

God's undivided attention

ANN ARBOR – One of the core memories that I have of my dad was a phone call. I have no memory of what the phone call was about, but what has stuck in my mind is the way that the phone call ended. I was in college and must have been between some classes and had called just to kill some time. Around five to ten minutes into the conversation he apologetically asked if we might continue a little bit later because he needed to get back into a meeting he had stepped out of.

What became clear to me was that my dad was in the middle of a fairly important board meeting where he was presenting. He had paused the meeting to answer a call from his son, and upon finding out it was just a casual invitation to talk, he proceeded to step out of the meeting and talk with me for almost 10 minutes while everyone else waited for him to come back and continue. The reason I often think back to this moment is because it is representative of almost all my interactions with my dad. No matter what he was leading, involved in or busy with... I had his whole attention.

Over the past twelve years as God has called us into different ministry roles, I have had the opportunity to help lead thousands of college students. Not many have stories like this. What each did have was a view of themselves, their world and their God that had been profoundly shaped by their view of their father.

Five years ago, was the first time that I held my son Silas in my arms. I know now that he couldn't really see much, but for about 15-20 minutes he just quietly stared up into my eyes. It was a powerful moment that I doubt I will ever forget. I was a father. This was my son. As his little eyes searched around for what was real and what was true of his world, in that moment he knew that he had the full attention of his father. I couldn't take my eyes off of him.

I wish that were still true today. As a father of two with a third on the way I often wonder how the mismanagement of my attention will affect the way that my children step out into life. I wonder if they too will find themselves enamored with their phones when they get them, or whether they will disdain technology as the mistress of their father's attention. I wonder if they will see their father as a hard worker who built a home for his family, or whether they will see him as someone who preferred remodeling kitchens to playing with them on the floor. What I wonder most often is if they will believe that the heart and the eyes of their father are fixed on them, or whether they were somewhere else.

The greatest lie ever told was spoken to the very first children of our world, and this lie still haunts the caverns of our soul. It was a lie about the heart and the attention of their Father. Apparently, those who don't believe that they have the attention and heart of their Father will journey all the way to hell looking for something to replace it. Tozer said that "What comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us." What if the most important thing about our view of God is what we believe about his attention over us?

A few years ago, I read a passage in Deuteronomy that I haven't stopped thinking about since:

"Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day."

Of all that is in creation, God has uniquely set his heart in love... on you. That while he owns the heavens and while the pulsating energy of the stars scream across the dark corners of the universe, his gaze pierces past the light of ten trillion suns to look at you. While he holds the unexplored and unseen edges of the cosmos in the palm of his hands, God cares most about holding your hand. And despite all the noise in the universe, his ears are tuned to the sound of your voice.

As I think back to the gift that God gave me in my dad, there's a profound and long list of things he gave me. Before I even became a Christian, my dad instilled in me a deep sense of the sovereignty of God. He gave me my doctrine and theology. He taught me how to think and how to love the outdoors. He taught me how to work on cars and fix things with my hands. He gave me wisdom and life advice. He showed me how to build a home, a marriage and a faith. Though more than anything, he gave me his attention. And somehow.. more than anything else in my life, this has helped me believe that I also have the attention of my Father in heaven.

What if the greatest gift that a father can give his children isn't his provision, wisdom or inherited skills, but simply his attention? Sometimes it is the simplest things that change the world. Through the course of my life, I have found that it was simply the time and attention of my dad that has helped unwind the lies at the center of my soul. The clearest gospel he ever preached to me was simply the way his eyes and his heart were always on me. So, to all the fathers with little eyes looking up at them to see what is real and true about their world: Let's give them a picture that might help lead them home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Livingston is Church Planter/Pastor of Treeline Church in Ann Arbor Michigan. Treeline Church is less than one year old. It is their passion to reach the students in the surrounding universities with the message of Christ. Dave and his wife, Steffi, have three children, one of which will be born later this year.

First-Person: Addressing the four major gaps in student ministry

There are usually two types of people when it comes to setting the alarm to wake up in the morning. Person number one (this is me) – sets the alarm for the last possible minute to when you actually need to wake up to not be late. Person number two – sets the alarm for about an hour before they actually need to wake up, because they want to be able to hit the snooze button over and over and over again.

In student ministry, there is a massive reality that we need to wake up to. I believe most leaders are aware of it, know it needs to be addressed, but keep “hitting snooze” because they don’t want to deal with it or don’t know how to.

What am I talking about? What is it that we have to wake up to and address? I’m thinking of the four major gaps in student ministry.

There used to be one major gap in student ministry where teens would typically cease being part of a church. It was the gap between student ministry and collegiate ministry. In fact, for decades, we’ve heard stats shared and leaders express the need for fixing this. According to Lifeway Research, two-thirds (66 percent) of American young adults who attended a Protestant church regularly for at least a year as a teenager say they dropped out for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22.

This gap remains a serious concern, but in my exposure to hundreds of student ministries and tens of thousands of students every year, I believe there are actually four major gaps now. Fewer and fewer students are making it all the way through student ministry (sixth grade through senior year) before they even have a chance to drop out after graduation.

What are those gaps?

- The gap between middle school and high school
- The gap around getting their driver’s license
- The gap between junior and senior year
- The gap between youth ministry and college ministry

If the Church is going to be an effective student ministry moving forward, we must wake up to addressing and closing these four gaps.

How do we do this?

Here is a list of things that I believe will help in closing these gaps. It's not a comprehensive list, but it is a start. Also, these are not in any particular order of importance, because I believe they're all extremely important and urgent.

- **A love for the Lord and His Word:** Our ultimate call is to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Let's be honest, some of our teens walk away from our ministries with a Ph.D. in pizza and laser tag and a Pre-K education in doctrine, theology and loving Jesus. Your theology will heavily influence your doxology. A love for Jesus, His Word and living it out has sticking power. Don't dumb it down; disciple them up.
- **Be a part of the church as a whole:** If a student ministry is run like a "church within a church," then when a teen is navigating through the different transitions within a student ministry or graduating out of it, it feels like they're having to go join a different church that just meets at the same address. That's why many leave, because they're now being a part of something different that they don't understand and where they do not have relationships. I definitely believe in age-specific ministries, but I also believe that the student ministry should be a part of the whole church. It's one church that is multi-generational. Find ways to constantly be together instead of always separate.
- **Build relationships:** The more relationships a student has, the less likely they are to fall through the gaps. Help cultivate relationships with their peers and at the same time with those in the next phase. For example: if your middle school and high school ministries are separate, then multiple times throughout their eighth-grade year, strategically plan high school events where they're intentionally being invited so that they're building relationships. When they already know people in the ministry that they're about to step into, the transition is less intimidating.
- **Get them serving and living on mission:** When students catch the vision for serving, then getting a driver's license is no longer an excuse to disappear. Instead, it's actually leveraged to no longer have to depend on rides from others. They become more reliable to serve because they can get themselves there. When juniors and seniors have caught the vision for living on mission, then they no longer feel like they're too mature for the student ministry. Rather, they're making the most of being a leader by reaching their spiritually lost peers and discipling younger students to do the same, which points back to point number two. They should be serving and living on mission with the church as a whole, not only in the student ministry. Empower them to be involved in the whole life of the church.

As next gen leaders, if we're equipping and empowering students to have a love for the Lord and His Word, be a part of the church as a whole, build relationships and to serve and live on

mission – then this will be the posture of their lifestyle from now until they see Jesus face to face. They'll navigate the different stages in their life without falling through the gaps, because they'll realize worshipping Jesus and being the church isn't for a period of time but for all of eternity.

"I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." – Philippians 1:6, CSB

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shane serves as the National Next Gen Director for the North American Mission Board. He and his wife, Kasi, reside in Rockwall, TX with their six children. He has been in ministry for over 18 years as a denominational worker, church planter, lead pastor and student pastor. Shane is the author of several books and co-hosts the Next Gen on Mission podcast with Paul Worcester.

Hundreds of thousands flee, but God has not left Sudan

War, conquest, colonization, coups and dictators — Sudan's history runs red. Blood flows now, leaving a trail behind the men, women and children who have, and are, fleeing to bordering countries.

On April 15, fighting broke out between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group. An observer outside of Sudan who is familiar with the situation said the fighting is so devastating and all-encompassing that they think the winner of the conflict will stand on a pile of rocks.

The conflict has, so far, internally displaced and made refugees out of an estimated 1.15 million people — about the population of Montana. Many of the refugees have no intention of returning.

IMB workers, like Jerry and Meg Brown, are forming plans to assist refugees in bordering countries. Trauma healing counseling is a primary way they are meeting needs, and Sudanese Christians are receiving training in trauma counseling so they can minister to their people.

Send Relief funds are being utilized to serve refugees as well as Sudanese who've remained in the country.

"We don't know why God permitted this to happen right now, but we do believe He's given us a job to do," Meg said. "Pray for the church there in the midst of it all."

A history of hardship

Sudan boasts centuries of rich history, but its history is also rife with unrest and economic hardship.

Part of the African nation belonged to the Kush and Nubian kingdoms, which were cradles of civilization, and lasted from 2450 BC to 1500 AD. The kingdoms were Christianized by Coptic Christians. Settlers from Arabia introduced Islam to the nation, and Christianity faded. Colonization by the Egyptians and the British followed, and in 1956, Sudan gained its independence. Coups, two civil wars, dictatorships, and wars extending past the country's borders followed.

While unrest and economic hardship have also been the markers of the past 50 to 100 years, this time, the violence broke out without much warning, Jerry said. The Browns live in another country in Northern Africa and the Middle East.

Many people have fled on foot and are seeking shelter in neighboring countries. (IMB Photo)

Jerry said Sudan has undergone eras where it has been more open and Christian work was possible. The country is estimated to be roughly 3% evangelical Christian. Islam is the predominant religion, and Sudan is home to 67 unreached people groups.

Though the situation is grim, the Browns are confident the Lord will redeem what seems unredeemable.

“We do believe God will use this to build His church. Even though we don't know how, we know He will because that is His will, that every kingdom, people, tribe, nation will hear, even all those people groups in Sudan that have yet to hear,” Meg said.

Loving your neighbor

Refugees in neighboring countries who left before the current conflict can minister and empathize with refugees who are now fleeing. The Browns say they expect terrific conversations to result.

South Sudan is one of the nations receiving refugees. Many of those fleeing, the majority of whom are Muslim, once persecuted those who now live in South Sudan for their Christian faith. Christian Sudanese are loving their neighbors and welcome them wholeheartedly. Jerry said they are ministering to the people who threw them out of the country.

“It's really hard for people to go through the trauma of evacuating, but it's often in those circumstances where they turn to God,” Meg said.

A Christian fleeing Sudan had the opportunity to share with a non-Christian family the story of Jesus calming the sea.

“God sees the turmoil we’re in, and He has the power to calm that,” the Christians shared.

“We believe God is going to use this. We also really believe that God, will continue to build His church in Sudan,” Meg said. “Even though so many believers have had to leave again, God has not left Sudan.”

A long-time Christian worker shared, “The church in Sudan belongs to the Lord, and He will nurture it, so it’s not like we left anything that belonged to us. It’s always been His church. He will take care of it.”

The Browns ask for prayer for the Christians who remain in the country. Pray also for the Christians who’ve fled to be ministers of hope to people who have been hopeless for a generation.

Pray for the believers ministering to refugees in surrounding countries to have wisdom, compassion and discernment.

Eventually, refugees will make their way to Europe and the U.S., and Jerry and Meg said it will provide a chance for the global church to respond in love.

You can be a part of bringing relief to hundreds of thousands of Sudanese in need. Please visit <https://www.sendrelief.org/projects/sudan-crisis/> for more information.

Some names have been changed for security reasons.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tessa Sanchez writes for the IMB.

Who will hold your umbrella?

LANSING – Several years ago, my family and I were invited to attend my cousin’s son’s wedding.

After arriving a little too early, we asked if there was anything that we could do to help. We set up chairs, doing our best to ensure that they were perfectly aligned, perfectly spaced, and at the right angle so the guests would get the perfect view of the ceremony. After that was all set

the groom asked if he could task me with one last thing. Willing to do anything the groom asked to help make his special day picture perfect, I promptly agreed.

He asked if I would help him by carefully arranging flower petals down the aisle where the bridal party and his bride would soon be walking. These rose petals were the deepest, richest, reddest looking rose petals that I had ever seen!

This was a beautiful outdoor venue decorated to the max. Fortunately, it was a beautiful sunny MICHIGAN day. Because we were outside, the slightest breezes and these rich, red rose petals started flying all over the place. I found myself repeatedly arranging and rearranging the rose petals down the sides of the aisle before the wedding ceremony started. After several failed attempts at keeping the rose petals nicely arranged, I did what any strong-willed male would do. I got frustrated and gave up. At least it was sunny.

If you know Michigan. You know that it is not an exaggeration to state that you can have all four Michigan seasons in one day. Sometimes even before noon!

Now everything was all set, chairs were set up, people were in their seats, the bridesmaids, groomsmen, and the pastor were all in their places. The rose petals were in their places, well kind of, and the groom anxiously awaited his bride. We were about to be witnesses to a wedding.

My wife Annabel and I decided to stand in the back so we could take everything in. The wedding had just begun, and off in the distance I saw it, a flash of lightning! Pure Michigan!

As the ceremonies began the breeze picked up slightly and scattered the rich red rose petals, it started to sprinkle and soon became an all-out rain shower.

The guests quickly began shuttling into the indoor reception hall scattering every chair leaving no hint that they were once perfectly aligned and spaced. My wife Annabel and I jointly decided that we couldn't do the same and leave the couple to weather the storm alone, especially on their special day.

All the seats were empty, but the bridesmaids and the groomsmen stood fast with the bride and groom. Some of them selflessly held umbrellas over the bride, groom, and pastor so they could finish the ceremony.

What a picture! How wonderful it is when you have people who will weather the storm with you.

After the ceremony I was able to speak with the rain drenched newlyweds sharing with them the picture that would be forever burned in my memory and complimenting their choice of friends and family in the bridal party. Overstating perhaps Proverbs 18:24, "One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

No matter how well we choose our friends, family, and fellow ministry servants, there will be times in our lives and ministries that we will not have people to hold “umbrellas” over us in our stormy times of life and ministries. We will have to weather the storms alone, at least physically.

We must press on.

God promised us that He would not abandon us! (Joshua 1:5) We never face our storms alone! Thank you, Father, for that promise!

Can we as Christ followers, ministry leaders, and brothers and sisters in Christ do likewise and commit to being a “reliable friend” to someone who may be struggling greatly in their life’s storm?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joshua Diaz has served as Youth Leader, Worship Leader, Deacon, Sunday School teacher, Baseball Chaplain (of the Local Single A Team) and recently an Interim Pastor. Joshua and Annabel have served jointly leading VBS outreach. Joshua is a husband, father, and grandfather who has served in ministry at Good Shepherd Baptist Church, (El Buen Pastor) in Lansing, MI since 1991. Joshua and his lovely wife Annabel have been happily married for nearly 29 years.

A rough and rocky road

PLYMOUTH – It was a really cold winter morning in the Glass Mountains of West Texas. This small range of barren outcroppings was located just to the north of the Big Bend National Park with one rancher owning a good portion of this entire mountain range.

The foreman of that ranch was a member of our church and had on many occasions invited me to go out with him on one of his trapping excursions as he tried to capture renegade mountain lions. About three quarters of the livestock on this ranch consisted of sheep, and as you may know, sheep are one of the main listings on the menu for mountain lions.

For a lion to take one or two sheep a week from flocks that consist of thousands is not a serious problem for ranchers and is considered acceptable losses, but one particular lion was doing far more than taking an occasional meal here and there. This lion was a mother of at least two young adolescent cubs that she was teaching how to hunt and kill prey. Her prey of choice just happened to be mutton a la rare.

It was not unusual for this lioness to kill more than 100 sheep per night and not consume any of them. She would sneak into a herd at night as they slept and begin taking them down one by one while her children observed and learned. As one might imagine, an entire flock could be decimated in a very short period of time.

The destructive habit of this lion had caused my friend, Robert, to set out on a trapping run to try to capture the lion so that it might be sedated and transported to another location where there was no livestock. He asked me to go with him, so we saddled up our trusty steeds and headed up the mountain.

My ride of choice was a mule, but he preferred his favorite horse from the stables. I didn't ride in the rough terrain of the mountains very often, and I wanted a mount that was sure-footed and stable. My beast was not pretty, but it sure was steady.

At times on our way up we would have to cross some very steep valleys, and then climb up almost vertical slopes. On more than one occasion I was laying all the way back on my mule with my head resting on its rump, my feet pointing past its ears and holding on for dear life. The mule just took it in stride and deftly descended and ascended the rocky terrain with ease.

Robert knew where the den of the lion was located, and most of its haunts. The lion had made its home in the very top of a mountain range in a secluded spot. It was a long hard ride, and the weather was deteriorating by the minute. A cold North wind was blowing, and the clouds had begun to shed a few flakes of snow.

When we got to the area where a trap had been set, we found that the lion had been there, but had escaped. Our arduous trek had seemingly been for naught. As Robert reset the trap and placed more bait, I decided to ride over to the edge of the cliffs and take in the view from the top. As I approached the edge and began to peer over the side, my eyes widened with amazement and wonder.

Never in my life had I seen such a beautiful sight. There I was at what seemed to be the top of the world looking down at an ever-expanding valley that stretched for hundreds of miles. It was cold and nasty on top of the mountain, but down below it was beautiful.

Herds of cattle and sheep splattered and speckled the landscape like so many drops of ink from an artist's pen. A small creek snaked its way across the canyon floor with small pools of water periodically finding a resting place along its course. What a beautiful place.

The way I had traveled to attain this perspective was rough and rocky. My intended purpose and goals were never really met, but I found a visual treasure that has been one of my most prized memories.

Could it be the way you are going is rough and rocky? Could it be that your purposes and plans have all been dashed on the hard places of life? Has your present destination brought only disappointment and grief?

Just as Wayne Watson, one of my favorite songwriters and singers of decades past has so insightfully said, "sometimes the rough and rocky road will lead you to a beautiful place." I want to encourage you today in this wonderful journey we call Christianity. Many times, our plans and purposes can be completely different from what the Father has for us. Remember, He sees what we cannot and knows well what we truly need.

If you are frustrated with the way things are "not working out" or are disappointed with the place your chosen path has taken you, never forget that He is in control. He knows you well and His plans for you. Trust Him. Rest in His sovereign care. Let the peace that passes beyond your understanding have control of your heart and emotions. Be patient and wait. To be in the middle of the will of God is a beautiful place.

Proverbs 16:9 – "A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps."

Proverbs 19:21 – "There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand."

Romans 8:28 – "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

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.

Upcoming June 2024's national convention

PLYMOUTH – Twelve thousand messengers, this past month, voted their personal convictions and in doing so defined the global and local direction of Great Commission Baptists. Those of us attending from Michigan helped shape that future.

Where and when will next year's convention take place?

Indiana Convention Center
100 South Capitol Avenue
Indianapolis, Indiana 46225

June 9-10, 2024, Pastors' Conference & other special gatherings
June 11-12, 2024, Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention

Next year's four-day convention at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis, Indiana on June 9-12, 2024, will be worth the drive, meals, and lodging costs! There is no participation fee for attending the convention, but advanced registration as a messenger representing your church is required. More details can be found at: <https://sbcannualmeeting.net> or at <https://sbc.net>.

What happened last month?

- During the first two days, inspirational meetings with national and international impact met prior to the annual convention, such as the Pastors' Conference, Woman's Missionary Union, language/ethnic ministries, and more.
- During the second two days, important business matters were addressed with each messenger's voice and vote counting as importantly as the messenger next to him or her.
- Officers were elected to guide the convention for another year.
- Trustees were elected to serve on the board of six seminaries, two mission agencies, and other important entities for years to come.
- Motions were received, acted on, or deferred.
- Resolutions were received, acted on, or deferred.
- Evangelism efforts saturated the city resulting in many salvations and baptisms.
- Seventy-nine international missionaries were introduced to the messengers, on stage, before departing for their overseas assignments.
- Breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, and banquets were held by a variety of ministries throughout the entire four days. Your selections are yours to make.
- Over two hundred exhibitors put their ministries on display with free access and free giveaways to make exploring options for your church as convenient as possible.

Next Year is Near.

Pastors, church leaders, and church members, I encourage you to make plans to attend next year's annual meeting, June 9-12, 2024. Begin now by asking the church to set aside some funds to reimburse those who will attend next year's convention from your congregation.

Here are some distances and time estimates from some Michigan locations to Indianapolis:

Location	Miles	Drive Time
Marquette	600	9 hours
Traverse City	400	6 hours
Bay City	350	5 hours
Detroit	287	4 hours
Grand Rapids	262	4 hours
Lansing	255	4 hours

Arrangements for lodging can be made on your own at any time, or with the assistance of the national convention starting in October 2023 at <https://sbc.net>.

Is Michigan's Influence Important?

Do we make a difference as Michiganders at an event filled with thousands? The answer is, "Yes!" Representatives from Michigan's churches carry influence all year long, each year, by serving as trustees on national boards of convention agencies and entities.

Here is a glance at those from Michigan who serve on national boards:

1. International Mission Board – Mr. Warren Hessling, Memorial Baptist Church, Sterling Heights, MI
2. North American Mission Board – Pastor Roy Henry, Faith Baptist Church, Battle Creek, MI
3. SBC Executive Committee – Mrs. Nancy Spalding, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Roseville, MI
4. Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission – Pastor Michel Guyer, Treasuring Christ Church, Ypsilanti, MI
5. GuideStone Financial Resources – Minister David Cox, Temple of Faith Baptist Church, Detroit, MI
6. LifeWay Christian Resources – Mrs. Sharon Greer, Orchard Church, Kingsley, MI
7. Woman's Missionary Union – Mrs. Odelle Cadwell, Temple of Faith Baptist Church, Detroit, MI

8. Gateway Baptist Theological Seminary – Pastor Jerome Taylor, Eastgate Baptist Church, Burton, MI
9. Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary – Pastor Edward Mattox, Forest Park Baptist Church, Farmington, MI
10. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary – Mrs. Zeola Carey, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Roseville, MI
11. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary – Pastor Arthur Werry, New Life Baptist Church, Fraser, MI
12. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary – No Michigan representative on the board due to the seminary’s unique historical charter
13. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary – Pastor Larry Johnson, Middlebelt Baptist Church, Inkster, MI

Tuesday Night is Michigan Night

Michigan Baptists may be the only state convention celebrating together on Tuesday nights at the annual conventions. Michigan messengers gather together on the free, unassigned Tuesday night of the convention for fellowship. The president of the state convention and the state executive director host this special meal as a way to express their gratitude to messengers who support the Great Commission Baptist ministry at their own expense.

Years ago, the evening started as simple as an ice cream gathering in Phoenix, AZ, then it evolved into a delicious fine meal in a private banquet room in Nashville, TN, and more recently became a loud party in a Cajun-style restaurant in New Orleans, LA.

No one knows what to expect in Indianapolis next year for Michigan’s night, but we do hope that hundreds from Michigan will take part in all of the events at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis, IN on June 9-12, 2024. Together, we can help churches take their next step to accelerate Gospel movement.

Please, contact the state convention office if you have questions, or if you require assistance in preparing for next year’s annual convention: (810) 714-1907 or Jamie@bscm.org – I look forward to seeing you with others from your church in Indianapolis.

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 would happen if...

PLYMOUTH – Our college Philosophy professor pointed at a picture of a horse drawn cart and asked: “What is the most important part?” For much of the class, students vigorously debated the question, landing on one side or the other as they shared their reasoning, while he just smiled.

Not a single student suggested the answer he offered - the idea was most important, for without it, a horse drawn cart would never have existed. It was an “ah-ha” moment for us. Ideas not only proceed reality, they shape it.

I am reminded of that lesson from time to time as I think about just how incredible the world is because of ideas from my childhood that are reality today. In the cartoon, “The Jetsons,” George and his family live in a world filled with robots, communicate with each other face to face on phones, and get around in flying cars. Shar and I don’t have the flying car, but a robot vacuums our home, and we regularly FaceTime with our grandchildren. Someday I hope to have a self-driving car. All my friends hope I get one too.

Ideas, that at one point seemed like the stuff of science fiction, are now reality and our lives are better for it.

But what would happen if...?

That’s the question that is being debated by some of the greatest technology leaders in the world today about Artificial Intelligence. Some have even raised concern that AI might ultimately turn against humanity. The discussion taking place is way beyond my capacity to grasp, or even to imagine, but it reminds me of something else. The ultimate story of created ones turning against their Creator is our story.

“In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it” (Genesis 3:5-6).

Everything changes in that instant, but God does the unfathomable. He works through prophets, priests, and kings, until that moment in the “fullness of time” that He sends forth His Son to be born of a woman. That Son, Jesus, dies for our sins on the cross, rises again, and redeems us. The old, old, story of the Gospel is so familiar that I sometimes wonder if we fail to grasp just how radical it is. I’m afraid we take it for granted and lose the full horror of creation turning against the Creator.

Compare what God did with my first thought about AI turning against us: pull the plug, kill it, and be done with it forever. God does just the opposite - He gives His Son who dies for us that

we might have LIFE. He wins our affection, not by force or coercion, but by love so amazing that we willingly turn and surrender to Jesus as Lord. What a Savior!

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.

What kind of pastor?

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – Over a decade ago Thom Rainer asked several hundred church people to write down what they desired most in a pastor. “What kind of pastor do you want?”

Among other things, people said they want a pastor who:

- loves the congregation
- teaches from the Bible
- has a good work ethic
- casts a contagious vision
- demonstrates healthy leadership
- models evangelism

As you can see, serving as a pastor today demands much of us. Yet, God has called us! He has called us to be shepherds of the flock. He has called us to be pastors and teachers of his people. He has called us and anointed us to be leaders in the church of Jesus Christ, and that is what we are!

So, what kind of shepherd; what kind of pastor; what kind of leader should we be?

We need a sensitive heart

2 Timothy 1:4 – “As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.” Apparently, the last time Paul and Timothy were together, there were tears. Maybe it was just before Paul was taken to prison by the Roman authorities. We’re not sure, but Timothy exhibits

a sympathetic, supportive, and sensitive spirit. A young leader who was not ashamed of his tears....

He loved Paul and Paul loved him. That's an indispensable ingredient for making disciples and leading a church. You must love your people. Paul said he had no one like Timothy, "who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare."

We need more pastors with a vulnerable heart.

We need a sincere faith

2 Timothy 1:5 – "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well."

Timothy is the real deal. He may be a young leader. He may not be the strongest man on the block, physically or emotionally, but his faith oozes sincerity, honesty, and authenticity. All of that was first modeled for him by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

I often think about the family God used to draw me to the gospel.

Andy and Ethel were ordinary people who loved Jesus. Andy was a firefighter, and Ethel was a nurse. They were genuinely concerned for my welfare and my salvation, and I saw something in their lives, in their home, and in their family that I had never seen before. As a result, when Ethel shared the gospel with me months after we first met, I listened carefully to what she said. She had earned my trust, and I knew that her faith was the real deal.

And soon I put my faith in the Lord Jesus. The faith that first dwelt in Andy and Ethel Storfield now dwells in me!

We are only one generation away from losing the gospel. If we take the gospel for granted in this generation, it will be neglected, ignored or abandoned in the next.

The young men and women in your community and in your church are watching you! So, pastors, let's model a sincere faith for them and for their parents and grandparents. We need church leaders of all shapes and sizes who will trust God for the impossible and take the next step to accelerate Gospel movement.

We need a divine calling

1 Timothy 1:6 – "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands...."

Let's do ministry out of a sense of calling rather than a sense of duty.

Judging from the surrounding context of 1 and 2 Timothy, we might say that Timothy was not a spiritual giant. He appears to be physically weak, personally timid, and relatively young (1 Tim 5:23, 2 Tim 1:7, 1 Tim 4:12). However, God delights in using the weak and ordinary to demonstrate his mighty power! He specializes in putting broken pieces back together!

We all need to embrace our weakness. We don't have what it takes. We are neither sovereign nor omniscient, nor invincible. We are not in control, and we don't know everything. Weakness means that we desperately need God. And the plea for my own soul, and for yours, is that we embrace weakness, not despise it.

God has called you by his Spirit to love him and serve him in our Send Michigan family! I'd like to remind you today to fan into flame the gift of God. Be sure of your calling by God.

We need to be full of the Spirit

1 Timothy 1:7 – "...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

There is some debate about the word "spirit" and whether it should be capitalized. Does it mean that God gave us a human spirit not of fear, or does it mean that God has given us his Holy Spirit who is not a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control?

For several reasons I believe Paul is referring here to the Holy Spirit. God has given us the Holy Spirit so that we do not have to be afraid. We don't have to be afraid of the fact that only a small percentage of Michigan's population affirms the gospel of God to one degree or another.

God has given us the Holy Spirit so that we do not have to cower in fear every time we have a Board meeting at the church. God has given us the Holy Spirit so that we can leave a mark on our community and on the next generation.

That is how we will make disciples who live and lead like Timothy and push back the darkness in the state – in the power of the Spirit of God.

Spirit of God fall in this place,
Lord have Your way with us.
Fill us anew we pray.
Let your glory fall.
In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Is Jesus better?

ROSCOMMON – Is Jesus Better? Recently a personal testimony was shared with me regarding this very question. It was the testimony of a person who had been “all in” to the homosexual lifestyle and was miraculously delivered from it. The transformational turning point in his life came when he realized “Jesus was better”. Jesus was better than all the pleasure, self-indulgence and pride. Jesus was and is better!

If you want to look in the mirror and take a self-examination of your spiritual life, this is a great question to ask - Is Jesus Better? Is my life the reflection of a life choosing Christ? Maybe I should ask the question this way - Am I pursuing things in my life as though they are “better than” being with Jesus? OUCH!! I would like to deny and rationalize, but the truth is yes - I am oftentimes living as though my dreams, goals, desires and stuff are “better than” Jesus.

Heather Holleman, PhD and author said it this way - “Knowing and enjoying Jesus is the point of the Christian life, and when I lose this essential truth, I’m doomed to a life of forever chasing after the next dream. I will continually compare my life to that of others, imagining their happiness and their joy, while bemoaning my own situation”. As a chosen child of God seated in Christ, I must begin to believe that knowing Jesus and being with Him is better than any life I could design or even imagine for myself!

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul penned a prayer for them expressing this very truth. Paul's desire was that he and all Christ followers would come to know and love Jesus above all else. He wrote - “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” Ephesians 1:17 To know Jesus is to know He is better. Knowing Him better leads to loving Him better and Enjoying Him more than anything this world could possibly offer.

Is Jesus Better? Let the question penetrate to the very core of your being. Let it unravel your grandest dreams and elaborate plans. Let it replay in your mind and keep you from serving temptation’s call. Let it reveal your true motives and empower you to rest in Him. As Christians, we cannot allow sin and selfishness to rob us of all Christ has for us.

Can the world offer peace? Unending joy? Unfailing love? Unconditional acceptance? Hope? Salvation? Contentment? ...and the list could go on. The resounding answer is no! JESUS IS BETTER! ALWAYS WAS AND ALWAYS WILL BE!!

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.

“I will go down, if you will hold the rope.”

WATERFORD – These are the words spoken by missionary hero William Carey as he kicked back off the ledge and rappelled into an unreached India. Carey was compelled to go where the rocks of countless souls had not yet been turned by the Gospel. But, for Carey to go and make any considerable dent in the darkness, someone would have to “hold the rope.”

In April, I had the opportunity to visit another location in South Asia where many rocks remain unturned. As I walked the streets of the city, I was overwhelmed by the mass of humanity in every direction, a city with more than 25 million people in a country less than 1% Christian. As the lostness ran through my mind, tears would run down by my face. It’s happening again as I type these words. So many people and so many stories. So much religion yet so little hope. Millions trying to make their way up to God, totally unaware that God came down to us.

Thankfully, there are those like Carey who’ve said, “I will go down...” In this city, I encountered families who had also kicked back off the ledge and rappelled into the unreached. It was amazing to see in a city of 25 million, in an absolute sea of souls, authentic relationships are being formed and substantial Gospel conversations are taking place. Years of days of faithfulness are stacking up on one another. Sure, we saw some sites. This know-nothing country boy even got to lay his eyes on some crocodiles. But the most beautiful sight was a small group of people giving their lives away so that the nations can know God.

There are those who’ve said, “I will go down.” Now, who will “hold the rope?” You’ve probably heard the words of Matthew 28:19-20. The resurrected Jesus appears to the 11 remaining disciples and says...

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

On this recent adventure to South Asia, I was reminded that Jesus’ commission was not just for the eleven or the elite, this is God’s vision for every follower and every church: “Go and make disciples of all nations...” We all have a part to play. Some of us will be compelled to go down, while others of us must plant our feet on the edge of the cliff, shouting “we’re still here” and refusing to let go of the rope.

I may have given the hint earlier that I’ve still not recovered from my visit. If you’ve ever been on one of these “global engagement” trips, you know what it’s like to “see what you can’t unsee.” You’ve got to do something to reconcile your life choices with the lostness that exists around the world. With this mind, I want to share 2 questions that I’m still wrestling through and invite you to do some wrestling too...

1. What am I doing with my life?

Another missionary hero, Hudson Taylor to China, once said, “If in the sight of God, you cannot say you are sure that you have a special call to stay at home, why are you disobeying the Savior’s plain command to go?” I think it’s good and right, healthy and God-glorifying, to periodically ask questions like, “What does God want me to do with my life?” In a lost world full of dark places, where would the light of my Gospel-changed life shine the brightest?

2. What is my church doing with its life?

As a Pastor, I want to lead a church that matters in eternity. When I stand before Jesus, I don’t think He’s going to ask, “So, how many people showed up last Sunday?”

Transformation Church must live for more. We have limited resources. Our moment in time is brief. How can our church leverage our time, money, and people to honor Jesus’ commission and impact lostness around the world? How can we make disciples, develop leaders, and then release and resource them to live out God’s calling on their lives? What is my church doing with its life? How are we holding the rope?

I’d like to close with a strategic prayer we’ve been praying at Transformation Church these last 3 years. It’s nothing fancy, but God is starting to answer it. Maybe He would lead you and your church to pray something similar...

“God, please allow us to participate in a Gospel Movement in Waterford, Oakland County, and to the Ends of the Earth.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas (Seth) Springs is Church Planter/Pastor of Transformation Church Waterford, Michigan. He and his wife Taylor have 3 children.

Gobbledygook

WARREN – These words from the verses of one of the Beatles' biggest hits: Come Together. You can probably hum the chorus in your head as you read this:

Come Together...Right Now...Over Me.

That catchy chorus, bolstered by Paul McCartney's chunky bass line, appears to be a rallying cry for unity in a time of great upheaval and disunity.

But John Lennon himself called the song's meaning, "gobbledygook."

The lyrics are a hodgepodge of veiled drug references from the late 60s, plus a whole lot of pure meaninglessness. Yet, on one level, I think Lennon was getting at something that all humans long for: unity, fellowship; koinonia, to use the biblical word (Acts 2:42).

We all want to belong. We all desire a sense of togetherness—from the toddler who misses her mommy to the radicalized loner who joins a white supremacist hate-group. But here's my point: it's hard to come together over pure "gobbledygook."

But we're living in a society that celebrates gobbledygook. Objective truth has fallen on hard times. Personal preferences and feelings rule the day. Even basic questions like, "What is a man?" or "What is a woman?" are up for debate now, and that debate is deemed as progress.

In fact, one of the great hindrances to this kind of "progress" for many modern people are groups (like Christians) who believe that there are absolute truths that are absolutely binding on everyone.

So, it has become trendy for influential "Christians" to publicly deconstruct their tired, old religious heritages that kept them "shackled" to an ancient book, written by a bunch of "patriarchal" men. Now that their modern eyes have been enlightened, people are finally finding the "courage" to follow their hearts and be true to themselves. Princess Elsa would be proud.

But this "new" reality in which we're living is—actually—not very new at all. In fact, a very old book in the Old Testament provides a window into what happens when we favor self-rule rather than submission to God. That book is called Judges. Spoiler alert: after pages of horrific atrocities and utter disappointments, the book ends with this:

"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25).

It turns out that following your heart and being true to yourself is disappointing at best and dehumanizing at worst. In a society where everything is equally valid, nothing is valid. If everything matters, then nothing matters. If the "self" determines what is true, then there's nothing ultimately true and "anything goes." Who's to say otherwise?

Good luck finding productive unity in a society like that. You might as well try to get people to come together over "toe jam football" or "walrus gumboot," whatever that is.

This is where the radical beauty of Christianity shines brightly. As a lover of God's Word, I'm freed from the bondage to self and secular society. I'm freed from my fickle inconsistencies. I'm able to look to an authority that's "outside of myself" and navigate a confusing world.

Judges ends with a nation in chaos without a king. An Israelite king was supposed to write a copy of God's law, read it regularly, learn to fear God, and obey him (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). A king was supposed to get his people to "come together" --not over gobbledygook, but over God's laws.

May God's people have the courage to cut through the gobbledygook with a steadfast call to men, women, and children to come together—right now—over God's words.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clayton Knight is the senior pastor at Warren Woods Baptist Church in Warren, Michigan. He is married to his best friend, Sarah, and they have a daughter named Aubrey.

The tension felt between church and family

HOUGHTON – This is for all those pastors' kids and/or pastor families. There are few things more difficult than trying to live for Jesus under the scope of the church while trying to prioritize your family when the "church" needs you. The struggle of attending your kids' basketball games, driver's ed., Christmas and band concerts while feeling the pressure to be a super pastor and a super dad at the same time can be frustrating.

I grew up in a Pastor's family who went through extreme difficulty. I felt the pressure from the church people even as a 7-year-old who didn't always wear a coat or tuck my shirt in for Sunday School or God forbid wasn't wearing a belt. Silly rules traditional church people make up.

The pressure to perform and be what they expected was huge, and it was felt by the entire family, not just the pastor/aka Dad or the pastor's wife/mother. Mom & Dad had to make hard choices and often times seemed to choose the church and the endless responsibilities the people in the church put on them. Needless to say, we didn't function properly as a family let alone a pastor's family, and in the end our family fell completely apart.

My dad, my pastor, fell morally, and we lost everything. And just like unrealistic expectations some churches put on the pastor's family, there wasn't aid or help when my family fell apart. There wasn't grace given to the pastor. No mercy for our hurting family. Grace and mercy, the very things that were preached and communicated every week, weren't shared with us. There wasn't an exit plan in place.

Fast forward to my own family life and ministry. I've invested 15 years of full-time ministry at the same church as their lead pastor, and we've grown and shrank as a church several times, while facing intense hardships as a church and as a family.

Painful things! Hard things! Lonely things!

But over the years, especially more recently I've learned, by the grace of God, to take time and invest in my family when it's time to do so. I fight the temptation to be so busy with the church and ministry that we miss our kids' childhood. We have to pull back from meeting everyone else's needs in the church and community and pour into our own family's needs.

The truth is that the first half of my ministry here, I ran the race of putting my church first. Every day I lived and breathed church while feeling burned-out. Just ask my beautiful wife. I was ambitious to say the least, but God showed me through the painful church experiences and physical pain that my family needs to be a top priority.

Our church has lost countless families and church people over the years, mostly close friends. But God used this hardship at the ministry level to keep highlighting the importance of keeping my work and ministry in our church and my time with my family in the right perspective.

We attend the sports games that our kids are in and let them know that their events are important to us. We protect holidays and celebrate with our family.

Our marriage and relationship are important to God and to us. We work hard at keeping each other first. It's been so beneficial.

We have a good family and great kids. It is my God-given responsibility to love them well, and after that, to shepherd the church and our ministry in Houghton. We have 4 beautiful kids which was recently topped off by our now beautiful 19-month-old baby boy.

We went 8 years without having a baby and God surprised us with baby Cooper. He's such a blessing but don't let his cuteness deceive you. He's a menace. Partially because we're now older parents, we struggle to keep up with him, but I believe God gave us a baby to keep us in this healthy pattern of prioritizing the family He's given us. God knows what He's doing.

We truly have no choice, but we wouldn't want it any other way. We love all that God is doing through our family and our church. My plea to anyone who's reading this and puts their church or position first, is to not gamble with all God gave you, especially your family. Prioritize your wife and kids.

Put your marriage and family first. You'll never regret it. Trust me!! Believe it or not God is fully able to keep your church moving and effective through others in the church.

God designed the family for fulfillment and satisfaction. Enjoy it and rest in it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Whitaker is Pastor of the Houghton Baptist Church in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He and his wife, Gillian, have four children, 3 sons and 1 daughter.

Resolution on care, support for pastors and ministry leaders aims to ease their burden

NEW ORLEANS (BP) – The reality of both internal and external struggles for church leaders served as the impetus for a committee-generated [resolution](#) affirming and seeking to improve the spiritual, physical, mental and emotional well-being of pastors and other ministry leaders.

“Our church pastors...they get the joy of serving us, but a lot of times they bear all of the collective hurts of their congregations, whether it’s marriages that are falling apart, people have lost loved ones,” said Dani Bryson, a resolutions committee member. “I mean, they’ve walked through all of our traumas with us, and that’s a wonderful gift to their congregation(s), but it can also really take a toll on a pastor.”

Bryson, a member of First Baptist Church in Dickson, Tn., threw out an initial idea that later evolved into “[On Needed Care and Support for Pastors and Ministry Leaders](#),” one of nine resolutions passed by messengers at the 2023 SBC annual meeting.

The groundwork for the resolution was laid by Bryson, Kristen Ferguson and Tony Dockery, remotely, before the full committee met in New Orleans to flesh out the idea.

“This was a burden on many people’s hearts in the committee,” said Ferguson, a member of 11th Street Baptist Church in Upland, Ca., where her husband serves as pastor. “We’re all very aware of the reality that COVID put our churches and our ministry staff and our pastors through significant trials and burdens...coming out of that, we felt that our pastors and our ministry leaders need more support.”

Dockery, pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church in La Puente, Ca., said the resolution is “critically important,” aiming “to help pastors come out of the shadows and just get the concern and the care that they need, and also to encourage churches to support and help their pastors to know it’s okay to seek out resources to help (them) negotiate those challenges.”

“On Needed Care and Support of Pastors and Ministry Leaders” draws on current research detailing critical struggles faced by spiritual leaders:

- a majority of pastors believe pastoral ministry has negatively impacted their families,
- 42% are considering leaving the ministry in the next year,
- and seven in 10 pastors do not have someone they consider to be a close friend.

Ministry leaders also feel the weight of political, social and spiritual issues around them, Dockery noted.

“You couple all those together and, as a pastor, you’re trying to carry the weight and disseminate the weight of all those things,” Dockery said. “But we’re not always as effective at...sharing the weight and the concerns.”

In passing the resolution, messengers acknowledged that the holistic well-being of pastors and other ministry leaders “helps them lead God’s people faithfully” and affirmed “the importance of godly relationships, counseling, rest, and recreation that contributes to the overall wellness” of those in church leadership.

Resolving to encourage pastors and ministry leaders to seek help, and exhorting churches and ministries to “neither ignore nor stigmatize the internal and external struggles of ministry leaders,” messengers committed to “promote a culture of holistic flourishing” throughout local SBC churches, associations, state conventions and denominational entities.

While resolutions are not binding on convention churches, Ferguson said they can be a “launchpad.”

“I...hope, and we ask God, that God would use this resolution in particular to encourage churches to be more aware of the burdens of ministry, and to find ways that they can support their pastors and ministry leaders better,” she said.

“My biggest hope for this resolution is that if there is one pastor who is struggling and about at the end of his rope, that he sees this and he feels seen and loved by his brothers and sisters in Christ, and it helps him keep going,” Bryson said.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tessa Redmond is the Life Issues Reporter for [Kentucky Today](#).

Seasoned pastors can play key role for younger pastors, panelists say

NEW ORLEANS (BP) – How can a seasoned pastor invest in the ministry of an emerging pastor? A group of SBC pastors and leaders discussed the importance of healthy relationship dynamics between the two groups during a panel on the CP stage during the SBC Annual Meeting in New Orleans.

“In Scripture, we can see some contrasts between healthy and unhealthy ministry collaboration,” said Charles Grant, associate vice president for Black Church relations for the SBC Executive Committee.

Grant pointed to how David had to be willing to wait until his appointed time after being anointed King of Israel, while Saul refused to mentor and attempted to kill David.

He also discussed the deep investment Paul made as he mentored a young Timothy in the New Testament.

Brian Kennedy, senior pastor of Mt. Zion Church in Ontario, Calif., said sticking to “core values” will help pastors keep these relationships healthy.

“The core values are the wind beneath our wings,” Kennedy said.

“They determine what we do, where we do it, why we do it, and how we do it. When you forget those critical statements that are governed by the Word of God, it’s easy to get mixed up, it’s easy to create a lot of chaos in the leadership lineup. Where God wants us really to raise up leaders so that we can have more leaders.”

Nate Bishop, lead pastor at Forest Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., said knowing one’s true identity will help both the seasoned and emerging pastors in these relationships.

“When I have that clear sense of identity, I’m less likely to be fearful,” Bishop said.

“When I have that clear sense of identity, I’m less likely to be jealous, to be prideful. But then also ... I can have that patience in waiting for God’s timing to move where He wants me to be. Instead of trying to rush that and get ahead of God.”

Erik Cummings, senior pastor at New Life Church of Carol City in Miami, Fla., outlined a strategy for seasoned and emerging pastors to build a successful ministry relationship.

“I think everything rises and falls on communication,” Cummings said. “I think a seasoned pastor and an emerging pastor literally have to be joined at the hip.”

Cummings believes in every meeting; the seasoned pastor should be helping the younger pastor:

- With encouragement
- To clearly identify God's leading in life and ministry
- To understand how to fulfill the mission he's been given by God
- And be motivated to move forward

"The encouragement provides the fuel for that relationship. Direction provides, if you will, the map, but then the challenge is the target or the goal that allows them to continue to walk together," he said.

Chip Luter is the senior associate pastor at Franklin Avenue in New Orleans, and the son of Fred Luter, former SBC president and senior pastor at Franklin Avenue.

Luter re-joined the staff at Franklin Avenue after pastoring a church in Florida. He explained how he is set to succeed his father upon his retirement.

Similarly, Cummings pastors the church his father used to pastor. Luter said these principles regarding these pastoral relationships are important no matter the context.

"It was even his (Cummings') encouragement to say 'Chip, there ought to be a couple of times you and your Dad meet. One time y'all need to meet during the week just as pastor to pastor and talk the church business, and then another time just as father and son,'" Luter said.

Luter said a healthy mentoring relationship requires both partners to have a hunger to move to the next level.

"It's got to be a mutual desire to want to grow together."

The full panel discussion can be viewed on the [Cooperative Program YouTube channel](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Timothy Cockes is a Baptist Press staff writer.

From prayers to evangelistic opportunities

ITASCA, TX – Every Sunday, early in the morning, the Hernandez family wakes up, gets dressed and prepares to make the hour-long drive to serve the small town of Mexia, Texas—a community they pray for daily.

Who knew that a few years earlier, in the middle of planning for his retirement, Jose Luis would receive a call from God that would change his plans?

Out of obedience, his family moved from Fort Worth, Texas, to Itasca, a small rural town in the Lone Star state, to plant a church in Mexia, an hour away from where they now live. Jose Luis says he lacked experience working in rural areas. Still, after brainstorming with Laura and persistently seeking wisdom through prayer, he sensed a divine calling and embraced the challenge.

“We didn’t know anyone,” Jose Luis explained. “So, we started working to get to know the people in the area.”

Twice a week, they walked the streets of Mexia, and they prayed for opportunities to share the gospel. And every Sunday, they visited different churches to learn about the community.

“We went to gasoline stations, stores, laundromats and restaurants. We used these places to talk to people and start conversations about any topic, which would eventually lead to sharing the gospel,” Jose Luis explains. “If you let them talk, they will tell you their stories and problems. They often need someone to talk to about their hardships.”

Jose Luis didn’t do this alone. With his wife, Laura, they prayed, shared ideas and challenged each other on ways to share the gospel better. They began to hand out tracts in the different locations around Mexia. Sometimes the family would play music in parking lots.

“We also held up a sign that read, ‘How can we pray for you?’ at a tractor supply store. It seems incredible, but there are a lot of needs. One day, a lady stopped, got out of her car and ran to hug my wife,” Jose Luis shared. “This woman was going through a divorce and felt desperate and alone.”

God moved people and provided many opportunities for the Hernandez family to share the gospel and provide encouragement for those seeking hope. When Jose Luis and Laura began to pray that God would provide a place so they could continue doing evangelistic work, God answered their prayers!

While sharing tracts at the local Walmart parking lot, they met four young people. One of the men asked Jose Luis if he would lead a Bible study in his apartment. This Bible study eventually

laid the foundation for a new church, Iglesia Bautista Alcance Hispano (Hispanic Outreach Baptist Church).

When asked what God has taught them as they stepped out in faith to share the gospel, they responded, “The time is critical. We need to obey the Great Commission. It doesn’t matter where you go. God will always be with you. There are always people to share the gospel with and we have learned that obedience is the key.”

“Another key is prayer,” Jose Luis adds. ‘This wouldn’t have happened without praying for the power of the Holy Spirit to convince and change people and for God to bring them to us to share His Word.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raquel P. Wroten (MAMC, Dallas Theological Seminary) has served as an editor, social media manager, communications strategic consultant and content writer for over 15 years. She enjoys writing (in English, Spanish and Spanglish), learning, cooking, coffee and serving up a feast for her friends and family.

Generational impact: Pregnancy resource centers’ fatherhood programs help dads engage

BIRMINGHAM, AL (BP) — When Richard found out his girlfriend, Jasmine, was pregnant, he was nervous — he’d been a husband and a dad before, and he didn’t feel like he’d done very well.

Then one day Jasmine asked him to come with her to parenting classes at Sav-A-Life in Vestavia. He said yes and found quickly that he loved the fellowship with other men who came there for the fatherhood program. He realized the group was a safe place — there was no judgment, and the other men were very similar to him. After a while, he and Jasmine decided to marry.

“As a guy, it’s hard to find a place where you can be yourself and talk with other guys,” Richard said. “Coming to classes taught me what a man, what a father, should be. ... The greatest gift I received from coming to class is my knowledge of being more of a father for my kids and more of a husband for my wife.”

God at work

In north Alabama, Chad Cronin said he sees God at work in similar ways through the fatherhood program at Huntsville Pregnancy Resource Center.

“We’re able to meet with men in a one-on-one setting, share Christ, advocate for life and encourage them in the adventure and privilege of fatherhood,” he said.

Cronin said one couple who came to HPRC last year had faith in Christ as part of their story in the past but had drifted away. As the mother began attending classes, the father also joined fatherhood classes with Cronin, learning practical tips but also how to be a man who leads his family well.

“They came to go through our classes, reconnected with the Lord and ended up coming to my church, and we baptized them last summer,” said Cronin, who in addition to his role at HPRC serves as pastor of Providence Fellowship in Madison. “It was cool to see them come to the classes and get the material blessings but really be challenged on family discipleship.”

Stefanie Miles, HPRC executive director, said she believes that investing time, money and effort into building relationships with fathers “is going to change the future.”

“The cycle of fatherlessness is devastating. Statistically, it is so much better for a child to have a male presence in their life,” she said, noting that a father’s influence can help a child make better choices.

“If we can keep guys in the lives of their children, maybe we keep those children from growing up and not graduating from high school or ending up in prison.”

Lisa Hogan, who serves as executive director of Sav-A-Life Vestavia and two other Sav-A-Life centers in the Birmingham metro area, said a dad’s involvement is important at the pregnancy stage too.

She cited a Lifeway study in which mothers reported that the most influential person on their pregnancy decision was the father.

“We’ve learned over the years how important it is to engage dads,” Hogan said.

Getting a good start

She said Sav-A-Life was an early adopter of the Care Net ministry’s fatherhood program in 2010 when they received a grant from National Fatherhood Initiative and Care Net to help them get started.

“We went from serving 20 dads to 182 dads that first year, then it more than doubled, and from that it’s continued to grow,” Hogan said. “We now serve about 1,000 dads a year through

education, medical services and encouraging them to come for pregnancy test appointments.”

Programs like it are growing in other parts of the state too, like the one at HPRC. Their program started in 2019 but found its footing in 2021 after COVID-19. By 2022, it had doubled, reaching hundreds of men.

Raequane Jones, Sav-A-Life’s fatherhood ministry coordinator, said the vision has been to create an environment where there is love, education and a chance to see what it looks like to be a family that’s whole.

His wife and children have been involved in the ministry too, building relationships and modeling what a healthy family looks like.

“When I think about a father in a family, it’s not just dad, mom and baby, it’s this father who is a cousin and a brother, who eventually will be a grandfather or great uncle,” Jones said. “When he’s the man he needs to be for his family, it impacts way more than his partner and his child. When he gets exposed to the right things, he can be a model. You really can’t even see how far it reaches.”

Mentorship program

In Huntsville, Cronin is working to build a similar environment. He’s hoping to enlist men from area churches to be a part of a mentorship program that can help impact these fathers for the long run.

HPRC is also finishing up renovations on the building next door with plans for it to be a place where men can feel comfortable playing basketball or pool and spending time with each other.

Miles said ultimately they “want it to be a place where mentors come in and walk side by side with these guys and be a bridge to local churches.”

Fathers everywhere need to be supported, she said, and though HPRC “can’t do something everywhere, we can try to do something here.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Thornton is a writer for The Alabama Baptist.

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

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

Editor: Tim Patterson - tim@bscm.org

Managing Editor: Jamie Lynn – jamie@bscm.org

Webmaster: OneMissionTV, LLC