

Week of Prayer: Missionaries welcome efforts to push back darkness

by IMB staff

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions in the Southern Baptist Convention is Nov. 28-Dec. 5, with a theme of Together. The theme parallels the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Mission's theme of Let's Advance God's Kingdom Together. The offering provides a significant portion of the IMB's annual budget and 100 percent of the funds go to mission work on the field. Gifts to the Lottie Moon offering are received through local Southern Baptist churches or online at IMB.org/Imco, where there are also resources to help promote the offering. This year's goal is \$185 million.*

The mission strategy of Henderson Hills Baptist Church in Oklahoma was forever changed when Mike, the missions pastor, read a statistic: "5 percent of missions work is done in North Africa and Middle East." After reading this startling fact, Mike knew the Lord was calling him to lead his church in reversing the statistic in their own mission strategy.

"As I read that statistic, it just hit me," Mike says. "I looked at the missions team at [our church] and realized we weren't even doing 5 percent of our missions work among NAME peoples. I knew that had to change."

Otis Neumann*, a missionary with IMB's Northern African and Middle Eastern Affinity, appreciates the advocacy of Mike and his church.

"His vision has inspired others, including Hispanic churches and the Oklahoma Baptist Convention, to make NAME peoples a priority for prayer and missions work," Otis says.

For two years Mike and the missions team prayed about a specific, unreached people group. Along with a team from their church, Mike and his wife traveled to Europe in 2012. They met an IMB missionary who gave them a glimpse into how God was at work among NAME peoples there.

Otis says that coming to Europe first to connect with immigrants from NAME is a good way for churches to develop a love for the people and make them a priority in their mission vision.

"Europe is a modern crossroads of people from Northern Africa and the Middle East," he explains.

"From Europe, SBC churches have the unique opportunity to partner with IMB and share the Gospel with people who come from some of the most difficult to access places in the world."

Two years after their trip to Europe, Mike and his missions team made their first trip into Northern Africa. Since that first trip, the church has sent multiple mission teams every year. They focus on building relationships, prayer walking and meeting community needs.

In February 2020, the church sent a missionary couple from their church to Northern Africa to serve with the IMB. Even during the height of the pandemic when travel was restricted, the church looked for ways to support the work overseas through prayer and encouragement.

Otis and other missionaries pray for more churches to be bold in their mission efforts.

“When churches partner with IMB, we can do more together – and there is so much left to do in Northern Africa and the Middle East,” Otis says.

“Today, there are many people groups living in places where we cannot yet directly engage them with the Gospel, but through prayer, we can press forward into new places and push back the darkness as the light of the gospel is proclaimed to every people group of NAME.”

**Name changed for security*

“A hope deferred”; Jesus is coming

by Tristan Clark

GWINN, MI – “Do not be afraid,” the angel had told them, that fateful night in the fields. But how could they not fear; those shepherds whose peaceful evening had just erupted in a blazing fury of light and song? After all, it was only natural for their knees to quake and their heads to bow in the presence of the divine. Beyond the initial shock of the heavenly revelation, consider the words themselves, pouring forth from the lips of an angelic choir: “Good news of great joy” and “peace on earth!”

Such acclamations are sweet to the ear, but what foreign thoughts and lofty dreams those phrases may have seemed to the bedraggled shepherds. They were poor and ostracized, Rome oppressed their people, the religious leaders—charged by God to teach, intercede, and care for the people—placed burdens on them they couldn’t bear (even as those same leaders fought tooth-and-nail amongst themselves). And what of God? His glory had left, and He had not spoken through a prophet for some 400 years...

Much like today, the world was at war, life was hard, and God seemed distant.

Perhaps as they quested toward Bethlehem the fear of disappointment knocked on the door of their hearts. Could the prophecies finally be coming true? Was the Redemption of Israel at hand? Really?

So many false messiahs had already come and gone. "A hope deferred makes the heart sick," and at times it feels safer to be a cynic. Still, the message had come straight from heaven. And lo...having arrived and turned their eyes from the faithful young mother, and her husband, Joseph, they found that the manger was not empty. In it lay the promised Child. There was Jesus.

In the days that followed the birth of the Son of God, others shared in the shepherds' wonder and joy.

Simeon, a righteous and devout man, aged though he was, had banked on God's promise that He would see the LORD's Christ, and the day came when his wizened, old hands held the One he'd long hoped to meet.

Likewise, Anna, a prophetess and widow who spent her days and nights in prayer and fasting in the temple of God, laid eyes upon the Lord. He was a baby, and she was old, but her hopes were fulfilled before her dying day. Like many of us, Simeon and Anna waited, and waited, and waited, as the days which they faithfully hoped for seemed so far away. But God was faithful, and their hopes were not disappointed.

The boy grew, and, over time, the mercy of God was revealed in His works of compassion. God's holiness was made manifest in His life and teaching. The power of God was at work in His miracles. And, one day, the love of God dripped from His broken, pierced body. But that day was not the last day. No...He rose.

Jesus had prophesied his own death, burial, and resurrection, and Jesus made good on His word.

Brothers and sisters, He'll do it again.

His words did not disappoint Him, and His promise will not disappoint us.

The world may rage, and bitter winds may bite, but the hearths of our hearts ought to blaze with the light of hope and expectation. The same Jesus who shepherds welcomed, Simeon blessed, and Anna praised, is coming back to make all things right. Our Joy is rooted in a hope that will not disappoint. Our hearts may groan, but our prayers are heard. And this is the Christian's joy at Christmas:

He is coming.

He IS coming.

HE IS COMING.

For us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tristan Clark is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Gwinn, Michigan. He and his beautiful wife, Jodi, love Jesus because He first loved them. They have been married for 10 years and have five wild children, and it's all of God's grace.

No shortage on Christmas' best gift

by Danisse Abberger

ZEELAND, MI – I love nothing more than to open up my Instagram page and watch the stories and posts of my favorite fashion bloggers. I follow girls that are about my height and size and they let me know what's new at stores and what's on sale. The bloggers even have try-on posts where they describe the article of clothing and how it fits and feels. Better yet, they usually have a link that I can click to purchase the item from the comfort of my own home! They do all the work for me! As a busy mom of 4 and pastor's wife, it's been a game changer because I don't always have the time to go shopping and try on clothing. My husband may not think it's a Godsend, but I sure do!

Mid October, I saw a trend that troubled me. Many of these bloggers were posting Christmas gift links early because they said that many of the items were going to be hard to find closer to December. The result of the pandemic were fewer products made over the past year, and half and cargo ships stuck at sea due to labor shortages. The bloggers were urging followers that if they needed an item for Christmas, they needed to buy early so that they could have it in time. They seemed to insinuate that your Christmas may be ruined if you were not able to fulfill your families' wish list. I found this thinking so disheartening.

As a people we have forgotten what we are celebrating. As nice as it sounds, Christmas is not about family and friends. It's not about Santa Claus. It's not about a naughty or nice list. It's

about the birth of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our God sent His one and only Son on Earth for us. Jesus dwelt among us and felt every feeling we have felt. Jesus experienced what we have experienced. "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering..." Isaiah 53:4. He paid the ultimate price and died for us so that we can have the gift of eternal life. "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means, "God with us").

He is with us! Not only can we go to heaven but we were also given the Holy Spirit. Our God in His infinite wisdom knew that not only did we need saving, but we needed access to Him 24/7. We were given such a gift that is something to truly celebrate!

So maybe it's not so bad that we won't be able to find that special gift in the store? The lockdowns were not fun, and were very inconvenient for many families. But one nice thing from the lockdowns was that we were given the gift of time. Families were able to slow down and spend time together like never before. We were able to reevaluate and take notice of how busy our lives had become and take note of what really matters.

Perhaps this supply shortage at Christmas can do the same. Families will stop and reflect on what's the real reason we celebrate. Parents will be given the opportunity to teach their children that gifts are nice, but we have been given the best gift of all. It's not a gift that could get stuck out at sea on a ship, and it's not a gift that will ever run out. It's our Savior. It's our Jesus. It's our Immanuel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Danisse Abberger is a church planter's wife (Hope Church in Zeeland, MI) and a mother of 4. Her favorite pastime is going to the beach with her family.

“Every Church Thriving” BSCM holds 64th Annual Meeting

by Jamie Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – The 2021 Baptist State Convention of Michigan's annual meeting is in the books.

The 64th annual meeting was hosted at Mile City Church in Plymouth on Nov 5th. The theme for this year's meeting was **“500 churches by 2025- Every Church Thriving”**. 157 messengers and guests were present representing 58 churches from the state's 297 churches.

BSCM staff worked with Will Mancini's team in what they're calling Denominee. This year's meeting looked differently than before with an emphasis on giving value to the representatives who came from churches all over the state. There was a buzz of excitement from the moment people lined up to register. (It may have been from the Send Network Michigan backpack giveaways and all the coffee and Looney Bakery donuts being served!)

There were two main thrusts to this year's meeting: Be The Church (Church Strengthening) and Send Network Michigan (Church Starting and Sending). BSCM Executive Director, Tim Patterson, even had a Harley motorcycle brought in with twin cylinders to illustrate our two-prong approach. (We talked him out of riding it up on the stage!) Pastor Tim shared a message of vision and unity over the pastors, church leaders and representatives.

The Be The Church morning session was filled with strengthening stories (Ed Emmerling and Jason Loewen), testimonies (Chip Faulkner and Billy Walker) and video reports from State Ministry Directors (Mike Durbin, Evangelism; Pastor Coye Bouyer, Diversity Ambassador and Mick Schatz, Bambi Lake Director).

Pastor Joel Wayne of Chapel Pointe Church in Hudsonville brought a powerful word that challenged churches to Be The Church that God had called them to be. It includes a partnership strategy which draws pastors and leaders into cohorts to strengthen them. There are five "Be The Church" cohorts already meeting across Michigan. Pastors and church leader's hearts were filled with emotion and courage as the words poured over them.

The Convergent Church band from Owosso, led the gathering through soul-touching hymns and songs of worship.

BSCM President, Roy Henry, led the business of the convention. It included State Director video reports by Sue Hodnett, Women's Ministry/WMU; Mike Wigle, MI Southern Baptist Foundation; and Bob Kiger, MI Disaster Relief. Our current Officers were all re-elected for a second term: President Roy Henry, 1st VP Ed Emmerling, 2nd VP Roland Caldwell Sr, Recording Secretary Jerome Taylor and Assistant Recording Secretary Michele White. Pastor Roy Henry gave a potent sermon on being bold as a church to spread the Gospel of Christ.

In addition to re-electing officers to second terms, the BSCM passed a 5 percent increase to its Cooperative Program giving, and approved a \$2,279,793 budget. Patterson said this annual meeting reduced business time to only what was necessary to allow more time for inspiration and encouragement.

The SEND Network afternoon session kicked off with Matt Thompson, MI Church Planting Catalyst, passionately sharing about Church Planting Residencies, and how any church can be a part of the process. Tony Lynn, Director of Missions, and Wayne Parker, Send Detroit Missionary, enthusiastically testified about the amazing things that God is doing in Detroit and across Michigan in the area of church starting! They shared how God continued to spread His Kingdom in Michigan even during the post pandemic time. Pastors Ken Nether and Josh Tovey gave their stories of challenges and victories as God led them to start multiplying churches. Dean Fulks, Send Network Ohio Valley Regional Director and Pastor of Lifepoint Church, Lewis Center Ohio, brought the message stirring the everyone to do more in following, serving and sharing Christ. Letting it permeate all of life, community and the world.

As they left, the faces of the people were encouraged and ready to go back to their church field with renewed strength and passion. They looked ready to strive to share the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ with everyone around us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie loves working for the Michigan churches at the State Convention Office. She is married to Dr. Tony Lynn, State Director of Missions and enthusiastic follower of Jesus Christ. They have 3 married children and 9 amazing grandchildren.

Barking dogs

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – Many years ago, the Patterson household possessed two dogs and one cat. Or should I say they possessed us?

Our oldest dog, TEX, was given to us just after we moved to Florida by a friend in our church. At this particular time, he had been with us for more than eight years, while our newest canine addition was still learning the layout of the land. NAPPY was the name that came with the short four-legged mop that was claiming the Patterson's as family. She was a Yorkie but only in body. Inside she was a Great Dane with an attitude. If your name was NAPPY, you would have an attitude too!

TEX on the other hand was a big black Lab-Shepherd mix that would scare the willies out of you with his yellow eyes and ominous bark. But the fact of the matter was that he was a big baby. A genuine lap dog. And yet he was a great watchdog and was very protective of his domain. He survived several car wrecks where he left the scene of the accident with less damage to him than the automobile that was involved.

Our cat had been with us for several years as well, and was the same midnight color as TEX. The major difference between her and TEX, besides being of a different species, was that she did not have a loving disposition. In fact, she didn't like anyone but me, and that was only because I fed her. Or it could have been because I was the one that took her in after someone dropped her off at the church.

Most of us believe that cats and dogs are not compatible, but for the most part TEX and PRISSY got along just fine, as long as TEX stayed out of her way. Now NAPPY and PRISSY was all-together a different matter. A bad attitude has a way of driving a wedge between relationships.

The cat was fat, lazy and unconcerned with few things but sleeping and eating. She usually stayed perched on the back of the sofa or on an elevated place on the porch where she could oversee and direct the affairs of the house.

TEX didn't stay in any one place very long at all. He was usually yapping, barking and terrorizing every squirrel in the county. He was also a great tormentor of "other" cats.

With all the noise and racket our dog made, the cat maintained her position. She was totally unconcerned with the barking of the dogs. The cat knew that she could "take out" both dogs with one swipe, but for some odd reason she chose not to. She just found herself a higher place to rest and ignored that yappy NAPPY. Could it be that she knew that it wouldn't last forever and that soon everything would be at peace?

In the midst of today's "wild west social media", I sometimes feel like my old cat, and that I have been treed by the dogs of this world. All the noise they make in their immoral protests, the bantering for their rights to have no social controls are barked at me and the rest of society almost endlessly. Their vile and abusive attitude for evangelical Christianity is without question. If it is not the ACLU, it is the Americans for the Separation of Church and State trying to force the presence or even the mention of God from the public square. They are adamant that we do not have "freedom of religion but freedom from religion."

Most of them remind me of a pack of stray dogs roaming about looking for their next victim. Turning over the filthy garbage cans of the indecent discards of corrupt humanity and spreading its abhorrent contents across our communities. They do so with the willing and willful help of most forms of media and those that control it.

The filth that now covers the passageways of our cities because of these hellish hounds makes it almost impossible to walk at times and that is why we must seek higher ground. We do not seek higher ground by running from this world but running to our Lord. That is why we must have faith in the "Most High" and believe that He will lift us up.

Taking the Higher Ground is a choice. It is choosing to be kind and willing to show more grace than is deserved. It means not entering into the "cat and dog fights" that are all around us but by staying elevated from the fray.

Garrison Keillor, the former host of the National Public Radio program, "A Prairie Home Companion", and author of several best selling books was quoted in Leadership magazine. "A little faith will see you through. What else will do except faith in such a cynical, corrupt time? When the country goes temporarily to the dogs, cats must learn to be circumspect, walk on fences, sleep in trees, and have faith that all this woofing is not the last word."

During this wonderful season of Christmas, may I encourage you to take the high ground and enter into His peace. A peace that goes beyond all understanding.

My friends, don't let the dogs of this world bother you too much. Their barking will cease and we will enter into His final and everlasting peace. Besides, most of those barking dogs are headed for the pound anyway.

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.

Save Scrooge

by Dr Tony L Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol* is a story about the possibility of redemption. In the moving drama, we see the contrast of an isolated, stingy Ebenezer Scrooge against his employee, the loving, hopeful Bob Cratchit. Cratchit's warmth is infectious invading his family members and the community, whereas Scrooge's grumpiness makes everyone recoil out of fear of being hurt by the miserable, complaining miser.

Scrooge's transformation of redemption only occurs after a visit from the ghost of a former business partner, followed by the ghosts of Christmas past, Christmas present, and Christmas future, during Scrooge's restless Christmas Eve at home. Visiting the scenes of his life revealed the importance of relationships, kindness, and generosity to Scrooge, so the next morning on Christmas Day Scrooge sets out displaying the obvious change in his outlook and pursuit in life. People are shocked, but rapidly embrace the newborn, compassionate Scrooge.

In case anyone would miss the point of the source of all things worthwhile, Bob Cratchit's son, Tiny Tim, though sick and feeble utters the famous words, "God bless us, everyone," in the closing scene of the story. Author Charles Dickens even repeats the phrase as the closing words of his manuscript. In essence, author Dickens is saying "God bless us, everyone" whether we are rich or poor, feeble or well, small or mighty. God bless us, everyone! Let's act like the Lord in all our interactions with everyone.

This Christmas Season we have an opportunity to display our "Tiny Tim" outlook on life whether life is perfect or not. We can lead others toward redemption in Christ by celebrating God becoming man so that we might know Him more.

Here are some practical ideas.

1. Mixed Party

Bring the skeptic, non-believing “Scrooges” to a fun, delicious December Christmas party in your house along with some Christ-followers. Mix them, 1 to 1. Don’t make the night religious. Just let your Christian friends hang with the unbelievers with whom you share life and let them discover some commonalities. You’ll hear someone say, “My children and your children attend the same school.” Another will say, “I work there too, but in a different department.”

When those who yet don’t know Christ discover that believers-in-Christ live normal lives being employed, taking their kids to sporting events, and have favorite restaurants, they will let their guards down and become friends with your friends. The only time you bring up the “religious” part is when everyone is leaving for home. Cue your church friends to say happily, “See you at church for Christmas Eve service. I can’t wait.” Let your church friends know that they have your permission to invite your unchurched friends, in a personal meaningful way to the big upcoming church service, to even sit with them. It will mean the world to those unfamiliar with church.

After the mixed party, the Scrooges will feel confident that they have more friends at your church. Their fear of attending will be replaced with a feeling of belonging. That feeling of belonging usually moves toward believing in and behaving like Christ.

2. Shame Invite

If you’re fortunate enough to have children or grandchildren in Christmas plays or musicals at your church meeting place shame those “Scrooges” who have put off coming to church with you by saying something like, “Charlie, you keep saying you will come to church with me, but you haven’t. Would you come to hear my daughter Rachel sing? It would mean the world to her just to know that you are there. She babysits your kids, so why don’t you bring the entire family and afterwards we can circle back to my house for some Christmas desserts.” Some people just need to get over the “roof will fall in” if I attend church with you, so feel free to maximize the value of your little ones’ influence over adults who need Christ.

3. Gift Your Story

Pick-up something that your “Scrooge” neighbor, friend, coworker, or family member would enjoy for Christmas. It doesn’t have to be expensive, just something they would enjoy. The real gift is the personal letter you will write and put in with the gift card, tool, or baked-good.

You can write starting off with something like this phrase, “I am so grateful for your place in my life and thrilled to give you this gift; but I just wanted to let you know about the greatest gift I ever received.” Then using your own words and your way explain your journey on how you came to discover Christ as your Savior.

If you need an outline:

1. Share about your life before Christ.
2. Share about how your life is now that you follow Him.
3. What you are looking forward to in the future because you are following Christ?

Did you see what I did there? I replaced the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future with those three parts of your personal salvation. The interactions of God and you, in your personal story, is far more helpful than fictional ghosts. By the way, keep the letter to 2-3 pages maximum.

I hope you found one or two of those ideas helpful. I hope even more that you will follow-up and accomplish one of them. I once was a Scrooge. Mom started me in church during the seventies. It was the teenagers who made me feel comfortable at church. It was the men who greeted me by name that made me feel valued . . . so I kept going until one of the messages from the pastor was as clear as could be, I needed to follow Christ!

That gift of salvation is something I wish for the almost ten million people living within the state of Michigan.

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.

An Elijah Christmas

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – “I have had enough!” These are the words of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19 as he runs from Jezebel after the spiritual showdown on Mt. Carmel between the prophets of Baal and God. It was a moment that left the people on their faces confessing, “The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God.” It was also the beginning of a moment that led to a downward spiral in Elijah’s life.

Elijah experiences a difficult season in his life. He reaches a point where he is emotionally distressed, relationally disconnected, physically drained, and intellectually deceived. He goes from faithful prophet of the living God in one chapter to a man who’s barely a silhouette of who

he once was in the next. He's depleted and on a path leading to despair. He gets to the point where he actually asks God to take his life.

False expectations and struggles can leave us feeling overwhelmed, alone, exhausted, confused, and depressed. The last two years have stressed each of us to one degree or another. COVID-19, social unrest, racial injustice, political dysfunction, supply shortages and rising inflation are just some of the pressures adding to life's stress.

At the lowest point in his life, Elijah experiences a life altering encounter with God that changes everything. God graciously speaks to him in a still, small voice - a barely audible, breathless whisper. It's a quiet moment with God that changes the conversation and gives Elijah hope for the future.

It goes from Elijah saying, "take my life," to him returning the way he came with God given assignments that transform his life and ministry. God continues Elijah's story by giving him a wider glimpse of redemption's story. God helps him see beyond himself to a successor who will accelerate Kingdom movement, to a school of the prophets, to the anointing of kings and ultimately to that moment in the fullness of time when the Gospel will be birthed in the person of Jesus. An encounter with God changes everything and gives him hope for the future.

Elijah is not one of the traditional characters of Christmas, but his story has much to teach as we enter what many call the "most wonderful time of the year." Christmas is filled with decorations, dinners, music, and gifts. It's a wonderful time, but not for everyone. Some are entering this season with deep losses and disappointments. Christmas will be hard.

While the people of God were celebrating renewed faith after the events on Mt. Caramel, Elijah was in a dark place. Perhaps that describes you this holiday season. It's hard, but it will not last forever.

Elijah was only one encounter with God away from new hope. Elijah was only **ONE** encounter with **GOD** away from new **HOPE**. God was there for Elijah and He's there for you. A breathless whisper from God in a dark, lonely place started Elijah's renewal. It gave him the strength to put one foot in front of the other and start walking away from the darkness.

Christmas is the ultimate celebration that God is with us - that He is Immanuel. The cries of baby Jesus that first Christmas are a declaration that God is for us. That He is for you. Christmas is not about what is happening around us. It's about what is happening in us. Christ in you. The Hope of Glory.

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.

“Patiently Persevering with People”

by Coye Bouyer

LANSING, MI – Jesus teaches, “*if someone slaps you on the cheek, turn the other to them also*” (Matt. 5:39-40). Paul says we are to “*bless those who persecute us, to never pay back evil for evil to anyone and not to take revenge; rather if our enemy is hungry feed them, if they are thirsty to give them a drink*” (Rom. 12:14,17,19-20).

In other words, Paul echoes Jesus’ words for us to practice the spiritual discipline of *turning the other cheek* or to *patiently persevere with people*. For clarity purposes, it is necessary to mention that Paul nor Jesus are addressing times of war or the protection of another. Rather both illuminate one’s response when being personally attacked by another. Both admonish us NOT to retaliate or seek revenge.

But how in the world are we supposed to overcome physical abuse, verbal assaults or actions from others who seek to do us harm? For not only do such actions hurt, they often leave us in physical pain or psychological and emotional instability. While Jesus’ statement is direct, Paul gives more insight to the practice and application of ‘*turning the other cheek.*’

Paul says, “*we are to overcome evil, with good*” (Romans 12:21). Paul makes it plain that the only way to practice ‘*turning the other cheek,*’ is to commit to a practice of doing good, even to one’s enemies.

Since doing good is not something that just happens, Paul gives us practical principles to live by to assist us in the execution ‘*turning the other cheek.*’ Paul says, bless instead of curse; never pay back evil for evil (wrong for wrong or offense for offense); Furthermore, he instructs us to live at peace, when possible, with everyone (Rom. 12:14,17,19-20).

Biblical responses like this take time, patience, and practice. Any successful athlete, actor or professional would agree that they did not get to the heights of their career without putting in long hours of practice, persistently trying to get it right. In the same way, you and I will never ‘*overcome evil with good,*’ if we don’t first spend much time practicing the spiritual discipline of patience with people, not returning wrong for wrong. To better deal with larger or more public attacks appropriately, we must first practice and perform in private; learning how to overcome the smaller, less offensive acts of others as it prepares us for greater and even more public execution of this biblical principle.

Secondly, we must learn how to take heed to Paul’s words, “*Beloved leave room for the wrath of God.*” In short, instead of executing our own judgement and consequences for being wronged, we let the LORD decide a person’s punishment. Wow, this is nothing short of a miracle, as the human heart not only desires to make sure our wrongs are made right, but we tend to want someone to suffer because they have offended us.

But what if we took to heart Jesus' words to turn the other cheek; what if we took seriously the idea of surrendering our imbalanced sense of justice for God's perfect sense of justice? You see too often we vindicate ourselves because we want Justice, and we want it now. We want the offender to deal with the consequences of offending us. But both Jesus and Paul are asking us to appeal to a different type of justice. A justice that says, I am okay with God deciding the fate of the one who has offended me, even if that means their punishment is one of grace and mercy and not vindication and wrath.

Isn't this what happened to us on the Cross? Didn't we offend the God of the universe? Don't we deserve the penalty and consequence for our actions? After all, we are guilty, aren't we? While it is true that God's justice often ends with His wrath it is also true that it always starts with His grace and mercy.

Finally, Jesus' and Pauls' teaching on this subject is critical to every believer because it teaches us to be more like our Lord. It reminds us of the mercy we should demonstrate because of the mercy we have received. The biblical philosophy to *'turn the other cheek'* or *'patiently persevering with people'* can be experienced if we are willing to make the decision to commit to doing good, even to those who do evil against us.

Furthermore, this approach is made easier when we let God be both judge and vindicator not just for our lives, but also over our lives. So go forth my brothers and sisters practicing the spiritual discipline of *'turning the other cheek,' 'patiently persevering with people'* as we *'overcome evil with good.'*

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.

Good news, great joy!

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Greetings from Bambi Lake Retreat and Conference Center and Merry Christmas! As I am writing this the snow is lightly falling and there is a quiet hush and calm over

all the camp. I imagine it is much like the night (no snow or course) the shepherds were gathered around a fire swapping sheep herding stories and keeping watch over the sheep.

This is one of my favorite scenes in the Christmas story. The gospel of Luke records it like this – “In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:8-11.

Now I don't know about you, but I have been in a field at night when all you can see and hear is the fire and the wood crackin' and every sensory receptor in your body is on full alert. If an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared before me I'm sure I would have lost full control of my faculties and died right on the spot. At best I would have “freaked out” like the shepherds and been paralyzed in fear. Wow! What an entrance! However, imagine the relief when this glorious angel said, “Do not be afraid; for behold I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people...”.

I love the fact that God the Father chose lowly shepherds to be the first hearers of this Heavenly announcement. This message of hope was not restricted to the religious elite, socially favored, or financially secure. It did not single out only those who dressed to impress or looked the prettiest. This clarion call did not resound for those of a particular ethnicity, skin color, privileged background or ancestry.

THE GOOD NEWS AND GREAT JOY OF JESUS CHRIST WAS ANNOUNCED FOR ALL PEOPLE! HE WHO IS EVERYTHING CAME FOR EVERYONE! All people have been invited to join in and celebrate Christmas. Right from the beginning of our Saviors life here on earth we witness the banner of love for all being heralded across the sky. We hear the heart of a loving heavenly Father calling out to His creation declaring a provision of hope and redemption through His son, Jesus.

As Christians we bear the responsibility of continuously declaring this Good News and Great Joy. In a world full of selfishness, fear, confusion, and sadness we have Good News and Joy to bring to those around us. In a culture filled with noise and hopeless messages, the Gospel is the only announcement loud and powerful enough to stop people in their tracks and captivate their hearts and minds with a love and joy that changes everything.

Celebrate Christmas by sharing the Good News and Great Joy of Jesus Christ!

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.

Send Network churches make up one quarter of Outreach Magazine's reproducing churches list

by Tobin Perry

LAS VEGAS, NV (BP) – When Heiden Ratner started WALK Church in Las Vegas, he had an ideal model for reproduction in his sending church. Las Vegas' Hope Church has started more than 60 churches since its 2001 founding.

Ratner served as an apprentice at Hope Church before planting WALK Church in 2014.

"It was in that season where I got to learn under Pastor Vance Pitman about the kingdom of God and how the kingdom of God is so much bigger than just one church," said Ratner, who also serves as the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) city missionary for Las Vegas. "He showed me that it's going to be churches planting churches that actually reaches the city. That shifted our thinking. We didn't come to start something. We came to be a part of something God was already doing in Las Vegas."

Ratner and WALK Church clearly learned what Pitman taught. Since its launch in 2014, WALK has planted two churches and supported another eight in just seven years. *Outreach Magazine* recently recognized the church as one of its [100 Reproducing Churches](#).

At least a quarter of the magazine's list of reproducing churches came from Send Network, a Southern Baptist network of churches committed to reproducible church planting. Send Network churches include both long-standing, established churches and relatively young church plants.

The list is one of three published in the magazine's September/October issue. The magazine also highlighted the fastest-growing and largest-participating churches. *Outreach Magazine* partners with Lifeway Research to create the three lists.

"It's easy to focus on larger churches, but we are committed to looking at churches that plant churches," said Ed Stetzer, editor-in-chief of *Outreach Magazine*. "We know that church planting, done well, is about reaching people. We know statistically that new churches reach more than established churches. So, at *Outreach Magazine*, we want to celebrate churches reaching people – and you can't do that without church planting!"

Noah Oldham, whose St. Louis church, August Gate, appears on the list, said reproduction is a critical part of NAMB's strategy to reach North America.

"It's the task Southern Baptists have given us," said Oldham, who serves as senior director of church planter deployment with Send Network. "We have the collective calling of taking the Gospel to every man, woman, girl and boy in North America. We believe that happens not only

in evangelism, not only through compassion ministries like Send Relief, but it happens through church planting. It is healthy churches planting healthy churches. Great Commission churches planting Great Commission churches.”

Oldham said August Gate has served as the sending church for six new plants in its first 12 years of ministry and helped to financially support another 12 plants. Even the name August Gate symbolizes the church’s commitment to planting new churches. August, Oldham says, is the month when farmers prepare for harvest, and St. Louis has long been known as the Gateway City.

“If you put those two things together, you get harvest St. Louis,” Oldham said. “So, we gave it that name because we wanted, from the very beginning, every time someone asked, ‘Hey, what’s your church about? What’s the name about?’, we could tell them God called us not just to plant a church, but to plant a church that would plant many churches.”

Shades Mountain Baptist Church, an established church founded in 1910 and a Send Network church in Birmingham, Ala., also made the Outreach 100 list. The church has served as the sending church for two church plants and has supported 16 church plants in strategic cities throughout North America.

A little more than two decades ago, recently retired Pastor Danny Wood began raising the value of missions and church planting through a five-day missions conference that introduced the congregation to church planters from around North America. Church planting became a part of the church’s fabric as the congregation learned to love, care for and resource church-planting missionaries.

“The church has grasped the conviction that multiplication is a biblical mandate,” said Tim Wheat, Shades Mountain’s missions pastor. “We are not only called to multiply disciples but to multiply leaders and multiply churches. As a living entity, the church follows the path of life of all living things. Things that are alive are to reproduce things that are alive, of like nature, so therefore, we have sought to make support and engagement with church planting a priority.”

The church leverages its Sunday School system and small groups to “reproduce disciples” and uses Send Network’s Multiplication Pipeline to reproduce “missional leaders.” Both are key elements to its church-planting strategy.

Church That Matters, another Southern Baptist church on the *Outreach* list, credits Send Network for helping to spur even greater multiplication efforts within the church. Oklahoma and Send Network announced a partnership in August 2021 to form Send Network Oklahoma.

“Send Network jumping into Oklahoma has been a game-changer in terms of the tools available through them to support the multiplication taking place,” said Rusty Gunn, pastor of Church That Matters, who also serves as a church-planting catalyst in the state. “It has inspired us. I was driving a lot of the church planting in our first eight to 10 years. This is really giving us a

shift to a much larger involvement, belief and buy-in from other people in our church. It has given us a framework, something we can latch onto to continue to discover, develop and deploy more and more planters.”

Send Network’s [Multiplication Pipeline](#) is a free resource that is designed to help churches reproduce by discovering, developing and deploying its members to help start new churches throughout North America.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tobin Perry is a writer living in Evansville, Ind.

A few reasons to be grateful

by Dr. David Thompson

NASHVILLE, TN – There is one thing—that everyone can give.... from the penniless pauper to the wealthiest magnate—that one thing is “Thanks”! ‘Tis the season for some but ‘tis always the season for one that knows God. Followers of Jesus should always and forever be the most grateful folk this side of heaven. Some may have more “stuff” or be more “noticed” or possess more talent—ahh but nobody should be better at giving thanks—than you.

Here are a few of the ten million reasons you should be grateful:

1. **You are completely and unequivocally and forever—“Forgiven”**. My favorite author C.S.Lewis puts it so succinctly, “to be a Christian is to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you”!! WOW! Chew on that.
2. **You can choose and control little—but you can always control your level of thanksgiving**. “We either make ourselves miserable or we make ourselves strong—the amount of work is the same” so says Carlos Castaneda. Is that true? Is he right? Two words—“YOU BET”! Bet you didn’t know it takes twice as many muscles to frown as it does to smile. A grateful heart cannot help but smile.
3. **You have a vehicle in gratitude that propels you “UP”**. The great motivator Dale Carnegie taught this lesson often—says he, “develop success from failure.... discouragement and failure are two of the biggest stepping stones of success“. I submit to you that the only way that is true (and it is true), is if you have an attitude of gratitude for all the good God is doing in you. Thanksgiving shoots

you out of where you are to exactly where our Lord wants you to be.

4. **You genuinely are able to “Love “more and be “loved” when thankful.** “When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves “William Arthur Ward points out. You see true love is always promoting others—not self. Is it even remotely possible to do that with an ungrateful spirit? NO! The Jewish hymn scribe was correct—“It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord... and to sing praises to your name... O Most High” (Psalm 92).
5. **You can see the invisible when giving thanks!** Before he was ever famous on the world’s stage, he was just a fiery Baptist preacher—and he preached, “you don’t have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step.” Reverend M.L.King lived it—What’s that have to do with being thankful? Everything! If you have never thanked God for something in advance—just try it! Ultimately, the Lord does what the Lord wills to do; however, your own personal gratitude has everything to do with how you experience each day—and eventually how you love Jesus.
6. **You can accomplish great things when you are a grateful person.** Norman Vincent Peale noted, “There is real magic in enthusiasm. It spells the difference between mediocrity and accomplishment”. You my dear friend were put here on earth to accomplish something that only you can and that for the glory of God. The only way to rightfully do that is to first accept the mantle of responsibility of complete and utter thanksgiving to God with all your heart.

Just try it for 30 days and I promise you your life will never be the same. And all those around you will also be changed into grateful beings. Only once does the apostle Paul in his final letter say these emphatic words, “this is the will of God, that in everything you give thanks“! You are welcome—says The Lord!

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.

Christmas joy

by Jay Anderson

MONROE, MI – This Christmas season, we will all certainly sing what can rightly be called “an accidental song for the season.” *Joy to the World* is among the most beloved Christmas hymns ever written by one of the most blessed hymn writers to ever live. However, when Isaac Watts published this hymn in 1719, he did not intend for it to point to the first advent (coming) of the Lord. Rather, Watts intended to reflect the truth of Psalm 98 and thus, he wrote this hymn to point to the joy of the second advent of the Lord...the time when the earth will permanently receive her King...the time when all will recognize that the Savior reigns...the time when the curse of sin is no more...the time when the world finally experiences the truth and grace of His rule.

So, should we sing *Joy to the World* during the Christmas season when Isaac Watts was writing about the second advent? Absolutely! In fact, at the beginning of Jesus’ first advent, the angel announced, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). *Joy to the World* may be an accidental song for the season but it is perfectly fitting because that is the good news that was proclaimed and celebrated by the heavenly host!

Let us never forget that our joy in looking forward to the second advent of King Jesus is grounded in the joy of His first advent as the Savior. Without the first advent, there would be no good news. We would all remain dead in our sins and we would all continue to dwell under the just wrath of God (John 3:36; Ephesians 2:1-2). However, there is good news of great joy because God became man in order to save sinners (Matthew 1:18-24; Galatians 4:4-5)!

The angelic announcement is the most joy-filled news ever proclaimed; but surprisingly, it came first to shepherds. They were generally poor and powerless. They were often uneducated and ceremonially unclean. Their names are not even recorded in the biblical record. And yet, the good news of great joy was for them as well. The Savior has come for all people regardless of nationality or political position or social standing or ethnicity or historical setting. The Savior came to pay the penalty for sin for people from every nation, all tribes and peoples and languages (Revelation 7:9-10)!

Certainly, let us sing *Joy to the World* during the Christmas season because the Savior has come for all people. However, perhaps we should also remember to sing *Joy to the World* during every season because the Savior is coming again!

Grace and Peace,

Jay

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jay Anderson serves as Lead Pastor at CrossPointe Church in Monroe, Michigan. Jay and his wife, Kristie, are blessed with four children (Noel, Deacon, Anna, Selah). Prior to coming to

Michigan in November 2016, the Andersons served as church planters in Iowa and cross-cultural workers in East Asia.

Finding peace in God's presence

by Karen Blanchard

SHELBY TOWNSHIP, MI – We are now in the middle of the holiday season. When kids think about Christmastime, they think of presents, time out of school, and all the fun things they get to do. There is a wonder that comes along with Christmas. As adults, we may feel that way some, but oftentimes the holidays can bring anxiety.

We start creating lists, right?

Lists of items we have to bake.

Lists of presents we need to buy.

Lists of the parties or events that we have to attend.

We feel pressure to find time to fit holiday obligations into our already busy schedules. The pressure leads to feelings of being overwhelmed, which then robs us of our peace.

One of my favorite verses during the holiday season is Isaiah 9:6...

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus is our Prince of Peace. He is where we get our peace from. When we are in a busy season of life, such as the holiday season, it is so easy to rush through our time with God and move on to the tasks of the day. However, when we do this, we will not be filled with all we need to handle the situations we will face. This holiday season, I want to encourage you to find time to REST in Christ. This isn't the type of rest we typically think of such as a nap, a massage, or lounging on the couch watching a Hallmark Christmas movie or a sports game. No, this type of rest is for our souls.

Psalm 61:2 says, *My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him.*

The following acrostic is a great way to remember how to **REST** in Christ.

R – Resist the desire to be in control.

Trust that God is working in your life and surrender your plans to him.

Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe. – Proverbs 28:26

E- Escape to a quiet place to be alone with God.

Jesus modeled this to us several times in the Bible. After a long day of ministry, Jesus told his disciples they needed to get away to a quiet place.

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” – Mark 6:30 – 31

S – Sit, be still, and listen to God’s voice.

Once you have found that place to escape, now it is time to be quiet, sit before the Lord, and listen for his voice.

“Be still and know that I am God.” – Psalm 46:10

T – Talk to God.

After you have escaped to a quiet place and taken time to be still and listen, then God wants you to talk to Him. In this place, I am not referring to praying down a long list of prayer requests, even though you should do that. This is the time where you pour out your heart to God. Share with him the things you are struggling with as well as your desires and your dreams.

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:6-7

When you take the time to REST in Christ, the overwhelmed feelings that you were carrying are then transferred to Him. In return, God will give you the peace your soul craves. Nothing else in the world can do this! It is only when you spend time in God’s presence that you find his peace. How would your attitude change this holiday season if you built in time to REST in Christ? It makes all the difference!

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!

What gives you the greatest joy at Christmas?

by Harold Raymond

DUNDEE, MI – “Christmas is the greatest holiday of the year! Merry Christmas! Yes!!! Elves, flying reindeer, chimney arrivals, Santa Claus, and all that candy and presents! Wow, I can hardly wait!”

“Yes??? Wait a minute. Isn’t there way more to Christmas than all those things?”

“Oh, yeah. Well, sure! We get together with our families and have turkey dinners with all the trimmings, and sometimes we even get some special gifts after we eat! Christmas is incredible! I’m so excited! How many more days till Santa comes?”

“Santa???”

“Oh, wait, yeah. Now I remember, ah, Jesus was born on Christmas, too . . . right?”

Be honest now, Pastors. Have you ever struggled convincing people that Jesus really is the reason for the season? Are people in your church more excited about Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer or the glory and wonder of God Almighty becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ?

What really gives you the most joy at Christmas?

What really gives your church the most joy?

Is it the secular fairy tales or the Living Christ?

I first faced this Christmas question when I was just eight years old. One of my friends at school told me there was no real Santa Claus. Talk about taking the joy out of my Christmas! After thinking about my friend’s denials, I went home and asked my mom if Santa Claus was real. She said, “Of course!” But I trapped her when I answered, “Well how does Santa get the presents under our Christmas tree? We don’t even have a fireplace for him to come down!”

The joy in my mom’s eyes disappeared and I knew I had been lied to. My own mom and dad had lied to me!

You might think Christmas was ruined forever for me at this point, but the Lord worked a miracle for me. The next day in school one of my other friends heard I had learned the truth about Christmas, but he told me there was something way better than Santa. He actually witnessed to me. He told me about Jesus and about how great He was. I was so shocked at the joy I heard in my eight-year-old friend that it gave me hope.

Telling people that Santa was real, lived at the North Pole, and delivered presents to everyone all around the world was a lie. But Jesus was real, the great God and Savior! My friend actually shared Titus 2:13 with me. Talk about a miracle!

Talk about joy! Knowing Jesus personally is way better than seeing a little kid yelling with excitement because he got the gift he wanted from “Santa!” Experiencing the true joy of Christmas is for eternity and for every day of the year!

How should we in the church respond to this yearly battle? I like this verse: “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation!” (Habakkuk 3:18).

And let’s make sure the people in our churches don’t miss this other part of God’s Christmas joy. Christ’s first coming at the “first Christmas” has been preparing us for over 2,000 years for Jesus’ Second Coming!

Talk about JOY as we celebrate Christ’s birthday!

Please bless us Lord Jesus, and we pray every Christmas season and all year long,

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”
(Revelation 22:20-21)!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harold Raymond serves as Pastor of Dundee Baptist Church in Southeastern Baptist Association.

The present of presence

by Matt Carter

HOLT, MI – Last Christmas (you remember 2020, right?) was a holiday like no other for many people. Perhaps, like most, you spent it exclusively with your household and were left to celebrate by Zoom with your friends and extended family.

This distance from loved ones made the holiday seem a little hollow, a little less joyous than usual. It's not so merry and bright when you have to keep telling grandpa he's on mute. Technical glitches aside, what made it such a burden is that we are made for community, for physical presence with others.

This is why the incarnation is such a gift. Jesus did not announce His love to us by text or send out a Zoom link to witness His saving work. Jesus is our Immanuel, "God with us." The God of the universe took on flesh, walked on this earth, sweated, laughed, cried, bled, died, and rose.

This great truth is made plain to us in Matthew 1:21-23: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, "God with us")."

"God with us" is the great marvel, the great joy, the great wonder of Christmas, and of each day- now and for all eternity. "God with us" was the blessed reality of life in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world. It is what we are created for, it is our deepest longing. "God with us" was a physical reality, in space and time, during the days of our Lord's flesh. "God with us" will be the all pervasive reality in the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21-22). "God with us" is the current experience of the people of Jesus. What He promised in Matthew 28:20, He delivered by pouring out the Holy Spirit to indwell believers. Jesus is with His people now, always, and forever.

Jesus is "God with us." He will never leave us nor forsake us and His presence brings us many blessings. Jesus is strength when we are weak, comfort in grief, peace in hardship, and confidence in times of fear. He multiplies our joys, grants us boldness to serve Him and speak for Him, and gives us stability when life seems out of control. He is our Victor as we battle sin and when we fail He welcomes us back with open arms. That is good news of great joy!

Hopefully, this Christmas you will have the opportunity to celebrate in-person with friends and family. As you cherish time together, remember that Jesus is present with us. Ask Him how you can show His love by being present to the lonely, the hurting, and the needy in your church, family, and community. Who can you bring into the presence of Jesus by showing His love and sharing His gospel? The best present we can give to anyone this holiday is to remind them of the presence of Jesus, "God with us", who saves His people from their sins.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

What to look for in the wilderness

by Phil S. Lee

COMMERCE TOWNSHIP, MI – King David had to flee into the wilderness of Judah to escape the rebellion of his son Absalom. The wilderness is a desolate and uninhabitable region with no water. Everyone feels pain when they enter the wilderness. It was the same with David.

But David actually suffered not because of the lack of water, or the desolated land, but because of his beloved son. When people face difficulties, they easily become pessimistic about their situation. However, rather than being pessimistic and resentful, David called on the name of God and approached Him. In that moment, David confessed, “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” (Ps. 63:1).

Christians should realize how miserable and unhappy life without God is and have the wisdom to seek God earnestly in their circumstances. David longed for God in that difficult situation so he was able to overcome the challenges.

When we enter the wilderness, we realize the necessity of water in our bodies. But for us believers, we need the wisdom to realize how important God is to our souls as water is to our bodies.

The wilderness is like an empty field with nothing, but it provides us a precious opportunity to discover what is missing in our life and whom we can meet. In this wilderness, David was able to discover what he lacked and what was precious to him: the presence of God. The very moment he went into the wilderness, he called on God's name: “O God, you are my God” (Psalm 63:1).

In the original Hebrew text, the word “Elohim” is used here, meaning Almighty God. Even though he was in a desperate situation, even though he felt like a failure, he still called his God ‘Elohim’, Almighty God, confessing that his faith in God remained unchanged.

When people become unhappy with their situations, when they are defeated, when friends and families leaves them, and when they are abandoned, they often resent God. ‘I believed in God so desperately and earnestly, what kind of God does this to me? Is He really living?’

When we are pushed into the wilderness, we become like this. Despite this fact, David still called God Almighty his God, ‘Elohim’ in the wilderness, where he was pushed, fled and abandoned. Without faith, it’s truly impossible to call God ‘Almighty God’ in the wilderness of desolation. David was able to overcome the wilderness with his unchanging faith.

That is right. For God's people, the wilderness is a place to discover God, a place to call on God's name, and a place to meet God. The Israelites, who crossed over the same wilderness, did not

call on God's name. They did not try to meet God, and they easily blamed and complained to God. As a result, they had to stay in the wilderness for another 40 years.

However, David was different. Even though he went to the same wilderness, he was able to overcome it. It was because he had discovered what he lacked in the wilderness. "Not water, not food, not a veil against the strong sunlight in day and bitter wind in night, not a shield, but I need God" so he can stand in the midst of that desolate and barren wilderness and confess "O God, you are my God."

The field of your ministry may be a wilderness. Your life may be a wilderness. I pray that the same confession will overflow from your hearts. So, I bless you in the name of the Lord that you conquer today's wilderness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Phil S. Lee is the senior pastor of Korean New Life Church in Commerce Township, MI where he has served since February of 2014. Pastor Lee received his M.Div. degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2004 and completed the coursework of the Doctor of Ministry program at Gateway Theological Seminary. He has been married to his lovely wife, Eunshin Byon for 20 years, and they have two children, David (son) and Danielle (daughter).

The universal gift of God from above

by Nathaniel Bishop, Sr.

DETROIT, MI – The recording in Luke's Gospel brings us to focus on the heavenly announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds which were keeping watch of their flock by night; truly this was God's blessings from above. This announcement by the Angelic Host from heaven was spoken directly to the shepherds, but it carries a universal message for all of mankind and for all ages.

The appearance and the message of the Angelic Host as recorded in chapter 2, verses 9 - 10 were quite plain, but yet it was an amazing event and quite astonishing to the shepherds. The announcement of 'good tidings of great joy,' to all people, ever rings true for today. In addition to the royal announcement the shepherds were given further information revealing unto them, 'Born this Day, in the city of David (Bethlehem) a Savior, which is Christ (Messiah) the Lord (Verse 11).

Looking at this account of what took place by the supernatural power of God; these shepherds, no doubt, in their daily and nightly task of keeping the flock safe and well-guarded, were

emotionally startled by this heavenly appearance, the glorious message, and the invitation to go and see with their own eyes, the Christ Child.

No doubt being startled, they were equally overwhelmed to be given such a privilege of seeing the glory of the heavens opening and observing the appearance of the Angelic Host; As well as receiving the message of the Christ Childbirth in Bethlehem (House of Bread) and the invitation to go and see. Those shepherds were honored by God to witness this great biblical event which is deeply rooted in the prophecy of Old.

Although, Christmas is a celebration throughout our world, and some acknowledge Jesus' birth was in Bethlehem, where He was born in a manger. It is very unfortunate that despite the birth of the Christ Child and the biblical impact of God's Gift, there have been many who have missed out on seeing God's plan and true purpose of the coming of the Messiah. Through the prophecies of old, God spoke of the coming of the Messiah (The Anointed One), and the divine impact of the birth was to have on all of God's creation.

God, who is omniscient, in His foreknowledge had already arranged for the coming of the Messiah. Going back to Genesis 3, we read the account of Adam and Eve, and the Serpent which had a devastating part, in Adam and Eve's fall and separation from God. Here in this 3rd chapter, where Adam Eve disobeys God's commandment, God pronounced the punishment upon the serpent. Because of what the serpent did, God placed a curse on the serpent, and the serpent would undergo a metamorphosis and the 'Seed of the Women, would bruise his head, and the serpent would bruise His heel.'

From this passage of Genesis 3:14 and 15, we have what is known as the 'Protoevangelium,' (the first mention of the good news), God's plan and promise as His divine way to bring about "Restoration, Reconciliation, and Redemption," for mankind. By sin entering into God's creation, which brought the sinful nature of mankind, as well as death, destruction, and separation from God, who is holy and righteous.

So, from Genesis 3, we have the plan and promise of God to bring about salvation to mankind, because of His great love for His creation (Ephesians 2:4). God's prophecy allowed us to see His divine hands moving throughout scripture and raising prophets up, to prophesy about the Messiah. God used the prophets of old to foretell the coming (Genesis 3:15), the how (Isa. 7:14), the when (Daniel 9:25-26), the where (Micah 5:2), the tribe (Genesis 49:10), and the glorious salvation for all of mankind (Isaiah 53:3-5). All of this was preordained by our Sovereign God.

The appearance and message made to the shepherds and their invitation to go and see the Christ Child is the fulfillment of God's love and universal gift to mankind.

Christmas isn't just another holiday, but it is a day when the very Son of God was born into this world. Being born of a woman, He came as the universal gift to all, bringing the gift of eternal life, to all who would receive Him.

So, to that end, let us join with the Angelic Host in speaking the message of good tidings of great joy to all, and tell others about the Savior, Christ the Lord. God's gift of salvation (deliverance). A Gift that has a universal appeal, A gift that is free – A gift that is perfect – A gift that is everlasting.

I do pray with all sincerity that this Christmas may be one of great joy and everlasting hope from above to each of you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Nathaniel Bishop, Sr is Pastor of Cass Park Baptist Church in Detroit. He is married to Joyce A. Bishop. They have been married for 53 years, and are blessed with a wonderful daughter and son, and 6 very great and very special grandchildren (5 girls, and 1 boy).

Michigan Campers on Mission - December 2021 update

by Rick and Cindy Truesdail

Are we the only ones who think time is passing by so quickly? 2021 is almost gone and Christmas is just around the corner. It is an exciting time of the year, getting our holiday decorations in place, lights glittering down our streets and in our towns, and sales promotions everywhere we turn. It's so easy to get caught up in the excitement of buying gifts for others, making cookies and fudge, and celebrating the season with family and friends. But as Christians, we all know that the "reason for the season" is to be thankful and remember that Jesus came to this earth for our salvation – and for others. Let's keep on mission to tell others about Him!

We are so thankful for each of you and wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! As we plan for 2022, we are anxious to see what God has in store for each of you. We hope you will work a few of our activities into your schedule and keep involved with MI COM. This ministry is a blessing to many people, so many that we do not even meet or will not know how we have touched their lives until we are in Heaven. We have worked at camps and on houses in low-income neighbors. We have taught youth skills that have boosted their self confidence and given them ideas how they can move forward in adult life when it comes their way. And we have touched each other's lives as we have come to work together and bond in the sweet fellowship of Christ Jesus.

May God richly bless you!

Sharing Christ as We Go,

Rick and Cindy

MI COM Christmas Banquet

Saturday, December 4, 2021 from 1:00-4:00pm

New Haven Baptist Church

1477 E. Bristol Road

Burton, MI 48529

Tickets are \$12.00 each

Special Speaker • Special Singers • Group Singing

Bring and ornament for exchange.

Dinner will include Roast Beef and Baked Chicken, Mashed Potatoes, and all the fixings.

2022 COM National Rally

June 7-9, 2022

North Florida Fairgrounds

Tallahassee, FL

This will be the Golden 50th Anniversary of Campers on Mission. "Renew in 2022" will be the theme. Mark your calendars, start saving your money for travel, and be ready to register when it's available. More information will follow as we get it over the next few months.

Article from our MI COM Member

Christmas, it's what God did

by Larry Allen

I spent last Christmas in the hospital. I don't recommend it. My daughters flew in to Texas that day so they could be with me. My prognosis was very grim. This Christmas Mary and I will be flying off to Minnesota to celebrate with our daughters. We'll be celebrating what God has done.

If we are not careful as we celebrate Christmas, we get so caught up in all the trappings and traditions that we forget what it's really about. Don't get me wrong, I love all the trappings and traditions. I embrace them fully. But I also don't lose my focus on what God did. I love how Paul put it in his letter to the Philippians Church. Speaking of Jesus, he said:

“Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. “(Philippians 2:6-8 NLT)

This year God gave me life and I’ll be celebrating that all season long and beyond. Fifty-one years ago, He gave me eternal life. I’ll be celebrating that forever!

So, this Christmas embrace your traditions. Sing the songs, watch the movies, eat all the goodies, and give and receive gifts. But allow every aspect of your celebration be a reminder of what God has done for you. Christmas is about what God did and continues to do in our lives every day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Larry Allen is a retired pastor is still very busy working for the Lord, especially sharing his testimony of how God brought him through a double transplant. He and Mary are full-time RVers and an inspiration to all of us. Check out Larry and Mary’s blog at: www.secondchancevagabonds.com

Chaplain's Corner

Symbols are a part of life. And it is nothing less than yet another blessing from God that we can neither escape them, nor do without them. They are throughout all of creation, if only we will see with our eyes (Romans 1:20); they are everywhere in our Bibles, if only we will read with our minds (Psalm 119:18); and they are everywhere at Christmas time, if only we will look with our hearts.

The Lights remind us that that Jesus, the Son of God came from Heaven as the Son of Man and Light of the World, the Tree that His light shown brightest at Calvary, the Wreath that on the cross there He purchased eternal life for us, the crimson red Poinsettia that it was with His precious and spotless blood that the transaction was made.

So, brothers and sisters, during this Christmas season may our lives themselves be radiant symbols pointing to the Savior who came to die for us and ...

To the Praise of His Glory,
Chaplain Chip

Prayer Requests & Praise Reports

Prayer Requests

- Pray for MI COM often! We seek God's guidance and will for what we do in 2022!
- Pray for one another!

Praise Reports

- Praise God for Tim and Gayle Jones recovery from Covid.
- Rick and Cindy both have dealt with heart problems, and each thank God for healing and His hand upon the doctors.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NIV

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

MI COM Officers & Executive Board

Presidents/Project Coordinator: Rick & Cindy Truesdail

Vice-President/Project: Tony Morningstar

Hospitality/Food Coordinator: Kim Norrington & Maria Hannuksela

Sewing Project Coordinator: Cindy Truesdail & Terry Simmons

Cleaning & Beautification Coordinator: Sharon Hessling & Ruth Farwell

Secretary: Brandy Dyke

Treasurer: Gary Hannuksela

Chaplain: Pastor Chip Collins

Historian: Cindy Truesdail

Disaster Relief Liaison: Warren Hessling

Keep checking at our online Website and Facebook for announcements!

Website: www.michigancampersonmission.org

Facebook: Michigan Campers on Mission

For more information, contact: Rick & Cindy Truesdail Phone: (810) 869-4716

Email: michigancampersonmission@gmail.com

To view the corresponding images and links that accompany these stories or to read past stories and issues of the Baptist Beacon, visit BaptistBeacon.net.

The Baptist Beacon is the official newsjournal of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM.org), in association with the Southern Baptist Convention. The mission of the Baptist Beacon is to communicate with Michigan Baptists in our shared mission of punching holes in the darkness through starting, strengthening, and sending churches.

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