

SATF report shows EC pattern of resistance to addressing abuse claims

by Brandon Porter

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Months of work by the Sexual Abuse Task Force and Guidepost Solutions concerning the alleged mishandling of sexual abuse claims by the SBC Executive Committee (EC) resulted in a [288-page report](#) released publicly Sunday (May 22). The report came at the request of messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting.

“Our investigation revealed that, for many years, a few senior EC leaders, along with outside counsel, largely controlled the EC’s response to these reports of abuse. They closely guarded information about abuse allegations and lawsuits, which were not shared with EC Trustees, and were singularly focused on avoiding liability for the SBC to the exclusion of other considerations,” the report said.

The report says that for the two decades within the scope of the investigation, survivors of abuse and other concerned Southern Baptists have been met with “resistance, stonewalling, and even outright hostility from some within the EC.”

The task force was charged with reviewing cases and claims of alleged mishandling claims of sexual abuse made between January 1, 2000, and June 14, 2021.

“Over the years, the EC’s response to sexual abuse allegations was largely driven by senior EC staff members, particularly D. August ‘Augie’ Boto, the EC General Counsel and later Interim EC President, as well as the SBC’s long-serving outside counsel – James Guenther, James Jordan, and the firm of Guenther, Jordan & Price (‘GJP’),” the report says, adding: “Their main concern was avoiding any potential liability for the SBC.”

“Mr. Guenther advised that EC staff should not undertake to elicit further information or details about reports of abuse, so that the EC not assume a legal duty to take further action,” the report says.

In addition, the existence of reports of abuse were not shared with EC Trustees “over the years,” according to the report.

What does the EC do?

The EC board of trustees is composed of Southern Baptists from across the convention’s 41 state and regional conventions. Trustees are elected by the Convention at its annual meeting.

The SBC president, SBC recording secretary, WMU national president and EC president/CEO are also ex-officio members of the EC board of trustees.

“Although the Executive Committee does not control or direct the activities of Convention agencies, it reviews their financial statements and recommends the Convention annual operating budget,” says a description at SBC.net. “In addition, it receives and distributes the moneys Southern Baptists give in support of denominational ministries, acts as the recipient and trust agency for all Convention properties, and provides public relations and news services. It also performs other tasks assigned by the SBC and promotes the general work of Southern Baptists.”

The EC “employs an executive and professional staff in its Nashville office.” There are currently 25 employees on staff with the EC.

Abuse claims

The Guidepost report listed only one instance of alleged abuse by an EC member in its summary. “During our investigation, an SBC pastor and his wife came forward to report that SBC President Johnny Hunt (2008-2010) had sexually assaulted the wife on July 25, 2010,” the report said.

Investigators found the claims to be credible, according to the report, having verified them “by a counseling minister and three other credible witnesses.” The report says that investigators did not find Hunt’s statements concerning the alleged assault to be credible.

Mishandling abuse claims and survivors

The report says that though high-level EC staff kept a list of reports of abuse among possible SBC pastors, it had no plans to act on behalf of survivors.

“In a May 2019 email to Dr. Ronnie Floyd, the then-EC President, EC Vice President Dr. Roger ‘Sing’ Oldham acknowledged that ‘[f]or the past decade, I have been regularly sending Augie news reports of Baptist ministers who are arrested for sexual abuse, for his awareness. It hasn’t slowed down since the [Houston] Chronicle articles started on February 10.’ Mr. Boto responded that: ‘Yes. We are collecting them, and may even post them in some way, but we’d have to really examine the potential liabilities that would stem therefrom.’”

The Guidepost report also spoke of instances where survivors were further harmed by mistreatment by the EC, “The survivors – those persons who actually suffered at the hands of SBC clergy or SBC church staff or volunteers – who spoke out the most, and who criticized the SBC’s inaction, were denigrated as “opportunistic,” having a “hidden agenda of lawsuits,” wanting to “burn things to the ground,” and acting as a “professional victim.”

The report points to this publication, Baptist Press (BP), on two occasions.

“For example, in March 2019, Jennifer Lyell, a senior executive at an SBC entity, was asked by executives at Lifeway and SBC entity heads to disclose her sexual abuse at the hands of her former seminary professor through a first-person account to be published in BP,” the report says. “Rather than publishing Ms. Lyell’s corroborated account as BP staff had originally drafted it, the account was changed to read as if Ms. Lyell was consensually involved with her alleged abuser. The article as published reported that Ms. Lyell alleged that she had a “morally inappropriate relationship” with her former seminary professor, making it appear that she engaged in a consensual sexual relationship with him.”

Another instance is related to a report from the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission’s 2019 Caring Well conference.

From the report: “Additionally, an article about the 2019 Caring Well conference, written by an Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (‘ERLC’) staffer, was sanitized before publication. The draft article had contained quotes from two survivor advocates who had spoken critically at the conference about the SBC’s handling of sexual abuse allegations. When the article was published, some of the story had been deleted, including all references to one of the advocates and all claims that the SBC had failed survivors.”

Other SBC leaders named in the report who are said to have “protected or even supported abusers” include Steve Gaines, former SBC president; Jack Graham, former SBC president; Paige Patterson, former SBC president and former president of both Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; Paul Pressler, former Texas judge and former EC member; and Mike Stone, current EC member.

The report also spends 65 pages discussing the work of the SBC Credentials Committee, a body created to examine whether or not a church was acting within cooperation guidelines held by the SBC.

The report says the task of investigating sexual abuse claims was assigned to the committee before there were proper protocols, guidelines and training in place. “Consequently, the Credentials Committee began operating without adopting any written policies and procedures, such as set timelines/deadlines, protocols for correspondence with submitters and churches, and standards for review. At least one outside expert offered help and support in developing criteria and standards, but the offers were rebuffed,” the report said.

While the report says the committee meant well, it adds: “These and other deficiencies led to delays and communications breakdowns that caused submitters and others to lose faith in the process despite what we believe to be good intentions and effort on the part of the Credentials Committee members.”

Recommendations from the SATF

The Sexual Abuse Task Force was [selected by SBC President Ed Litton](#) in the days following the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting. In addition to working with Guidepost to carry out the investigation, messengers gave the task force the responsibility of bringing recommendations to messengers to the 2022 SBC Annual Meeting.

While the SATF says it will be posting formal motions and suggestions before the annual meeting, it has listed a group of “a few initial needs:”

- We recommend that an Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force be appointed by the next SBC president to assist with the implementation of reform initiatives in our convention for a period of three years. This Task Force will evaluate all recommendations by Guidepost and bring a report at next year’s convention on recommended reforms. This Task Force will also work with the Executive Committee to create and maintain a process that will work within our Baptist polity for alerting the community to the presence and activity of credibly accused offenders, including the establishment of a “ministry check” website. Additionally, this Task Force will work with and resource the Credentials Committee to help them function more effectively, including formalizing and improving their processes, procedures, and standard principles of cooperation. The Task Force and Executive Committee will take steps to establish a relationship with an independent firm to assist the Credentials Committee in their work.
- We recommend that the Executive Committee hire a subject matter expert(s) to receive calls, provide initial guidance for reports of sexual abuse, and work with state conventions for training and educational opportunities.
- We recommend that all entity boards and standing committees have training regarding sexual abuse prevention and survivor care, as well as background checks as part of their orientation and selection.
- We recommend that IMB, NAMB, and our six SBC seminaries require formal preparation for their denominational workers and students in regard to prevention, training, and survivor care.
- We recommend that the Executive Committee set aside a budget and hire a salaried staff person for the Credentials Committee.

Responses from the SATF, SBC president, the EC, and the Credentials Committee

The task force issued a statement with the report calling on Southern Baptists to take the content of the report seriously and to act upon the findings.

“As the task force, we grieve for what has been revealed in this report,” the task force wrote. “We lament on behalf of survivors for how they have not been protected and cared for as they deserve and as God demands. With broken hearts, we want to lead the way by publicly repenting for what has happened in our convention. We implore our Southern Baptist family to respond to this report with deep repentance and a commitment to the ongoing moral demands of the gospel as it relates to sexual abuse.”

The task force called on Southern Baptists to take action based on the findings of the report. “We must resolve to give of our time and resources to not only care well for survivors of sexual abuse, but to provide a culture of accountability, transparency, and safety as we move forward,” the statement says.

Ed Litton, SBC president, echoed the sentiment of the task force. “There are not adequate words to express my sorrow at the things revealed in this report,” he said. “I am grieved to my core for those who have suffered sexual abuse in Southern Baptist contexts, both for those named in this report and the many who are not. I thank God for the courage and persistence of the survivors and advocates who brought the Southern Baptist Convention to this moment.”

He called on Southern Baptists to act in light of the report. “Amid my grief, anger, and disappointment over the grave sin and failures this report lays bare, I earnestly believe that Southern Baptists must resolve to change our culture and implement desperately needed reforms,” Litton said in a statement to Baptist Press.

He called on messengers to the 2022 SBC Annual Meeting to be prepared to respond. “The time is now,” he said. “We have so much to lament, but genuine grief requires a godly response. I pray Southern Baptists will begin preparing today to take deliberate action to address these failures and chart a new course when we meet together in Anaheim.”

Rolland Slade, current EC chairman, and Willie McLaurin, EC interim president/CEO, issued a joint statement upon receiving the report.

“To the members of the survivor community, we are grieved by the findings of this investigation,” they said. “We are committed to doing all we can to prevent future instances of sexual abuse in churches, to improve our response and our care, to remove reporting roadblocks, and to respond to the will of the messengers in Anaheim next month.

“This is the beginning of a season of listening, lamenting, and learning how to address sexual abuse in the Southern Baptist Convention.”

In the statement, they announced a special-called meeting on Tuesday, May 24, to “discuss and process the report.”

They asked the members of Southern Baptist churches to pray for EC members and staff as they “move through the process that Southern Baptists have asked us to do.”

The SBC Credential Committee also issued a statement regarding the Guidepost report. “We receive this report with open minds and heavy hearts. We grieve for those impacted by abuse, and we are prepared to repent for anything the Credentials Committee inadvertently failed to do to alleviate the suffering of survivors,” the statement said.

“We are committed to listening and learning from this extensive report and its recommendations. We look forward to implementing recommendations and strengthening the Credentials Committee’s work.”

The 2022 SBC Annual Meeting is scheduled for June 14-15 at the Anaheim Convention Center.

***Editor’s note:** In an earlier version of this story, Greg Addison was included in a list of those alleged to have supported abusers. The wording does not accurately reflect the nature of Addison’s inclusion in the Guidepost report.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Porter serves as Associate Vice President for Convention News at the SBC Executive Committee.

A small church serves as a large witness in the wake of Gaylord tornado

by Mike Durbin

GAYLORD, MI – An EF3 tornado ripped through Gaylord tragically taking the lives of two people and injuring more than 40 on May 20th. The winds reached up to 140 mph as they flipped cars, destroyed homes, and damaged businesses. It also brought the town of 4,200 people together as neighbors immediately started helping one another. The grit and resilience of Northern Michiganders was clearly on display as the town pulled together and started the recovery. So was the love of Christ through area churches. Tim Patterson, Bob Kiger, and I surveyed the damage and witnessed the church and community response firsthand.

One of the newest churches in Gaylord stepped forward in a big way. Pastor Jeremy Bowling started Passion Church about a year and a half ago. After seeing the damage caused by the tornado, he immediately offered the church building to be used however needed.

Bowling says: "We partnered with...the Evangelical Free Church. We are on the West side of town, and they are on the East side. We took the donations here and they took the donations there. The tornado hit in the middle. We've had lots of people in the community help by donating, including people in the church and the Food Bank. It's been an awesome opportunity to reach out and show people the love of Christ."

A non-profit called "Kids Santa and Company" messaged Pastor Jeremy and offered toys for the church to distribute to children affected by the tornado. Bowling says, "He brought not just toys, but brand-new toys. Lots and lots of them for the children who lost everything in the tornado. There's a whole community of people that have been displaced. Their children are without their toys, no doubt confused and devastated. If I was a kid, I'd want my toys." Passion Church is giving them those toys.

Michigan Disaster Relief Director, Bob Kiger, connected with other relief groups serving the community, and offered Michigan Baptist help. After seeing all Passion Church is doing, he said: "The love of Jesus is shining through in the midst of the disaster in Gaylord. Passion Church has established a donation center in their church, and they are supplying affected homeowners with toys, food, clothing and other needed items. A small church has become a large witness because of their obedience to Jesus!"

Pastor Tim Patterson shared, "It does my heart good to see when churches and people come together to make a difference in their community. It is especially true when one of our church plants that is only a year old is making such a difference.

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.

Imperfect dads giving thanks for a Perfect Father

by John Babri

SALINE, MI – Churches have begun to recognize that Mother's Day is a day of mixed emotions for women the day may be hard for, like those who never became moms or those grieving a loss. Yet Father's Day is another day that can be hard, too. It can highlight tough memories of fathers who weren't there or even those who were there but not all they should be.

Since I became a Christian from atheism as an 18-year-old, Father's Day has been a reminder of the lack of closeness with my dad. My dad, an avid atheist, has never fully accepted my coming to Christ. When your dad can't accept the most important part of you, you feel that loss. There's a closeness that's missing. As an imperfect father with my own imperfect dad, I can still praise God on Father's Day. So let me share 4 reasons to praise God on Fathers' Day even when there's mixed emotions.

1. Praise God that God Himself is your father!

Ps 27:10 says, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me." The reality is the best earthly dad will fall short. But the beautiful thing about the gospel is that we receive a perfect dad who will never let us down, leave or forsake us, or disown us! He knows us more fully than any earthly dad could, yet He still loves us with a perfect love! Praise God for His adoption of us!

2. Praise God for being a father!

If God has blessed you with children, you can praise God for the gift of being a father and praise God for your children! Also, praise God for how being a father helps you understand your father's love. Awareness of my sin can make me feel like God just tolerates me, like I am a C-student. Yet, after becoming a father, I learned that is not how fathers think!

When my two kids do something wrong, that never tempts me to stop loving them; my heart does not grow cold toward them. I still love and adore them. That reality helped me see God's own love for me in a new way. Yes, I still need to confess sin and repent, but God is a much better father than me and still loves me! Becoming a father helped me see the unconditional love of the Lord.

3. Praise God for father figures in your life.

In 1 Timothy 5:1, Paul tells Timothy to treat older men as fathers. Some of the blessings of the church is the new family you have in Christ. I've been blessed with a man I call "Papa Joe." He and his wife, "Mama Becca" adopted my family as their Michigan children when I came to serve at my church. I am not handy in any way, but I remember Papa Joe coming over to show me how to patch drywall. He was a gentle and patient teacher as he took me through that process. I remember thinking, "Why is he being so nice to me? This is what it must be like to have a Christian dad." When the Lord provides a father figure in your life, be thankful for that blessing, whether he's an older mentor at church or a Christian father-in-law who will always have your back.

4. Praise God for your earthly father.

Even if your dad was not everything he should've been, you can still praise God for common graces in your dad! When I lift my children in the air, put on a goofy voice, or let my kids beat me in play-wrestling, I see my dad in me in how he played with me.

My dad never pointed me to Jesus, but he still left a mark! And I can praise God for common grace blessings even from a father that does not know God. If you have Christian dad, praise God for the blessing many don't have! Either way, pray for your dad on Father's Day!

These are 4 ways we, as imperfect dads with imperfect dads, can give thanks to the perfect dad on Father's Day!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Babri is the Pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Saline and an alumnus of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is married to his beautiful bride Katherine and is the proud father of two energetic boys.

Christians say they're seeking but not having evangelistic conversations

by Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Most Christians say they're ready, willing and praying to have conversations about their faith with others, but many admit they haven't gotten around to actually having those conversations recently.

An [Evangelism Explosion study conducted by Lifeway Research](#) found Christians express a willingness and desire to talk to others about their faith, yet few have shared with someone how to become a Christian in the past six months.

"Now, perhaps more than ever, people are open to conversations about faith, yet this study reveals few Christians actually take the opportunity to engage in personal evangelism," said John Sorensen, president of Evangelism Explosion (EE). "Our mission at EE is to equip followers of Jesus to have the confidence to share the Gospel naturally, lovingly and intentionally with family, friends and yes, even strangers, which is why we wanted insights on the evangelistic attitudes of Christians. We imagine a world where every believer is a witness for Christ to His glory."

“Many Christians say they agree sharing their faith is important,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “But many also need encouragement and to be shown how to share the Good News about Jesus Christ with others.”

Evangelism actions

In the survey of 1,100 self-identified Christian adults in the U.S., more than 9 in 10 (93 percent) say they’re at least somewhat open to having a conversation about faith with a friend, and around 4 in 5 (81 percent) feel similarly about speaking about faith with a stranger. Almost 2 in 3 Christians (64 percent) say they have prayed at least once in the past month for the salvation of a friend or family member who is not a Christian.

In the past six months, most have spoken about their beliefs with loved ones at least once, including having a conversation about faith (53 percent) and sharing a story about what God has done in their lives (52 percent).

However, less than half of self-identified Christians have, at least once in the past six months, shared a Bible verse or Bible story with a non-Christian loved one (46 percent), invited a non-Christian friend or family member to attend a church service or other program at church (43 percent) or shared with a non-Christian loved one how to become a Christian (38 percent).

Far fewer Christians have taken any of those evangelistic steps with a non-Christian they did not know in the past six months: 40 percent have had a conversation about faith, 39 percent have shared a story about what God has done in their lives, 36 percent have shared a Bible verse or story, 34 percent have invited a stranger to church and 30 percent have shared how to become a Christian.

“Praying for someone to follow Christ comes more easily than talking with someone about it,” McConnell said. “It isn’t clear if the proverbial cat has the tongue of some Christians or if they’re not connecting with non-Christians in settings where these conversations can take place.”

Evangelism opinions

When Christians think about evangelism, they’re thinking about showing love to the other person. Almost 2 in 3 Christians (65 percent) agree sharing with a nonbeliever how they can become a Christian is the most loving thing they can do for them, including 30 percent who strongly agree. Around a quarter (23 percent) disagree.

More than half of self-identified Christians say they are willing (39 percent) and/or eager (15 percent) to evangelize. Three in 10 (29 percent) are neutral, while 18 percent are reluctant and 11 percent are indifferent.

Specifically, Christians are more prone to be proactive or reactive in their evangelistic tactics than avoiding it all together. Around 1 in 7 (14 percent) say they try to bring up faith in conversations with everyone, while more than a quarter (28 percent) look for natural opportunities to bring up faith. Close to a third of Christians (32 percent) say they answer faith questions if asked or comment if others bring it up. Around 1 in 5 (21 percent) say they won't talk about faith with most people.

More than half of self-identified Christians in the U.S. (58 percent) say it is easy for them to talk about Jesus with non-Christians, including 23 percent who say it is very easy. A third (33 percent) say it is at least somewhat difficult, with 10 percent saying it is very difficult to share about Christ with those who are not Christians.

For some, evangelism might bring up emotions more closely associated with giving a public speech than having a conversation with a friend. More than 2 in 5 Christians (42 percent) say sharing with a non-believer how they can become a Christian is scary. Slightly more (46 percent) disagree.

When asked how they believe most non-Christians feel about evangelism, Christians are split. More than 1 in 3 (37 percent) think most of those who are not Christians see it as pushy. Almost a quarter (22 percent) believe non-Christians are open to it. Similar percentages say those who aren't Christians view evangelism as worth hearing once (18 percent), hope-filled (17 percent) and worth exploring (17 percent). Fewer think non-Christians believe Christian evangelistic efforts are rude (14 percent).

According to a [2021 Evangelism Explosion study conducted by Lifeway Research](#), 51 percent of Americans, including 60 percent of the religiously unaffiliated, say they're curious why people are so devoted to their faith. Two in 3 (66 percent) also say they are at least open to having a conversation about the Christian faith with a friend.

Still, in the most recent study, 52 percent of self-identified Christians agree that encouraging someone to change their religious beliefs is offensive and disrespectful, including 20 percent who strongly agree. Fewer than 2 in 5 (37 percent) disagree.

"It's a bold idea to encourage someone to consider converting the center of their life to be Jesus Christ," McConnell said. "For some Christians, their love for others compels them to suggest this offensive thought. For others, this discourages them from speaking up about what they believe."

Evangelism preparation

Two in 3 (66 percent) Christians say they aren't familiar with any methods of telling others about Jesus, but half say they're ready to at least share the basics of how someone can start following Jesus. Around a quarter (23 percent) say they're ready for any opportunity to tell someone how to become a Christian, and 27 percent are prepared to share the basic steps.

Another 1 in 5 (19 percent) say they know the essentials but aren't comfortable yet putting them into words. A quarter of Christians (24 percent) say they aren't sure what information needs to be shared or where to start.

Most Christians agree it's their calling to share their beliefs but that it's their pastor's duty to equip them to do so. Seven in 10 Christians (69 percent) say it's every Christian's responsibility to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, including 35 percent who strongly agree. One in 5 (20 percent) disagree. Similarly, 68 percent agree it's the pastor's responsibility to equip the congregation to share the gospel, and 19 percent disagree.

When thinking about the specifics of being trained and equipped for evangelism, Christians have wide varieties in their preferences. Around 1 in 5 (19 percent) want to experience real-life faith conversations with a trainer and another 16 percent prefer to take a class in person. Fewer are looking for less personal or more individual activities like watching videos (14 percent), reading a book (12 percent), taking a class online (8 percent) or listening to audio like a podcast or audiobook (5 percent). Another 18 percent say they would never be trained in evangelism.

"Half of Christians aren't ready to tell someone how to become a Christian, and that likely won't change without some help," McConnell said. "Most are looking to their churches and its leaders to help prepare them for these conversations about faith."

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

Methodology

The study originated from and was commissioned by Evangelism Explosion. The online survey of 1,011 American Christians was conducted by Lifeway Research, April 12-23, 2022, using a national pre-recruited panel. Quotas and slight weights were used to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity, education and religion to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,011 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.1 percent. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

Tim Patterson's response to the Sexual Abuse Task Force Report

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – The [report from the Sexual Abuse Task Force and Guidepost Solutions](#) was released at 4pm on Sunday, May 22nd to the general public. This has been a much needed and timely investigation into a matter that should have been addressed and dealt with decades ago. The following quote comes from the report and gives a basic summation of the results.

"Our investigation revealed that, for many years, a few senior EC leaders, along with outside counsel, largely controlled the EC's response to these reports of abuse. They closely guarded information about abuse allegations and lawsuits, which were not shared with EC Trustees, and were singularly focused on avoiding liability for the SBC to the exclusion of other considerations."

After being immersed in the report, my emotions have been from one extreme to the other.

Deep sadness, grief, heartbreak, intense empathy for the victims/survivors, anger, frustration, relief...and much more. There were revelations in the report that were shocking, especially concerning those in the past for whom I have had the greatest of love and admiration.

Disappointment is such an inadequate word to describe my feelings.

Michigan family, I want you to know and understand that I stand in full support of the investigation and the subsequent report, though painful as it may be. Sin and abuse at any level cannot be tolerated, especially in the area of leadership and those who try to cover up instances of abuse are just as guilty as those who commit the abuse, if not more so! It is hard for me to imagine the pain, suffering and abuse/survivors have and are experiencing. As I read the report last evening, I was actually physically ill, almost to the point of vomiting.

Those who know me well, understand that I cannot and will not tolerate the abuse of others, especially those who cannot defend themselves. When I encounter this kind of abhorrent behavior, my anger arises and can very easily be fleshed out.

What has been done to the abuse/survivors is wrong, wrong, wrong! They should be able to be heard and find justice without any fear of retribution or retaliation. It is my greatest hope that this becomes a reality and is the normal way the SBC handles these issues.

Early on when these issues started to surface, the BSCM began to take steps to assure that sexual abuse would be dealt with appropriately from a Biblical foundation here among our Michigan churches. Several tools and ministries were accessed or developed.

Caring Together is a ministry that was created and initiated in Michigan in October of 2019 with Dr. Mitchell White, a wonderful and gifted professional counselor, taking the lead. We created Caring Together to connect churches with resources and support in order for them to have the tools and training to equip and protect their congregations from abuse and also to provide care and support for those who have been the victims of abuse.

We also provide free Ministry Safe training for pastors, leaders, and members as another layer of protection and prevention. Since my arrival here in Michigan as your State Executive Director, we have trained all our staff and personnel that are connected with the Baptist State Convention of Michigan that when they receive accusations of sexual abuse, especially concerning minors but not limited to them, that they must report these matters to local authorities and to offer counseling and support to the victims.

It should be noted that after the Annual Convention in Nashville where the messengers directed the Executive Committee to implement the Task Force and there began to be push back from the EC, we as a state convention developed and voted unanimously as a State Board to make a [resolution that instructed the Executive Committee to move forward with the investigation](#) unimpeded and to waive attorney client privilege. As to my knowledge, we were the first and only state convention to do so. (To read the full resolution, [click here](#).)

Another fact that our BSCM family should be aware of is that we do not endorse nor recommend pastors, ministers, or church leaders to anyone if we are aware of any allegations or proof of abuse in their history. We also recommend and will provide for an extensive background check for anyone who works in our churches or ministries.

With all this being said, I want you to understand that even though this has been a heart wrenching and difficult report, I am encouraged and hopeful for our future.

- When the truth is elevated to its supreme and rightful position and darkness is exposed, God is glorified, and His children are blessed. The purpose and process of this Task Force is a good and godly thing.
- When we think of the breadth and depth of our Convention, the tens of thousands of churches and millions of members, only a handful of people were responsible for keeping our family in the dark, while resisting accountability, reporting and transparency. Our convention rose and demanded the truth, and it has been revealed. Is the work finished? NO! But it has begun, and it will be completed.
- When we recognize the good and godly leaders in our Convention that stood up for what is right and against wickedness and have prevailed. We will be forever indebted for their courage and strength. Many have paid dearly for their heroic actions but not as dearly as the victims/survivors.

Are there difficult days ahead? Yes. But God has given us the Great Commission and a wonderful mechanism through which we may accomplish it. Here in Michigan our mission has not changed, our message has not changed, and our motive has not changed. But greatest of all, our God has not changed nor will He. With that assurance, may we all join together to: "PUNCH HOLES IN THE DARKNESS."

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.

98-pound weaklings

by Dr. Tony L Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – "Don't be that 98-pound weakling," was the message Charles Atlas advertised in comic books during the sixties and seventies. The comic strip ad was direct.

A skinny guy is on a blanket, on the beach, with his girlfriend. A muscle-packed bully kicks sand in his face and makes fun of his boyish, scrawny build. The 98-pounder loses his girlfriend to the bully and is ridiculed by everyone on the beach.

The self-loathing little man returns home, kicks the chair at his house, then vows to take a stand sending off a request for Charles Atlas' training manual. Later, after a period of muscle training, the 98-pounder is shown admiring his newly strengthened form in the mirror promising to return to the beach to teach the bully a lesson.

That sacred showdown day arrives, and the former 98-pound weakling now bulked-up, punches the earlier bully in the chin. Immediately, the former small guy wins his former girlfriend back who is seen hanging on his now sculpted shoulders and biceps, while the onlookers at the beach gush aloud, "Gosh! What a build. He's already famous for it."

The Charles Atlas ad is the classical American way to face a bully. Is it not?

With Father's Day upon us it may be a good time to look at how we define weakness, strength, and masculinity. Sons, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, cousins, brothers, and friends identify and react to bullies with a heavy push from the other men around them.

Men's Bullies

Ask men to list the bullies in their lives and most, with their words, will decorate a room with dartboard images of the bullies they believe have kept them from a summit of success: tyrannical bosses, caged-conditions, bitter betrayals, unrecognized talents/strengths, missed opportunities, un-offered advantages, being unappreciated, over-demanding spouses, a neglected or abusive childhood, addictions, and on and on.

WARNING: Men's Biggest Bullies Are Inside of Us!

However, men be warned! The Holy Spirit, the world's best strength coach behind the writing of the world's best strength training manuals of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, would like to rip down those man-made, dartboard decorations of imagined bullies and replace the entire room with mirrors made of Bible verses so that each one of us could see ourselves for who we are and pinpoint our areas of vital development. Let's admit it, men can be jerks and we can shrug our shoulders when asked why we did what we did with a mumbled response of, "I dunno why?"

2.5-pound Plates

You might be saying, "If only men tried harder." Trouble is even though many men attempt to get stronger on their own it does not work. We need a training coach in the Holy Spirit. Check-out the short, strength-training manuals in the Bible, and we are told repeatedly that we cannot do it on our own. Every man, every father, every husband, every son needs a training partner in the Lord.

When I was younger, in much, much, much better shape, and spent more time lifting weights in the gym, the 2.5-pound plates, in manner of speaking, were my best friends. I referred to them as barrier-breakers. Mentally and physically, I would reach a previous lifting goal at a certain weight in my bench press, my squat, or my curl. I could add an additional ten to twenty pounds to the bar, which is normal in weightlifting, striving for a new personal best. The surprise? Try as I might, I could not get a new personal best by jumping up an additional ten to twenty pounds. I would try for seven to fourteen days but to no avail. I would hit a barrier.

Disappointed that I could not make a 10-to-20-pound improvement, I would instead add a small, 2.5-pound plate on each end of the bar. In my hands they almost felt invisible and weightless, but together the two plates represented five more pounds. I would wave them in my hands, reminding myself of how small and insignificant they were. It was a ritual just before sliding the plates onto the bar. It was my way of breaking a previously set mental and physical barrier.

A Spotter

The other important element was adding a spotter or training partner the day I wanted to advance up in my strength or lift. I would ask someone to stand nearby ready to assist if I couldn't lift the new, additional five pounds. If you've ever been to a gym, most assists start-out with the "eight-finger-lift-assist" where the spotter will place his or her fingers under the bar, on both ends, so the assist is ready but only used in desperation. Sometimes spotters will fake-assist letting the lifter know at the finish of the successful lift that no assist was necessary. The spotter will usually scream-out, "It was all you, Man, that was all you! I didn't even help!"

The power of the 2.5-pound plates and a spotter is incredible! Previous barriers can be broken when even small strides forward are marked and celebrated. That is what we men need to return to in our lives. Our 2.5 lb. barrier breakers or spotters could be the next memorized, recited Bible verse that gives us strength the next time we want to act more like the Holy Spirit.

Look at these "eight-finger-lift-assists" and imagine the Holy Spirit spotting you the next time you're tempted to act like a jerk. These four little training manuals consist of only 20 chapters. Perhaps while the month of June warms-up and suns-up, you and I could read and reread these manuals until they train us up to become more of what the Lord knows we can become – if we will let him spot us as we try to break the next barrier.

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

Galatians 5:16-17

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.

Ephesians 5:1-5

Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. 7 You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.

Colossians 3:5-10

I promise, I will read and reread these four books all during the month of June. I hope you will join me. Let's get stronger together.

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.

What to do with wisdom from our fathers

by Coye Bouyer

WHAT THE GUARD...

Proverbs 4:23 says, "watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." The father says to his son, 'Watch over your heart...' The Hebrew word used here for the phrase 'watch over,' is 'nosar' and literally means 'to watch,' 'to guard' or 'to keep.' This is important because unlike guarding material things like possessions, people or places, the son is to guard... 'his heart.'

While the Hebrew word 'lev' does refer to one's actual heart, abstractly it also refers to one's inner self, one's will, understanding or even one's mind. In Solomon's day, much like today, the heart and mind were seen as synonymous or interchangeable. Therefore, the son is being told to guard both his heart and mind.

HOW TO GUARD...

The Hebrew word used here for the phrase 'with all diligence,' is 'misar,' meaning 'to pay careful attention to.' Another example is Adam being told that he is responsible to protect or 'guard' the Garden. The concept of guarding in the present context of Proverbs 4 carries the understanding of guarding or protecting someone/thing from an external enemy. Here in Proverbs 4:23 the father is challenging his son to 'guard' or to 'protect,' with a careful conviction, a deliberate diligence of something internally, i.e. 'his heart,' from an external enemy.

WHY GUARD...

To better understand the significant weight of his father's instructions, we must recognize the father's previous instructions with regards to the path of both the wicked and the righteous. He has said that if his son wants to live he will not only hear, but he will hang onto and even heed his father's wisdom. So, when the father says, 'guard your heart... ', his son is not just guarding his heart from the attack of an enemy or from someone/something physically puncturing or hurting his heart, rather he is to guard the good and godly guidance/counsel given to him by his father (v. 3). For his father knows that just as he has deposited godly guidance into the heart of his son, there are those who will seek to somehow supplant the father's Godly guidance and right thinking for ungodliness and wrong thinking.

Therefore, his son must be intentionally insistent on holding/guarding his father's wisdom for while information may come from outside sources, only what takes root in the heart of an individual flows from them to the rest of their world (for from it, that is one's heart, flows the springs of life).

CONCLUSION

Dad's, as we prepare to celebrate another Father's Day with our children, let us take a moment to remind them of the good and godly wisdom we have imparted to them as we encourage them like this father, hear, hold onto, and heed the godliness, faithfulness and wisdom we have taught them so that this is what flow from their lives into the rest of the world. God Bless you men!

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.

Thirsty guitars and dried-up souls

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – I have a distinct love and appreciation of wooden instruments, especially acoustic guitars. I have owned quite a few over the years of various brands. Even though I don't play them extremely well, I thoroughly love the look, feel and sound of the different types of woods with which they are made. Each wood is different in sound and depth of tone giving each guitar its own individual uniqueness. Along with owning an acoustic guitar, as with any wooden instrument, there is periodic maintenance required to keep them in good sounding condition.

One very important fact I had to learn as an acoustic guitar owner is that guitars are thirsty. What does that mean you might ask - that sounds a little strange. Acoustic guitars, like all wooden instruments, require water to stay in good working/sounding condition. They must be kept in a humidified space, or the wood begins to dry out. The tops begin to crack, the neck begins to warp, and the instrument begins to sound bad and not function like it should. It can become unusable. They must have water to perform the task for which they were created - make beautiful music in the hands of an artist.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but as Christians aren't we supposed to be instruments in the hands of our Heavenly Father - the master artist - to be played and make beautiful sounds in this world to bring glory to Him and help others tune into His melodies of salvation and love?

For us to stay in good-sounding repair we must keep our souls properly maintained. We must keep our souls hydrated. A thirsty soul is a cracked soul - a warped soul - a soul that sounds out of tune. A dehydrated soul cannot play beautiful music - it's not pleasant to the ears or attractive to the heart. The only solution for a dehydrated soul is "Living Water".

In John chapter seven Jesus boldly declared, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water".

It's easy to become dehydrated. A dried-up soul doesn't happen overnight, but it will happen eventually if we don't drink from the river of life. The "cares of this world" can squeeze us dry and make us unable to be used.

We must continually drink in the Spirit of Jesus and let Him hydrate our souls. We must let His Living Water flow deep as it fills in the cracks of anger and frustration and reshapes our warped sentiments of hopelessness, loneliness, discontent, and unbelief. The more we drink the more we can be used/played by Him. His Living Water floods our soul to the point we begin to flow out onto those around us.

And isn't this what we were created for - to be a uniquely created instrument, masterfully played by our Creator bringing Heavenly sounds to a fallen world? Don't be a thirsty guitar.

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.

Stronger than the struggle

by Karen Blanchard

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MI – As we journey down the road of life, we face mountaintop highs as well as valley lows. The last few months have been a challenge for me. Over the years as my relationship with Jesus has grown deeper, he has taught me how to handle the struggles of life; however, with as much as I have learned, the last four months have shown me that I still have a lot to learn. God is so good and faithful to guide us through every step of our journey.

The Bible says in Ephesians 6:12, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

I have learned over the years to try to look past the circumstance I am going through and look to God. The enemy is the one who is behind all the chaos and confusion that we experience in this world. Once we begin to recognize that, it then helps us to shift our perspective off of the person or circumstance and ask God to help us fight the battle.

Personally, I have found in my life that the enemy tries to attack me before I do anything big for God. The past few months, I felt the warfare of the enemy trying to attack. With every attack that would come, my gaze began to fall a little more and a little more off God and onto the struggle.

Before I knew it, the negative thoughts began to trump God's voice, and I couldn't figure out how I got to this place. I have learned that when I am in the struggle, I need to seek God more than ever. I would journal out my feelings and frustrations and I would read my Bible. Every time I chose to seek God, he would meet me there.

Finally, God opened my eyes that I was grumbling and complaining about a situation I was in. Through grumbling and complaining about this situation, I opened myself up to the enemy which began to affect my thoughts and attitude. The Holy Spirit convicted me of this sin in my

life. I am so grateful that when God reveals a sin in our life, he does it in a loving and gentle way. The enemy is the one who brings shame and condemnation, not God.

I prayed and confessed my sin and decided from that point on with God's help, I would keep my mouth closed and trust him through the circumstance. By the end of that week, God sent the answer to the prayers I had been praying. His answer was so much better than mine could have ever been.

I was reminded during this difficult time, that God was teaching me things in the struggle that I wouldn't have learned otherwise. It is through the struggle that God strengthens us for the next thing he has prepared for us. It is in the darkness we learn to lean on God and allow him to light the path for us. Once God spoke to my heart that I had been grumbling and complaining, the fog started to lift, and everything began to become clear again.

In James 1:2-4 Paul writes, Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

We are never promised a struggle free life! When you feel like you are sinking and you don't know what else to do, call out to God! He is there waiting to rescue you. This takes surrender! We must lay ourselves down and be willing to listen to the hard things God is trying to reveal to us.

One verse that has been very dear to my heart during this time of struggle has been Galatians 6:9, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

You are stronger than the struggle! You know why? Because Jesus has already fought the battle and holds your victory. Don't give up

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!

Challenging Father's Day sermons

by Jim Stolt

PLYMOUTH, MI – Last Father's Day my college-aged son had a friend over after church. He attends our church as well, and he said something to me that has stuck with me since that day. "Pastor Jim," he said, "I noticed that on Mother's Day the moms are encouraged and celebrated, but on Father's Day you always challenge them and beat on them a bit." He then laughed nervously, unsure if he had crossed a line.

After I picked my jaw up off the floor, I wanted to respond with a retort, but found that I couldn't. He was right and I let him know it. We definitely celebrate our dads as well, but I have been harder on our men than I have on our women.

Allow me to illustrate. This past Mother's Day, my main point was, "Even though I'm a hot mess, God can still use me." The main point for the Father's Day sermon my son's friend referenced, based in 1 Kings 2:1-4, was, "Be strong, show yourself a man and keep the Lord's charge." Notice the difference? Why is that? I must say that I prefaced the Mother's Day sermon with the intimidation that the Proverbs 31 woman causes every woman and tried to encourage them with the fact that they didn't have to compete with the Proverbs 31 woman to be used of God—God used women that were a complete hot mess, too. But that compassion is glaringly absent when it comes to the men. Should I change and ease up a bit on the guys?

Men are called to serve their families as the head of the household.

As I began to prepare for Father's Day and I began to write this article, I tried to bang two brain cells together, and I asked the Lord for help in answering that question. As a result, I came up with a few thoughts and the Holy Spirit reminded me of some key Scriptures. Men are called to serve their families as the head of the household.

Headship is about responsibility and accountability to God, not power or control. As the firstborn of God's creation, Adam was the original model of headship. Though it was Eve who initiated the Fall, it was Adam who was held accountable, "The Lord God called to the man" (Genesis 3:9-10, emphasis mine).

As Christ is the head of the church, His body, the husband is called to serve his family by sacrificially leading them (Ephesians 5:23, 1 Corinthians 11:3). As sinful, selfish creatures, men need to be reminded of this responsibility. There is no greater day to drive that home than on Father's Day.

Men need to be challenged.

There is a reason that there is an expression of "deadbeat dads" and not "moocher moms." Most moms take care of business and provide for their children, no matter what it costs them

and without being asked to do so. Moms don't need a kick in the pants, they need a pat on the back. Guys often are the opposite. Too many dads are willing to walk away from their families and the responsibility that God has placed on them. Even if they don't walk away, guys tend to get distracted and forget what is truly important—myself included. We need to be reminded and refocused. Perhaps that is one reason why there are so many challenges in the Bible that are addressed to men. Besides, men love a good challenge, and often rise to the occasion when the challenge is placed in front of them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Stolt has been in full-time ministry for over twenty years in youth ministry, music ministry and pastoral ministry. He has been the Senior Pastor at Praise Community Church in Plymouth, MI for four years. He and his beautiful wife, Karyn, have two incredible college-aged children, Jacob and Sarah, and two adorable dogs, Scout and Ender.

Rethinking Father's Day

by Clayton Knight

WARREN, MI – For many people in the church, there's a certain kind of dread that creeps in one Sunday every June. What is intended to be a holiday to celebrate dads, can easily become an opportunity for hurt—both old and new—to rear its ugly head. Sadly, life in this fallen world means that everyone's dad is a sinner.

Oftentimes, those sinful dads have caused tremendous amounts of pain to their own children. As a pastor, I've sat and wept with people in my church as they talked with me about their wicked fathers. As foster parents, my wife and I have cared for children who bear the consequences of their fathers' poor choices, absenteeism, neglect, or criminal activity.

For other men, Father's Day serves as a painful reminder that they aren't fathers yet, despite their deep desire to become one. For others, Father's Day comes loaded with sadness. Maybe dad has passed away. Or perhaps it's dad himself who's faced with mourning the loss of a child who's no longer here to celebrate.

Added to the mix, pastors can be tone deaf to the complex emotions that many feel on Father's Day. We can be totally unaware of what we're doing when we walk up into our pulpits and thoughtlessly blab out, "Happy Father's Day!"

When we tailor our sermons to fathers and maybe even hand out gifts to dads in attendance (I once knew of a church that fried bacon for every dad who walked into the church building on

Father's Day), we may unintentionally be throwing salt in an open wound for many hurting people in our congregations.

But I think it's time that we broadened our understanding of who a "father" is in the church.

Paul writes to the church in Ephesus: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

Here, Paul is arguing that God is making one new humanity in Christ. And that "new humanity" is God's household—the church. And in his household, there are spiritual mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers—as Paul makes abundantly clear elsewhere:

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

Paul himself, being a celibate, single man (1 Cor 7:7), understood that he was a "father" to the entire congregation at Corinth:

Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 1 Corinthians 4:15

So, here's the truth that we need to grapple with: **You don't have to have kids to be a dad in the church.** You don't even have to be married. You just have to be a man committed to Christ and his plan for the world.

People ought to be able to look at the mature, godly men in our churches and say, "That's a father."

"What?" someone may respond, "But that guy doesn't even have kids. What do you mean he's a father?"

To which we reply, "Oh yes, he does! That man is a father to many in the church."

I don't know your family situation or your past, but I do want you to know the kind of family you are welcomed into now in Christ. The psalmist lamented, "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in" (Psalm 27:10).

Now, let's ask ourselves this: How does the Lord take people in?

The answer: he does it through the local church.

So, let's commit ourselves to shaping our church communities, our sermons, and our holiday celebrations according to the Word of God. So that, by God's grace, we may see more spiritual fathers (and mothers!) rise up in our churches for the glory of God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clayton Knight is the Senior Pastor at Warren Woods Baptist Church in Warren, Michigan. He is married to Sarah and a blessed daddy to one sweet daughter.

Godly fathers create a gospel culture

by Josh Tovey

GRANDVILLE, MI – In Spring 2015, we planted Redemption Church, and then we adopted our three kids in the Spring of 2018. When we planted a church, we were always processing what kind of culture we wanted as a church. Especially, what does it look like to build a Gospel culture in our church?

When we adopted our three kids (ages 8,7,6) we started processing the same question, but from the perspective as parents. As I think about being a godly father, I am always processing the culture I want my home to have for my kids to thrive physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Our kids have experienced a significant amount of trauma, so at times we do not feel equipped. Yet, God in his sovereignty has allowed us to be their parents. As we study the scriptures, we learn that the kind of culture God wants for the church is the same culture God wants in my home. The kind of culture God wants in my home is the same culture God wants in his church.

So, the question is, as fathers, how do we create a Gospel culture in our homes? This past winter, as a church, we spent 13 weeks in the book of 1 John, processing a framework for transformation. While studying 1 John we saw the kind of culture God wants every Christian to experience in their life. The culture God wants directly applies to every role in our lives, including fatherhood.

In other words, the culture John unpacks is for every church and every home. John repeats a pattern in the book to help us answer what a Gospel culture is (see 1 John 2:1-6). A Gospel culture is like a three-leg stool. If one leg is broken the whole thing collapses. The strength of a gospel culture is found when all three legs are equally celebrated.

Three Aspects of Gospel Culture

1. A Gospel Belief: What You Know

A gospel culture first requires the good news of Jesus to be the focus of my home. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection changes everything - my identity in him, my intentionality for him, my eternity with him. A Gospel belief speaks to the story of the Bible in creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

As a father I want my kids to know that Jesus is the hero not me. I must point my kids to the beauty of Jesus whenever possible. Talk about Jesus at the dinner table, pray to Jesus with them, talk about Jesus in discipline, etc.

2. A Gospel Behavior: What You Do

This means what I know changes what I do. I don't obey for God to accept us, but I obey because I have been accepted. Teach your kids that the good news of Jesus motivates a specific response in our hearts. Showing your kids Jesus' unwavering acceptance will empower obedience to him. Behavior is striving to make the things of Jesus visible.

3. A Gospel Belonging: Who You Are

1 John uses the word "beloved" many times, which speaks to the idea that God fully knows you yet fully loves you. Why? Because you belong to him. You are a part of his body, the church, and his kingdom. Belonging speaks to your identity, and when you know you belong you will never wish for anything else.

I want these three things to speak to the culture we have in our home.

Our world is offering a completely different worldview that produces counterfeit gospels and challenges each aspect of the three-leg stool. While the world is pulling at your kids' hearts, how will you respond?

The question each father must answer is what kind of culture do you want in your home?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josh Tovey serves as the Lead Pastor of Redemption Church in Grandville, Michigan. Josh's heartbeat is for people to experience life change that can only be found in Jesus and to see God advance a gospel movement through church planting.

The days of our lives

by Billy Walker

SOUTHGATE, MI – Ok, so as Father’s Day approaches, I have to share this memory from childhood. My dad would kill me, but here goes.

I distinctly remember as a child, pre-school, and kindergarten age, cuz I’m home for lunch. My dad was a full-time evangelist. For those who wonder what that means, he went to different places and preached every night for a week, aka Billy Graham – but it was more Pontiac than Poland, and Grand Rapids more than Great Britain.

He was, however, pretty successful, and gone quite a bit. But he made it a point to come home every night. No matter how far away he was, he was home at some point so that he was able to get up and spend some time with his family before leaving again in the afternoon.

Now, the memory is this – every day for lunch, mom would make something for him to eat and he would enjoy it while watching, wait for it... “The Days of our Lives!” And every day I would hear, “Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives!”

Now for the life of me, I can’t remember one storyline from that show, but I sure do remember that tagline... “So are the days of our lives.” At age 5 or 6 I am thinking that sand passes through like molasses. I remember sitting in class on some days in school and thinking “never mind making it to the end of the day, how will I make it through this class? When will this hour end?”

The older we get, the faster the sand seems to travel. What do we do when our kids are wanting life to speed up and we are begging for time to slow down? In a whirlwind of warp speed that a decade provides, parents wind up experiencing driver’s licenses, open houses, graduations from high school, moving out and on to college, senior recitals, more graduations from college, first cars, first jobs, first loves, dating, engagements, weddings, and on the list could go.

Having gone through that period, I admit that I sometimes live vicariously through my oldest, Whitney, as she seemingly travels the world with a carefree spirit, writing, singing, and leading worship with Michael W. Smith. (True story!) She’s a wonder! Have you ever seen “Father of the Bride?” Awesome movie, but man, do NOT watch it when the sand is pouring through the hourglass as your youngest prepares to walk the aisle and marry the love of her life.

I could so relate to the Steve Martin character. Trying to figure out how to pay for the whole thing yet wanting it to be the reality of the dreams Kaylie, our youngest had since she watched Cinderella! This incredible sense of pride, while at the same time this piece of your life that feels like it’s being taken away. What in the world is that and where did it come from and can anything be done about it?

Let me try to summarize with hopefully a glimmer of spiritual encouragement. I remember the experience of graduations, both high school and college, and the perpetual smile and sense of “That one’s mine” that we felt as we watched each of those girls receive that diploma. It really isn’t much different than when they were kids on a stage for a musical performance. They would come on the platform and look for us – and once spotted, we couldn’t help but wave and smile, as if to say, “That one’s ours!”

I believe that pride we feel for our children is something that was created in us by the very one who feels pride for HIS children. It’s hard for us to imagine, isn’t it? The God of the universe pointing us out to some angels and saying, “that one’s mine!”

Now, were our girls perfect growing up? Far from it – made some mistakes, had some missteps, and were part of their share of misunderstandings. But none of that mattered in the overall scope of things. Especially on these special occasions when parental pride is not only accepted but expected.

So, God, in His incredible grace, accepts us with our imperfections and loves us unconditionally, while still pushing us to be better not only FOR Him, but THROUGH Him! (Philippians 4:13) The emotions we go through are emotions He gave us! He is an emotional God! (John 11:35) We were created in HIS image and that image gives to us the emotion that travels with us through this life, and I believe on into the next. Part of heaven’s greatness is the lack of longing that will accompany it! We’ll never have to say good-by again.

One more thing, as the sands of time pass through life’s hourglass, I believe God’s intention is for us to move from season to season...continuing to GO, continuing to GROW. Sometimes the pace will be frantic and frenetic with no time to think towards the future, let alone remember the past. At other points, it slows down a bit, giving us the opportunity to look back and remember the seasons that have been, but also looking forward to the seasons that are yet ahead. And in the midst of it all, remember the most important thing is to live in the moment that we have been given. Life is a series of seasons, seasons are years, years are months, months are weeks, weeks are days, days are hours, hours are minutes and minutes are seconds which hold the moments that we call NOW.

Oh, there goes another one! See how quick they are? Let’s make them count. Let’s enjoy not only the destination occasions that come for our family, but the life travel that moves us to those points. Whatever season you find yourself in – the sands of time continue to pass through the hourglass (James 4:14). Make each grain count! Not just for ourselves, but for our families, for our communities, for our world, and most importantly, for our God. Ok, I’m done – think I’ll go grab some lunch while taking in an episode of “Days of our Lives!” Nah!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Billy Walker became Lead Pastor of Calvary Church Southgate in 2006. He also serves as the Vice President of the Billy Walker Evangelistic Association and Hiawatha Youth Camp. Billy and wife Laurie have two adult daughters, Whitney and Kaylie, and a son-in-law, Eric.

Just do it?

by David Thompson

NASHVILLE, TN – Nike is a Greek word more than 2000 years old, and it means “overcomer” or “victorious one”. The modern-day company that brands the name simply states “Just Do It”. Are you supposed to be an overcomer if you are a follower of The Lord Jesus Christ? The answer is simple—“Yes” and “No”... and you may want to slap me right now—“I forgive you”.

First, the answer is no—not if the standard is set and determined by the world, not if it is based on who has the most tik-tok followers or has achieved some earthly success. Second, the answer is yes for every child of the King if the metric is from God’s vantage point... you see dear friend, every single one in the family of God has one eternal destiny—and that is to be an overcomer!

Good news—it has nothing to do with your circumstances, “ they overcame by the (Blood of the Lamb)...And the word of their testimony” says the disciple whom Jesus loved—banished John. That absolute FACT does not dismiss your daily resolve. Here now an admonition from God—“whatever your hand finds to do... (Just Do It) with all your might” the Old Testament. That has everything to do with our testimony.

Let’s examine how. President Reagan said in 1985, “there are no constraints on the human mind, no walls around the human spirit, no barriers to our progress except those we ourselves erect”. I say, “Amen!” It was true then and it is true now. It has always been true. Then it begs the question, what wall is hindering you? Next question: What are you going to do about it?

Your testimony has to do with your direction. Ralph Waldo Emerson noted, “The world makes way for the man who knows where he is going”. Maybe you are stuck in neutral. My advice is to pick a direction for the glory of God and GO! What I suggest is the opposite of just “Dreaming Big”! In fact, Carl Jung puts it like this, “Your vision only becomes clear when you look (deep) into your own heart... who looks outside, dreams... who looks inside—awakes”. Or as my good friend Mike Connor likes to say, “you just need to look in the mirror for a minute”. So, what’s the problem—why do we all get stuck in a rut?

One reason is we stop growing, call it “a lack of faith”—more simply, we compromise. Ayn Rand touts, “live and act within the limit of your knowledge, but keep expanding it to the limit of your life.” Just as we only use 10 percent of our brain, some only live 10 percent of the potential of their life. Is this why God tells us—“whatever your hand finds to do—do it with all your might”?

Now thankfully, I remind you that these efficacious efforts are not what gain you entrance to Heaven—ahhh! But it does determine your level of belief in it all. I love what one coach preached, “we have a mandatory dress code when we work out, practice or play as a team. We all dress exactly alike. If you want to draw attention to yourself around here, then outwork your

teammates”. Coach Bear Bryant said that. I love it! Trust me—there are no “Super Children of God”. We all wear the same “blood of Jesus.” But shouldn’t we at least outwork the unbeliever. You may have the worst job or position or status in the world—doesn’t matter, “Whatever your hand finds to do—JUST DO IT, with all your might... and for the glory of God! Because you, my friend, are an OVERCOMER!!

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.

SBC presidential candidates, state leaders respond to Guidepost report

by BP Staff

Editor’s note: This story was updated after its initial publication.

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Baptist Press has compiled a list of public statements from Southern Baptist leaders regarding the [findings of an investigation by Guidepost Solutions](#) into the SBC Executive Committee’s handling of sexual abuse claims.

First, are statements from each of the three men running for president of the SBC. Following that are public statements from either a group of state Baptist convention leaders or from the state’s executive director-treasurer. Where the statement is from one person, he is named. A link also is provided to the full statement where possible.

Baptist Press intends to add to this compilation as we receive more information.

Tom Ascol — I was grieved deeply as I read the report of the SBC Sex Abuse Task Force. Sex abuse is horrific and failure both to work for its prevention and to respond Christianly in the

wake of it should cause Christians and churches to look to the Lord with godly sorrow and repentance.

Southern Baptists must recommit ourselves to uphold God's standards of holiness and purity in all things, especially in caring for those who are most vulnerable among us.

I also call on all Southern Baptists to join me in carefully studying the Task Force's recommendations and their implications. There is much before us to consider, and we will need wisdom from above as we chart new paths of mercy and righteousness.

I am confident that our Lord will enable us to do so as we depend on Him for strength and recommit ourselves to seek honor of our crucified and risen Savior.

Full statement [here](#).

Bart Barber — The record represented in this report is clear. Men and women, boys and girls, have been abused in Southern Baptist churches. The churches belong to Jesus Christ, their Founder and Head. Every time abuse happens in a church, the abuser has committed a mutiny against Christ's lordship over the church and has scandalized His little ones. Jesus said that it would be better for such a one to have a millstone hung around his neck and to be thrown into the sea (Matthew 18:6).

Sometimes the victims of that abuse or sometimes the leaders of those churches have called the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention to seek advice or to try to protect other churches from enduring the same abuse at the hands of the same abusers. Each of these contacts has presented the Executive Committee with an opportunity to help those churches and those individuals as much as possible. Instead, some people entrusted with leadership at that entity have deliberately helped as little as possible—deliberately refusing to return phone calls and messages, deliberately withholding information that they were collecting about abusers, and deliberately minimizing the amount of helpful advice that they would disclose.

...

The Executive Committee seems to have been operating under a different notion of local church autonomy—one arising less out of the Bible and more out of Blackstone.¹ The biblical doctrine of local church autonomy in no way prevents churches from advising one another, critiquing one another, or establishing or withdrawing fellowship from one another. Yet, although these activities in no way endangered the biblical doctrine of local church autonomy, the Executive Committee's counsel believed that these activities posed a threat to the Executive Committee's legal arguments against ascending liability. The biblical doctrine of local church autonomy came to be conflated with that legal argument, although they are not the

same thing.

...

Sometimes our assertions of local church autonomy have seemed insincere to the people on the receiving end of them. Do we want people to take seriously what we say about local church autonomy? Then we should demonstrate with actions our commitment to love them to the fullest extent and seek justice for them to the fullest extent that we can achieve within our beliefs.

Regardless of whether I am elected as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, I pledge my efforts toward that end.

Full statement [here](#).

Robin Hadaway — Like everyone in Southern Baptist life, I was troubled and saddened by the contents of Sunday’s release of the report by Guideposts Solutions and the Sexual Abuse Task Force (SATF). We grieve for the victims and covenant to continue to pray for them.

Guidepost Solutions’ report to the SATF presents 17 recommendations, plus 16 more if one of the 17 is not implemented. In the Baptist Press article today, the SATF indicates it will be “posting formal motions and suggestions before the annual meeting, it has listed a group of ‘a few initial needs’.” First and foremost on the SATF’s list will be a call for the next SBC President to appoint an Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force that will suggest steps for the Convention to consider over the next 3 annual meetings.

This seems wise. This will allow the SBC, through her committee process to navigate this difficult situation so the SBC can continue her commitment to evangelism, missions, educational and benevolent causes.”

Alabama (Rick Lance) — Now we all are saddened. We’re grief stricken, deeply grief stricken concerning those who had to endure experiences that no one should have to face. But we as Alabama Baptists need to join together with the larger Southern Baptist family in praying for those who have experienced this trauma.

...

Last Friday, our State Board of Missions authorized \$200,000 for participation in churches to scholarship them to be involved in training for good policies, for prevention, for protection.

That \$200,000 will be a \$200 scholarship for the first 1,000 Alabama Baptist churches wanting to participate.

Full statement [here](#).

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Alaska (Randy Covington) – Alaska Baptists grieve the existence of sexual abuse in any setting, but especially when it occurs in the context of the church. We affirm that sexual abuse must not be tolerated in any form, and every measure available should be utilized to prevent individuals from abusing those who are vulnerable. We offer our deepest concerns and prayers for those who have experienced abuse of any sort, and are committed to ministering with Christ’s love to the needs of these individuals.

It is extremely heartbreaking to receive the Guidepost Solutions report. We are thankful that Southern Baptists have taken action to expose and deal with abuse that has occurred within our denomination. Now is the time for deep lamentation and sincere repentance for all Southern Baptists. We, as Alaska Baptists, have been and continue to be committed to giving this issue the attention it demands as we support the work of our churches in taking the gospel to a lost and hurting world.

Statement [here](#).

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Arizona (David Johnson) — While Arizona does not appear in the report released Sunday, May 22, by the Southern Baptist Convention Sexual Abuse Task Force, we grieve over the reports of sexual abuse that have taken place in SBC churches, institutions, and entities over the past 20 or more years. We are saddened by the conduct of our leaders, and our hearts are broken for the victims and their families.

The Arizona Southern Baptist Convention stands against sexual abuse of any kind and has posted policies and procedures for our churches to follow to aid in preventing this type of behavior in our churches and among our leaders. Resources for churches are available at azsbc.org/caring-well/.

We recognize the gravity of the recommendations made by Guidepost and the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force, and we commit to continue working toward making our churches and convention a safe place to be.

Full statement [here](#).

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Arkansas — The report is nothing short of heartbreaking. Its findings indicate that a problem exists at the highest level of the Southern Baptist Convention regarding the treatment of sexual abuse survivors within our denomination. We must do better! Our prayers are with survivors, and we are overwhelmed by their endurance and strength.

Arkansas Baptists have taken steps to ensure that our state convention and its entities represent Christ regarding handling sexual abuse. With unanimous support from the messengers at the 2021 ABSC Annual Meeting, the Arkansas Baptist Sexual Abuse Task Force was formed. We have been working ever since to ensure the policies and procedures of our state convention and its entities are above reproach.

Full statement [here](#).

California — The abuse brought to light in the report is a cause for us to grieve for those children, women, and men who have suffered sexual abuse. We are saddened by the pain these individuals have experienced. We are disturbed by the manipulation revealed in the report. We take these horrific offenses seriously.

We commit to pray for the sexual abuse task force as they have an important responsibility in responding to the report and bringing necessary recommendations.

Together we mourn with the victims and intercede on their behalf. We ask God for His will to be done. And we pray for wisdom as we move forward continuing to do the work of the kingdom.

Full statement [here](#).

Colorado – (Mike Proud) [Statement released May 23] I cannot fully express the emotion I am feeling over this report. I am sickened, saddened, angry and extremely disturbed that these things have taken place in our denomination. I am grieved for the numerous victims who have not only experienced this violation, but the shameful way they were dismissed when they brought this to light.

I want you to know your Executive Board was already scheduled to meet today and tomorrow (May 23-24) and on their agenda is a Sexual Abuse Protocol which was drafted in April. We are working diligently to put protocols into place as a convention and to provide resources to our churches so we may do everything within our power to be proactive, transparent, and spare others from this hurt within our state.

Full statement [here](#).

Dakotas (Fred MacDonald) — Two words that come to my mind are ‘disturbing’ and ‘painful.’ It’s hard to put into words the feelings and recognizing the pain that has been caused over the years by men of God.

Full video [here](#).

Florida — Executive Director Tommy Green shared in a letter to pastors that the “Florida Baptist Family grieves over the information shared in the recent Guidepost report. We pray for sexual abuse victims and survivors. We pray for the grace and mercy of God and healing in their lives.”

Thankful for pastors as they continue to “fulfill their calling to the glory of the Lord,” Green asked Florida Baptists to continue to be in prayer in the days ahead. Those days, he said, “will be challenging as the SBC wrestles with how to move forward in response to the revelations in the report.”

Georgia — We are all grieved by the findings of the Guidepost Solutions investigation. The report submitted through the SBC’s Sexual Abuse Task Force revealed disturbing and egregious acts committed on some of our most vulnerable.

We recognize the courage of survivors who continued to share their stories and bravely pursue action from their leaders. We must pray for God to provide strength and healing for all survivors as well as wisdom for everyone dealing with abusive situations.

Let us commit ourselves to doing all we can so every place of worship is a safe place for everyone. The Special Committee on Sex Abuse appointed by GBC President Kevin Williams will bring recommendations at our state convention in November to assist Georgia Baptists with safety policies, guidelines and procedures.

Full statement [here](#).

Hawaii (Christopher Martin) — As Guidepost Solutions released its report to the Sexual Abuse Task Force of the SBC today, we all should be humbled as we grieve for the victims of sexual abuse. We offer our prayers for God’s healing of abuse victims, their loved ones, and others who are affected.

Among the pages of this report, we find that those victims of deplorable and inexcusable acts opened their lives to needless scrutiny and pain to bravely share the sins committed against them by pastors and leaders in the SBC. But unfortunately, these sins remained hidden and disregarded for far too long.

...

Your Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention Executive Board has begun strengthening policies and resources to assist our churches in making them safe places of refuge. We ask for your prayers and support in the continuation of this work. We will release more information on these efforts in the coming weeks and months.

Full statement [here](#).

Illinois (Nate Adams) — “Along with many others, I am grieved over the information released today by the SBC’s Sex Abuse Task Force, including the detailed findings in the Guidepost Solutions report. I’m grateful for the Task Force’s concisely stated recommendations, which I’m sure will receive sober and serious considerations by messengers to next month’s Southern Baptist Convention in Anaheim. While the focus of the Task Force’s work has been at the national SBC level, any network of churches, including our association of churches here in Illinois, should carefully examine its own practices in responding to victims of abuse, as well as assisting churches in prevention. IBSA is doing so and remains committed to continuing transparent and proactive processes to assist churches in protecting the vulnerable and ministering to those who have experienced abuse.”

Statement [here](#).

Indiana (Ryan Strother) — Today, may all Southern Baptists humble themselves and commit to caring for survivors of sexual abuse. I’m still processing Guidepost Solutions’ “Report of the Independent Investigation,” released last night. I’m deeply grieved and upset by what has been reported. No follower of Jesus should mistreat or intimidate abuse survivors, but rather should be like the Lord who works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed (Psalm 103:4).

Yet, I remain hopeful that the Southern Baptist Convention will humbly change what is necessary to help our churches prevent further abuse. Last year, many messengers made clear that they wanted to take this issue seriously (which led to this investigation and report). The majority of members in SBC churches are committed to Scripture and faithful to God’s work. We can learn through this time of anguish and change the future of the Convention for the better. This is my prayer.

Statement [here](#).

Iowa – Executive Director Tim Lubinus has not released a statement but told Baptist Press the convention is publishing regular updates regarding the investigation and report on its website.

Kansas-Nebraska – We join Southern Baptists around the world in lamenting and repenting of those acts of commission and omission outlined in the report.

...

We have been in consultation with numerous men and women who are leaders in our KNSBC churches and associations to begin the process of formulating both better safeguards to protect and clearer pathways to report so that what happened nationally does not happen locally.

Full statement [here](#).

Kentucky (Todd Gray) — After reading the report, the Lord led me to pray for sexual abuse survivors in a way I never had before. Romans 12:15 reminds us to “weep with those who weep,” and this is a time to grieve with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In November 2021, former KBC President Dr. Wes Fowler brought a motion to the messengers of the Kentucky Baptist Convention meeting in Elizabethtown to establish a Kentucky Baptist Sexual Abuse Task Force (SATF). That task force was approved unanimously by the messengers and has been actively at work since that time.

Full statement [here](#).

Louisiana (Steve Horn) – I, like many of you, read the report from Guideposts and experienced an array of emotions. We must do better. We must be better. Those affected by sexual abuse deserve better and certainly, our devotion to our Lord demands better.

As promised during our Annual Meeting last November, we will seek to listen to, and support, those who have suffered abuse. In addition, we will be proactive in implementing strategies that endeavor to eliminate all incidents of sexual abuse among our churches.

During our May Executive Board meeting, I updated our trustees on what's been done since our November gathering. We will continue to review the report from the SATF and discern what recommendations can and should be adopted among our convention of churches.

I urge Louisiana Baptists to pray this moment brings us to a place of acknowledgment of sin which leads to repentance that makes way for the fruit of repentance.

For about a year now, we have been calling people to introspection, consecration, intercession, and decision through the personal revival guide, *Change Me*. Today, more than ever, we need to be praying, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way. Lord, change me!"

Maryland-Delaware — We are saddened by the Guidepost report released on May 22, and we grieve with the survivors. We admire and applaud their courage in coming forward with their stories. We see them. We hear them. And we support them.

At the BCM/D, we are committed to helping churches create and cultivate a culture where vulnerable people are protected and cared for and are able to heal and thrive. Our work has only just begun.

...

Read the full statement [here](#).

Michigan (Tim Patterson) — After being immersed in the report, my emotions have been from one extreme to the other.

Deep sadness, grief, heartbreak, intense empathy for the victims/survivors, anger, frustration, relief...and much more. There were revelations in the report that were shocking, especially concerning those in the past for whom I have had the greatest of love and admiration.

Executive director Tim Patterson goes on to outline ways his state convention has been engaged in pursuing transparency and protecting people from abuse.

Full statement [here](#).

Minnesota-Wisconsin (Leo Endel) — There is a time for every activity under heaven: ... a time to weep... and a time to mourn... (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Today is a time for both.

...

[T]oday we grieve with those who have been abused, are outraged at those who abused them, and are broken by the lack of action from significant leaders who may have prevented some of this from happening.

Full statement [here](#).

Mississippi (Shawn Parker) — Although it is difficult and heartbreaking to receive the Guidepost Solutions report, we are thankful that Southern Baptists have taken action to expose and deal with abuse that has occurred within our denomination. Mississippi Baptists have been and continue to be committed to give this issue the needed attention it demands as we support the work of our churches in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).”

Full statement [here](#).

Missouri (Sexual Abuse Response Team) — We want to be clear. This report reveals an ongoing pattern of sin, idolatrous use of power, and callousness toward the abused. The report made several recommendations for institutional change and cultural repentance. We are grateful for those leaders and staff members whom the report revealed were serving faithfully throughout different levels of our denomination.

In this time of shock and grief, we offer you two counsels that are prayerfully given and biblically sourced. First, this is a time for prayer, for the abused, for justice, for lamentation and repentance of the perpetrators and our denomination. Second, we urge you to consider careful and wise responses in this season and that we approach this with a spirit of humility and lamentation.

Full statement [here](#).

New Mexico (Steve Ballew) — My heart is broken today. It is difficult to process another elementary school shooting. As of this morning, 19 children and two adults are counted as senselessly slaughtered.

We live in a world broken by sin. While politicians and news pundits will debate various solutions, the one solution they will miss is the spiritual solution.

The church desperately needs revival. The world around us needs a spiritual awakening. May this event drive us to our knees before the only One who can affect real and lasting change. We must admit our impotence and seek the omnipotence of our great God.

...

I am grateful for the work of Guidepost Solutions and the Sexual Abuse Task Force for bringing out into the open these disgraceful acts. I am optimistically prayerful that the messengers who gather in Anaheim in June will be presented with recommendations that will move us forward to a day when we with integrity can testify that we are doing all that we can to protect everyone in our care.

Read the full statement [here](#).

New York (Terry Robertson) — Although it is difficult and heartbreaking to receive the Guidepost Solutions report, we are thankful that Southern Baptists have taken action to expose and deal with abuse that has occurred within our denomination. BCNY will continue to be committed to give this issue the proper attention it demands as we support the work of our churches in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).”

Full statement [here](#).

North Carolina (Todd Unzicker) — Today’s release of the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force report marks a time for our family of churches to grieve, repent, reflect and respond.

We recognize that the contents of this report will cause survivors of abuse to relive painful experiences and memories. I applaud the courage of abuse survivors who came forward to share their stories. We must demonstrate compassion and care to everyone who bears the pain of abuse.

...

People won’t trust our gospel if they don’t trust that they can be safe in our sanctuaries. As we pray for the gospel to bring healing and hope to everyone affected by this heinous sin, we must also be proactive in preventing abuse and taking the necessary actions to protect the most vulnerable among us.

Read the full statement [here](#).

Northwest — We encourage Northwest Baptists to read the SATF’s cover letter and the full, detailed Guidepost Solutions report that were released Sunday afternoon. They contain the basis for much of the work in which the denomination in its various expressions will be engaged for a few years to come.

Statement [here](#).

Ohio — When the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention voted to conduct a third-party investigation regarding sexual abuse in our convention, we knew the results would be disturbing. Ohio Baptists grieve with the rest of our SBC family as well as the watching world at the findings of the Guidepost report. We especially grieve with survivors who may feel wounded afresh with the revelations of the report.

Sexual abuse is not only a barrier to the gospel; it is an attack on the gospel. The abuse of another person made in the image of God within the context of the local church is an unthinkable act of darkness. Just as light dispels darkness, however, truth dispels deception. The Guidepost report, while painful, is necessary to reform and healing.

In November 2021, Ohio Baptists expressed our commitment to address the scourge of sexual abuse with the creation of the SCBO Sexual Abuse Task Force (SATF). The SATF is conducting a review of all SCBO policies regarding sexual abuse and is drafting new policies and pathways for prevention and appropriate response within our convention.

Just as we long for the day when God will wipe away all tears from every eye, we are grieved now by the tears of survivors. Now is the time for us to shed tears of grief and repentance which will lead to God-honoring reform in our churches and our convention.

Oklahoma (Todd Fisher) — I am heartbroken and sickened as I read the findings of the Southern Baptist Convention Sexual Abuse Task Force. I am grieved for each and every one of the abuse survivors. Southern Baptists must unquestionably be more vigilant in preventing abuse, reporting abuse, and caring for survivors of abuse. This is a pivotal moment for the SBC. We must learn from this report and be faithful in protecting the vulnerable among us.

Pennsylvania-South Jersey (Baptist Resource Network) (Barry Whitworth) — It is a serious day in the Southern Baptist Convention. On Sunday, May 22, Guidepost Solutions, an independent research firm hired by the SBC’s Executive Committee at the requests of messengers at last year’s SBC annual meeting, issued their 288-page report.

...

The Baptist Resource Network is committed to protecting against all abuse, whether children, women and/or vulnerable adults. We are so serious about this that in recent days, before this report came out, our Executive Board unanimously voted to adopt a “BRN Abuse Prevention” policy for our organization.

Full statement [here](#).

South Carolina (Gary Hollingsworth) — We are grieved by the results of the Southern Baptist Convention Sexual Abuse Task Force report. Foremost, we are grieved for the survivors that have been overlooked, unheard, or dismissed. We lament the actions and abuses that have brought us to this point. In the midst of this grief, we are not without hope. At the South Carolina Baptist Convention Annual Meeting last year, we commissioned our own Sexual Abuse Task Force to respond and apply the results of the national report to our own internal processes, as well as the resourcing of our 2,100 South Carolina Baptist churches.

Full statement [here](#).

Tennessee (Randy Davis) — I believe we have some serious and difficult decisions ahead of us as a people. Many of those decisions are going to hurt, but I don’t see any way forward unless we address what’s been disclosed. I am still trying to process the recommendations, but those need to be looked at closely for how we can ensure that every Southern Baptist church is a safe place for every woman, man, girl and boy to come and focus on worshipping the Lord.

More [here](#).

BGCT — Our hearts break at the findings of the Guidepost Solutions report released by the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force. We join others across Texas and beyond in lament and earnest prayer, acknowledging the failures of the past, accepting the present report’s findings and recommendations and looking ahead with resolve to future change.

...

We continue to urge churches and staff towards a proactive approach focused on sexual abuse prevention, reporting, and compassionate care, even as we look for opportunities to strengthen efforts wherever possible.

Full statement [here](#).

SBTC — The contents of the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force report cause us to grieve for those who have been affected by sexual abuse. We can only imagine the pain and trauma survivors have endured through the reliving and retelling of their experiences, and we are grateful for their courage in coming forward. As a family of churches, we must do better. We must repent of our sin, learn from our past, care for those affected, and respond with clear pathways forward. SBTC churches and church leaders can be assured of the SBTC’s commitment to embrace constructive pathways to restoration and healing, to work to comfort and minister to survivors of abuse in our own network, and to continue to evaluate and reform our own policies, procedures, and ministries toward prevention. The SBTC task force, authorized by unanimous vote of the messengers in our November 2021 Annual Meeting, has been working diligently to strengthen our efforts within our own network of churches. May God grant us forgiveness where there is sin, healing where there is hurt, encouragement where there is hope, and the mind of Christ in all things.

Full statement [here](#).

Utah-Idaho — The details in the Guidepost Solutions report are egregious and deeply disturbing. We are heartbroken for the victims of sexual abuse. There is no level of sexual abuse nor mistreatment of women, children, or men that is acceptable. In honor of the courage of the survivors who came forward to report abuse, and for the sake of righteousness in our denomination, the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention heartily affirms the recommendations of the Sexual Abuse Task Force Report. In addition, we ask the messengers, churches, and those in leadership positions in the Executive Committee, the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention to pray for God’s wisdom, compassion, and strength to make the necessary changes to ensure the safety of all who attend our churches.

Read the full statement [here](#).

SBCV (Brian Autry) — I can’t begin to imagine the hurt and grief of survivors whose trust in leadership has been broken. It grieves me to see more leaders failing to finish well or serve as

God intends. It is heartbreaking, sobering, grieving, and challenging beyond words. We, indeed, must humble ourselves, learn, and seek solutions to serve and care better for people.

Over the last year, our state convention launched a [Caring Well Task Force](#) to provide safe resources and information for survivors, churches, and individuals seeking to learn best practices for how to navigate the subject of spiritual and sexual abuse and domestic violence. This task force meets on a regular basis and has a regularly scheduled meeting this week.

Read the full statement [here](#).

West Virginia — We strongly encourage you to intentionally carve out time in your schedule and [read yesterday's release of the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force report](#).

The weightiness of these findings should humble us before God. We pray this process moves Southern Baptists towards repentance and an increased sense of urgency regarding such matters.

...

West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists remain faithful to God's call to care for others. We have been proactive in recent years in how we recognize, prevent, and care for the abused through training and awareness. We are encouraged by our messengers' initiative to create a WVCSB Sexual Abuse Task Force last November, and our Executive Board will hear their report in two weeks. A complete report will be given to our messengers in November. We want to continually improve and grow as shepherds who protect the sheep God has entrusted to us. Our churches should be places of safety for the vulnerable and healing for the hurting.

Full statement [here](#).

Wyoming (Quin Williams) — Over this past week, I have read the report on sex abuse investigation by Guidepost Solutions. As I read the report and reread portions of the report, I was dismayed to know that vulnerable people had been victimized at the hands of church leaders. If there is any safe place for anyone in our society, it should be in the presence and under the protection of those of us who are kept in the hand of our Lord and Savior. Survivors of abuse, especially sex abuse should find a place of safety in our churches. Nothing less is acceptable. Then, to see the reports that some of them had their stress and emotional suffering was worsened when they sought relief from some of our national leaders added to the heartbreak.

A few things Wyoming Southern Baptist need to do at this point are:

1) Pray for the survivors of sex abuse, both those named in the report and the many others who are not named. These folks still hurt every day.

2) Pray for our Executive Committee. The vast majority of the members of the EC were found to bear no responsibility for the mishandlings of reported abuse. They have a heavy burden now to bear.

3) While, to date, no one from a Wyoming Southern Baptist Church has been named as an abuser in this report, we cannot be naïve to the fact that these things could happen here. Therefore, each of our churches, regions, entities, and our Network in general must have a plan in place to report abuses and abusers to proper authorities. We must also must make every effort to see that the vulnerable are given a safe place and that survivors must be given the best possible care.

4) As we move forward in the wake of this report and the difficult facts that it presents, we must do better in the area of caring for the abused. As we find ways to do better, we must add these advances as a means to better spread the Truth of the Gospel to a hurting world that needs Jesus.

Let us all now turn ourselves to dependency upon the leadership of our Lord. Above all else, we need His comfort and direction to bring something of value from the troubling times we find ourselves in today.

First-Person: Reasons to stay invested in the Southern Baptist Convention

by Nick Sandefur

LEXINGTON, KY (BP) – As many of you are probably aware, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), in particular, the SBC Executive Committee (EC), has been under investigation for its handling of sexual abuse instances involving pastors or church members in local Southern Baptist churches from June 2001-June 2021.

Following the will of the SBC messengers who voted in Nashville in June 2021, the current EC (which I have served since September 2021) authorized an independent investigation into our staff and committee. To ensure transparency, the trustees of the EC waived attorney-client privilege and fully funded the investigation conducted by Guidepost Solutions.

The report from Guidepost is painful to read. It is painful because people who were harmed were not loved well, and their pain was often exacerbated by our leadership. Victims were ignored or shunned to avoid legal risk or avoid internal conflict. The report reveals, either indirectly or directly, we harmed survivors who came forward. Wrongs have been done. For this, every Southern Baptist church and member should grieve.

Over the next few weeks, our convention will seek to take steps to correct this action. We will deal with past actions as best we can, and we will diligently work to protect the vulnerable who are entrusted to our churches' care. Polity and feasibility will no doubt be a part of discussions. Safety of current and potential victims integrity, and transparency must be the outcome of our work. Please pray for our committee and for our convention as we lean into this difficult issue.

The SBC has a very tainted past. Blatant racism, latent discrimination, controversy and sinful activity have been part of our history. They are a part of every organization of humanity. The latest actions could lead people to disengage from the SBC. I understand. However, I choose reform from within.

Here are the reasons I choose to continue to invest in the SBC:

1. **Mission Funding Strategy** – The cooperative program mission endeavor is still the most effective way of spreading the message of Jesus.
2. **Missionaries/Church Planters** – Many current missionaries have left families and country to share the Gospel. They left with the promise of SBC support.
3. **Network of Believers** – Staff, partners in ministry, and friends have been developed because of our SBC connections.
4. **Disaster Relief** – When disaster hits, Southern Baptists seek to bring relief to hurting people.
5. **Theological Education** – SBC seminaries make the best theological education in the world affordable to future generations.
6. **Survivor Protection** – A network committed, although very late in its commitment, to rooting out the evil of sexual abuse from our congregations is better than 50,000 independent churches with little support to address the issue.
7. **Self-Correcting Capacity and Desire** – We have a troubled past. We have fostered sinful behavior and will make more mistakes but thankfully some are in our past. I pray for the day that sexual abuse is a former issue facing the SBC.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Biblical hospitality: avenues of grace

by Austin Collins

In this two-part blog, we'll first look at what the Bible teaches about what hospitality looks like. The next installment will contain a list of practical helps and tips for engaging in real life hospitality in your home.

Biblical Hospitality

JACKSONVILLE, FL – It's a scary word – hospitality. It's a word that often strikes fear in the hearts of Christians. We're busy, and our homes can be messy, and – oh no – our kids just drew 13 smiley faces on the wall with permanent markers. "Hospitality" conjures to mind elegant table settings, fanciful three-course dinners, and spotless homes with well-mannered children.

But thankfully, that's not what biblical hospitality has to look like. Paul, in a single verse, provides for us a biblical definition of hospitality. In Romans 15:7 he says to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." There are three keys to this verse - a what, a how, and a why - that explain what biblical hospitality looks like.

What: We are called to welcome one another. Jesus Christ wants us to welcome everyone with open arms, smiling faces, and with a desire to serve above and beyond. Biblical hospitality means opening up our hearts, our homes, and our church to others.

How: As Christ has welcomed you. The welcome that Christ gave us into the family of God cost us his life. Through his death on the cross, we were brought near to God. We who are his disciples should exemplify that sacrificial service in the way we go about welcoming others.

Why: For the glory of God. The reason why we want to warmly bring others into our homes and greet them with love is so that God might be worshiped and glorified. Lord willing, through conversations with us, our guests will hear the gospel, repent of their sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus. When this happens, God is glorified above all!

Hospitality isn't always about having a Cordon Bleu-level dinner or a picture-perfect house. It can be, and the Lord has blessed some people with those things to share with others. But maybe for you it's grabbing pizza and some cans of soda on your way home from work and calling a family in your Sunday School class to come over, eat, and fellowship in the backyard while the kids run around.

Hospitality is about a willingness to have open hearts and open doors because Christ does the same for you. With this in mind, I want to share with you 4 avenues of grace that biblical hospitality opens up for us. Will you commit to walking down one of them in the next month with your family?

An Avenue for Evangelism

There is nothing like hospitality to grant you a captive audience. Inviting your neighbors or coworkers into your home for dinner is an easy way to get to know them better, to learn how to care for them, and eventually to share the gospel with them as your relationship with them deepens. Something about the warmth around a dining room table helps people lower their guard and be more open to the things you share with them. As you get to know unbelievers around a meal in your home, you'll discover different pathways to take in leading them to Jesus.

There are so many holidays that involve food and fellowship. At your next cookout or potluck for one of these holidays, challenge yourself to invite one of your unbelieving neighbors to come eat and hang out. Hospitality is as simple as that! It creates the opportunity for you to talk about the gospel with them.

An Avenue for Discipleship

The early church modeled hospitality for us. Early on, churches often met in people's homes where they gathered to hear the Word taught, to pray together, and to grow in their fellowship with one another. And then in Acts 2, we see the fruit of the combination of hospitality and discipleship:

“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved”

Acts 2:46-47

Do you see the direct result of discipleship taking place through hospitality? Salvation for more people! As Christians opened their homes for discipleship, God blessed their efforts, and the church grew!

Hospitality can look similar to this today. Instead of braving the hustle and bustle of a busy café to meet with someone and study the Bible, open up your home, sit together at the kitchen table or in the den, and drink homemade coffee out of your favorite mugs as you open up the Word and pray. Maybe watch a sermon together and discuss it afterwards while you munch on chips and salsa.

An Avenue for Care

In Matthew 25:31-40, Jesus is commending his sheep for showing genuine care to him during their lives, and yet the people are confused because they had never personally encountered Jesus in the flesh. Jesus reassures them, when they showed care to “the least of these” they were glorifying him.

Opening up our homes to the brokenhearted, the downcast, those in need of a place of refuge, the hungry and the thirsty – when we do this for Jesus’ people, we are doing this for Jesus’ sake. Hospitality means giving a warm embrace to the church member grieving a loss on your living room couch. Or reading Scripture with them at your dining room table and reminding them of the gospel.

Though it might cost us something now, we can look forward to when Christ will restore anything we may have lost in our efforts to care for others:

“The King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

Matthew 25:34

This past week some friends of ours found themselves without a working fridge and a kitchen under repair. We were already planning on having breakfast for dinner that night as a family, so we invited these friends over, threw a few more slices of bacon in the skillet, and rejoiced with them about how God was working wonders through a difficult season in their life.

An Avenue for Community

Showing hospitality provides us with one of the best ways to grow in our relationships with other Christians. In Philemon 1:12, Paul states that he is sending Onesimus “back to [Philemon], sending my very heart.”

How many people can you say that same statement about? How many fellow church members would you say constitute the very core of who you are? When we invite people into our lives and our homes, we open up a setting of intimacy, comfort, and safety where we can truly get to know other Christians and grow in community with one another.

A simple way to cultivate community through hospitality is hosting playdates for kids. In our neighborhood there is another Christian family who have a child around the same age as ours. At least once a month, my wife opens up our home to this mom and her son to come over. While the toddlers play, the moms talk about ministry, the Bible, and parenting. There’s no fancy tea or crumpets, but these two ladies have grown to love one another dearly in just a short time simply by letting one another into their homes, and through that, their lives.

A Seat at the Table

Hospitality begins and ends with Jesus Christ. Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has brought believers into the family of God. But even more than that, God has shown us “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7) through all he has given us. And at the same time, God’s generosity to us gives glory to him as the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). We are simply stewards of what he’s given to us. God has commanded us to share with others so that we might display the glory of Jesus to the world.

God has given us more than we could ever need, so why should we be stingy with our homes, our belongings, our money, or our time (Philippians 4:19)? So, brothers and sisters, show hospitality on earth now, looking forward to the heavenly hospitality we will receive from God at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9). Invite someone over, share a meal, and talk about Jesus with them – no matter who they are. Welcome them as Jesus welcomes you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Austin Collins (M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Serve Pastor at First Baptist Church Jacksonville. Prior to joining First Baptist in 2018, he held roles in student ministry, as a worship pastor, and as the research assistant at the Institute for Biblical Worship. He is also a certified biblical counselor with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. Austin is passionate about turning strangers into servants and loves helping guests and church members take their next step of faith, whatever it is.

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