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Mother-in-laws

PLYMOUTH – When my granddaughters were younger, they spent a lot of time with us in our home. It seemed we were always driving somewhere, so I would take those prime opportunities and teachable moments to talk with them about what was going on in their young lives.

On one occasion, Sarah had shared some things that had happened with one of her friends that had her concerned. Thinking she was ready to talk about those concerns or maybe some other concern, I started what I assumed was a rather deep conversation with Sarah as I asked her, “What is something *you* are worried about?” She didn’t take two seconds to respond, and promptly responded with, “I’m worried about what my husband will look like when I grow up.” I had to suppress a giggle, but thought, if we were all honest, we at one time or another, wondered that same thing.

When I met my future husband, Tim, I wasn’t concerned with his looks because he was quite handsome, but my whole world did center around him as I searched for the answers I was looking for in a husband. Were we compatible? Did he love Jesus and follow Him as much or more than I did? Is he compassionate and sensitive to my needs? Would he treat me the way my father treated my mother and so on.

But the one thing I never even considered was that I was not only getting a husband, but I was getting a mother-in-law as well. It wasn’t even an option!

Every one of us who is married or has married children, know what it is like to be a mother-in-Law. It is for that reason that I wanted to take this Mother’s Day article in a different direction this year, as I reflected on my “other” mother as well as being the “other” mother in my own daughters-in-law’s lives.

God has shared with us one of the most famous mothers-in-law in His Word. Naomi, from the book of Ruth, is a biblical example of what a special blessing it is to be a mother-in-Law. We are not privileged with a look at how Naomi cared for her own sons, but we do have the privilege of having God’s Word paint a beautiful picture of Naomi’s qualities of kindness and care for others, and her sacrifice as a mother-in-law. We also see that she was a perfect example to others of faithfully and sacrificially following her husband, Elimelech, to a foreign country during a difficult time in her own homeland.

How many of us would willingly leave our families, our customs, our language, our food preferences... all that we knew and take our children to travel to a foreign country? That was the sacrifice this wife and mother made. It was this same attitude towards loving and following her husband that was passed on to her daughters-in-law as we see Ruth live that out in following Naomi to a foreign land herself. Naomi’s encouragement to her widowed daughters-in-law to stay in their homeland while she returned to her home by herself, was a selfless act.

She was all alone and without her husband or sons, but still encouraged her daughters-in-law to remain behind.

Ruth 1:8-9 Naomi told them to “go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Because Naomi was an exemplary mother-in-law, one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, refused to leave her. The two of them formed a deep relationship that took on the form that one only sees in a mother/daughter relationship. Naomi became an excellent example of faithfulness and was a source of strength and advice for Ruth that was much needed as she faced a new life in a foreign country without any man to provide for her. Even during Naomi’s suffering and loneliness as the result of her own severe loss, she thought about Ruth’s well-being and made it her mission to find Ruth a new husband.

So, on this day of giving honor to our mothers, I wanted to bring to your mind a different kind of mother. Naomi offers us a wonderful lesson when it comes to self-sacrifice and compassion for others.

She gives us a lens through which we may see beyond our myopic perspective. From her point of view, we are given the privilege of being able to focus on the goodness, care and comfort of our loved ones, understanding how precious a gift they are from God, though they may not be birthed from our bodies.

I want to encourage mothers-in-Law to love your daughters-in-law (and sons-in-law) well. Choose to love them as much as you would love your own children.

I also admonish daughters-in-law and sons-in-law to have a heart that is grateful for the God-given gift of your mother-in-Law. I know from experience, even if they don’t walk with Jesus, your spouse’s mother has many life lessons she can extend to you, resulting in a better life for you and your family. It’s your choice to look for them.

Naomi’s life was guided by faithfulness toward God and because of that faithfulness and in spite of all her losses, she found the true joy of being loved once again, not by a man, but by the daughter with which God had blessed her with. May your faithfulness and love for your Heavenly Father fill your heart with that kind of love for your mother-in-law.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sabrina is the wife of Tim Patterson, Executive Director of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. My greatest accomplishment is being the mother of my two sons, Micah and Aaron, and the Mother-in-law to my two daughters-in-law and the proud Grammie/GeeGee to my five grandgirls. My heart's desire in ministry is to see women of all ages fall in love with spending time with God and His Word.

As pro sports goes all-in on gambling, society is left to count the true cost

NASHVILLE (BP) – *“Welcome to the 2027 NFL Draft! We’re coming to you from the Caesar’s Sportsbook Stage, courtesy of BetMGM, with additional commentary from the DraftKings desk back in the studio. But as we watch the FanDuel blimp circling above the festivities, we first have this word from Genius Sports, the exclusive sports betting data provider of the NFL.”*

The only thing matched by the pomp and festivities of the NFL Draft, held tonight in Detroit, may be the level at which gambling has become entwined with the league (All the companies in the fake intro are actual NFL partners).

The concern spreads to all sports. When baseball’s biggest star becomes embroiled in a \$41 million betting scandal, [people begin to wonder](#) about gambling’s ultimate payout.

“We want to show that the detriments are more than the benefits,” said Mike Griffin, public affairs representative for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. “Gambling supporters point to the tax revenue and how it can help fund education.”

He specifically targets predatory gambling such as sports betting, parimutuel horse racing and video poker machines. There is a definite grooming aspect to draw people, even minors, into participating.

“We’ve seen the data on how addictive gambling can be and that up to one-third of gamblers will attempt suicide,” he said. “It’s going to end up costing you.”

A bad deal

A 2018 Supreme Court decision took out a federal ban on state authorization for sports betting that had exempted Nevada. Other states jumped at the opportunity practically overnight, and today [38 of them](#) offer legal gambling.

Legislatively, there is little connecting California and Georgia. But they are the only two states where sports gambling legislation has been defeated. A 2022 [rejection](#) by California voters has set up a [massive showdown](#) over the issue.

As sports betting has gathered steam, though, many are beginning to wonder if it is [out of control](#). Studies show how it [rewires the brain](#). A late three-pointer can affect the point spread and [bring death threats](#), as one Purdue basketball player experienced this year.

Andrew Hurley is a senior walk-on for the national champion University of Connecticut. Occasionally his coach and dad, Dan, would put him in at the end of Huskies blowouts and the

younger Hurley will hear chants to shoot the ball. He would wonder later if money was riding on those shots.

“It’s scary at the end of games,” [he told](#) the Boston Globe. “I don’t fully understand how much of [sports betting] works. ... During the game I’m not thinking about that, but in the locker room after the game I’m thinking, ‘I hope nobody is out there jumping me for what I did in the game.’”

Increasing effects

The NFL previously had never broached the idea of having anything to do with Las Vegas due to its gambling background, and yet there was Sin City hosting the Super Bowl in February. The result was [a record \\$185.6 million in wagers](#) on the game by Nevada’s sportsbooks.

Sure, there were winners in those bets. But as everyone knows, there are far more losers than winners.

States are noticing [an alarming rise](#) in calls to gambling hotlines, with numbers more than doubling. It’s costing homes and relationships and skewing toward men in their 20s and 30s.

“We believe, nationwide, the rate and severity of gambling problems have increased across the United States since 2018,” said Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling which operates a helpline at 1-800-GAMBLER, in an NBC News report.

Griffin is in his 11th year as Public Policy representative. His predecessor, the late Ray Newman, was also pushing back on attempted sports betting legislation as early as 2010.

This year there were at least 12 gambling bills, which [Griffin shared in detail](#) in a column for Georgia Baptists’ state news journal, The Christian Index. He knows he’ll have to suit up for battle again next year against gambling proponents.

“It won’t stop trying until Jesus comes back,” he said.

“They are misled into thinking that they can fix a problem by regulating it. ... If you regulate it too well, though, there won’t be as much money to make. You need the problem gamblers. You need to increase the opportunities to gamble and entice more people to do it.

“The house has to win.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley is national correspondent for Baptist Press.

Spirit-led Parenting

SHELBY TOWNSHIP – Parenting is one of the greatest joys of my life, while at the same time, it can be one of the most challenging. Writing about parenting is not my forte because I am still forging my way through these years. My kids are 17 and 11 and I have so much still to learn and navigate as a parent.

People tend to approach parenting differently. This could be because of the way we were raised ourselves. Sometimes we want to do things the exact way it was modeled for us, yet at other times we may want to completely change the way our parents handled situations. Wherever you fall on the spectrum, we can all agree that parenting is hard work!

God reminds me often that even though I don't have all the answers, I do have a Counselor who is always with me and ready to help when I need Him. Jesus told his disciples in John 14:16b – 17a (NIV),

“... he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.”

The Holy Spirit is our Counselor, our Helper, and our Guide. The following are ways to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you as you raise your children:

1 - Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with all you need.

As Christ followers, we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. However, if we don't intentionally call on Him and ask Him to lead us, we can easily quench the Holy Spirit, and continue to lead ourselves. When we parent without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will miss out on supernatural insight and divine assistance with our children.

Paul writes in Galatians 5:16 (NIV),

“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

Often, we can think this verse is only referring to immoral things, but the flesh can also be referred to as pride and self-righteousness. As a parent, if I am constantly leading out of my flesh and never inviting the Holy Spirit to lead my words and my actions, I can do damage to my relationship with my children. Our parenting style was formed by experiences in our lives, and those experiences may not have always been good. However, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit we can care for our children with compassion and understanding.

2 – Listen to the still small voice.

One of the biggest challenges to hearing God's voice is recognizing when His voice is leading you to do something that you don't necessarily want to do. I believe we often hear God's voice, but we don't want to submit to it! Why? We think we know what is best and when the Holy Spirit wants to counteract what we think is right, we often ignore His promptings and forge

ahead with our way of handling the situation. When we do this, we are “gratifying the desires of the flesh” as stated in Galatians 5:16. Have you been there? As parents, sometimes we can make situations a lot worse when we lead out of the flesh and not the Spirit.

In John 14: 26 (NIV) Jesus says,

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

3 – Be attentive to your child’s needs and listen.

If you have more than one child, you know every child is different. Therefore, your parenting style may vary from child to child. I am a very structured person and I like to do things a certain way. However, I have learned that when I parent in the way I think is best without considering my child’s needs, I am not able to form the attachment to my child I need for healthy respect and nurture. Our relationship then becomes about authority and control. I learned this about myself from my oldest child. I have found that when I am quiet and listen to his needs, the Holy Spirit is showing me how to respond to him in a way in which he will receive it.

In James 1:19 (NIV) James writes,

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

Are you familiar with this verse? Most parents are because we use it on our kids, but do we follow it ourselves? When we are slow to speak and allow our children to share their feelings and frustrations, this allows us time to sit with the Holy Spirit and ask Him to guide our next words and actions. It gives space for us to lay down our fleshly desires of what “WE” want to say in the moment, and allows the Holy Spirit to fill our minds and hearts with His words to flow through us.

I am thankful that God has given us a Helper, the Holy Spirit, to guide us through our parenting journey. We aren’t always going to get it right. When we fail, which I often do, we need to stay in tune to the Spirit leading. If He convicts you because of the way you handled the situation with your child, go back and apologize! Don’t let pride keep you from making things right with them. When we model asking forgiveness from our children, we allow them to see Christ at work in us. Stay in step with the Holy Spirit, and He will faithfully see you through each stage of your parenting journey.

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!

Slumps need good teammates

Is it possible to start a season already in a slump? The trees and temperatures are signaling spring, but winter's slowness still has a hold on me. Signs of new life are all around, but I'm more likely to muster a "meh" than much enthusiasm for the new season.

I'm still struggling to gel with a new schedule for our family. Projects I'd hoped to finish are undone. These last few months have been spiritually dry. For all those reasons, I'm starting this spring in a bit of a slump.

Even in the sluggishness, though, there is evidence of God's goodness and mercy. As I struggle to get with the program for a new season, he's reminding me of the valuable teammates he's graciously put around me:

- A husband who already bears at least half of the responsibilities we share, finding ways to take on more of mine while acting as if it isn't a sacrifice.
- A new work friend who, more consistently than anyone I know, puts the needs of others above her own, pointing people toward Jesus as she goes.
- A small group of women I meet with regularly who, all in their 20s and well acquainted with changing circumstances, encourage me to trust God more fully in this season and all the others.

There are others too. Some of these teammates have offered literal acts of service—a shared project at work, an extra afternoon of school pickup. Others have encouraged me through their example of faithfulness. All have been invaluable, bringing me to a familiar place where I remember again God's provision in community. The history of the church is covered in examples of believers encouraging each other, lifting one another through slumps and hard seasons.

"Encourage one another daily," Hebrews 3:13 exhorts us. "Outdo one another in showing honor," Paul urges in Romans 12:10 (ESV). And be filled with the Holy Spirit, he says in Ephesians 5:18-19, "speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs."

A slump is less weighty when accompanied by the songs and prayers of fellow pilgrims who have trudged through a similar season. God's gift of community is good all the time, but perhaps even more when life forces us to lean into it a little more than we'd like.

Slumps are isolating, but we weren't meant to walk through them alone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meredith Day Flynn is a wife and mother of two living in Springfield. She writes on the intersection of faith, family, and current culture.

False advertising

PLYMOUTH – It seems as though almost every day someone is claiming fantastic benefits from using their product, procedure, or following a prescribed practice. Everything from simple dietary supplements to radical blood cleansing processes are being touted as the physical, mental, and spiritual “cure-alls” for humanities’ ills.

I read an article many years ago that was beyond bizarre. Charles B. Loftin, vice president of San Antonio college of Chiropractors, was quoted in an AP item as saying: *“Had ex-Kaiser Wilhelm received chiropractic adjustments for whatever abnormal conditions from which he was suffering, the World War would have been averted.”*

Right, and if leaders of Hamas would have had better dental care, they would have not invaded Israel and massacred hundreds of people and taken hundreds more captive. If the radical terrorists of the world had access to better hair care products, then we would not be in the mess we’re in right now! Well, at least they would look better.

Now before you go off on me about chiropractic care and its benefit to healthcare in America, just know Chiropractors provide a wonderful and needed service. On many occasions they have been of great benefit to me personally, and I believe they are legitimate healthcare providers. They truly are healers with their hands.

The point I am making is that we generally exaggerate the positive, and gloss over the negative when we want someone to buy into our way of thinking. It is human nature to want to be right and have others agree with you, but it is wrong to stretch the truth or lie, no matter what your motive. The ends do not justify the means. It is still wrong to do that which is wrong no matter how right your motive or desired results.

I am afraid that most who are promoting the new “cure-alls for what ails us” are doing so for one reason. Money. And what is worse is that millions of Americans are following these “Pied Pipers of Promise” into physical and financial ruin. They are taking advantage of mankind’s hope for health and prosperity and using the naiveté of the masses to deceive and manipulate, never disclosing the dangers and damage they can cause.

I am so glad that our Lord didn’t use the tactics of these modern day hucksters. He was straightforward and open about what it would mean to be a “follower” of His. No hidden agendas. No undisclosed problems. No fine print. Everything was, and is, in big bold letters, “Take up your cross and follow me.” That’s it!

He doesn’t want just part of us, He wants all of us. He wants our lives. Total, complete surrender. In return He truly is “the cure all for what ails us.” And what is even better is that what He offers really works.

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, **If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his **cross**, and follow me.**" (Matthew 16:24 KJV)

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.

Accelerate gospel movement

PLYMOUTH – “Accelerate Gospel movement,” are three words worth remembering! With 10 million Michiganders surrounding us and an estimated 6 million unaware of the Gospel’s meaning, wouldn’t it be amazing to see each church take their next step to, “Accelerate Gospel movement?” Imagine thousands of Michigan Baptists watching and listening for that split-second, green flag or green light moment, when each person could start a conversation in which they could “accelerate Gospel movement.”

Here are a few possible examples that could happen:

- A Christian career woman who hears another woman at work openly regretting recent decisions in her life, invites her coworker out to lunch patiently listening then concluding the discussion with an invitation to her coworker to join a weeknight Bible study with friends, stating, “Each week, my Bible study group friends and I use our midweek visits to reset our lives by learning from the Lord. I would enjoy having you sit beside me if you would come?”
- Three businessmen in one church decide to host a conference, within their city, for all business owners. The conference’s agenda could start with practical solutions for running a company, but could end with each of the three businessmen sharing their spiritual testimonies during a catered lunch. The hosts could invite the business owners into a biweekly Bible study and prayer time to learn more about how following the Lord gives wisdom to life and business.
- Pastors and church leaders in a region, as a team, might decide to engage each of their communities with acts of kindness and assistance, followed by a well-planned weekend gathering in a large, local venue with musical guests, and keynote speakers who will share the Gospel with the region’s residents. Each participating church could follow-up on those making decisions for the Lord or requesting more conversations.

Bring Everyone to Evangelism Training

Evangelism Training for Everyone by the North American Mission Board

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

10:30 am – 1:30 pm

Warren Woods Baptist Church

14251 Twelve Mile Road

Warren, Michigan 48088

Spanish and English Training

[Reserve Your Spot by Clicking Here](#)

The training kit comes with a variety of useful tools:

1. A training guide so you can train frequently in your church throughout the years.
2. A resource catalog so you can order precisely what you need.
3. A USB flash drive with videos and resources that you can use as promotional and training materials customized for your church.
4. A keychain to remind participants of the importance of praying over the ministry of evangelism.
5. Encouraging cards that can be posted on a wooden stand to inspire faithfulness.

All of these materials and the training plan will help you create and sustain a culture of evangelism within your church. The training guide, personal assessment, road map, and resource catalog will help you tailor a robust training experience specifically focused on your church members, those around you who need the Lord, and the rhythm of your community. The possibilities are endless. I will be there on May 21, and I would love to see you in the room with us. By the way, the catered lunch will be our gift to you. Please register yourself and those who will join you as soon as possible.

[Reserve Your Spot by Clicking Here](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tony L. Lynn is the Send Network Director for Michigan and the Language/Ethnic Church Planting Catalyst. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as a lead pastor in Michigan churches and as an international missionary, along with his wife Jamie, in the Niger Republic, France, and Canada.

What does it take to revitalize a church?

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – Pastors Bobby Owings and Brian Moss share a fondness for going to places no one else wants to go. For them, it meant being called to lead dying churches—congregations in steep decline, or even on the brink of closing. Joy Allmond refers to them in “3 Non-Negotiables for Revitalizing a Dying Church.”

When Owings came to Surf City Baptist Church in 2009 (now known as The Gathering), located in a resort town near a military base on the southern coast of North Carolina, each Sunday service had around 50 people in attendance—on a *good* day. Today, Owings preaches four sermons each Sunday to a total of around 500.

Moss entered the ministry in 1999 after nearly two decades in the information technology industry. His first pastorate— Oak Ridge Baptist Church in Salisbury, Maryland—brought him to a church that boasted around 30 in a weekend service. He’s still at Oak Ridge, along with 1,100 more faces than he started with, and over 1,000 viewers online each week.

Here in Michigan, we have our share of churches with 30-50 people meeting on Sunday morning. We need a fresh wind of renewal to blow across the State. We want to see our churches turn around and grow again, make disciples who make disciples, and take their next step to accelerate Gospel movement.

What does it take to revitalize a church in sharp decline?

Dependent prayer

Above all else, the work of revitalization is a spiritual endeavor *and* a spiritual battle. Satan and his cohorts are arrayed against us. They do not want your church to prosper. That’s why we need a gospel-saturated, long-term prayer strategy in every church.

James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.” Trust that God can redeem and renew any church for His glory, pray fervently, and don’t let pride stand in the way.

God-centered worship

God-centered worship is our proper response to the magnificence, splendor, and majesty of God’s character. He is delightfully and eternally worthy of our praise and adoration. Worship goes beyond simply knowing what God is like; it goes beyond “traditional vs. contemporary;” it means that we take delight in the perfection of his attributes.

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

Biblical preaching

In biblical exposition, or expository preaching, the structure of the sermon, the substance of the sermon, and the spirit of the sermon, all should come from what we find in the text itself. In that sense, the sermon is not topically driven; it's not audience-driven; it's not felt-needs-driven. It is driven by the text of Holy Scripture and becomes a primary source of spiritual nourishment.

“Preach the word!” (2 Timothy 4:2)

Deliberate discipleship

Deliberate discipleship means we have a plan in place. We guide people into a discipleship system and help them move through it on their way to spiritual growth and maturity. Furthermore, we train and equip disciples to become disciple-makers (Matthew 28:19-20). Do you have an intentional discipleship process at your church? What does it look like?

Simple Structure

A declining church does not need the same structure it had when it was running 200 people. A church in renewal must become a focused church.

Acts 2:42 “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Simple structure. Laser-like focus.

A church in our area has 40 or 50 people in the morning service, down from 185, but they host all the same programs. They also have more committees than I have teeth! They are burning people out. They need to simplify.

Frequent celebrations

Throw a party every chance you get! Nothing will change the atmosphere of your church faster than *celebrating* what God has done for us in Jesus!

“We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2)

In our church, every time we had a reason, we'd throw a party and serve cake! Every time we had a Mission Sunday, or a guest speaker, we'd have a party. Every time we took a special offering, or somebody was saved by God's amazing grace, we'd throw a party! Celebration changes the atmosphere of your church. You celebrate more than you complain. You party more than you protest. You lift each other up instead of pushing each other down.

May I ask?

To the six suggestions above, we could add *missional engagement, joyful hospitality, meaningful membership, hopeful vision, leadership development, and humble partnership*. All are important to the work of church revitalization.

But may I ask... What will it take to revitalize *your* church? Maybe God is calling you to lean into this possibility to discover his will for your church.

If you'd like to speak to someone at the Baptist State Convention of Michigan about this, please contact Gary Maxey at gary@bscm.org and he will help you get started. We have used Corpus church revitalization training and resources with great profit.

You may not feel called to lead a dying church, or one in steep decline, but God may want to use you anyway! Your church attendance may not soar to 300, 800, or 1,000 people in worship, but you will have the gospel-satisfaction of partnering with God for the good of his church to the praise of his glory.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Garth Leno is the Pastor/Planter Care Specialist with the BSCM. He serves in a similar role with the Canadian National Baptist Convention, and he is the founding pastor of The Gathering Church in Windsor, Ontario, a church he planted with his wife, Patty, and a few of their friends.

Christ: a mother's only hope

A Mother's Day Encouragement

ANN ARBOR – Mother's Day is a complicated holiday. There is a lot of joy wrapped up into the gift of motherhood. However, Mother's Day is also a painful reminder of unfulfilled or shattered dreams for many women. Even for those who celebrate Mother's Day with arms full of children like I do, we can still carry an ache in our hearts, because we recognize that we are not the moms we hoped we would be. One deep ache that a mother feels is when her wings are not big enough to wrap safely around her children.

We, mothers, feel most comfortable when we have our children held tightly under our wings—warm, safe, and happy. However, we more often feel like getting our children under our wings is as impossible as trying to wrap our arms around a cloud.

We want to control environments. We want to meet their needs and tend to their cries. But, at some point, all mothers realize that we are limited, finite creatures, who simply cannot be there for our children at every moment of their lives. We also realize that despite our best efforts, we cannot get our children tightly under our wings.

I'll never forget when I felt this so poignantly. I was six weeks postpartum with my fourth child. My three older children were tucked safely into bed when I began to have excruciating pain in my abdomen. I needed to go to the emergency room at the hospital. My newborn son began to cry in hunger. I wanted nothing more than to console and feed him. Instead, I had to place him in a neighbor's arms. I barely told her where she could find a bottle. I did not have time to wake my other children to tell them what was happening. Instead, I was rushed quickly to the hospital for an emergency surgery and lengthy stay.

I will never forget sobbing in the car. What would my other children think when they woke in the morning? Would they feel afraid or insecure because their safe worlds turned upside down overnight? I did not care about my excruciating abdominal pain, but instead I was devastated that I left my newborn son in such a vulnerable state. I felt as if I had abandoned my children.

Many mothers walk through significantly more challenging circumstances than I felt in that moment. However, we all realize that our children are out of our control. They go beyond our reach. Despite the fierce love we carry for them, we cannot protect them from hard circumstances.

What is a mother to do with this ache? With this gnawing feeling that she cannot be everything her children need her to be? Where is her hope?

Sister, this Mother's Day, if you wrestle with the disconnect between (1) *the mother you want to be* and (2) *the mother you are*, find strength in the fact that Christ is your hope. Christ stands in the gap between us and our children, holding all things together (Col. 1:17).

1. Christ loves our children and is their only hope.
2. Christ calls us to trust him and ministers to us in our fear.
3. Christ invites us to release our children to His loving care.

What good news! Christ, the surest foundation, is our only hope.

1. Christ loves our children and is their only hope.

Satan tempts us to wallow in anxiety about our children when we cannot see them. Are they safe? Are they afraid? Are the influences around them pointing them towards, or away from, the Lord?

As mothers, instead, we must believe that Christ is our child's only hope. We must remind ourselves of the truth and not give into the fear meant to cripple us.

Christ goes with them when we cannot. Christ loves our children more than we ever could. They are ultimately not our own children. They are his. *He* knitted them together in *our* wombs. He knew their days (even the hard ones) before any of them came to pass. He is working in their lives. If they don't know him as their Savior, he is pursuing them. He is providing opportunities for them to cry out to him to save them. If they are his followers, he is shepherding them. He will lead them. He will correct them. He will restore them. They are safer in His hands than in mine.

2. Christ calls us to trust him and ministers to us in our fear.

Not only do we believe that Christ loves our children and is their only hope, but we also know that He is our only hope too.

When our children no longer tuck safely under our wings, God is calling us to trust him. We can lay our head on the pillow at the end of the day with a sense of needy confidence because we firmly believe that he sees us. We know that he will act according to his promises and character.

Instead of tossing and turning, Christ invites us to pray fervently – to commune with him and beg God to act on behalf of our family. He gives us his Word. It is alive– ministering to us, guiding us, and providing truths for us to cling to. He has given us his church to walk alongside us through this mothering journey, bolstering and strengthening our faith in him.

Charles Spurgeon famously said, “I kiss the wave that throws me onto the Rock of Ages.”

Motherhood is a wave. It throws us daily back onto the Rock of Ages– who will never, ever move.

3. Christ invites us to release our children to His loving care.

We know that during our child's first 18 years of life, they are slowly learning independence and being prepared for life outside of our nest. There are thousands of little moments that help them gain confidence and strength to enter the world. However, each of these thousands of little moments are invitations for us to release them into His loving care, so that He can use them for His glory. We want *his* plan to unfold in their lives. We want *him* to walk with them. We want them to know *him*. We want *him* to use them for his glory.

When God calls us to open our hands to release our children to him, it is a good thing. He is trustworthy and kind. There is no better invitation.

As we release our children into his loving care, we are also modeling for our children what it looks like to follow him – open hands and a surrendered, dependent heart. We are empowering them not to live in fear but instead to firmly believe that God is good. We will watch from a

distance as they probably fail, but we sit back with a lump in our throat knowing that those opportunities present an opportunity for Christ to restore. As we watch Christ tenderly carry our children, we will be given opportunities to see them grow and flourish.

But what if the worst thing happens? What if that's not our story? What if our children have hardened their hearts to Christ or are living in sin? What if our children are physically gone? What if we can never hold them in our arms again?

Sister, my heart aches with you. I must gently say that even when (or, *especially when*) the unthinkable happens and our deepest fears become actualized, His hands are still the safest and best place – for us *and* our children.

If that is where you find yourself, here are some promises to which you can cling:

- As your Good Shepherd, Christ will guide you through this dark valley (Ps. 23).
- As your sure and steady anchor, Christ will hold you firmly amidst the hurricane of life flying around you (Heb. 6:19-20).
- As the one who never slumbers nor sleeps, Christ will keep you through the hardest nights (Ps.121:4-5).
- As the one who weeps with you, He compassionately feels the brokenness of the world and is resolved to act (Jn. 11:25-44).
- He says he is making all things new. One day, there will be no more tears and no more night (Rev. 21:4-5). The wrong will be undone. Instead, we will be in his presence where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11).

On this Mother's Day, I pray that we all acknowledge this ache and rejoice loudly that Christ truly is our (and our children's) only hope. What good news! What a sure foundation to place our hope! Though it feels scary to surrender control, we know that we are in the safest place we could all be if we are all tenderly held by him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily is married to Michael, lead pastor and planter of Treasuring Christ Church in Ann Arbor and is a mom to four kids: Amelia, John, Caroline, and Graham. She serves as Kids Ministry Director at Treasuring Christ Church and freelance graphic designer. She loves partnering with parents in discipling their children, serving the local church, and using her talents of graphic design and communication to put on display the all-surpassing worth of Christ. Emily is happiest when she is with her family, sitting in a trendy coffee shop, traveling, or when she has sand between her toes at Ocean Isle Beach, NC.

Church revitalization

PLYMOUTH – Church Revitalization is the process of leading a plateaued or declining church toward a healthy growth, which begins when church leaders and church members come to the realization that the church is not healthy. Therefore, to begin church revitalization, it is important that we have a clear understanding of what a healthy church is and have an honest examination of our church.

So why do we begin our discussion with the topic of the health of the church? Simply because most churches today do not realize that they are unhealthy. What we have found in the churches today is only 10% are healthy, 40% demonstrate symptoms of being sick, 40% are very sick, and 10% are dying. Therefore, it is critical to discuss and understand what a healthy church looks like.

What is a healthy church? What is the purpose of the church? Is a healthy church always expanding numerically? These are all good questions, and there are several church growth principles that attempt to answer these questions. However, very few growth principles identify the need for a theological foundation, which I believe is essential for a healthy church. The model below developed by Dr. Chuck Lawless, a seminary professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary addresses the need for a strong theological foundation.

The model is built with the goal in mind to make disciples, and contains three areas of focus: Theological Foundation, 6 Purposes of a Church and Application:

Theological Foundation

A healthy church must first have a theological foundation based on knowing God and who they are individually and corporately in Christ. This theological foundation is non-negotiable, and it is important that the foundation be biblically and theologically sound. Dr. Lawless' approach is built on the first three chapters of Ephesians where Paul provides a strong theological foundation on which we should build our church.

The problem exists when churches think that simply just teaching the Word somehow produces congregations with an orthodox theology. Unfortunately, this is a false assumption, and cannot be further from reality. To have a strong theological foundation it takes deliberate and intentional strategy on teaching theology and doctrine in our churches.

6 Pillars of a Church

The pillars represent the purposes of the church as described in the scriptures: great commission (Matt 28), the great commandment (Matt 22), and the portrayal of the early church (Acts 2). The 6 pillars are:

1. **Exalt** God through worship (Matthew 22:36-37 Acts 2:43,47)
2. **Evangelize** the world through proclamation and missions (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:41,47)
3. **Equip** believers through teaching and mentoring (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:42)
4. **Edify** others through ministry and service (Matthew 22:39, Acts 2:44-45)
5. **Encounter** God through prayer (Acts 2:42)
6. **Encourage** one another through fellowship (Acts 2:42,46)

Application

Now we move to the rooftop which is the Application. This is built on the final 3 chapters of Ephesians where the emphasis shifts from the first three chapters of Ephesians which is focused on theology to the evidence of our faith. Here we find Paul focusing on the believers walk “In the manner worthy of our calling”

This evidence of our faith is essential because who we are in Christ must affect every area of our life. Therefore, the Application identifies 4 areas of faith: our personal walk (Eph 4:1-6:9) at home (5:22-6:4), church (4:2-5:21) and workplace (6:5-9).

As we began our discussion on Church Revitalization, we find it begins with the examination of the health of the church. As we look upon the model presented by Dr. Lawless and examine the church we need to ask these 4 critical questions:

- Are we intentionally teaching sound doctrine and theology?
- Are we living out the 6 purposes of the Church?
- Are we applying the gospel to all areas of our lives?
- At the cross are we preaching Christ – the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascending, and Coming Again?

The answers to these questions will help you determine on a scale of 1 to 10 where your church health is today. To have further discussion on church health and revitalization feel free to reach out to gary@bscm.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary is a Church Revitalization Coach and Consultant for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, with 35+ years of experience working for companies like EDS and IBM as a director working closely with organizations worldwide to enable the execution of strategic initiatives. He has served in a variety of positions with Youth for Christ International, involved in teaching ministries for several churches, and a church elder. He received Certificates in Biblical Studies and Theology, New Testament, and Christian Apologetics from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Gary is married to his wife Odena for over 39 years and has two children and seven grandchildren.

Echoes of a godly mother

CLINTON TOWNSHIP – My momma was raised in rural Georgia in a sharecropper's family who picked cotton. This was at the end of the Great Depression. They were poor and life was hard with seven kids plus an alcoholic father who disappeared for weeks after payday. My momma and her sister began attending church. They accepted Jesus and were baptized. Momma made a commitment to have a Christ-centered and alcohol-free home. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

As we grew up, our lives were school and church. The church was the center of our lives. Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday night. God was not just at church; He was in our home. In fact, I learned to read by reading the Bible. Momma modeled reading her Bible daily and kneeling by her bed every night to pray for those on her list. God was real to her, and she spoke of how much He had blessed her.

Momma modeled ministry, although at the time, I did not know what it was called. Momma would pick up elderly ladies for church. I would sit in the back seat between them and often thought, "We could get to church faster if we did not have to make all of these stops." I started listening to these ladies and learned their stories of hardships and understood why she drove them. I have picked up many for church in the same way. At WMU meetings, I really loved the missionary stories and was captivated by them. I realized that Momma was like a missionary, telling others in our world about Jesus. That impacted my life.

Even as a Christian, her life had struggles and the loss of loved ones. The biggest one was losing her husband to a sudden heart attack. At age 52, she was a widow. She wrote in a journal about losing Daddy. She repeatedly wrote that even in the midst of sorrow, God was giving her peace, strength, and the help she needed to carry on. "My God will supply all your needs, according to His mercies in heaven."

Momma had a deep relationship with God, like a hotline it seemed. I spent a summer in Michigan helping a church. After returning home, God spoke to me about moving to Michigan as a long-term missionary. I was hesitant to tell momma since it was far away. I finally got the courage to say that I needed to tell her something. She said, "I guess you are going to tell me that you are packing up and moving there," I replied, "In a nutshell, but how did you know?"

She said, "God already told me." Wow! She sent me a note with this Scripture: "I have no greater joy than my children walk in truth," (3 John 1:4). She added, "Kay, I am so thankful that you walk in truth." That note is a treasure to me!

She was a prayer warrior and prayed down on her knees until kneeling was too difficult. In her later years, dementia began to take over. She still could quote Bible verses and parts of hymns near the end. Many trivial things left her mind, but God did not.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths,” (Proverbs 3:5-6). Momma lived it. I have videos of her quoting it perfectly. I would ask her “How did that work?” Her answer, “If you trust in Him. He really will direct your life.”

Momma’s faithfulness to God will echo into future generations because of her determination at a young age to commit to do things in her life and home that pleased God, and she never wavered. I have been greatly blessed by having a godly mother. Thank you, Lord, for her.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kay is a Georgia girl who moved to Michigan in 1991 as a volunteer missionary. She is married to Steve Elliott. Steve is the Pastor of Faith Outreach Fellowship in Clinton Township where they serve together. Kay is also a First-Grade teacher and has been teaching 39 years. She has a heart for children and lady’s ministry as well.

Embracing motherhood: a tribute to sacrificial love

NEW HUDSON – Unsteadily, she lowered herself to the floor and shakily took a pitcher of warm water and poured it into a ceramic basin. Gently, she lifted each one of my feet and placed them in the basin full of water. With tears in her eyes and a quivering voice, she began praying for me as she washed my feet.

“Dear Lord, thank you for my dear sister. Tara, The Lord your God is in your midst a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness and will quiet you by his love, he will exult over you with loud singing.” Her precious prayer over me continued as she prayed and read scripture. Zephaniah 3:17 was our verse. She always prayed this with me and ended all her cards or notes to me with this verse.

Nancy is her name, and I consider my relationship with her to be one of the greatest gifts God has given to me. Despite her chronic pain and difficulties with mobility she continually showed me how to love sacrificially and would instill godly wisdom into me. Nancy was more than just a mentor, she was an answer to many years of prayer, asking that God would provide a mother figure in my life.

As a young wife and mother, I would question my abilities to love and serve my family well and also serve my church community whole heartedly. My relationship with Nancy is a testament to God’s provision. In her, I found a motherly figure that I have always desired to have, she taught me humble servanthood and sacrificial love.

I will never forget the day that she washed my feet. A couple months prior, Nancy had extensive back surgery. Her washing my feet was pivotal in my understanding about sacrificial love. Despite her brokenness and pain, she remained steadfast in her obedience to her Lord. Her strength and ability to love and teach well was nothing she could do on her own, her physical body was literally broken, however she relied on Christ daily.

Through Nancy, God revealed what sacrificial love is. It's not just putting the needs of others before your own, it's something much greater. Being able to show sacrificial love is rooted in having an abundance of joy. Joy found only in knowing Christ, relying daily on Him to sustain you through every trial, hurt and pain. A genuine joy where Christ is your treasure above everything else and others identify this treasure in you and desire to have that same closeness.

As we celebrate Mother's Day, let us honor not only the mothers who nurtured us, but also spiritual mothers and mother figures who have helped shape us because of their obedience to Jesus.

May we be able to teach our children, and influence others just as Nancy has taught and influenced me. Dear Lord, thank you for the readers of this article. Reader, the Lord your God is in your midst a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness and will quiet you by his love, he will exult over you with loud singing."

Happy Mother's Day! May your lives continue to be a testament to the transformative power of Jesus Christ, and may you be blessed abundantly for the sacrificial love you so generously give.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tara Ford is a wife to Nick Ford and a mom to 6 amazing kids. In 2002, Nick and Tara moved from Southeast Michigan to Arizona where Nick pastored for 20 years. During that time, Tara served in various roles in the church, however, her greatest joy was being able to come alongside women to disciple and teach them how to apply and pray the Word of God. Tara never thought that her family would leave Arizona and the church that they loved. However, in 2022, God relocated their family to New Hudson, Michigan to plant a brand-new church called Mission Church. Tara received her undergraduate degree from William Tyndale College in 2002 and will be graduating in October 2024 with a Master's in Behavioral Therapy. She plans to someday provide biblical counseling for marriages and families.

Claiming His promises and a life verse for my children

NORTH STREET – My journey into motherhood started with the words, “You’re going to have a baby.” The joy and excitement of that moment and of that time in my life, did not allow me to think of motherhood as a lifelong adventure.

Now my children are in their 40’s and as I look back on almost 50 years of motherhood I can see how God was faithful to me, and is still faithful, as I claim His promises for their life and continually pray for them.

Promise: He will direct your path. “In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path.” Proverbs 3:6

There was so much I did not know as a mom. I prayed many times for God to help me know what to do and He never failed me.

Promise: My children would know God. “Train up a child in the way he should go. When he is old he will not depart from it”, Proverbs 22:6.

It is my ‘job’ to teach my children about God. Our home was the ‘soil’ that helped them to grow. Being a Christian example in my home was vital to their knowing God. Taking them to church was one of the best ways for them to be educated in God’s Word and living the Christian life.

Promise: He will complete His work in my children’s life. “Being confident of this one thing, He who began a good work in you will complete it...” Philippians 1:6.

Especially during their difficult teen years, this promise was my daily prayer.

The prayer I claim for their life is Colossians 1:9-10 “...we...do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him; being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.”

I am now claiming promises and praying for my grandchildren because I know God is faithful and will do the same for them. I pray you will invite God to help you raise your children to know Him. Claiming promises for them and praying scripture can be a lifeline to help you do that.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phyllis Harbaugh is the wife of a retired pastor with three married daughters and six grandchildren.

The unconventional will of God

MONROE – “Well, be safe getting home you guys. I don’t know what I’m going to do, but hopefully I’m not stuck!” These were the school principal’s words to us support staff as we were leaving campus for an early dismissal due to the solar eclipse.

Thousands of vehicles were making their way south to Ohio before 3PM in hopes of catching the best experience, and our town of Monroe was the place to travel through to get there. With traffic backed up for miles, many of us were thrown off our normal routes home. The day was anything but conventional. It was irritating! While many were excited to experience the eclipse, the inconvenience of traffic threw a giant wrench into our plans.

As God’s people, we have a unique gift in life by Him allowing us to have a part in accomplishing His will here on earth. What an incredible and beautiful thing it is to know that He has a mapped-out will for your life to bring souls to His Son, Jesus!

But what does that journey of His will for you look like? Is it a straight road with a guided GPS to tell you ahead of time that there is a slowdown ahead in thirty miles? Does He give you a scheduled calendar, showing you each twist and turn that will come your way in the coming days? No. He doesn’t.

The will of God for our lives is not always typical. It’s not predictable. And it’s not ironed out ten years in advance. In fact, it’s often unconventional. Like backed-up traffic on a Monday afternoon in our small city of Monroe, Michigan, it often throws a wrench in our plans of how we thought things would look. It doesn’t tell us ahead of time when a storm of life is going to pop up, when a crushing burden will be placed on our backs, or when a different route needs to be taken to advance Christ’s Kingdom His way.

Over the past fifteen years of my life, God has continually taught me of the peace that comes from taking one step of faith at a time (without knowing the other future steps). When I planned for four consecutive years of Bible college to get my bachelor’s degree, it ended up taking me eight. When I thought my wife and I would be at our rapidly-growing church in Knoxville for the first decade in ministry, the Lord uprooted and moved our senior pastor. When God answered our prayers for a baby that year, the Lord took that child home with Him before we were able to hold it in our arms.

I was convinced our next venture in Virginia would be our long-term home, but God brought us there to simply guide a small church through the pandemic. We found ourselves at a thriving church in the Bible belt where we figured our kids would grow up, but the Lord said, “Go move to Michigan and reach your hometown with the Gospel.” When we were planning to start a new church in Monroe, the Lord said, “Go help lead a young church that I already started there five years ago.”

This is often how the will of God looks in our lives. It's not always what we thought it would be, or what we would have planned, but it is always right. Ask Joseph, who was sold into slavery and spent years in a prison before becoming second in command. Ask Moses, who God called out of his comfort zone of Midian to go back to Egypt. Ask David, the anointed king, who had to hide in caves for years before inheriting the throne. Ask Paul, who was shipwrecked while traveling to do the Lord's work.

The will of God is often unconventional. Proverbs 19:21 tells us: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." May God help you and I to continually place our personal aspirations, anticipations, and plans on the altar of sacrifice in order to trust in His will above our own - no matter how unconventional it seems.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Meade pastors at Outpost Church of Monroe alongside Jason Aaron in Monroe, Michigan. After serving in pastoral ministry down south for ten years, God called he and his wife to move back to his hometown in August of 2023 to reach the city with the Gospel. He and his wife, Kaylee, have been married for ten years and have two kids - DJ (3) and Kelly (2).

WMU Missions Celebration brings 'Joy' to Indy

BIRMINGHAM, AL – (April 22, 2024) – Gather your friends and race to Indianapolis this June for the [WMU Missions Celebration](#) just prior to the [SBC Annual Meeting](#).

This year's WMU gathering will be in the Indiana Convention Center in the 500 Ballroom on Sunday, June 9, beginning at 12:00 p.m.

"Join us and discover ways God is at work in our midst and around the world as you hear inspiring stories from missionaries and missions advocates who are making Christ known," invited Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national WMU.

The event theme *What Joy!* will be supported by 1 Thess. 2:8 in which Paul writes, "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well."

Missions speakers will encourage various aspects of this verse, including being passionate about reaching the lost, compelled by love, generous in sharing, and serving with much joy.

“In addition to hearing from field personnel, testimonies from our national Acteens panelists along with WMU emeritae presidents is a special time for me,” shared Connie Dixon, president, national WMU. “It is an encouraging reminder that while we have a rich heritage in WMU, we also have a very bright future.”

Jason Stewart, worship and music consultant for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, and his wife Stephanie will lead in praise and worship, along with the [Native Praise Choir](#) which is celebrating 25 years of ministry. There are 19 tribes represented within the choir that sings in the languages of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Muskogee Creek and Seminole tribes.

“Their celebration tour launches at the WMU Missions Celebration,” Wisdom-Martin said. “There is something about hearing them that touches me deeply and profoundly. Everyone should experience that blessing.”

Between general sessions, participants can discover a wide variety of missions-focused ministries and initiatives in the “Idea Pit Stop,” a self-paced interactive area designed to provide tangible, takeaway ideas for greater missions involvement. “You will gain insight, inspiration and ideas to advance your missions journey,” Wisdom-Martin said.

At the conclusion of the missions celebration, participants will be invited to the WMU booth in the SBC exhibit hall to watch the top state RAs race their cars. The grand finale will be Monday morning at 10:00 a.m.

Early bird registration for the WMU Missions Celebration through April 29 is \$30; regular registration is \$40 through May 23. For more information and to register, visit wmu.com/indy.

Stay the Weekend

On Saturday, June 8, WMU will participate in [Crossover Indianapolis](#) to plant seeds, share the gospel, and give people an opportunity to respond. Registration for Crossover is separate; visit namb.net/crossover to learn more.

On Monday, June 10, at the [SBC Annual Meeting](#), be sure to visit WMU in the SBC Exhibit Hall for a friendly competition on the RA racers racetrack, shop [WorldCrafts](#) at the Women’s Expo, and see the schedule for missions-focused speakers on the CP stage.

JSU student from Nigeria embraced by area church

JACKSONVILLE, AL – It was a rainy Sunday morning, and Olalere Bolaji Funsho had made his way from Nigeria to the Atlanta airport and then by shuttle to Jacksonville State University. He had searched online for a church, but when he arrived on foot no one was there.

“There he is on the corner by that church. It’s pouring down rain. A car pulled up and stopped, and a young man was in the car,” Carol Haynes recalled to The Alabama Baptist. “The man said, ‘Do you need a ride?’”

Funsho told him he was trying to find a church, and the driver said he knew of one down the road, West Side Baptist in Jacksonville. He dropped him off, never to be seen again.

Soaking wet, with scars on his cheeks from a Nigerian birth ritual, Funsho, 34, walked into West Side Baptist with a big smile, just in time for Sunday School. Haynes, whose husband David is pastor, was leading the class for Funsho’s age group along with her husband.

“He loves the Lord,” Haynes said of Funsho. “He has an amazing Scripture background. He knows God’s Word. He’s just an amazing guy.”

Church members warmly welcomed Funsho.

“Though they didn’t know him, they loved him, they embraced him and then they tried to help him. That has never stopped,” Haynes said.

Funsho’s story

Church members quickly learned Funsho’s story: He grew up poor in southern Nigeria, and after his Muslim mother accepted Christ he soon followed in 2009. He earned a college degree there while working several jobs, and aspired to earn a master’s degree in biology in the United States to later serve as a research scientist and help the people in his country.

From 2015 to 2022 he applied to many schools in the United States, but the scholarship he would need never materialized — until Jacksonville State offered a scholarship and an opportunity to work as a graduate assistant.

Funsho had never been out of Nigeria when he left there in December 2022, and when he arrived in Jacksonville he had only a large backpack with his belongings.

“It was the first or second week of December when he got here, and at that point the universities are gone for Christmas,” Haynes recalled. “Jacksonville becomes a very small town when the students go home.”

When he told church members his name, Funsho could see the blank looks on their faces, Haynes recounted, so he told them, "Just call me B.J."

They learned he had secured a small, shared apartment, but had no furniture, not even a bed.

"One of our church members provided a bed. Another one provided a table," Haynes recalled. "We kind of halfway furnished the place where he lived."

Since cars are driven only by the wealthy in Nigeria, B.J. walked everywhere, including to classes and Walmart.

Family time

And since he arrived at Christmastime knowing no one, Haynes invited him to celebrate Christmas with her family.

"I have five kids and a lot of grandkids, so he came into a bustling house of 16 of us and had an American Christmas," she said. "He was just blown away because we do Christmas big at our house. He had never been a part of anything like that.

"He didn't know what cheese was. He didn't know what a strawberry was."

Haynes' son-in-law gave B.J. a bicycle so he could at least ride instead of walking everywhere. Last summer, a church member offered to buy him a used car, but he needed a driver's license.

"My husband gave him driving lessons for several weeks, and he passed his driver's test," Haynes noted.

"He's one of the most grateful people you'll ever meet," she added. "He thanks us constantly. The church people have over and over given to him. I see people slipping him money regularly. He's never asked us for one thing."

A couple of months after he arrived, B.J. learned his wife in Nigeria was expecting their first child, a daughter. He had no way of going back to Nigeria for the baby's birth in June, but he FaceTimed his wife daily throughout the pregnancy, and the church followed along excitedly.

As December approached, church members decided to send him home for Christmas to meet his daughter and visit his wife.

'A precious story'

"It's a precious story," Haynes said. "I wish you could have seen his face when my husband told him. He couldn't believe it; he was just beside himself. He FaceTimed his wife. She thought he was kidding; she didn't even believe him. When she finally realized it was for real, she just

bawled.”

B.J. had never intended to be separated from his family for so long. His plan had been to secure a life in America then have his wife join him, but after the baby was born, when she tried to obtain a visa, it was denied without explanation. She had to wait nine months before applying again.

When B.J. went to Nigeria for three weeks at Christmas, those were the only three Sundays he has missed at West Side Baptist since that rainy December day in 2022, Haynes said. “He’s been faithful. He comes every time.”

West Side recently completed a “prophet’s chamber” in the office area of the church, offering it to B.J. for \$100 a month until he completes his degree in December.

“He was thrilled because it’s really nice,” Haynes reported. “It’s got a bed and bath and a little seating area, perfect for a single guy, and it’s all been redone.”

The story of B.J.’s arrival in America and the reception he received at West Side Baptist “is just one of those things that only God could have orchestrated,” Haynes said.

*This story first [appeared](#) at *The Alabama Baptist*.*

First-Person: Generation next is generation now

I remember hearing the late Michael Catt, long-time pastor of Sherwood Baptist in Albany, Ga., say many times, “Whoever wants the next generation the most will get them.” That quote has resonated with me for years and especially now.

Who comes to mind when you hear or think, “next generation?” Maybe it’s one of the named generations — Gen X, Y, Z, Alpha, and so on. Maybe you think about the kids and students in your own church and community. Maybe you think about your own children and grandchildren.

With those faces and stories in mind, consider Catt’s quote again — whoever wants to reach those young people the most is who will get them. It’s a startling statement that should impact our lives and our leadership.

Every year, surveys and statistics tell us all sorts of things about what people believe and what they prioritize and how they engage or don’t engage with churches. One statistic that has been

consistent for many years now has been our declining effectiveness in reaching the next generation. But it doesn't mean the next generation is not being reached.

Travel and school sports are reaching them. Social media is certainly reaching them. All types of entertainment are reaching them. Iconic celebrities and stars are reaching them. The list goes on.

Whoever will prioritize and intentionally pursue reaching them will get them. The world is doing it. Are we?

In our [Acts 2:17](#) listening sessions and surveys, we heard an overwhelming and consistent passion to reach the next generation.

We heard families and churches are struggling to navigate the ever-increasing challenges their students and kids are facing. We heard a burden to reach the most vulnerable and at-risk children and youth through adoption, foster care and compassion ministry. We heard the challenge of a broken and dried up ministerial pipeline. We simply are not seeing the same numbers of young people answering a call to prepare for ministry as we have in the past.

I'm so glad Tennessee Baptists sounded the alarm and so powerfully declared our desire to reach, disciple and equip the next generation. Several of our [Acts 2:17](#) workgroups are giving concerted, focused effort to dream and develop fresh ways to equip our churches to meet the needs that we heard so clearly from you.

We want there to be no doubt that Tennessee Baptists want to reach the next generation the most! Not only am I encouraged by how you shared with such clarity and passion, I am also encouraged by what I am hearing and seeing in our churches and campus ministries across the state. Churches and campus ministries that are prioritizing the next generation are making an impact and seeing success. At Forest Hills, we are seeing incredible growth from preschool through young adults, especially in college ministry. Here's what we are seeing:

The next generation is hungry for truth. They want to be equipped with truth that is more stable than the passing fads and trends culture continues to present to them. Churches that are reaching the next generation are clearly preaching and teaching the Bible and helping the next generation learn, answer questions, and apply biblical truth to their everyday lives.

The next generation is hungry for community. They are weary of fickle relationships that change on a dime. They are hungry for family because so many have grown up in broken homes or maybe are far away from home. I'm blown away by how many college students are going through our membership process to join our church! Churches that are reaching the next generation are valuing relationships with them, mentoring them, and walking with them as family.

The next generation is hungry for purpose. At times it seems like this might not be true, but what we are seeing and what I am seeing and hearing across the state is that when we show the next generation how they can make a difference in the mission of God, they are “all in.” Churches that are reaching the next generation are giving them places to serve in the church, opportunities to serve on mission trips, and opportunities to serve in Fintern-type roles as they explore potential vocational calling.

I believe God is moving in the next generation and He is moving in our churches and campus ministries. We have before us a huge opportunity to reach, disciple, train and send the next generation, and we are seeing examples of it happening.

Let’s keep pursuing the next generation because whoever wants them the most will get them!

*This piece first [appeared](#) at *The Baptist & Reflector*.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jay Hardwick is the senior pastor of Forest Hills Baptist Church in Nashville, Tn.

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Editor: Tim Patterson - tim@bscm.org

Managing Editor: Jamie Lynn – jamie@bscm.org

Webmaster: OneMissionTV, LLC