

In Fiona's wake, Send Relief begins serving meals, assisting in recovery

by Brandon Elrod

PUERTO RICO – Following Hurricane Fiona's landfall in Puerto Rico Sunday, Sept. 18, Southern Baptist churches on the island have begun meeting crisis needs and engaging their communities with the Gospel through Send Relief.

"In the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona, all North American Mission Board (NAMB) and Send Relief staff are safe," said Jonathan Santiago, Send Relief's ministry center director in Puerto Rico. "We are in the process of responding all across the island."

The entire island lost power, which has made feeding those in need a top priority. Send Relief has launched six response sites through local churches across the island, some of them Send Network churches that were recently planted.

"My heroes! Our Send Puerto Rico church planters are at work, meeting needs and changing lives with the gospel," tweeted Felix Cabrera, director for Send Puerto Rico. "Please continue praying for them."

Send Relief's immediate response so far is focusing on providing meals and water as long as these needs persist. Each site can produce up to 2,000 meals a day, and local Puerto Rican Southern Baptist volunteers have been driving the response.

Before Fiona made landfall, Send Relief leadership pre-staged equipment and resources to enhance their ability to respond, and on Tuesday morning, Sept. 20, they began delivering food, water and other emergency supplies to the six churches, which are located in the hardest hit areas.

"Puerto Rican Southern Baptists have been eager to serve their neighbors and communities," said Coy Webb, Send Relief's crisis response director. "That's why hundreds of people have trained to respond to crises like Hurricane Fiona in recent years, and now they're putting themselves into action to meet needs and proclaim the hope of the Gospel as they serve."

Volunteers also began removing debris from people's yards and started the recovery process. Local churches are receiving calls from people who need help, which may open up opportunities for volunteers from the mainland in the coming weeks.

Hurricane Fiona is the first major hurricane of the 2022 hurricane season and has reportedly killed five people across the various islands of the Caribbean.

After hitting Puerto Rico as a Category 1 storm, Fiona has since migrated further north into the Atlantic where it has become a Category 4 storm. According to the National Hurricane Center, it is slated to make landfall in northeast Canada by this weekend.

Fiona made landfall nearly five years to the day after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico. Send Relief was still actively organizing trips to help homeowners rebuild from the historic 2017 storm when Fiona hit.

“Southern Baptists, we want to thank you for your prayers. Thank you for reaching out and thank you for all you’ve done to make this response possible,” Santiago said. “Thank you for your giving that allows us to bring the gospel through serving people.”

To learn more and donate to Send Relief’s hurricane response fund, visit Send Relief’s [Hurricane Fiona response page](#). Send Relief’s opportunities for teams to serve on mission trips [remain available as well](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

Discipleship opportunities for women

by Sue Hodnett

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MI – One step at a time. We all have a next step to take, whether it’s your first step or one of many in a long journey with God. Leading and serving is about more than liking Jesus or knowing about Him. It’s about becoming like Him.

“Rather than view women as risks, liabilities, or burdens, Jesus invited them to draw near.”

~ Jen Wilkin.

How as women do we view Jesus?

“We see Him as the one who welcomes women and defends their right to learn from Him.”

~ Rebecca McLaughlin.

Bible studies, small groups, leadership training and trustworthy courses to assist women into God’s Word are not only vital but biblical.

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Cost: \$30 / online course fee

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Gives participants opportunities to discover the meaning of leading with a biblical perspective based on Christian values. *Real Women Leading with Proverbs 31 Values* (New Hope Publishers), by Lisa Troyer and Dawn Yoder, is the course textbook. Online Course/Student completes assignment on their own, we meet on zoom weekly to review and encourage.

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Wednesdays 7:00pm – 8:30pm @ the Ministry Center
7 Weeks / Begins October 3rd

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Women's Ministry is dedicated to strengthening the women of BSCM by **encouraging, equipping, and engaging** them to live intentional lives to the glory of God. Our ministry opportunities are of culturally relevant content, guided by a missional mindset, compassionate care, and places value on the development of women in leadership.

Women's Ministries provide encouragement and support the professional development of women leaders in our churches. We come alongside our pastors and ministry leaders to provide resources and support in **Leadership Development, Compassion Ministries, Missions Discipleship** and **Administration**.

Visit: www.facebook.com/bscmwmu for the most current women's ministry information.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Hodnett serves as women's ministry leader for the BSCM as well as WMU Michigan Executive Director. She has dedicated her life to ministering to women in Michigan.

Reaching the nations through ESL ministry

by Glenda Lassiter

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MI – A few years before I retired from teaching, I felt God pulling me in the direction of teaching English to immigrants. Soon after my retirement, I began searching for opportunities for teaching English, and my first thought was to seek a part-time job with the local public school adult education program. I also started looking for training, but wasn't having much success..

In January of 2021 I began volunteering with the English as a Second Language (ESL) group at my local public library. One of the teachers there told me about the North American Mission Board (NAMB) training through the Georgia Association where he was trained. When I reached out to Georgia for information I was told that I had missed the registration deadline by three days, the class was already full, and I didn't live in Georgia, so I couldn't be enrolled. Three days later I got a call from Karen Elrod, Georgia WMU. She said that the teacher had agreed to accept an additional student and I could enroll. Within a week I started the five week online training.

After my first online training session, it became clear that God was calling me to start an ESL ministry rather than finding a secular English job. The training was wonderful, not only for learning how to teach English to Internationals, but it also gave excellent direction for launching a successful ministry. When I shared the possibility of starting a ministry at Lakepointe Church with my pastor, Scott Blanchard, he was very supportive. 14% of Macomb County residents speak another language as their native tongue, so there is definitely a need. And Matthew 28:19-20 and Leviticus 19:33-34 give us the call to love immigrants and share the gospel with them.

The next step was to enlist a few other teachers and get them enrolled in the Georgia Association online training. Once their training was complete, we began to meet and plan out what the ESL ministry would look like at Lakepointe. I also had help planning from several ESL leaders in Georgia and North Carolina. I was given excellent advice on materials to use, advertising, and organization. They have answered questions and given me great encouragement along the way.

By October 2021 we were ready to launch the ministry. Our first night we had 3 trained teachers, 7 rotating childcare volunteers, 3 adult students, and no children. By the end of our school year in May 2022, we had 4 trained teachers, 13 adult students, and 7 children. Our students were from 7 different countries. Most of the students are not Christians. Most of our volunteers are senior citizens, which shows we're never too old for ministry!

Every week we begin class with a devotional message, and our students have been open to hearing the Word and asking questions about our faith. We have been so blessed and have had opportunities to meet with our students outside of class to build relationships. Several have reached out to us for prayer. Two of our Albanian students became United States citizens with the help of their English teacher. We gave a baby shower for one of our students whose family lives far away in Turkmenistan. One of our students from Iraq needed transportation to purchase necessities for her apartment and her teacher provided that. We saw needs to be met, and God helped us to meet them.

We have set a goal to double our enrollment this year. This summer we expanded our advertising, especially reaching out to places that employ immigrants and to libraries in neighboring communities. To be prepared for the students that God will bring our way, we will have 5 trained teachers, allowing us to offer 5 levels of instruction. We have also enlisted 12 rotating childcare volunteers. As we begin our new school year, we look forward to seeing what God is going to do!

God is always at work, in our hearts, in our lives, and in our churches. Now, looking back on these last few years, it is clear that He was leading and lining up everything for an ESL ministry at Lakepointe Church according to His will. Maybe He has ESL plans for your church. Is He calling you to reach the nations through ESL?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Glenda Lassiter lives in Clinton Township with her husband, Dan, who is also an ESL teacher. She is a member of Lakepointe Church in Shelby Township where she serves as Director of ESL Ministry. She also serves in children's ministry and co-teaches an adult Life Group with Dan. She recently retired from 35 years of public school teaching but doesn't plan to retire from ministry.

Fast food versus church

by Brian Jones

TECUMSEH, MI – I don't know why people do it. Why do they treat fast food restaurants better than they treat churches? Well, if not better, at least in showing more grace. Let me explain what I mean.

Imagine that you went to the local burger fast food chain. Maybe it is known for a certain golden letter of the alphabet. As a hypothetical. You go through the drive thru, which now takes longer than it used to, you pay (which now takes more than it used to), you receive your bag of goodies and head home. And what do you find when you arrive safely to your abode? A messed-up order.

The double burger that was supposed to be no onion has onions, no pickles, and extra mustard. The fries are cold and the drink now comes in a container big enough to satisfy the thirst of King Kong.

So, what does any reasonable person do at this point? Clearly, they decide that they will never again go to any fast food restaurant. Ever. Anywhere. Of any type. Period.

But that isn't what happens, at least not in the real world. In the real world you might not go back to that particular clown endorsed establishment (although in truth you will probably end up there again and sooner than you would like to admit). But you will most likely visit another of the same chain, just at a different location. Maybe you are so frustrated that you abandon that chain all together and decide to take your hard-earned money to other dining options. After all, they aren't the only burger place in town. (Unless they actually are the only burger place in town.) And who said it has to be burgers? Taco Tuesday anyone? Chicken? Chinese? Sub sandwiches? Roast beef sandwiches?

You won't give up fast food, but you might stop supporting the one that just can't get it right.

We don't take one bad experience and throw them all to the curb.

But what do people do when they attend a church?

Imagine that you went to the local Baptist church. And let's imagine that they were cold and distant. No one greeted you. No one welcomed you to service. And the service was a mess.

So, what does any reasonable person do at this point? Clearly, they decide that they will never again go to any church. Ever. Anywhere. Of any type. Period.

And sometimes, that is exactly what happens.

They don't give the church another shot. They don't try other churches of the same denomination. They don't visit other denominations. They have one bad experience and throw them all to the curb.

Now, it may seem silly to point this out in the official newsletter of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. After all, everyone reading this probably goes to church on a regular basis. But maybe it will come in handy when you talk with others.

One time our church was hosting a health screening, and one of the nurses was mentioning how she didn't go to church anymore because she caught the pastor and the secretary in an embrace. [This analogy is not meant to diminish the true hurts that people can experience and the analogy isn't perfect, but hopefully it gets people to think.]

Now, she had told me earlier that she was recently engaged. So, I asked her if all the men she had previously dated treated her well, or if there were some bad experiences. She was quick to respond that she had indeed dated some less than excellent men. And that is when I asked her. But you didn't give up on men, did you?

She smiled sheepishly. She understood perfectly.

Men were important enough to her to give them another shot.

For most of us, so is fast food.

For all of us, church should be too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Brian Jones, Tecumseh Missionary Baptist Church, MDiv. SBTS. His wife, Lisa, and family came to TMBC in March 2008, and have been privileged to serve at TMBC for over a decade.

The mall

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – While I was continuing my theological education, Sabrina and I were living in Dallas, Texas. We experienced the good and bad of big city life. The 6:00 am traffic and the smog on hot summer days were sights and sounds we will never forget.

We had very little money at any time, so we looked for ways to entertain ourselves on a pocket full of nothing. One of our favorite pastimes was to go to a local mall and “people watch”. We would find a comfortable location that was as close to the center of the flow of foot traffic as possible and just sit. You can learn a great deal about people and our society, just by careful observations.

This was great fun, but for a short period of one year there was a rash of car thefts at the mall, and a series of breaking into automobiles and stealing stereos and contents. Because of this, many were afraid to patronize this particular mall.

Business dropped and many stores were in jeopardy of closing until the mall association put a great deal of money into security, promotions, and subsidized sales at all the stores. People began to flood back to the mall in herds.

A pastor friend of mine told me the story of an elderly lady in his church who had been afraid to go shopping at this mall, but because of the super sales they were advertising, she had decided to deny her fears and to give into the enticement of a great bargain. (I have since heard this story told about different women at different malls, so I don't vouch for its veracity. It's still a great story.)

It was said that her husband wouldn't go near a mall, but was concerned for her safety, so he made her take their “38 snub nose revolver” with her. He told her, “If you get into trouble, don't hesitate to show your fire power”. (In order for you to have a better grasp of the situation and setting, this was in 1980!)

Well, she had been shopping for an hour or so and had collected all the bargains she could hold, and made her way to her car. As she approached her white, Buick LA Sabre, she saw two men standing at the doors and one was trying to open the driver's side.

At that moment she dropped her packages, pulled the ‘38” from her purse, spread her legs just like she had seen on the television cop shows, held the pistol with both hands and pointed it at the would-be intruders. “All right you scum bags! Get away from that car or I'll fill you full of lead”.

The two men didn't wait to discuss the matter, and went running as fast as they could in opposite directions. She put her gun back in her purse, picked up her packages and walked over to the car. She took her keys from her purse and placed one in the door lock. When she tried to turn the lock, it wouldn't budge. That's when she realized she was at the wrong car. Her car was parked several rows over.

Have you ever done anything like that? I mean, leap before you look? Speak before you think? Purchase before you determine if you can afford something? React to a situation of which you do not have a full understanding? Make important decisions based purely on emotion? If so, it

is very likely that you have risked causing great damage not only to yourself but to those around you. A term I often use and can easily relate to is "Stepped in Stupid!"

We all do it and most of the time we regret it. It's a characteristic of our human nature. Or should I say our fallen human nature.

One of my greatest fears is that I will react to a situation and say something that will hurt someone else or cause damage to our relationship. Sadly, this still happens in my life. I have found when I am not at my best physically, spiritually, and emotionally is when I am most susceptible to acting in the "flesh".

If I am over fatigued, don't sleep well, don't eat properly, and let myself get physically depleted, that is when I can succumb to these reactions. I am not giving an excuse, but stating the reasons. I have a choice in those matters, and when I choose poorly, the results are evident.

The same is true in my spiritual life. When I neglect the spiritual disciplines of practicing the presence of Jesus in my life through prayer, study, and meditating on His Word, I am susceptible to inappropriate actions.

Here are some practices that will help you stay out of trouble:

- Stop.
- Think.
- Pray.
- Ask God for wisdom.
- Use discernment.
- Get wise counsel from others.
- Men, ask your wives.
- Wives, ask you husbands.

But whatever you do, don't be so quick on the draw and shoot off your mouth until you know what is really going on. Remember, Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.[1]

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5 KJV)

"Through presumption comes nothing but strife, But with those who receive counsel is wisdom."
(Proverbs 13:10 NASB)

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.

[1] [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Pr 17:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Holy Land Snapshots

by Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – You may have tired of last month’s Facebook posts of our personal vacation to the Holy Lands. If so, I am sorry about that. For us, the posts were an easy sharing-point with our immediate family. We gave reports on amazing locations like Jerusalem, Capernaum, the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, Jericho, Masada, and the Dead Sea.

I thought along with some vacation snapshots that I would share some lessons we learned during our trip to the Holy Lands.

Lesson 1 – Ask those who previously traveled about their favorite experiences.

Two weeks before leaving for Israel, we had dinner in Michigan with friends including the Renders and Tim Steele and asked, “What were some of your favorite memories?” They responded rapidly that the Western Wall of Solomon’s Temple, at the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, was one of their favorites. They were correct!

We saw what the locals themselves described as the celebration of Sabbath which included dancing, recitation of prayers, readings, and family-like excitement. We found ourselves suspended in a sea of color and sounds, among the Orthodox, those in military uniforms, parents holding children in their arms, and those in solitude in deep reflection.

While at the Wall, we prayed that Jesus Christ would be made known among the nations.

Lesson 2 – Enjoy the enchanting international interaction with locals and visitors.

We customized each day’s excursion for ourselves and walked slowly experiencing every moment with individuals. Jamie’s warm smile and kindness makes friends without words that then lead to enjoyable conversations and easy interactions. People from two major world religions, Judaism and Islam, were overwhelmingly hospitable to us during our entire visit.

As we often do during international trips, we learn 8-12 of the most common phrases of the local languages found at our vacation destination. This time we concentrated on less phrases but two languages. The effort is always rewarded with friendly gestures and uplifting, personal conversations. Being that our vacation included the celebration of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, our greetings helped us learn how our hosts were going to celebrate family time over the course of a few days.

An exceptional joy was remembering how big the Lord is among the nations, tribes, peoples, and languages as we rubbed shoulders with, had conversations with, ate with, and knelt together in silence with other Christians.

- People from Central Asia sang familiar old hymns in their mother tongue at the Garden Tomb. We recognized the tune, but the words were unfamiliar until their beautiful voices reminded us of the English words we sang as children and teenagers.
- A South African woman standing alongside Jamie in the waters of the Jordan River may be one of my favorite pictures from the trip. Their spontaneous smiles show the supernatural fellowship that can immediately be created among those who love and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Listening to them discuss life, the Lord, and faith was uplifting.
- Stumbling upon an elderly woman reading, with a magnifying glass, in a sacred place was unexpected and precious. The instant reminded us again that our trip was about drawing closer to the Lord while being surrounded by the crowds.

We find the Lord teaches us a lot through our human interactions like those lifted above which leads us into deeper reflection and prayer so that we would become more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson 3 – Always when traveling, find a place of local worship.

When we arranged our lodging in Jerusalem, we placed ourselves within walking distance of the important items for us. That has been our standard operating procedure for years.

- Old Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate was within a fifteen-minute walk.
- Church/Sunday morning worship was within a ten-minute walk.
- Grocery stores were within a five-minute walk.
- Mass and low-cost transportation was within a three-minute walk.

The Baptist congregation with about 125 fellow believers blessed us. It was an international group. The experience was uplifting because we saw the reach of God's arms wrap around an

entire world reminding us that the Good News of Jesus Christ is for everyone everywhere. We are always glad to see the Lord's people gather to encourage one another in their faith when they are far from their homeland and families. After each service a fellowship meal is provided. Be certain we stayed and visited with our brothers and sisters from across the globe.

Our gratitude is always increased when we meet people courageous enough to live in other countries, on mission for the Lord and His plans.

Lesson 4 – We must urgently share the Good News of Jesus Christ among the nations.

The Central Bureau of Statistics tells us that as of 2022, in Israel, that

- 73% of the residents are Jews
- 21% are Arab
- 5% are members of other religious groups
- Less than 2% is Christian

If any of this testimony of our excursion is turning your heart and mind to global considerations, please click on and investigate a possible future for you with: <https://www.imb.org>

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.

Sabbatical

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – God has blessed Michigan Baptist Churches with gifted and loving pastors, and we are grateful for each one. October is Pastor Appreciation Month. Please take some time to express your love and appreciation to your pastor (and his family). A simple web search with the words: “Pastor Appreciation Month” will result in a variety of ways to express appreciation to your pastor.

I want to share an idea that may be an incredible blessing to your pastor - especially if he has not really gotten away from the demands of ministry in recent years. It's called the "Sabbatical." I like to think of a Sabbatical as a sustained, mutually agreed upon time away from the demands of daily ministry for the pastor to rest, reflect, and refresh personally. Our BSCM Staff has helped two pastors this year take Sabbaticals by filling the pulpit while their pastor was on Sabbatical. Recently, one of them shared his experience with us, and with his permission, I want to share it with you.

"Sabbatical, the best gift I've received in years. It has not only undoubtedly prolonged my time in ministry, but it's also helped my marriage and family life as well. I cannot recall how many times I've heard people say or ask me in the past couple of years, 'Are you taking your vacation days?' or 'Are you taking a sabbath?' I would always respond, 'What's a vacation?' or 'I try to.'"

In my mind I didn't think I could get away. There was always too much work to do, as there was no one else who could do it. But if I am being honest, I really didn't trust anyone to do anything. So, I made excuses, and I worked, and I worked to the point of just exhaustion. To the point of being burned out and ready to walk at any time. I would have kept going too, just because it's who I am and how I was raised. I am a workaholic, just like my dad. But it wasn't till a family crisis arose and I reached out for help with that and then it happened. I was asked a simple little question, 'But how are you doing?' 'Pastor, how are you doing?' Normally I would have said, 'Living the dream,' but for some reason, this time I was honest, brutally honest. I just spilled my guts.

Next thing I knew I was on sabbatical. I had never been on a sabbatical, and didn't even know how to "sabbatical" for that matter. But I will tell you that this time away has been one of the biggest blessings in my life. To be honest, the only way that I can compare it is Adam walking with God in the garden. It was just me and God, with no agenda other than just spending time with Him. I wasn't in His Word, in silence in solitude, or in some other discipline to get something, or for sermon prep, or for some lesson I had to give. It was just to be with Him, to rekindle my first love, to realign my heart and desires to His.

I believe that I had become theologically arrogant because all I did was work. Studying the scriptures for sermons, for lessons and for knowledge, but with a void of a relationship and connection over time to the author created an arrogance in me that made me vulnerable to spiritual warfare. It was subtle at first, but over time the damage it was creating was being felt and seen by everyone but myself. Relationships were deteriorating, but because I was theologically or biblically correct, I kept pushing forward. See you can be theologically correct, and still be a jerk and still end up on the losing side. That's where I was.

This sabbatical has been a true blessing and will be added to our regular church calendar for staff from here on out. I just wish that every single one of my brothers in ministry could be able to benefit like I have these past few weeks. Just the ability alone to step away in absolute freedom to reconnect with God, and to work on specific areas of your spiritual walk or other

areas you may be lacking in is invaluable. It is a tool that every church and ministry should have in their toolbox available to their leadership teams.”

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.

Sitting with Jesus or working for Him; which will be more important?

by Coye Bouyer

PLYMOUTH, MI – ‘But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her”’ (Luke 10:40-42).

What is the one thing you need? What is that one thing that feels necessary in your life? What is it that keeps you going from one day to the next, possibly from one minute to the next because it is what seems to give your life meaning?

In the passage above Martha is so busy with her preparations that the Bible calls them distractions. Wait a minute, she is preparing a meal for Jesus and their guests. Surely, if Jesus and His disciples were to show up to your house or mine, after traveling (v. 38) and doing ministry all day you and I would also assume that they might be tired and probably pretty hungry.

Yet, the Bible seems to be alluding to that idea that it was these exact feelings, and Martha’s preparations in her meal that were distracting her. Not only is she distracted, but we find that she is bothered and worried.

Bothered by the fact that Mary has failed to assist her in the preparations of the food. Mary is present, and instead of helping out in the kitchen (where Martha was at) she was in the family room sitting with the men and Jesus.

There are a couple of problems with this. First, culturally speaking when men were talking or being taught women were usually not present. Second, it was the women and servants who prepared meals for the household, and so it would have been expected for Mary and Martha to be in the kitchen.

Thus, Martha's request to Jesus would have made much sense in the cultural times of Jesus' day. But Jesus informs Martha that in all her preparation she has been distracted from the one thing that was necessary. But how is she distracted?

Jesus' words inform us of this point when He highlights her worry and being bothered. Jesus says Martha is worried, and worry is not something that Jesus followers are to hold onto. For Martha's worry is a waste of her time as she is probably attempting to prepare what she thinks is the perfect meal for Jesus.

Next, Jesus says that Martha is bothered, meaning she is so focused on what Mary is not doing, she has become frustrated. For in some sense, Martha believes that what she is doing is so important, that Mary should also be doing it with her. Mary seems fine with what Mary is doing, so why is Martha not fine with what Mary is doing?

Because in this moment Martha has made her work in the kitchen more important than Mary's sitting at Jesus' feet. Whenever we make our desires bigger than someone else's desire or our thing more important than their thing we will usually find ourselves frustrated by the lack of attention on our thing. While Mary is relaxing listening to Jesus, Martha is feeling overwhelmed by the work she wanted to do.

Finally, Jesus informs Martha that Mary is doing the necessary thing by simply sitting at His feet. But why is this the necessary thing? It is necessary because in this moment the only thing Mary needs is the only thing Martha needs, it's the only thing we all need; to sit in the presence of Jesus.

Are you discouraged today, tired of your job, worried about the children or even your own health? What is it you really need? Well regardless of what we may think we need, Jesus reminds us that in this moment, and every moment, He is all we need. In fact, it is stories like this that reminds us that Jesus is and always will be what is necessary in this life. Therefore, whenever given an opportunity to sit with Him or be busy for Him, sitting with Him is more necessary than the work we do for Him. Today, stop letting life, its worries, its task and its concerns distract you from sitting at the feet of Jesus.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.

Recollections from a trip to the Holy Land

by Stan Parker

LANSING, MI – We were part of a team that had a blessed Holy Land experience in September. The adventure was a day of contrasts including visits to both sites where Jesus reportedly was born and where he reportedly died, as well as other historical and biblical places.

The Garden Tomb is the site of the " place of the skull" where Jesus was crucified. Though the site has changed hands over the centuries, the evidence has not been altered. The site is very consistent with the words of St. Matthew chapters 26 and 27. Many of the team spent time in prayer while also visiting the Garden of Gethsemane. The Garden is so beautiful and serene.

After leaving the Garden, the team traveled to the Church of the Nativity. In studying the Bible, we learn that Jesus was born in a manger. Many years ago, the Catholic Church converted the site and built a church at the very spot of Jesus's birth. It includes the cave revered as Jesus's birthplace, and it is believed to be the oldest functioning church in the world.

The trip included the Herodion, the fortified palace, and final resting place of Herod the Great. The Herodion is one of several palaces built by Herod the Great. History states he needed many places to live because he always feared for his life. Having various palaces made it almost impossible to know where he was at a given time. All of these palaces showed just how great a builder he was.

One of the most humble places visited was the Shepherds' Field in Bethlehem. In Jesus's day, shepherds were considered one of the lowest forms of work. Shepherds were not esteemed by the general public. However, scripture shows that in spite of how mankind may have viewed shepherds, their view did not stop God from showing how valuable Shepherds were to him, and the major role they played in God's plan for Salvation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Stan Parker serves as senior pastor of Faith Fellowship Baptist Church. He is on mission during his spare time, traveling domestically and internationally. He is the author of several publications, and serves as a regional director for the National African American Fellowship within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Convert or disciple?

by Karen Blanchard

SHELBY TOWNSHIP, MI – It is easy to assume that everyone who follows Christ is a disciple. I have been in ministry now for more than 20 years, and God has been teaching me a great deal on the topic of discipleship. Just because a person has chosen to invite Jesus into their life, doesn't mean they are living as a disciple.

I accepted Christ when I was a young girl and attended church regularly. My parents did devotions with us, and encouraged us to read the Bible. Sadly, I would begin to read the Bible many times, become frustrated, and give up. It wasn't until about eight years ago that I realized I was a spiritual infant, mostly relying on Sunday messages to teach me the Word of God. I believe many people are this way. It might be because we don't understand how to read the Bible or even know where to start. Another reason we don't read the Bible could be that we are busy and don't set the time aside to really dig in and meditate on what the Scriptures say. Whatever the case may be, the church is full of people who have made a decision for Jesus, but haven't yet become disciples.

Converts are people who truly have had a heart change, but have never taken the steps to grow in their relationship with the Lord. The following passage from Hebrews explains this,

You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's Word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what it is right. (Hebrews 5:12-13 NLT)

These verses explain that when we are a spiritual infant, we depend on others to feed us God's Word. Please don't misunderstand, we should go to church, and we should have teachers and leaders around us that we can learn from. However, that isn't where we should stop. In Hebrews, the passage continues on to say,

Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong. (Hebrews 5:14 NLT)

When you begin to change from a convert to a disciple, you begin to feed yourself. Spiritual growth is not accidental, it is intentional. It doesn't just happen because you have accepted Christ. For myself, I began to make the change from a convert to a disciple when I realized my time with the Lord was meant to get to know Him. So often we make reading the Bible about us! The Bible should teach us and change us, but our first priority is to get to know God. We need to have a desire to know Him and his character. In the church when a person accepts Christ, we tell them they now can "have a personal relationship with God." I have heard this all my life, yet I don't know if I truly understood what that meant.

Consider the relationships you have in your life. We don't go deep in relationships in our own lives until we have taken the time to get to know a person. Once we feel safe, we then feel comfortable to share our deepest thoughts and feelings. How do you build relationships so that you can get to a place of trust and vulnerability? You spend time with that person. You get to know who they are and their character. The same is true about God.

I believe a disciple takes steps past conversion to go deeper in their relationship with Jesus. This happens in different ways for everyone. Once we accept Christ, he begins to sanctify us. Sanctification is a big word that just means we are on a journey to become more like Christ! The journey is different for all, but the journey is how we grow and change.

Below is a prayer to help you surrender to the Lord to become a fully, devoted disciple for Him.

Father God,

I thank you for who you are and for sending Jesus to die on the cross. He didn't die so that I could play it safe as a convert. Lord, I declare today that I want to move from being a convert to a disciple. I want to know you more. I pray you begin to reveal to me the ways you are working. I desire to hear your voice and follow you. I want to experience what it means to have a personal, intimate relationship with you. Holy Spirit, fill me with more of you so that I can live the abundant life in Christ as a fully, devoted disciple.

Remove from me what doesn't belong, so I can become who you created me to be. I surrender all to you.

Amen

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

What is worship?

by Tim locoangeli

MONROE, MI – I don't know how it is in your church, but in our church there are a few topics that get people talking. Sometimes these topics lead to good discussion, and at other times it can lead to frustration. I am sure each of us has been a part of these types of conversations. One of these topics that usually gets people going is worship.

I know the worship wars seem to have been taking place now, I don't know, for 500 years or so, and there has been plenty written about it. All it takes is a quick google search and you can find hundreds of books, articles, and videos on the subject.

With so much out there I find it helpful sometimes to just get back to basics. This enables me to simplify the topic and often get rid of much of the "noise." One of the ways I like to do this is by asking some basic questions.

Question 1- What is Worship?

If you look up the word worship in the Oxford Dictionary you will find this, "the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity." Now one might say that this is a good definition, but I find it comes up a bit short. The reason for this is that one can worship all sorts of things, putting these things in the place of the deity, but not actually being deity.

The fact is all people worship because we have been created to worship. One of the great truths of the Bible is that mankind is made in the image of God and therefore we are image bearers of Him. We have been made to worship Him and glorify Him, yet sadly, people too often choose to be image bearers of something other than God. Sometimes it is material things, sometimes it is other people, but mostly we tend to be worshippers of ourselves.

Even Adam and Eve fell for this great lie choosing to worship themselves instead of the One to whom they were created to worship. Ever since that fateful day, mankind has struggled with worship.

There is another definition of worship that I like much better. It is found in the Westminster Dictionary of Theological terms, and it says worship is, "The service of praise, adoration, thanksgiving, and petition directed toward God through actions and attitudes. Christian's worship is Trinitarian in form as praise is offered to God through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit."

There is a ton to unpack in that definition, but I only want to focus on the one aspect of who we are to worship. That leads to my next basic question.

Question 2- Who is the object of Worship?

According to this Westminster definition we are to worship God through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, if we are to be worshipping God then who is God? Why is He worthy of our worship?

There are many ways to approach this question and try to answer it well, but I want to do it by focusing on one particular attribute of God; is His holiness. When we as believers approach God in worship it is good for us to remember that He is Holy, and we are not. In fact, the only reason

we are allowed to approach Him is because of the blood of Jesus that has cleansed us from our sin.

Every time in the Bible that God would reveal His glory or His holiness to someone they simply fell to the ground and acknowledged their unworthiness to be there. Isaiah said, "I am a man of unclean lips." John fell over as dead!

When we approach God in worship, whether in our personal time, or as we gather as a church let us remember who it is we worship. We worship the only one who is Holy. The only one who has made a way for us sinners to be in His presence through the work of His Son. Remembering this will cause us to approach worship with reverence and awe of Him. It will allow us to make sure our focus is on the One we worship and how He has called us to worship Him instead of arguing about it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim locoangeli is Lead Pastor at Monroe Missionary Baptist Church which is in the Southeastern Association. He is married to Amanda and together they have 4 children.

How to be prepared in perilous times

by David Kemper

LANSING, MI – Are we living in 'perilous times'?

II Timothy 3:1 - *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:"*

This passage then goes on to describe what Paul meant by 'perilous times'. It sounds like the world today. What is different from any other day is that it is a global situation. Does the Bible give instruction about being prepared physically for such a time? My approach is found in a simple but direct passage,

Proverbs 6:6-11

- 6) Go to the ant, you sluggard!
Consider her ways and be wise,*
- 7) Which, having no captain,
Overseer or ruler,*
- 8) Provides her supplies in the summer,
And gathers her food in the harvest.*
- 9) How long will you slumber, O sluggard?*

*When will you rise from your sleep?
10) A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep—
11) So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.*

Be committed to Jesus Christ first and foremost.

Matthew 6:33 says “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

It is impossible to properly be prepared for worldly difficulties without putting Jesus first. It does say though, that if you put Jesus first He will make it possible to prepare for the physical danger that we face. Put Jesus first! “Pray without ceasing”, read your Bible, be fanatically faithful to church and witness for Christ at every opportunity.

Make sure you put your family second to Christ.

It’s natural for us to be so concerned about the success of our church, ministry or job that we neglect our family and they go the way of the world. It is essential that we provide for our family’s spiritual welfare. But it is also essential to provide for their physical welfare.

1 Timothy 5:8 - “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

It’s clear that this means physical welfare. I have been preparing for the difficult times ahead for many years. I keep a thorough and balanced supply of food and water in my house. Our own government encourages us to do that! When our government gives us such warnings, it is past time for us to prepare. I have found that such preparation gives me peace about having done what the Bible says in this area. I would encourage all to do the same.

Put your local church third in this list of priorities.

During the time of pandemic there seems to be a new saying. That is ‘the building is not the church; we are the church’. I understand the point of the saying. I fear that many have been lost to the local church because a saying like this is all some need to absent themselves from church.

Remember that local church attendance is a command.

Hebrews 10:25 - “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

This command is in the context of the persecution of the early church. To be strong in the Lord we must obey His commands. Going to church provides an encouragement we cannot get any other way.

Continue to reach out to your local community in every way possible.

The great commission was not to be obeyed just during easy times. It is to be obeyed in every age and circumstance.

Matthew 28:19-20 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen."

Our methods may change due to the problems of the pandemic, but we have no excuse for disobeying our Commander-In-Chief's last command. REACH OUT! God will bless you.

There are physical things we must do to provide for and protect our families and churches. May we be busy doing them. May God provide, protect and keep safe all of the churches and ministries in the SBC. And may He keep us pure through His Spirit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a 72-year-old army brat (my dad was a career soldier). As a result, I was raised and have lived in four different countries and numerous states. I became a born-again Christian in 1971 shortly after returning from a tour in Vietnam. I have been an ordained minister since 1975. I have enjoyed dual careers, pastoring and being a systems analyst (computer programmer). I have pastored churches in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee and now Michigan. I have been pastoring the Discover Life Church in Lansing, MI for almost three years now.

Nicolae Moldoveanu: a Romanian saintly hymn writer

by Doru Radu

WARREN, MI – On July 12, 2007, the 85-year-old Nicolae Moldoveanu, prolific hymn writer, died in Sibiu, Romania. For more than 62 years, God enhanced our faith through his music, lyrics and especially his uncompromised Christian testimony during Romania's dark communist era of forty-five years. It was a great joy for the Romanian evangelicals living in America to find out that this saint's work and life was presented at the 2016 conference of the Hymn Society of USA and Canada, at the Redlands University, California.

Named “the Bach of Romania” (1), Moldoveanu could more readily be identified with hymnists Charles Wesley (1707-1788) or Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) (2). This prolific hymn writer wrote more than 6,000 songs, with 361 of them written while being persecuted for the faith in prison. While he was alive he rarely ventured out of his city, or even his personal residence for that matter, he was still present in the lives of at least one million Romanians that, “we could not believe he could ever die”, said M. Cruceru, Dean Of Theology, Emanuel University, Oradea.(3)

Born on February 3, 1922, to a very poor family, this extraordinary man lost his father by the age of three and a half and his only opportunity for education involved enlisting in the military program called the “Army’s Children” at the age of twelve. These destitute children lived in garrisons with soldiers, but due to his love for music, Moldveanu was enrolled in the military’s brass ensemble. There, a conductor recognized his talents and helped him develop his musical ability. Later, he would write, “I am now seeing God’s hand in everything that has happened in my life, good or bad”.

When he would come home for short vacations, Moldoveanu would accompany his mother to a newly-founded church belonging to “*The Lord’s Army*”, a reforming arm of the Greco-Orthodox Church that emphasized the need for repentance and of being born-again. Shortly, Moldoveanu met his Savior and also fell in love with the *Lord’s Army’s* musical tradition, putting its words and music to paper and publishing them, as well as his own original music, in “*Village’s Light*”. Music also likely saved his life during WWII, as his ensemble was stationed far from the war-ravaged front lines. Still young, Moldoveanu wrote very mature music and spiritually-deep lyrics during this time of conflict. To buy his first Bible, he sold half of his bread ration and his entire milk ration for an entire month; he would eventually keep this very same Bible until his death. During this and the short post-war period of freedom, before the communist regime’s ascent to power, Moldoveanu was able to publish hundreds of songs. (4)

In 1948, the Communists declared the *Lord’s Army* illegal and threw its leaders in prison. Nicolae continued to worship in secret and in 1959, after refusing to stop attending Christian gatherings and writing songs, he was arrested and sentenced to 12 years in prison for “conspiring to overthrow the communist regime”, despite his right hand’s infirmity due to an accident. Still, he praised the Lord and in return God “gave” him the optimistic song: *Heaven Bright*. On the day of his arrest, Moldoveanu was able to whisper to his wife. “Lena, look at the skies”. It was “the only thing we could share while separated”, he later said. The comment was to prove prophetic as after months spent in an underground section of the prison, Moldoveanu was finally allowed above ground. The cell he had been moved to had a broken window, and although it was a bitterly cold day, at least he could share the same sky as his wife. (This song is sung in English here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDr4pHtOW6k>)

In prison, he met Traian Dorz, a prolific Christian poet from *Lord’s Army*, and many well-known Christian brothers, including *Tortured for Christ’s* author and *The Voice of the Martyr’s* founder Richard Wurmbrand. Moldoveanu and Wurmbrand praised each other for their testimonies during persecution. Both considered it an honor and a grace to suffer for the Lord. “Moldoveanu was one of the two greatest saints I have met in my 14 years of prison”,

Wurmbrand said in a sermon. "He came smiling from the torture room. His approach was that of a lamb. While I was protesting the guards' abuses against others or me, he never protested" continued R.W. (5)

Amnestied five years later, though still under secret police's surveillance, he continued to meet with his small church house whenever possible. Warrantless home searches, abuses and threats continued for decades, but he always thanked the Lord for them, and also prayed for persecutors. In a time when the communist regime kept a tight grip on any publication, even owning a typewriter could put you in prison for a couple of years. However, the spread of his songs could not be stopped. Memorized, copied by hand, and later recorded, Moldoveanu's songs were used by the Lord to nurture our faith for more than six decades. Because of the surveillance, poverty, and poor health, he could not work or travel too far. But he was visited daily by Christians from all of Romania who were welcome in the small apartment he was renting. And a visit to him was quite an experience! In a country of religious divisions, Moldoveanu mended all fences and never asked visitors for anything other than their first names. He was even aware that some "Christians" might be police agents, but "they needed to hear the good news too"!

There was one exception to his presence though: after waking up, for at least two hours, he used to sing songs of praise to the Lord, alone and without any audience. Most of the songs he would write were granted to him during this intimate time. After that, he shared freely with anybody what God "gave" him, whether a song or a meditation. Even in more recent years, when recording artists sold CDs or DVDs with recordings and performances that included his songs, he never asked for copyright royalties. On the contrary, he encouraged musicians to arrange his songs for choirs or orchestras as he always looked upon his hymns as "God's copyright".

At times, his lyrics move one to feel spiritual immaturity; "This is a curse", said Jan Staneschi, former Bucharest Baptist Seminary Principal, when he heard the song "Break my Will, Even with Heavy Blows". "It is not a curse", Moldoveanu would reply. "It is my commitment to God's will, as was the Virgin Mary's", recounted him, at a '99 symposium, as saying and adding: "and His will is good and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). (6) (this song inspired the group This Hope, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnjorXxSmew>)

It has been God's infinite wisdom to choose a hymn writer and not a preacher to enhance our faith. In a country where translated Evangelicals' music was considered a means to westernize Romanians, Moldoveanu's folk style met no resistance. Although many of his songs are more sophisticated and require elevated vocal capability, most of Moldoveanu's songs came naturally for Christians, whether alone or in church, and they went directly to our souls. It is my prayer that these humble words would bring some well-deserved recognition to this miracle of God, Nicolae Moldoveanu. "May the Lord be praised", was the *Lord's Army's* old greeting. And the answer was, "For Ever and Ever, Amen".

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doru Radu is one of the elders at Golgotha Romanian Baptist Church in Warren, Michigan. Radu immigrated from the communist Romania and likes to write stories about the good hand of our Lord who protected us during the 45 years of communist persecution.

(1) D. Sida Hodoroaba-Roberts – *“Nicolae Moldoveanu (1922-2007) A Short Biography”*. Article presented during the Hymn Society of USA & Canada’s 2016 conference, University of Redlands California.

(2) Doina Catana, Director - Ioan Vidu National College of Arts, Timisoara – remarks on a special presentation of Moldoveanu in *“Viata Spirituala”*, a weekly series on Romanian public television, broadcast on July 22, 2007

(3) Marius Cruceru’s blog: *“Ipatratosu”* , July 12, 2007

(4) All biographic details come from *“Hope’s Hostages”*, *“Strigatul de la miezul Noptii”* Book House, November 2002, Arad, Romania (A book, printed in Romanian, and dedicated to Christians who spent years in communist prisons for their faith).

(5) Richard Wurmbrand, Audio Recordings of Sermons 1987- 1996

(6) Moldoveanu Symposium, 1999 Maranatha Baptist Church, Arad, Romania, Video Recordings.

Burden Bearing: why do we have them and who is supposed to bear them?

by David Thompson

NASHVILLE, TN – There are two statements made by the apostle Paul in the same paragraph that seem to be almost contradictory. In the last chapter of his letter to the Galatians, Paul says “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Then he says something that seems quite the opposite when he states to the believers that “each one should bear his own burden.”

Which one is it, Paul? Or is it possible that both are true at the same time. Let us consider where to find the balance in this journey we call the Christian life.

Question: what does it mean to bear your own burden? One thing for sure is that we are to take complete responsibility for our own actions and be prepared to deal with the result. The result is always better when we follow the advice of Jesus who said, “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” I love pastors— but even pastors need to follow their own advice.

This summer, a bishop in Brooklyn, New York was preaching. The sermon was being broadcast live on the Internet. In the middle of his homily, three masked gunmen walked in and everyone got on the ground at the preacher's request. The gunman forced the bishop to the pulpit's floor and removed \$1 million worth of jewelry from his person and left. From my humble perspective, that is not being wise as serpents and harmless as doves. No other person but he himself should bear the burden of choosing to wear \$1 million worth of jewelry live on the Internet and not expect someone to take notice.

Yes, sometimes it is good to bear one's own burden. Parenthetically, you should always be ready to help bear the burdens of another soul. I like this idea from Marcus Aurelius, "Be tolerant with others and strict with yourself." You need not look very far to discover that there is always someone who is having a bad day and that person might need you. A half century ago, a band called the Hollies sang a song that still rings true today, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother."

A young mother of five beautiful children and a friend of mine, was just diagnosed with advanced breast cancer. I told her of my prayers. She replied back that she can actually feel the prayers and that those prayers are making an incredible difference and giving her courage and confidence. Certainly, there are one million ways to bear one another's burdens, prayer is not only one of the simplest, but the most powerful.

Question: does one person's influence really make a difference? Alexander the Great said, "Remember upon the conduct of each, depends the fate of all."

God has actually equipped you to not only bear your own burden, but to alleviate the burden that others carry. God will give you what you need when you need it! He also expects you to learn and grow in the process. It was the late Eleanor Roosevelt who humorously quipped, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You cannot live long enough to make them all yourself."

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.

Sharing life leads to gospel conversations for summer missions team

Each year thousands of students volunteer to serve overseas. They leave the comfort zones of their universities and churches to join International Mission Board missionary teams around the world. For more than 50 years, college students have made a lasting impact around the world by building relationships with nationals through English classes, sports, activities and sharing heart-to-heart conversations.

Students from Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Arkansas, chose to serve in Krakow, Poland, this past summer. They shared everyday life moments and demonstrated what it means to be Christ followers in one of the most religious countries in Europe. Many of these interactions resulted in Polish students hearing the gospel for the first time and coming to know Christ as their Savior and Lord.

The Old Town Square in the heart of Krakow, Poland, is the largest town square in Europe. It has many gift shops and food stalls that tourists enjoy. The students took time to learn some of the city's history so they could better understand the people they interacted with. Poland is predominantly Catholic (90%) and is home to many beautiful churches.

As part of their summer mission trip, students prayer walked the city. They spent time praying for their peers at the Polish universities. They visited specific places university students frequent to prepare the harvest through prayer.

Meghann Bledsoe and her friends talk to Emma Mackey, a Polish student, on the street. The three OBU students befriended Mackey at a coffeeshop conversation group. The Arkansas students engaged with Polish students to help strengthen English conversation skills.

Krakow ministry involved a lot of walking. It's the life of university students in this city, so the OBU students joined in. They visited a university and the parks surrounding it. While there, they ran into their new friends and had natural conversations about school and the gospel.

Left: Emma Mackey talks with Polish students in the coffee shop. Right: Meghann Bledsoe (second from right) laughs about a word misused in a sentence within her discussion group. The Ouachita students helped their peers practice English as part of discussion groups outside of class. Many of these discussions led to talking about the gospel and sharing how Jesus transforms lives.

The volunteers visited a university and prayed together. They asked God to open the hearts of students to the gospel. College is a time when many are developing beliefs their own and not just following what their parents told them. The team prayed for God to use them to plant

seeds of the gospel and to be present in the lives of their new friends who were watching what being an evangelical Christian is all about.

Emma Mackey highlights a verse in the Bible that will be given to a Polish student as a gift. OBU students spent a lot of time with Polish university students practicing English and just hanging out. Many of the discussions led to Bible passages and their meanings. The Arkansas students found out most of their new friends did not own a Bible that was easy to read. Most owned ones written in old, formal Polish.

A Polish student practices her English with students from Arkansas. The OBU mission team prepared some extra classroom helps for their Polish peers. Sometimes speaking student-to-student is easier than using a new language in a formal class. It's easier to make mistakes and laugh it off. This bonding time in an informal setting led to both sets of students getting into deeper conversations outside of the classroom.

Kaitlyn Norris talks with Claudia, a Polish student, in a coffee shop. The two first met online when IMB missionaries asked OBU students for help. Claudia and Kaitlyn met in a video chat and practiced English. By the time they met face-to-face, they were able to have deeper conversations as friends. Kaitlyn and other OBU students presented the gospel and gave an English Bible to Claudia.

Claudia is excited to receive an English Bible as a gift from the summer volunteers. She wished to have an English Bible of her own. Her friends from Arkansas marked Scripture passages they thought would be helpful and offered to discuss them with her.

Is a college gathering even a thing without food? The OBU volunteers and Polish students chowed down at a game night hosted by IMB missionaries. Meghann Bledsoe (second from right) and Emma Mackey (far left) fellowship with Polish students at their table. Most of the students had been to classes or coffee discussion groups with the OBU team.

Bonding and practicing English, students laugh and play a game of UNO. Living life and being a steadfast presence is often one of the first steps in sharing the gospel. OBU students spent time getting to know their Polish college peers. Through these relationships and just normal fun, they were able to have conversations about the gospel.

The student volunteers and IMB missionaries get together with Ukrainian refugees at a local park for fellowship. The mission team came to work with university students but jumped at the chance to do any kind of ministry and gain experience working cross-culturally.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luke In is a photographer for the IMB.

Americans' theological beliefs changed to suit post-pandemic practice

by Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Americans experienced seismic changes over the past two years, including, for many, how they attend church. The shift in behavior coincides with a shift in theology.

The [biennial State of Theology study](#) conducted by Lifeway Research found relative stability in some of the religious and cultural beliefs U.S. adults hold. After months of quarantines and social distancing, however, Americans increasingly believe worshipping apart from a church is as good as attending church services.

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was just beginning in the United States, 58 percent of Americans said worshipping alone or with one's family was a valid replacement for regularly attending church, with 26 percent strongly agreeing. In 2022, 66 percent believe worshipping apart from a local congregation is as valid as worshipping with one, with 35 percent strongly agreeing.

Additionally, most Americans (56 percent) don't believe every Christian has an obligation to join a local church. Fewer than 2 in 5 (36 percent) say this is something all Christians should do.

Tracking surveys from Lifeway Research throughout the pandemic found [U.S. Protestant churches were open at pre-pandemic levels](#) by summer of 2021 and into 2022, but early this year few churches had reached pre-pandemic attendance levels.

“Religious identity, beliefs and behavior are interrelated,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “When in-person church attendance behaviors were interrupted and habits were broken, it affected some Americans’ beliefs about the need to gather with other believers to worship.”

With many theological beliefs remaining stable, those that did shift point to areas where a changing U.S. culture may be impacting Americans’ religious perspectives.

The 2022 State of Theology study, sponsored by Ligonier Ministries, surveyed more than 3,000 Americans and follows previous versions in [2014](#), [2016](#), [2018](#) and [2020](#).

God-sized confusion

Most Americans believe in God, but they’re a little confused about who the divine is.

While 66 percent of U.S. adults say God is a perfect being and cannot make mistakes, half (51 percent) say God learns and adapts to different circumstances.

Almost 7 in 10 Americans (67 percent) say God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Islam. A similar percentage (71 percent) say there is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Despite a majority of Americans affirming a Trinitarian God with three divine persons, most still aren’t sure about how that applies to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Slightly more than half (55 percent) believe Jesus is the first and greatest created being. Another 53 percent say He was a great teacher but not God. Close to 3 in 5 (59 percent) believe the Holy Spirit is a force but not a personal being.

When thinking about these theological convictions, most Americans classify them as opinions not facts. For 60 percent of U.S. adults, religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it’s not objective truth.

“Many Americans think about God as if He had only revealed himself in a vague, nondescript way. They seem to fill in the gaps with whatever they want to believe,” McConnell said. “This creates sharp contrasts between what Americans believe about God and how He revealed Himself in great detail in the Bible.”

Social issues and sin

Hot button cultural issues often intersect with theological beliefs, and Americans often aren't sure how to balance the two. A growing number says Christians should stay out of the discussion.

While 3 in 4 Americans (78 percent) say God created male and female, they're more split on whether gender identity depends on personal preference. More than 2 in 5 (42 percent) say gender identity is a matter of choice, the highest in the history of the State of Theology. Half (51 percent) disagree. The American public is more divided than American pastors. A [2020 study of U.S. Protestant pastors](#) found 72 percent believe it is morally wrong for an individual to identify with a gender different than the sex they were born.

Half of U.S. adults (53 percent) say sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin, while 42 percent disagree. Those who view non-marital sex as sinful has increased slightly but steadily since 49 percent said the same in 2016.

Americans are also split on whether the Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior is still applicable. Slightly less than half (46 percent) say it doesn't apply today, and 42 percent disagree.

Additionally, Americans are closely divided over the issue of abortion. While 53 percent say abortion is a sin, 39 percent disagree. Still, a [previous Lifeway Research study](#) specifically on abortion found 12 percent of U.S. adults say abortion shouldn't be legal in any situation. When asked specifically what time period they believe abortion should be a legal option assuming there are no health issues for the woman or the fetus, half of Americans say no later than 12 weeks.

Three in 10 Americans (30 percent) say Christians should stay silent on political issues, an increase from 24 percent in 2020 and the highest percentage recorded in any previous State of Theology study. Around 3 in 5 Americans (61 percent) disagree.

"Discussions of sin are inherently theological, because they explore whether God set standards and what behaviors miss this mark," McConnell said. "So, those who acknowledge certain behaviors as sin are acknowledging a deity's standards. This is a different discussion than whether society agrees on an ethical standard of conduct that we determine."

Eternal destinations

Americans believe God cares about what we do each day, most people are generally good, but hell is a real place where some people will spend eternity in punishment.

While 58 percent of U.S. adults disagree, a growing number believe God is unconcerned with their day-to-day decisions. Around a third of Americans (32 percent) say God isn't concerned with what they do on a daily basis, up from 25 percent in 2020 and the highest since the State of Theology first asked the question in 2014.

As people consider their actions and their nature, most believe they're naturally good and start off innocent before God. Two in 3 Americans (66 percent) say everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature. Seven in 10 (71 percent) say everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.

Still, 3 in 5 Americans (59 percent) say hell is a real place where certain people will be punished forever, up from 56 percent in 2020 and 54 percent in 2018. A quarter (25 percent) also believe even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation, consistent with the 26 percent from 2020 after climbing up in each State of Theology study starting at 18 percent in 2014.

"An interesting paradox exists regarding Americans' views of sin and punishment," McConnell said. "More than two-thirds of Americans believe everyone is inherently good, yet almost as many believe divine judgement will occur in the future."

Biblical balance

Americans tend to trust the Bible, especially what it teaches about Jesus, but may have some doubts in other areas.

Two in 3 U.S. adults (66 percent) say biblical accounts of the physical or bodily resurrection of Jesus are completely accurate. They believe the event actually occurred.

And Americans do not believe the Holy Spirit will contradict Scripture. More than 3 in 5 (62 percent) don't believe the Holy Spirit can tell them to do something that is forbidden in the Bible.

In many ways, Americans are split on the trustworthiness of the Bible. Around half say the Bible is 100 percent accurate in all that it teaches (51 percent) and the Bible has the authority to tell us what to do (52 percent); however, 53 percent of Americans say the Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true. And 40 percent say modern science disproves the Bible.

"As a society, views on the Bible probably best summarize how split Americans are when it comes to theology," McConnell said. "Half see Scripture as dependable and authoritative while half see it as fiction. Higher numbers acknowledge the story it tells, but more than half also give weight to their personal opinions."

For more information:

- View the complete report
- Read the white paper
- Visit the data explorer TheStateOfTheology.com

- Find previous versions at LifewayResearch.com/StateOfTheology
- View trends over the years at LifewayResearch.com/TheologyTrends

Methodology

A demographically balanced online panel was used for interviewing American adults for the 2022 State of Theology study sponsored by Ligonier Ministries. A total of 3,011 surveys were completed from January 5-23, 2022. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error from the online panel does not exceed plus or minus 1.9 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups. Slight weights were used to balance gender, age, ethnicity, income, region, and religion.

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

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

ABOUT LIGONIER

Since its founding in 1971 by Dr. R.C. Sproul, Orlando, Florida-based Ligonier has been a fellowship of teachers dedicated to making the deep truths of the Christian faith accessible to growing believers. For more information, visit Ligonier.org.

ABOUT LIFEWAY RESEARCH

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

Christians likely minority in U.S. by 2050, Pew says

by Diana Chandler

WASHINGTON, D.C. (BP) – Christians are projected to comprise less than half of the U.S. population by 2050 in a Pew Research study of how current trends might play out among believers and non-believers in the coming decades.

In the best-case scenario of how trends might continue to unfold, which Pew presents as the most unlikely and most optimistic possibility, Pew projects the Christian share of the U.S. population to shrink from a current 64 percent to between 54 percent and 35 percent by 2070.

In the scenario Pew described as most likely, Christians would comprise 39 percent of Americans by 2070, losing their majority status as early as 2050 at 47 percent of the national population.

“Nones,” or the religiously unaffiliated, would constitute the largest share of Americans at 48 percent in 2070, under the scenario Pew said is the most likely of four considered.

Among factual trends Pew considered in its hypothetical scenarios of the future of religion in America are the pace at which adults switch to a religion other than that of their childhood, and various demographic trends including migration, births and deaths.

“None of the scenarios in this report demonstrate what would happen if switching into Christianity increased. This is not because a religious revival in the U.S. is impossible,” Pew postured in the study released Sept. 13. “New patterns of religious change could emerge at any time. Armed conflicts, social movements, rising authoritarianism, natural disasters or worsening economic conditions are just a few of the circumstances that sometimes trigger sudden social – and religious – upheavals.

“However, our projections are not designed to model the consequences of dramatic events, which might affect various facets of life as we know it, including religious identity and practice. Instead, these projections describe the potential consequences of dynamics currently shaping the religious landscape.”

The trend-based scenarios Pew hypothesized are:

1. What if the rate of switching remains steady among 15- to 29-year-olds, the ages most susceptible? Based on trends, in each new generation 31 percent of people raised Christian would become religiously unaffiliated while 21 percent of those who grew up with no religion would become Christian. The result? Christians would retain their plurality but lose their majority, first dipping below 50 percent in 2060 and sitting at 46 percent by 2070. “Nones” would register at 41 percent or below by 2070.

2. What if switching became more common, seeing progressively larger shares of Christians leave the faith by age 30, but leveled off to prevent the share of Christianity from falling below the neighborhood of 50 percent? This scenario, which Pew deemed most plausible, would result in Christians falling to 47 percent of the population by 2050, compared to 42 percent of the population that would describe themselves as unaffiliated. By 2070, “nones” would constitute a plurality of the population at 48 percent. The plausibility is based on how switching has played out in 79 other countries where, amid switching, the percentage of Christians “has not been known to fall below about 50 percent,” Pew said.
3. What if switching continues to increase unabated in popularity, pushing Christianity below the neighborhood of 50 percent? If so, Pew said, Christians would fall from the majority by 2045. By 2055, Christians would comprise 43 percent of the population, ranking behind “nones” at 46 percent. By 2070, 52 percent of Americans would be considered “nones,” while 35 percent would be Christian.
4. Finally, in the scenario Pew describes as most unrealistic among the four considered, what if switching ceases altogether? Only in this case would Christians retain their majority as late as 2070, ranking at 54 percent of the population. Still, the majority ranking would represent a 10 percentage point decrease from today.

“While the change in affiliation rates in the United States is largely due to people voluntarily leaving religion behind, switching is not the only driver of religious composition change worldwide,” Pew said. “For example, differences in fertility rates explain most of the recent religious change in India, while migration has altered the religious composition of many European countries in the last century. Forced conversions, mass expulsions, wars and genocides also have caused changes in religious composition throughout history.

“Moreover, the scenarios in this report are limited to religious identity and do not project how religious beliefs and practices might change in the coming decades.”

Progressively since 1990, a larger share of adults who were raised Christian no longer describe themselves as such. In the early 1990s, nearly 90 percent of U.S. adults described themselves as Christian, a percentage that has fallen to 64 percent. About 30 percent of U.S. adults said they have no religion today. The remaining six percent of the population reflects several faiths including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus.

Scenario 2 “best illustrates what would happen if recent generational trends in the U.S. continue, but only until they reach the boundary of what has been observed around the world, including in Western Europe,” Pew said of the possibilities. “Overall, this scenario seems to most closely fit the patterns observed in recent years.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' senior writer.

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

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