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Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

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Opinions

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – Have you noticed that all of the sudden it seems as though everyone has become an "authority" on everything? You can ask the average "Bubba" on the street what he thinks is the answer to the situation in Palestine, and he will most likely give you exacting and definitive steps to deal with the problem. Now, of course, it doesn't matter if you offered him \$1000, he couldn't locate this little country on a map, but he does have the right answers for this ancient conflict. In fact, he has the right answer for everything. Just ask him.

If you present this individual with a medical problem, he will probably be able to diagnose and give what he knows is a proper treatment for the ailment, even though he couldn't tell you the difference between a stethoscope and a periscope.

Politics, religion, education, business, etc. It doesn't matter what subject, everyone seems to have the right answer.

I can hear some of you out there right now saying, *"Well, don't we all have the right to an opinion?"* Sure, you do but that doesn't mean the world needs to be blessed with it or that those in leadership in this community, country or for that matter, our convention, needs to be bludgeoned by it.

A fellow once told me that people have a lot in common when it comes to opinions and armpits. We all have a couple of them and they both usually stink!

Some have come to believe that social media has not only given them the right to express their opinions about anything or anyone, but it has demanded that they do so. As a result, many believe and receive as fact the preponderance of postulations and platitudes that are proclaimed.

An old cowboy saying is that, *before you ingest or eat something it's not as important to know what it is but it's really important to know what it was.*

I am fully convinced and fearful that too many good Christian brothers and sisters are ingesting any and everything they receive from media sources because it seem enticing in its present form without looking closely at its source.

My father was a good and hardworking man that provided well for his family within the means that he possessed. He only attained an 8th grade formal education, but he received a PHD from the educational system of life. One of the words of wisdom that he shared with many was, ***"Don't ever believe anything you hear and only half of what you see."***

Opinions are best when they are filtered through the good and Godly standards we find in God's Word. If we would just be obedient to God's command to, *"Let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus."* Phil 2:5, just think of the difference that would make in your life and the life of others.

I am fully convinced that God is not concerned with our opinions. He wants us to know His mind, (His desire and will) and to live accordingly. In the grand scheme of all of eternity, our opinions don't really matter. His does! Proverbs 17:28 tells us, *"Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is counted prudent."*

Now that verse gives a great deal of hope to a multitude of us here in this great family, we call Southern Baptist. If we can just keep our mouths shut, others might think we are pretty smart. My dear friend and partner in ministry, Mike Durbin, taught me to use the acronym, WAIT.

In any debate or conversation, he tells himself to WAIT and ask: Why Am I Talking? Good and godly advice from a good and godly man.

Then next time you hear one of those "specially appointed, I'm right and you're wrong" guys begin to spout their perfected insight, just remember what God thinks about it. HIS is the only opinion that matters.

And for those of you who are in leadership, there will always be those with their opinions. Just remember, their opinions have a great deal in common with armpits.

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.

Detroit growth

by Dr. Tony L.Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – Wayne Parker, Send City Missionary for Detroit, created an outstanding newsletter and I thought I would share Greater Detroit's latest news. Half of the state's population resides in the region. The most diverse Michigan communities exist in the area, forming an interesting mosaic where the Good News of Jesus Christ has not yet been shared among millions.

3+3 New Church Plants

We are praising God that churches are being planted in Detroit and throughout North America despite being one of the hardest hit cities in the country by the COVID-19 virus.

In the last year, we saw 3 new churches launched: Rhiza Church in Ann Arbor with [Pastor Tito Diaz](#), People's Fresh Start Church in Detroit with [Pastor Robert Lodge, Jr.](#), and Trails Church in Farmington Hills with [Pastor Phillip Box](#).

We are looking forward to 3 new church launches this fall including: Heart & Soul in West Bloomfield with [Pastor Cornelius Roberson](#), Reformation Church in Detroit with [Pastor Malcolm Griswold](#), and Reaching Out Church in Windsor with Pastor Sameer Kabul* (*name changed for security).

Four Nearby Mission Projects for Existing Churches

With summer upon us, we want to let you know of just some ways that you and your church could partner with church planters and their new churches as they serve Christ in Send Detroit. Several of our church planting missionaries have projects that can use your support. See the different ways that you can help by sending a team to assist with work. Two to three days of service could make a big difference in one church's impact.

Heart and Soul Community Church, West Bloomfield

[Pastor Cornelius Roberson](#) and the church recently acquired property with a building across the street from the local high school. The building needs work to prepare it for Sunday worship, Bible study, and other gatherings. They need assistance with a new roof, interior renovations, and exterior clean-up.

House Church, Detroit

[Pastor Roland Caldwell Jr.](#) just celebrated 4 years of public ministry. The church is passionate about serving the disadvantaged families surrounding the church. The congregation would appreciate any help in replacing exterior windows, painting interior rooms, and securing ceiling tiles in the worship center.

Church at Clawson, Clawson

[Pastor Bob Morrissey](#) has led this church for the past 5 years. The members of the church continue to renovate this former VFW hall location into an efficient church building every chance they can. They would welcome help replacing windows and refacing the outside wall surface. They want to relocate some interior walls to create an area for teens. An existing bathroom needs renovation and updating.

One Mission Church, Inkster

[Pastor Antonio Wimberly](#) has planned multiple ways to engage the local community all summer long. The congregation could use help with service projects and outreach efforts among those living in a local community with park clean-up, painting, and Gospel presentations. They will have an August Block Party where mission teams could jump into help.

Doxa Church, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

[Pastor David Livingston](#), during 2021, is inviting people to vision tours in preparation for a new church launch in 2022 that will reach university students on the campus of the University of Michigan and others throughout the surrounding area. University graduates are challenged to dedicate their first two years after collegiate graduation to the creation of a new church. It is very likely a hundred such students will participate in the vision tour then move themselves to Ann Arbor and find jobs so they can start the new Doxa Church in 2022.

Reach out to Wayne Parker

If you want to ask questions about how you can get involved in or contribute to the ever-growing ministries in the Greater Detroit area, write to wparker@namb.net.

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.

Time to re-connect

by Coye Bouyer

PLYMOUTH, MI – In 2020, churches were forced to move to services on-line and while many of us sat and watched worship in the comfort of our living room, we still sat in isolation (just our family) on Sunday instead of the community of local assembly.

While it is true that God is still with you in the living room of your house, our physical absence from the church house meant that instead of growing together through the trials of 2020, we

were forced to navigate through some very traumatic times disconnected from our local church body.

The Bible says that we are not to neglect the continual getting together with the saints (Hebrews 11:25) as had become the habit of some. The writer of Hebrews along with multiple writers of the Scriptures instruct us on the significant growth that takes place in the midst of community. Whether it's a sports team, colleagues at work, a workout partner in the gym, or a husband and wife, there is a special comradery within the company of others.

Too often we think that because we don't need the church to connect to God then we don't need the church to remain connected to God. And while this is true, the Bible seems to assert that since the beginning our God intended for us to be in community.

For God says, *"It is not good for the man to be alone;"* Jesus sent His disciples out two by two (Lk. 10:1) and the Spirit gives various gifts to different members in order to create a more codependent yet unified and functioning church body (1 Cor. 12:4-14).

This is the case because God never intended for us to be Lone Ranger Christians rather He wanted us to be in unity with Him and community with one another. For as we grow in spiritual maturity making disciples for the Kingdom of God, these things are always better when we experience them together in community.

In 2020 we experienced a major pandemic resulting in separations, sometimes isolation, and for many a sense of disconnection. But today you and I no longer have to hide behind masks, socially distant, separating ourselves from one another, nor bind ourselves in the confines of our own home in isolation. Rather, now we can Connect and Reconnect with shopping, restaurants, travel, outdoor activities and sporting events but we also have the chance to reconnect with regards to our worship with one another.

While some will still find themselves worried due to health concerns and attempting to use careful caution with wisdom, I want to encourage you not to take too long in coming back to your local assembly where you can worship our God with the rest of the body. Not because you have to, but because your local assembly needs you to. For we are always better together than we could ever be apart. Your church misses YOU and WE hope to RECONNECT with YOU soon!

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.

Light it up and shine bright!

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – One of my favorite celebrations is July 4th. I love the color, the pageantry and celebrating the fact that our country was established on Christian principles. Also, no matter how old I become, I still get excited to watch and hear fireworks.

My favorite place to watch fireworks is in Flagler Beach, Florida, close to the pier where the fireworks are launched. As a kid there was nothing better than laying on the beach, relaxing to the sound of waves crashing, smelling the salt air, and looking straight into sky and feeling as if the kaleidoscope of colors were going to fall right on top of me while waiting to hear the boom of the next round of fireworks being launched.

The colors would be so vivid and expansive it seemed as if you could reach out and grab them. The boom would be so loud and explosive it would make your teeth rattle and shake you to the core of your being. The only bad part of the evening was it seemingly ended too soon; however, it would go out with a bang – a continuous 5-6 minutes of explosions of color and sound would fill up the beach sky – it was always an amazing finale!

Reflecting back on this I am reminded of how God has called us to be light. In Matthew 5:16 we are instructed to let our light (God in and through us) shine before others so they may see our good deeds and bring glory to our Father in heaven.

Imagine for a moment living a life so infused with Christ, so empowered by His love, so visibly loud for His glory, our lost neighbors would be in awe of our lives and know that only God could be responsible. Amazingly, we do not need to just imagine it. When we die to our old nature and let God's nature supernaturally change us from the inside out, we become reflectors of His glory.

We begin to shine in dark places and light up the night sky like the 4th of July. We are to let the light of God manifest and shine so brightly in all we do that the world will not only take notice but will give glory to God our Father for it!

Oh, and do not forget, this light does not disappoint! This light has no end. It has no finale. It shines on and on for all eternity. Eradicating darkness wherever it shines! Healing broken lives, resurrecting lost dreams, restoring hope to the hopeless, replacing heaviness with joy, restoring relationships – this is the power of God's light. So don't hide His light, don't be afraid where it may lead you. As long as His light is illuminating the path you can be sure of your next step.

You never know, you may just be the fireworks that grabs the attention of your co-worker. You may just be the boom that causes your lost family member to wake up and look up.

Go! Let your life light up the dark night. Light it Up and Shine Bright!

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.

God has a plan

by Jon Locke

MOUNT MORRIS, MI – Growing up I always knew I was different, on the inside that is. I knew that my mind did not work or process like everyone else's. Being born in the seventies there weren't a lot of diagnoses floating around, but there was plenty of name calling. "Dumb, hyper, bad, worthless, class clown" and countless others that were attached to me growing up in Houston, Texas.

Sadly, most of the names came from adults, teachers, and even "well meaning" church folk. It was difficult knowing that you were different, but not being able to verbalize what that difference was even harder. I was also taller and bigger than most kids too so that was a blessing and a curse. I had to learn to fight from an early age.

I honestly fell through the cracks in the education system. I do not know how big those cracks were, but I fell through them, all of them. To be fair, I did get snagged a few times, but my well-meaning parents somehow would talk my teachers into passing me. This happened on multiple occasions. It wasn't till high school that I thought my luck had run out. I was being forced to redo some credits, and I had to do them by correspondence. Well, I refused. So, my mom and my older sister who wanted me to have a high school diploma did all the work for me.

There you have it, I did not earn my diploma on my own merit. In fact, it wasn't till I went off to college at the age of 28 that I learned how to put a sentence together properly. This was only because a professor saw something in me and took the time to help me. Maybe it was pity, because all my other professors thought they were on that tv show "punk'd." My papers were marked with so much red ink, they were questioning their own admission policies.

Remember I started off with God has a plan. I honestly shouldn't be alive. In fact, I tried most of my early life not to be alive. In my desire to be "normal", to be like everyone else, or to even to just have friends, my plan was destruction and death. Looking from the outside in, most would never have known that I was suicidal even from a young age. Who would think that the jovial, class clown, wanted desperately to leave this earth?

To be honest, I still struggle with thoughts. It was after a failed suicide attempt when a borrowed handgun did not fire that I finally surrendered my life to Christ. Not some of my life, but all of it.

So how does a husband, father, grandfather, pastor of a local church struggle with depression, anxiety, OCD, ADHD and a host of other acronyms? I'm human, I'm a real person, just like everyone else.

It wasn't until much later in life that I was diagnosed with being on the Autism Spectrum. It is hard for adults to be diagnosed because we learn to cope, we learn to hide our "little secrets." Sadly, ASD can be genetic and in a roundabout way that's how I was diagnosed. We have five children and two grandchildren.

Well, our fourteen-year-old son when he was ten had to be hospitalized because of suicidal ideations. He had already been diagnosed with ASD several years earlier, but some of his behaviors he was no longer able to control even with medicines. During the intake at the hospital, we learned that our son was very much like me, or I was like him. The intake nurse asked him if he had ever attempted suicide before and our hearts sunk. His little crying voice said that at eight he tried to hang himself in his closet. Why? He just wanted to be "normal." Where have I heard this before?

God has a plan, and He has a plan for you. It's ok to be different, there is no "normal." So many people are hurting and suffering in silence, but they don't have to be. We have to take the stigma away from mental illnesses. We have to be able to open up without fear of rejection and shame before it's too late.

There are people and kids just like me and my son in your families and in your churches, reach out to them, open the lines of communication!

If you, your child or loved one has a diagnosis or diagnoses they aren't bound by those acronyms. Look at me! Who would have thought that a punk kid who everyone else threw away, who couldn't even put a sentence together has multiple degrees. I'm a pastor, an author and have a beautiful family who loves me. All because God has a plan!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jon Locke serves on the staff of North End Baptist Church in Mount Morris. He is the Senior Pastor.

Why am I a Southern Baptist?

by Seth Springs

WATERFORD, MI – At the beginning of June, my wife and I attended our first ever Southern Baptist Convention meeting. It was an encouraging time as we gathered with 16,000 other Southern Baptists, including 2 of our church planting teammates. But, as we heard reports and casted votes, I began to ask myself a question that I believe many others have been asking themselves, “What makes *me* a Southern Baptist?” Why have I chosen to engage in Southern Baptist life? What keeps me committed to this family of Great Commission Baptist Churches? While you answer this line of questioning for yourself, I’d like to share 3 reasons why I am a Southern Baptist.

LOTTIE MOON

If you’ve been around SBC life for long, you know the name Lottie Moon (1840-1912). As a young lady, Lottie Moon offered her life to Christ through missionary service. This route included denying the comforts of home and declining a seemingly attractive marriage proposal. She would set sail for China at the age of 32, and never look back, making Jesus known among Chinese peoples for 39 years. You probably know Lottie Moon as the namesake of the SBC’s annual Christmas offering. This is because, while serving overseas, Lottie wrote letters urging churches to give generously and send missionaries so that the Nations might hear the Good News about Jesus. This has resulted in Southern Baptists giving over \$5 billion to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. That’s \$5 billion so that missionaries can be sent, the Gospel can be preached, and people “from every nation, tribe, people, and language” can call on the name of the Lord and be saved. This global cooperative effort is what makes me want to be a Southern Baptist.

ANNIE ARMSTRONG

Behind the organization of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering was a group of Southern Baptist women known as the Women’s Missionary Union. Behind that group was a woman named Annie Armstrong (1850-1938). Born and raised in the city of Baltimore, Annie always had a passion for serving those in need. As leader of the WMU, she helped mobilize other women, and their churches, to live on mission near and far. In 1934, The Home Mission Board (NAMB) renamed its annual offering for North American missions after her. Each year, Southern Baptists support the work of meeting needs, planting churches, and changing lives across North America through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Without this offering, the ministries of church planters like me would look vastly different! This cooperative effort, that our new church plant now has the privilege of participating in, makes me want to be a Southern Baptist!

BRENDA CARTER

Another significant reason I am a committed Southern Baptist is a name that you may not know. Brenda Carter has championed cooperative missions for the entirety of her adult life. For years she has led WMU efforts in her church and local Baptist association. Once a month, she meets with ladies of her church to pray for international missionaries by name. Brenda has been on close to 30 short-term mission trips to the country of Brazil, and has served hard-hit communities through Disaster Relief. I know all of this because Brenda Carter is my grandmother. My favorite memories of VBS are of my grandmother giving the weekly “missions moments.” The first time I can remember hearing someone share the Gospel was when my grandmother shared the Good News about Jesus with a UPS delivery man right in her kitchen. When I was radically saved at the age of 15, years of mission moments and evangelistic enthusiasm finally made sense. I am thankful for the work of Southern Baptists, especially this one!

What makes *me* a Southern Baptist? Simply put, I don’t want to miss out. The Great Commission really is great and we are better together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Seth Springs serves in Waterford, MI alongside his wife Taylor and 3 young children. Seth is a church planter and one of the pastors at Transformation Church Waterford.

Centershot event helps Hillsdale church hit a bullseye in their community

by Chip Faulkner

HILLSDALE, MI – “What just happened?” exclaimed John after we got back in my car. We had finished meeting again with the marketing director of radio station WCSR about our Centershot outreach event. How stunned we were to hear that a corporate sponsor, Whitetail Properties, had offered to cover the bulk of the fees for a huge advertising blitz to promote a multi-state tournament. The blitz promised to use radio, social media, and remote broadcasts to reach thousands of households.

Centershot is a faith-based program that uses archery as an outreach tool to share the Gospel. Some of the folks in our church knew about Centershot, and I had recently become more interested in Centershot while on retreat at Bambi Lake. We contacted Roscommon Baptist Church to see about the possibility of having a one-day Centershot event at our church so we could better evaluate the potential of the ministry in our context.

We soon learned that Centershot, the National Archery in Schools Program, and the International BowHunting Organization were looking for a location in our area to hold a Regional Open Tournament. A simple idea just kept growing into a bigger and bigger opportunity! The county fairground opened their facility to us and local businesses likewise got involved.

In addition to the tournament, we were able to offer a Centershot “Fun Shoot.” The shooting range was full all day with young people safely enjoying archery. The response from the community proved hugely positive.

Our church, as tournament host, not only got to serve our community, but we also staffed a prayer table and made many new friends. Through the registration process we were able to gather the contact information of numerous families interested in our Centershot ministry. What really stood out to me happened during the awards program at the conclusion of the tournament. The Centershot representative clearly shared the Gospel to the whole group using a color-coded LifeBow.

For follow-up we will have another *Fun Shoot* outreach in August, and then we will be starting our first 8-week Centershot ministry starting in September. Several of our members have received their Basic Archery Instructor certification. We believe Centershot will be a vital evangelistic channel in our purpose of exalting God, equipping mentors, and engaging community. It’s so amazing to be on mission and experience the Lord Jesus showing his provision beyond what we could ever ask or imagine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chip was called to Hillsdale Baptist Church in March of 2020. He has served churches in Oklahoma and Illinois and also as a missionary with the IMB. Chip and his wife Gail have three grown children and 5 grandchildren.

Don’t quit: how to succeed in ministry

by David Kemper

LANSING, MI – We spend a lot of time, energy and effort trying to find new methods for church growth, rather than simply trying to carry out our “Commander-in-chief’s” last orders.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have

commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20 NKJV)

Two commands and one promise in those orders:

- **‘Make disciples’**. Lead people to a born again relationship with Jesus Christ.
- **‘Teaching them’** to obey.
- **‘I am with you’** the promise is, that in doing this, He will be with us until He comes again.

He didn’t tell us to make church members. He didn’t tell us to make Baptists. He didn’t tell us to come up with clever and innovative ways to grow crowds. He told us to convince people to be followers of Jesus Christ (disciples). And He told us to teach them to ‘observe’/obey all that He has ‘commanded’ us.

Having been in ministry for almost fifty years, I have seen many changes in culture, methods and even gimmicks to build churches. I think it would be a great idea if we started once again to focus on just getting the clear message of the gospel out to the people in our communities. In my opinion, it is God’s word and the power of the Holy Spirit that actually brings people to Christ.

Be committed to God completely.

Even for those in the ministry, it is an ongoing work to stay as close to the Lord as we possibly can. We all have stresses and temptations that interfere with our ability to effectively communicate the gospel. I am sure that the closer we stay to the Lord the more powerful our efforts will be in outreach and personal witness.

Understand the gospel thoroughly.

It may seem strange to say, but effective communication of the gospel requires a clear understanding of it. Many times we think we know it clearly but that is only because we know the ‘vocabulary’ of the Christian and the Bible, and don’t realize as we attempt to share the gospel that it is not that clear at all to one who has been unchurched all their life. If one only memorizes a ‘plan of salvation’ and doesn’t understand all of the nuances involved in that from the Bible it becomes very hard to extend the conversation to the point of salvation. Using a ‘plan of salvation’ is essential, but understanding it is much more than ‘a plan’.

Learn to communicate the gospel clearly.

I have found that the best way to communicate the gospel is to keep it as brief and simple as possible. When I first did ministry as a director of a Junior Church in Nashville, I learned quickly that the only way to communicate to the kids was to keep it simple and as brief as possible.

That five year experience has helped me a lot in learning how to keep complex subjects easy enough for a child to understand. That's how we must work if we are to communicate clearly.

Don't quit.

Possibly the most important part of sharing the gospel is to be faithful. And absolutely 'don't quit'. If our efforts are not always visibly fruitful we can become discouraged. Be certain, God uses every effort we make to add souls to the kingdom, even if we personally never see the results.

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."
Galatians 6:9

DON'T QUIT!!!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is David Kemper. I retired as a systems analyst from Dart Container in 2011. I am now in my third year as the pastor of the Discover Life Church in Lansing, MI.

Baby bottle mix-up leads pastor to missionary connection

by Leslie Peacock Caldwell

GAHANNA, OH – Wally Contreras had a passion for missions before he became a pastor in January 2020. Having previously served 20 years in the U.S. Air Force, he lived overseas for six years in Europe and Central Asia – cross-cultural experiences that helped shape his love for the nations.

After he became pastor of First Baptist Church of Gahanna, Ohio, and wanting to see his church's commitment to international missions grow, Contreras prayed that God would lead them toward that goal and specifically to a missionary family the church could connect with on a personal level.

Wally Contreras, pastor of First Baptist Church, Gahanna, Ohio, preaches to his congregation on a Sunday morning. Contreras is praying that a passion for missions will grow in his church. (courtesy photo via IMB)

In March 2020, IMB staff asked how they could pray for him. Contreras requested: “Pray that God would send us missionaries and raise up missionaries from this congregation. I want us to have a strong connection to the field.”

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Contreras spent the next several months focusing on the pandemic response and leading the congregation through it. All the while, he continued to pray over his church’s role in missions.

In early fall 2020, Contreras was contacted by a local crisis pregnancy center about bringing baby bottle coin collection containers to his church. He was glad to invite his church members to participate in the fundraiser. When the representative called to confirm the drop-off, Contreras agreed to meet Christal at the church. What he didn’t know is that Christal was from a different agency, asking for the same participation from his church.

Christal delivered the baby bottles and while at the church asked Contreras if their church had an established missionary connection. Her son and daughter-in-law had been appointed by the IMB and were visiting churches to invite them to partner in the work.

Where were they going? Central Asia. In fact, they would be serving just a few hours from where Contreras had lived. He knew this was God’s answer to his prayers.

The next day he received a phone call from the crisis pregnancy center which had originally called, and it was only then he realized the mix-up. Contreras laughed as he thought about the baby bottle deliveries.

“It was through my own mistake,” he said. “The Lord wanted to make sure that I couldn’t take any credit for this. By my own error, the Lord brought us the missionaries we were praying for.”

Contreras apologized to the first woman who called from the center, explaining they now had plenty of baby bottles, but he knew God used that mistake.

He soon met with George and Judy Jameson* and eagerly shared his own experiences in Central Asia. He was also excited about the partnership with these new IMB workers. “The Lord was calling me back to a people group that I’d already met,” Contreras, adding that he soon told the church with confidence: “The Lord is calling us to partner with a ministry in Central Asia.”

Immediately the church made plans to intentionally pray for the Jamesons and the unreached in their country of service. The church also increased their regular international missions budget in addition to increasing their giving through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

“We’ll gain by losing,” Contreras continues to remind his church. “The Lord has given us this opportunity and I don’t know how else to respond.” But for Contreras, the giving and praying isn’t enough.

“When we just send money,” he said, “we’re outsourcing our responsibilities to the gospel.” He’s spending the next season getting his church excited about going—praying that his love for Central Asia will be contagious.

“Get your passports ready because I’m dragging y’all to go visit these people,” he tells his church members. “We need to be ready to have full skin in the game.”

When Contreras talks about the possibilities of bringing a team to join the work in Central Asia, his face lights up and he can’t help but look back at the ways God answered his prayer. “Send us missionaries” was his simple prayer.

The Jamesons urged FBC Gahanna to seek local connections with Central Asians, as they learn about the people and culture. It didn’t take many prayers before God began to show them how their international mission partnership would begin at home. They’ve even discovered a local business owner from the exact country where the Jamesons serve.

“FBC Gahanna is a prime example of the fact that Southern Baptist congregations everywhere are willing and able to have an increased personal connection to the field,” George Jameson said. “There are churches out there waiting to be invited into more intimate engagement with the work that they are already a part of through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Cooperative Program. The Lord is already making those connections and doing it by the wisdom of His providence and for His glory among the nations!”

Jameson says that the partnership with FBC Gahanna is “exactly the kind of partner congregation you pray for.” He is encouraged by the church’s willingness to learn and pray, but also by its commitment to increased giving and their desire to join the work in Central Asia in person when the opportunity arises.

“Coming and seeing what the place is like, meeting the people, getting firsthand experience of what is going on here has the potential to take their knowledge, connection and prayers to a new level,” Jameson said.

For Contreras and the church, prayers are being answered, the journey has started, and the future is bright. He expresses excitement about seeing God move in this way and has no plans to back away from their commitment. “We’re full steam ahead,” he said.

If you or your church is ready to make a missionary connection, email info@imb.org. Through the [Church Connections strategy](#), IMB missionaries are hoping to connect with every Southern Baptist church.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leslie Peacock Caldwell writes from New Kent, Va.

If God dwells inside of me

by Luke Bilberry

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
1 Corinthians 3:16-17 ESV

HUDSONVILLE, MI – This passage has been rattling around in my head like a BB in a tin can. These words resound with a twinge of sharpness that forces me to deal with the implications of what it means to be a temple where the Spirit of the living God dwells. Too often I rush past this reality—God almighty, the maker of heaven and earth chooses to take up residence in me. It reminds me of Psalm 8, “What is man that you are mindful of him?” This truth stirs awe and worship for God. Right now, God is with me, and I can dwell with Him.

This is true for each one of us who have come to live in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Right now, God is dwelling with you, and you can dwell with Him. Across our state God is dwelling from Detroit to the shorelines, from the southern border to the tip of the UP. We are part of God's plan of redemption for the lost and broken in our state and across the world.

I am not a native Michigander, but a transplant from Texas. In the last 4-and-a-half years, I have seen God moving across our state. I have seen churches partner together in unique ways. I have seen church plants and established churches collaborate in their communities. I have seen marriages restored. I have seen more people baptized and heard of lives transformed among your churches in the last year. I think it is because the followers of Jesus are becoming more aware that each one of us is a temple for the living God.

How is this possible? Simply put—the Gospel. The Gospel has changed us, and it is changing others. Jesus told Peter, “Upon this rock he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail” (Matthew 16:18). Just as Peter was leading the early church, this passage helps us see that the Gospel is what grounds us. It compels us into the lost and broken world around us as the temple of God. 1 Peter lays out a picture of what we as individual temples of God look like, but also what the collective of temples looks like.

The temple is a picture of the place where God moves toward humanity and where humanity can move toward God. *You and I are that same temple.* God moves toward the people around us—through us. People can encounter God through us because of the Gospel.

As the truth of 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 has rattled around in my head, I pray that it rattles in all our heads. When we live with the understanding that God's Spirit is dwelling in us, our state will continue to be changed by the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We will continue to see lives changed as we steward the gifts (1 Peter 4:1-10) God has given us. Our state is diverse, beautiful and a gem in our country. This same diversity and beauty is seen in all the temples of our God that are scattered across Michigan.

May our lives, the temples of God, be a place where the people of our state can encounter God through Jesus Christ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luke Bilberry is the Executive Pastor of Multiplication at Chapel Pointe in Hudsonville, MI and serves on the leadership team of Be The Church. His primary role focuses on developing healthy leaders who strengthen and start churches to advance a Gospel movement. A native of East Texas, Luke has been married to his wife, Kathryn, for 13 years and they have three children.

Three keys to ministry leadership

by Chris Tenneriello

GRAND BLANC, MI – As I reflect upon my first pastorate, I remember how uncertain I was as a leader of a local congregation. I had learned many principles of leadership in seminary, but learning principles about leadership and being a leader, I found, were two different things. The principles of leadership are easy to know, being a leader, however, has taken me 30+ years to learn.

Over those years of ministry I have learned 3 key leadership principles that have sustained me over the years of ministry in a local church. The first principle I learned was that to be a good leader I had to be a dedicated follower of Jesus. My life in Christ is the foundation for my abilities to lead a local congregation.

I learned to nourish my soul as I worshipped Jesus daily by spending time with Him in His Word. Over the years in ministry, I cannot total the number of hours I have spent in study to teach His Word to others. But my quiet time with Him, when He was shaping me, made me both the man that I am and the leader He wanted me to be.

Another key leadership principle I learned was that I had to be a man of integrity. My heart had to be completely devoted to Jesus. In the Old Testament book of Kings, integrity was described as having a “whole heart” for the LORD. In the New Testament integrity could be described as character traits that should reveal the life of Jesus in those who follow Him.

In various lists in the New Testament that delineate leadership, character traits are repeatedly mentioned. One such list is found in 1 Timothy 3 *“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.”* I recognized early in my life as a follower of Jesus that character does matter. Who I am, preceded what I know. To be a shepherd for God was to be a man of God.

A final leadership principle I learned was the ability to say NO — to myself. Jesus clearly stated that ...*“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* I learned that delayed gratification is a necessary characteristic of a leader. If I could not say no to myself, then I would conflate my will with His. As a servant of my Lord, I had to be committed to do His will. The Lord expects nothing less. *“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”*

I can never think that I have a better way to build His church. I must always be mindful that I follow an ancient way that the Lord has used to build His church and I have been entrusted to adhere to that way as long as my ministry lasts.

While I could continue to list more leadership principles that I have learned over my years of ministry, those three were and continue to be foundational for me. *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Tenneriello is an Elder at Bethany Baptist Church, Grand Blanc MI. He is also a Certified Leader for the Antioch School of Church Planting and Leadership Development.

3 Ways my kids learn scripture

by Meredith Flynn

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Ten years after our premarital counseling, the piece of advice that sticks out above the others is a Bible verse. I wish I could report that Paul’s encouragement in Colossians 3:16 to “let the word of Christ dwell richly among you” has seasoned all of my speech for the past decade.

I can't. But we have found speaking to one another out of the overflow of God's word is a worthy goal. Especially once we added two daughters to our family, and particularly when statistics show biblical literacy and engagement are relatively low.

The American Bible Society reported last year that only 9% of Americans used the Bible every day. That's the lowest percentage since the annual State of the Bible survey launched 10 years ago. The survey pointed to specific challenges in 2020, but we've personally experienced other factors that were in place long before the pandemic: we tend to be over-scheduled, without margin, and apathetic about prioritizing the Bible every day.

But recently, our family has stumbled into a few new ways to engage with God's word together. These methods, helpful to us because our children are young, can be adapted for any context:

Sing it.

Our girls recently discovered the Slugs and Bugs series of songs based on Scripture. The lyrics are straight from the Bible and some songs have a generous helping of silliness. ("Deuteronomy 6:5," for example, features verses sung by monsters and bumblebees.) For adults, worship leaders Shane & Shane have two albums based on the Psalms. Singing Scripture helps it take root in our hearts.

Read it.

We've used some wonderful storybook Bibles over the years, but we recently realized the value of reading stories straight from the Bible itself. Watching the stories of Joseph or Moses stretch out over several chapters of Scripture, for instance, gives us an opportunity to talk about God's providence and provision in each part of their lives, and ours.

Tell it.

Ahead of Palm Sunday, our kindergartener wanted to tell us the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. That spurred our 3-year-old to tell us the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Their retellings reminded me of that piece of biblical advice from a decade ago.

"Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."

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.

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Florida pastor uses BBQ sauce to reach souls

by Barbara Hoffman

YULEE, FL (BP) – When stores in Northeast Florida receive a delivery of Yulee BBQ Sauce they're getting more than a collection of sauces and rub with tangy flavor perfect for grilling.

"They're getting a chaplain and pastor," said Jimmy Flanagan, creator of Yulee BBQ Sauce, who personally makes the deliveries to his customers.

Flanagan, pastor of Duval Station Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., has taken his passion for cooking to create his own barbecue sauce, which he sells in local stores and uses as a platform for sharing the Gospel.

"I could knock on doors, do outreach programs, but when I go with the barbecue sauce, it totally opens everything up for ministry and witnessing," Flanagan said, adding: "It's not about me at all and it's not about the sauce, it's about people and it's about Christ."

Growing up in Yulee, a rural bedroom community just north of Jacksonville, Flanagan relished helping his dad grill outdoors on the smoker or in a pit. He said those childhood experiences led to his love of cooking.

As a young adult he began experimenting with creating his own barbecue sauce.

"I prayed over every try," he said. "It was just a hobby for years."

In 2007, after serving a church in Hoboken, Ga., Flanagan and his family returned to Yulee, and he assumed the pastorate at Duval Station Baptist, about 10 miles south. All the while, he continued cooking and perfecting the sauce. When he added a new ingredient to a batch of sauce, his family, who always thought his experiments tasted pretty good, raved about this new batch.

He shared the sauce with friends and then served it at a local annual sportsman's feast. For the next two years, he set up a table at the event and sold the sauce.

Although excited that people liked his recipe, the pastor became concerned he was trying to do something outside of ministry.

"I had prayed over every test batch and I realized that God gave it to me and that I should do all things to the glory of God," he said.

Five years ago, after meeting all the necessary legal requirements, with the help of a co-packer, Flanagan began bottling [Yulee BBQ Sauce](#) and selling it in local stores. It now comes in three flavors — original, sweet and hot — and in a rub.

Ten stores carried the sauce the first year. He now produces 600-800 bottles every three months and sells it in 23 outlets – vegetable markets, meat stores and hardware stores – in eight nearby towns.

“I pray before I make every delivery, that God will have His will with communications and relationships,” said the pastor, who added that God has helped him build relationships in each store.

After making a recent delivery, he noticed the cashier had left the store. As he passed her on the sidewalk she asked if they could talk. Through tears she shared that her boss’ wife had just passed away and asked Flanagan to pray for her boss.

At another store he noticed an employee, a young woman who rarely smiled and spoke little to him, was absent. He found out she had had a stroke and was hospitalized in a local Jacksonville ICU.

Along with some members from his church, he drove to the hospital, prayed with her and her family gathered there. She told her family, “This is the barbecue guy.”

Not long afterward, Flanagan’s father overheard a woman in a local store telling others how her daughter had been in ICU and the guy who sells barbecue sauce visited the family in the hospital.

A month later, the young woman was back at work talking incessantly about how God had been working in her life.

“She smiles now! That wouldn’t have happened without the sauce,” Flanagan said. Flanagan said when becoming a vocational minister, he was mostly around other Christians.

“What I found missing,” he said, “was me being a witness, having spiritual conversations with new people.”

His business now allows him “to point people to Christ in a regular, organic way. It’s been really fun,” he said.

“I’m using sauce to reach souls.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbara Hoffmann, a member at Eau Gallie First BC, Melbourne, served alongside her husband Mike for over 25 years as North American Mission Board church planters in Georgia, Maine, and Florida. She is a graduate of Florida State University and taught Pre-K/VPK for many years. While serving in Maine she wrote articles for the NEW ENGLAND BAPTIST, and currently writes articles for the Canaveral Port Ministry's newsletter.

But God! One Michigan messenger's view of the Southern Baptist Convention

by Jamie Lynn

NASHVILLE, TN – The SBC Annual Meeting that met in Nashville Tennessee last week had been talked about with uncertainty in the media for a few months leading up to the gathering. There were so many things happening simultaneously, but this is just a glimpse of the activities. The crowd of messengers and guests representing the approximately 50,000 Great Commission churches swelled to almost 21,000. The possibility of several heated issues had been murmured about as to how and when they would be brought up during the meeting. Everyone seemed on edge.

But God! The SEND Conference, June 12-13, was started with an all-inclusive hour-long prayer time with Pastor Robby Gallaty (Long Hollow Baptist Church Hendersonville, TN). That heartfelt time of pouring ourselves out to God seeking forgiveness and asking Him to fill our hearts with His love and unity in Christ set the tone for the remainder of the time in Nashville. A true peace about the upcoming days of the Annual Meeting came over the huge crowd.

The NAMB (North American Mission Board) and the IMB (International Mission Board) had been invited to have a SEND Conference in the two days prior to the Annual Meeting that was usually for the Pastor's Conference. NAMB and the IMB worked together to host representatives from thousands of SBC churches. Sunday evening lifted worship with Michael W. Smith, David Crowder and Pastor Tony Evans preaching a powerful message. Monday was filled with a Women's Track with excellent speakers, Donna Gaines, Shelia Walsh and Katie McCoy and for the Pastor's Track, David Jeremiah.

NAMB had a luncheon which honored one church planter and his family. He had contracted COVID and had to have a double lung transplant. He was so blessed when he received word that his hospital bill was paid-in-full, and his wife received a new vehicle to transport him back and forth to his many doctor checkups.

The IMB had a SENDING Celebration. It was so inspiring hearing all the new missionaries that were preparing to go to their field of service, tell their 1-minute testimony of how God had worked radically in their lives to call them to serve Him.

Tuesday morning the SBC Annual Meeting began with President J.D. Greear presiding. His emphasis on prayer and the Gospel of Jesus Christ continued the spirit of accord that had begun in the prayer time with Pastor Robby Gallaty. J.D.'s easy-going manner, levity and always giving respect to the representative at the microphones carried the business sessions.

The Minister's Wives were treated to a special luncheon filled with inspiration and encouragement. Sabrina Patterson hosted a table full of Michigan pastor's wives who had such

fun visiting and listening to the speaker while enjoying a delicious lunch. The National Women's Missionary Union report was given by Sandy Wisdom Martin and they were commended for how they support the Mission Offerings and Studies. The National Send Relief report given by Bryant Wright, National Director, and was uplifting in how Southern Baptist are known and have such a good name around the world in their relief ministries.

The Resolutions were led by Dr. James Merritt. With several extensions of discussion times, the resolutions were amended or added until the voting messengers would come to an agreement to approve or refuse. This was the liveliest times of discussion. Dr. Merritt and the resolution team did an excellent job handling the resolutions.

There was a Michigan Fellowship Dinner hosted by the Baptist State Convention of Michigan churches at a restaurant (Merchants) in downtown Nashville. The restaurant had a limit of 83 people, and it was filled to capacity! The tables were brimming with Michiganders sharing their thoughts on the Annual Meeting and what's happening in their lives and churches. The food was delicious, but the kinship was sweeter.

The SBC Annual meeting was closed with grace and the smack of a gavel. The new President, Ed Litton, 1st VP-Lee Brand Jr, 2nd VP Ramon Medina, Recording Secretary-John Yeats and Registration Secretary-Don Currence will now be helping Great Commission Baptist Churches across the US work together to reach our world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie M. Lynn, I'm married to a God warrior, have 3 wonderful married children and 9 super grandkids. I love working at the BSCM office to help the churches in the Great Lakes area to thrive, serve God by drawing others to Him and to love their communities.

Detroit pastor Dr. Rochelle Davis Jr. retires

by Staff

DETROIT, MI – Pastor Rochelle Davis Jr. of the Temple of Faith Baptist Church Detroit, retired to the position of Pastor Emeritus (6-30-2021).

The time of Pastor Rochelle's retirement was commemorated by A Drive by Celebration at the Temple of Faith Church parking lot. Pastor Rochelle was seated on a platform and each car drove by and had a moment to give their congratulations. He received a plaque from the Greater Detroit Baptist Association and the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (presented by

Pastor Tim Patterson, Executive Director/Treasurer). Many pastors, church leaders and members came to give their respect and honor to a well-loved Pastor Rochelle. Here is but a small view of the faithful ministry and life of serving that Pastor Rochelle has had:

RELIGIOUS:

- Received Jesus Christ as Personal Lord and Savior at age ten (10)
- Professed the call into Gospel Ministry in 1963
- Ordained September 1965 at Baptist Temple Church, Shreveport, Louisiana

FAMILY:

- Married April 12, 1958 – Mariah Drayton (deceased)
- Children (3)

EDUCATION:

- Springville Senior High School – Coushatta, Louisiana
- Michigan Baptist Institute; Detroit Bible School; Boyce Bible School
- Institute of Holy Land Studies; American Ulpan Jerusalem, Israel
- Southern Seminary Extension

AREAS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE (SERVED):

- Became a Pastor in 1968 and have pastored the same Church for (53 years)
Temple of Faith Baptist Church
- Executive Board Member – Baptist State Convention of Michigan
- Advisory Board – Metropolitan Department of Evangelism – North American Mission Board
- The Committee on Boards and Agencies – Southern Baptist Convention
- Moderator: Greater Detroit Baptist Association
- Task Force – Ethnic Liaison Unit of the BSSB
- 2nd Vice President – Baptist State Convention of Michigan
- 1st Vice President – Baptist State Convention of Michigan
- President – State Pastors Conference
- Committee Chairman – National Baptist, Michigan Southern Baptist

- State Coordinator – Black Church Relations – BSCM
- National Consultant – Evangelism (Black Church Relations)
- President of African American Fellowship of Michigan
- Served as Trustee on the International Mission Board, SBC
- Member of the Executive Board – Baptist State Convention
- Member of the Executive Board – Greater Detroit Baptist Association
- Member of the Detroit Neighborhood Reformation Team
- Member of Cody Rouge Faith Based Alliance

MISSION PROJECTS:

- Coordinated a trip to Botswana, South Africa in relationship with the Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention
- Part of Mission Trip to Kenya, East Africa
- Participated in Overseas Evangelism project in England
- Participated in major project St. Lucia West Indies
- Mission trip to Brazil

God gave Pastor Rochelle Davis Jr., a vision to develop a people to glorify God. God also gave him a motto: *A Spark that continues to spark will one day become a Flame.*

His favorite quote: *Stay Focused, Move forward, In the Right Direction*

Thank you, Pastor Rochelle Davis Jr., for faithfully sharing God's love, not only with your words but also with your life. You have made a difference in countless lives.

Michigan pastors graduate from Southern Seminary

PLYMOUTH, MI – I would like to send our congratulations to these fine students who graduated from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. I know that God is going to use them mightily in furthering the Kingdom of Christ. We are so thankful for the continuing education of our leaders here in Michigan. May God bless them and use them in great ways to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their communities, state and around the world.

Tim Patterson

Executive Director of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan

Student Name: Larry E. Rednower

Hometown: Flint

Home Church: New Haven Baptist Church

School: Billy Graham School

Degree: Doctor of Ministry-BGS

Spouse Name: Janet K Rednower

Student Name: Collin B. Smith

Hometown: Tecumseh

Home Church: Tecumseh Missionary Baptist Church (Tecumseh, MI)

School: Billy Graham School

Degree: Master of Divinity-BGS

Spouse Name: Alysha Smith

Student Name: Ethan Cole

Hometown: Greenville

Home Church: Calvary Baptist (Greenville, MI)

School: Theology

Degree: Doctor of Ministry-SOT

Spouse Name: Kaitlyn Cole

First-Person: Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

by Ed Litton

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – In the hours after my election as SBC president, there certainly were a great number of things to do and new places to be. The Lord allowed me moments in the hallways to meet and greet Southern Baptists at their best. There were those who heartily congratulated me. Yet the ones who caught my attention were many, almost too many to count, who reached out their hand to shake mine and said a very similar thing: “Ed, I did not vote for you, but I love you in Christ and I promise to pray for you.”

We often focus on what disunity does to us. What I witnessed at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting was the real heart of Great Commission Baptists. What I saw cannot be chalked up to “Southern Hospitality” or even good sportsmanship. It is something deeper indeed. It is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing God’s Word to bear on hearts that in some cases were disappointed with the outcome of the election or concerned about our future together. Yet they saw fit to express to me their belief in a sovereign God and His purpose in all things. I was humbled.

Paul admonishes us in Ephesians 4:2-3 “...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

In the days since the Annual Meeting, reporters have often inquired how I am going to bring unity or lead a divided people into unity. My answer remains the same: It is difficult to unify people who don’t want to be unified, but I believe that Baptists long for unity in the Spirit and the bond of peace. They know that in their own churches disunity not only hinders the advance of the Gospel, it also makes people bitter and irreconcilable. No shepherd wants that for his sheep.

“With all humility...” It is not my job to humble you or yours to humble me. It is all of our jobs to humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God. Pride always erodes relationships. It makes us more certain that our judgments are beyond question, and certain that our knowledge is full and extensive. It makes us more demanding of our way and less prone to listen or serve.

“And gentleness...” When Jesus chose to describe Himself to us who share His yoke (Matt. 11:28-30), His first descriptor was gentleness. This is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. He makes us like Jesus.

“With patience...” If we demand to always have things our way, then genuine relationships will be the casualties. Our patience with one another says we value one another, we need one another and we work to see the best in one another. When we are quick to judge or criticize, we strain our relationships. Southern Baptists, even on such a large scale we must remain relationally connected. For this reason, I commit to doing my best to serve *all* Southern Baptists with wisdom and grace.

“Bearing with one another in love...” Love requires that we are willing to put up with one another, willing to suffer from each other’s unique and maybe even odd ways. We inhabit a sinful, fallen world and we are sinful by nature and by choice. We need the reminder of God’s call to bear with one another. Our love one for another makes God’s love more evident to the world around us.

“Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit...” Unity is the work of the Holy Spirit of God in us. It won’t be accomplished in our strength. We must be eager for it. I think at times we have forgotten how beautiful it is to be unified. Our unity is not uniformity. How pleased the Father is when a vast array from every tongue and tribe demonstrates a beautiful unity and cooperation for the display of His glory!

“In the bond of peace...” Peace is a binding agent. It holds us together and refreshes our confidence that God has chosen us to live our lives with a Revelation 7:9 vision of every tribe and tongue around His throne.

Our Southern Baptist family is the largest deliberative body in the world, and many outsiders think we are divided beyond hope. Yet in truth, many of the messengers I met in the waning hours of the SBC Annual Meeting were heading home to preach the Word, make disciples, serve their cities and baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. They don’t set the Twitter world on fire; they tenaciously lead and serve by faith. They are the kind of believers Paul had in mind when he wrote these words.

I am most honored to be chosen to lead at this hour in this mission. Please join me in prayer, seeking the Heavenly Father to strengthen our unity in order to fulfill His mission of the glorious Gospel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ed Litton is senior pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., and president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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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