and those who are high school graduates or less are the least likely to say the same (4%).

Older generations are more likely to look to pastors, while younger generations are more likely to look to university professors to generate healthy conversations. Those 50-65 (18%) and those older than 65 (18%) are more likely to say local church pastors than those 18-34 (9%) and 35-49 (11%). And those ages 18-34 (10%) and 35-49 (10%) are more likely to choose university professors than those 50-64 (5%).

Those in the South, where America is saturated with churches, are more likely than those in the West to say they look to pastors to lead healthy conversations (16% v. 10%).

Views from the pews

Even those who identify with a religious group or attend worship services hold varying opinions on where conversations about issues in society should be birthed. Catholics are more likely than Protestants to say healthy conversations should start with our elected president (22% v. 16%) or business leaders (12% v. 7%). Meanwhile, Protestants (22%) are more likely to say pastors of local churches should lead these conversations when compared to Catholics (9%), people of

other religions (9%) or those who are religiously unaffiliated (3%).

Furthermore, those with evangelical beliefs are more likely than those without evangelical beliefs (32% v. 9%) to say healthy conversations should start with pastors.

Christians who attend worship services at least four times a month (30%) are the most likely to look to pastors to generate conversations about challenges in American society.

“Society certainly has its problems, and productive dialogue on these challenges has become increasingly hard to find,” said McConnell. “Many have preferred solutions to society’s ills, but with no one trusted to stimulate or moderate a healthy discussion around them, achieving consensus will be rare.”

For more information, view the [complete report](#) and visit [LifewayResearch.com](https://lifewayresearch.com).

Methodology

The online survey of 1,005 Americans was conducted by Lifeway Research Sept. 3-14, 2021, using a national pre-recruited panel. Quotas and slight weights were used to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity, education and religion to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,005 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.3%. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

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

1. The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe
2. It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior
3. Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin
4. Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marissa Postell is a writer for Lifeway Christian Resources.

ABOUT LEFWAY RESEARCH

Lifeway Research is a Nashville-based, evangelical research firm that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches. For more information, visit LifewayResearch.com.

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