



Newsjournal of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan

Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

April 2022
Volume 66, Number 4

My favorite Easter

by Kevin Finkenbinder

DEWITT, MI – Each area of my life is impacted by the reality of Easter. Obviously, without Jesus living, dying, and rising from the dead, we would not know that God gave us the gift of salvation, and would not be able to effectively follow Him.

As I look at my life, my identity is multifaceted. First and foremost, I am a follower of Christ, then, in decreasing order of importance I am the husband of Amy, the father of 3 kids (Isaiah – 12, Asa – 10, Hannah – 6), the pastor of First Baptist Church of DeWitt, MI, and a computer programmer for Michigan State University Libraries.

My marriage and family are centered around Easter, as we inevitably fail to love each other, it is God's grace that restores us and our relationship. And working at MSU is not because of a love for the Spartans (Go Green), nor because of the paycheck (although it allows me to feed my family), God has placed me at MSU to be a light in the darkness, allowing students, staff, faculty and others to see that God has given new life through Jesus Christ.

Right now, the most beautiful example of the resurrection is watching God work in our church. When I came a couple years ago, the church was struggling to survive financially and otherwise. Our church is now much healthier, not because of a stewardship campaign or an outreach emphasis.

It is because as a church we have been seeking to apply God's grace and the reality of the resurrection to all that we do. As we learn of God's word and love for us, we naturally grow closer to Him and imitate His will in reaching the world. Seeking to love God who died and rose for us has changed (and is continuing to change) our church.

My favorite Easter memory is from childhood. Being that it was 45 years ago, my mind has probably conflated events, but I remember the children's ministers at Christian Center in Colorado Springs leading us to sing, "I'm in the Lord's Army" and then asking us if we wanted to fight with or against God.

It was at that time I prayed to ask Jesus to save me. As I remember it, later that same day I went into the adjacent park for an Easter egg hunt. I don't remember actually getting any eggs, but I do remember asking Jesus into my life. Even if that didn't actually take place on Easter, it was still Easter for my life.

Over the years, the Easter verse that has moved me most has shifted and changed as God works in different areas of my life. Right now, I am overwhelmed by Romans 5:7-11. Even as a young child, I had been an enemy of God, and I will never be a righteous man. Yet, Christ died for me, not only to save me from His wrath, but to give me life and reconciliation.

Life in a neutral stance to God would have been infinite grace, but far beyond that He gave me reconciliation, joining me into His family and calling me His friend. At this, I am overwhelmed and speechless.

“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Romans 5:7-11

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Finkenbinder is pastor at First Baptist Church of DeWitt, MI. He has been married to Amy since 2008 and together they celebrate their 2 handsome boys (Isaiah and Asa) and their beautiful girl (Hannah). As a bi-vocational pastor, Kevin has also worked at MSU in website programming and digital development since 2013.

Called: Living the life God created you to live

by Karen Blanchard

SHELBY TOWNSHIP, MI – The words “called” and “purpose” are buzzwords in our culture today. People are constantly searching to find their calling and purpose in life. I hear women say all the time, “What is my calling?” and “Do I have a purpose on this earth, and what is it?” Unfortunately, we tend to look in the wrong places to find the answers to these questions.

From childhood, we are conditioned that our self-worth is found in what we do, and from a young age we are asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” As we get older and meet people for the first time, one of the first things we are asked is, “What do you do?” We are taught that what we do is who we are; consequently, our identity can be easily mistaken for what we achieve, produce, or offer. This is a very dangerous view of our self-worth.

Many people experienced this when the pandemic hit. We were all sent home from our workplace during the lockdown. Even though we had technology to help, for some, everything changed. People really struggled not being able to do their jobs in the way they always had done them. There was a lot of anxiety and depression tied to this because people didn’t know how to cope without being able to do the thing that always defined them.

What we “do” shouldn’t be our identity. That is our vocation. Our vocation is the way we make a living for ourselves. Sometimes our vocation is also our calling. However, before we can ever step into the calling God has on our lives, we first must know who God has called us to be. In other words, it’s “who” before “do.”

The way we view ourselves and our calling matters so that when we look to our calling and purpose to define us, we take on a very self-centered view.

We often ask God,

“What is my calling?”

“What is the purpose of my life?”

Our calling and purpose aren’t things we must find. When we know who we are in Christ, we won’t have to look to our vocation or what we “do” to fulfill that need. However, on the other side of that, once we know who we are in Christ, we can step into our calling with confidence knowing if God has called us to it, he will equip us for it.

I love this quote on calling by Rebekah Lyons:

“Our calling is where our burdens and our passions collide.”

You step into your calling when you try to make a difference where your burdens and passions collide. This could be your vocation, but most of the time it won’t be.

What burdens your heart?

What do you wish you could change?

What passions and desires has God planted in your life?

What gifts has he given you?

If you struggle with knowing your calling and purpose in life, you aren’t alone. I have struggled in the past with these same questions. I want you to know that you can live a life of significance and walk in the calling God has for you.

On May 21st at 6pm, [BSCM Women’s Ministry](#) will be hosting an event titled Called: Living the Life God Created You to Live. This event will be at Lakepointe Church in Shelby Township. I was asked to share about what God has taught me in this area. Two verses we are going to look at are...

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. – Ephesians 4:1

He has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. – 2 Timothy 1:9

I hope you will make plans to join us as we talk about our calling and how we can have confidence knowing we are right where God has called us to be. We will also hear from a few women who are confidently walking in the calling they feel God has revealed to them. You don't want to miss this time of worship, inspiration, and fellowship!

Date: Saturday, May 21, 2022

Time: Evening / 6PM Start

Location: Lakepointe Church, 53245 Van Dyke, Shelby Twp., MI

FREE EVENT / Registration: <https://form.jotform.com/212824586212151>

Event Speaker: Karen Blanchard

Worship: Lakepointe Worship Team

Details: Ladies Evening of Worship & Inspiration

Event Director: Tricia Werry

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!

BOLD Retreat

by Sharon Hessling

BOLD retreat is a multigenerational retreat based on Titus 2 which tells us to teach one another and encourage one another. The first BOLD retreat was held in 2018.

Mothers, daughters, granddaughters, friends, fellow church members from ages 6 to 90 gather to grow together and learn from one another. The breakout sessions allow participants to learn or share a skill. The worship is a time of inspiration, testimony, and praise. The fellowship is always a time of refreshing at beautiful Bambi Lake.

The theme for this year's BOLD retreat is "Stand Firm". With all the craziness going on in our world, we certainly need to be encouraged to stand firm in our faith! I have known our featured speaker, Dottie Babcock, for years and had the privilege of serving with her in Sierra Leone.

Dottie is a Michigan native although you may not know it by her current Tennessee accent. She will be a lot of fun and has been working prayerfully on what Biblical insights the Lord will bring us on standing up strong.

Breakout sessions for this year are shaping up and, at this point, include: "A Minute to Win It", Card making, Cookie Decorating, Creative Movement, Getting More Out of Your Android Phone, Making and Using a Prayer Journal, Making Your Home Welcoming (Wreath making), Self-Care, Tea and Hospitality.

The dates for BOLD retreat are April 22 and 23. The cost is \$99. There is an early bird discount if you register by April 1, it will be \$89. [CLICK HERE to register](#), or call Bambi Lake at 989-275-5844. I hope to see you there to be encouraged and grow together!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon served as an IMB missionary on the continent of Africa for 25 years. In retirement she is known as "the pie lady" and enjoys spending time with her husband, 3 grown children, and her 10 grandchildren.

Fusion Camp for 2nd-6th graders

by Rachel LaBelle

ROSCOMMON, MI – Kids have a lot going on in their world these days. School, extracurricular activities, family and friend concerns, screens, and a thousand other things that have their attention.

At camp, we get a short window to replace the busyness of their daily lives and invite them to a safe place where they can focus on Christ. Some would argue that camp creates a mountaintop high and nothing more, but the long-term impact of camp cannot be denied.

Through camp, countless children have accepted Christ as their Savior. Whether they hear the Gospel for the first time—or in a new way that finally makes it all click—there is no denying that Christ-centered camps have a giant impact on our youth.

Kids walk away with a deeper knowledge of Christ, form lifelong Christian friendships, and gain new experiences that wouldn't have happened otherwise. For a few days in the summer, we get to be the loudest voice pouring into them and preparing them to be a light in their world.

Fusion is a new camp for kids who have completed 2nd-6th grade. The camp is designed to take kids out of their normal routine and place them in a safe and exciting environment where Christ is central, and every moment is intentional.

Whether campers are in worship, Bible study, swimming, or playing games, everything is designed with the intention to draw kids closer to others and Christ. At Fusion, we play hard, we worship hard, we pursue God with everything we have, and we open our hearts to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

This year's camp theme is, "Only a Holy God." During daily worship and small group discussions, campers will learn about God's character. Campers will see that God created all things, sovereignly rules over His creation, and ultimately wins over Satan, sin, and death. Throughout their time at camp, kids will participate in worship, recreation, and Bible study— all at an age-appropriate level.

Fusion Camp will provide the staff necessary to run camp; however, churches are expected to provide one sponsor per gender. Sponsors should expect to:

- Take responsibility for their kids' general well-being and monitor their kids outside of scheduled programming
- Lead nightly church debrief time (questions to spark discussion will be provided, but you are not required to use them)
- Be present and encourage their kids as they participate in activities

Fusion will be at Bambi Lake, June 26-28, 2022. The cost is \$150/camper and \$120/sponsor, early bird pricing ends May 1st. You can register using the QR code or [website](#) below.

Space is limited-sign up early!

<https://bambilake.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1146411>

Have more questions? We'd be happy to talk! Contact us at:

Fusioncamp@theresurrection.church

Rachel LaBelle: 616-283-1661

Kristina Borza: 586-438-4383

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel LaBelle has a heart for camp ministry and has served at different camps in a variety of capacities over the years. Resurrection Church; Lincoln Park, MI.

The facts of life

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – In my 68 years of traversing this terra firma I have come to know and understand many things about our world and the inhabitants thereof. This Easter season brings to mind three facts of life that I have come to understand and believe to be absolutely true.

The first fact that I know to be an undeniable truth is that we are all sinners.

Yes, all of us. I know this to be true because the Word of God states clearly and emphatically that the whole of mankind, past, present and future are rotten to the core. We were born sinful little creatures and will eventually die as such. The Word tells us in Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. And in Romans 3:10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one.

Over and over again, our Father reveals the dark and doomed nature of our souls. I not only know this from scripture, but observation of the human race reveals this as well. I came to the realization long ago that even those sweet and wonderful gifts that God gives us called children are born with sinful natures. Children do not need to be taught to lie, cheat or steal, it comes naturally. All of us sin. From the least to the greatest. The fact is we sin.

The second fact that I have come to understand is that we are all going to die.

No one gets out of this life alive. Try as we may, we cannot cheat death. Hebrews 9:27 “It is appointed unto man, once to die....” . Also, God’s Word tells us in Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

The western world is obsessed with youthfulness and the maintenance thereof. Advertizing, clothing, music, trends, fads and faces all focus on and give the highest priority to youthfulness. I believe this is just the result of our aging humanities attempt to prolong the inevitable. No matter how much plastic surgery is done. No matter how committed one is to a healthy diet and lifestyle, we ALL are going to die.

Some are even trying to cheat death by having their deceased bodies frozen and stored hoping that in the future science will discover a means to regenerate them and heal them of the disease that brought about their demise. This practice is called cryogenic suspension.

The following is taken from the website of a prominent Cryonics provider.

“Cryonics is the practice of preserving life by pausing the dying process using subfreezing temperatures with the intent of restoring good health with medical technology in the future. Cryonics is currently the best-known method for pausing the dying process in a

way that allows for potentially restoring good health with medical technology in the future. Cryonics is an ambulance to the future. When today's medicine gives up, cryonics takes over."

The amazing part of this is that people believe this is a viable option and are paying big bucks to have this done. The expense to have one's body cryogenically suspended can cost up to \$200,000.00 and at present there are about 500 bodies in the United States that are frozen in this manner.

My question is, how can they guarantee that these companies will not just run with the money to some warm sunny island in the South Seas, and forget to pay the electric bill? Sounds like someone trying to sell you the Statue of Liberty.

A few years ago, a letter appeared in the national news that was sent to a deceased person by the Indiana Department of Social Services. It read as follows:

"Your food stamps will be stopped in March because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances."

My friend, you cannot change your circumstances. If you are made into a people popsicle, the thawing process will not be pretty.

The third fact of life that I am absolutely sure of is that we will all live forever.

That's right! We are immortal and eternal beings. Though we may physically die, we will continue to live spiritually.

But the real question is: "Where will we be in eternity?" There are only two possibilities: Heaven or Hell. One option has already been decided when the first man and woman rebelled against God and sinned. They in turn passed that sin on to all of humanity and we have continued in that same sinful pattern. Remember the above-mentioned passage in Romans?

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Easter answers the great questions that arise from these facts of life. It is found in the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The following passages from God's Word reveal the answers.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how

can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 14:1-6

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O Death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?"

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

I Corinthians 15:51-58

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

I Thessalonians 14:13-18

This Easter may you find great faith and assurance in these FACTS.

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.

Resurrection power every day

by Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – I see resurrection power every day of my life in the [Send Network](#) and in the state convention.

The resurrection is about One life given so that many others may receive eternal life, and I get to experience that multiplication of life, Every. Single. Day. In my role with the Send Network of the [North American Mission Board](#) (NAMB) and the [Baptist State Convention of Michigan](#) (BSCM), I see individuals and congregations sacrifice a lot to bring eternal life to those living in Michigan. That is one reason why celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ on April 17 is one of this year's sacred days for me. Let me add some depth to my feelings describing a typical day.

On Sunday, March 20, a new church plant, during their "Vision Casting Sunday," was joined by previous church planters and an-up-and-coming church planter. Everyone was connected to the Send Network. I was there along with my wife.

I can testify to the actions as well as the emotions accompanying the day. It started out very well that sunny morning in March. As I slipped out of my truck, the driver in the next vehicle slipped out of his SUV. I greeted him and asked, "Is this your first time at Convergent Church?" He replied, "Yes" and offered that he was a friend of Dan Dameron, one of the church's leaders. I replied, "Let's go find Dan and I will introduce you to the other members of the team. You're in the right place looking at a good church. I hope you'll like it." We entered and started mingling with everyone.

Josh Tovey, a veteran church planter with [RedemptionMI.org](#) in the Greater Grand Rapids area, was there to support Jamison Bebiak, one of our newest church planters with [ConvergentOwosso.com](#). Tovey was also given the task of teaching that Sunday morning, unveiling a message from Romans 8 on adoption and becoming heirs of the Lord in glory and suffering. Bebiak is one of four church planters that has been given the chance at a healthy church start through a residency or training time connected with Redemption Church and Josh Tovey.

For the sake of this story, you can think of Tovey as a father-figure to the other men in this story. Though Tovey has a young look and an enjoyable sense of humor, everyone senses his wisdom when it comes to church planting.

Other men, like Bebiak, impacted by the life-giving ministry of Redemption Church are Seth Springs, Nathan Sharpe, and the newest one approaching assessment is named Charles. The loyalty these men have with one another is mind-boggling. Nothing will ever break the bond of love and concern these men have for each other.

When we snapped a picture of these men in the middle of M-21, a highway that splits the north and south of Owosso, as a symbol of taking the city for Christ, I could sense a stronger, lasting bond between these men that does not exist among the men and women who recently played elimination basketball games during March Madness. These men aren't competitors, they're one team serving Christ.

It was startling to hear Josh Tovey convey the idea, from Romans 8, that following the Lord's calling is not a guarantee that everything will be easy or agreeable. He was not painting a bleak picture; Tovey was covering the blank canvas of a future with reality. Tovey, through very personal disclosure, explained the previous years of surgery, treatments, and waiting as his wife, Stephanie, battled a stubborn cancer while they planted Redemption Church. Her cancer returned four times. Each time the cancer raised itself to steal life and hope from the Tovey family, and each time they fought back with the power of the resurrection.

My favorite moment that weekend was when the worship space went silent upon seeing an image that Tovey shared. The silence was followed by gasps throughout the worship space when Tovey showed the image of the three children Stephanie and he adopted exactly three years ago to the day he was preaching that March Sunday morning message. Tovey asked, "Could it be that our years of suffering and battling cancer prepared us to adopt these three siblings who had suffered early in their lives?"

He added, "Now that these three are adopted, despite all that they previously suffered they will forever be part of the Tovey family and they will inherit all that they can from us. We will be there to celebrate their successes and to catch them when they fail." Tovey's deep, intimate, and personal story illustrated the immeasurable inheritance that awaits all of those who come to know the resurrection power.

Years ago, as a pastor, I deliberately replaced any reference to the annual celebration of the resurrection of Christ from the word Easter to the phrase "Resurrection Sunday." I know there will be jelly beans, baskets, and phony-grass, I'm not an Easter-Grinch; but I want to remind myself when I speak of the annual event that changes everything that I feature the One and the act that changes everything.

He is risen! Christ is risen! I love seeing resurrection power every day of my life . . . and I do because it is there. I hope you see it, sense it, and know it.

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.

Inwardly strong, outwardly focused

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – Legendary football coach, Vince Lombardi, started the first day of the Green Bay Packers training camp in 1961 with a football in his right hand and these words:

“Gentlemen, this is a football.”

Those 38 professional players knew football. They were at the top of their game, but Lombardi reminded them that no matter how much one excels in speed, technique, or performance, the football is at the center of the game.

Easter reminds us that it’s all about the Gospel. The heart of our faith is the resurrected Lord Jesus. His Lordship is forever demonstrated in the resurrection. Darkness could not conceal Him. Demons could not constrain Him. Death could not contain Him. He is the resurrected Lord of Lords and King of Kings! Resurrection Sunday reminds us of the fundamental hope of the Gospel: “He is not here. He Is RISEN!”

Through repentance and faith in the resurrected Jesus, we receive forgiveness for our sins and the gift of eternal life. It’s the ultimate “Good News.” We receive it in an instant, but we spend a lifetime living out its truths. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the message of hope for a broken world. Jesus commissions us to “make disciples of all nations”. It’s a commission that unites us all as we advance His Kingdom together.

Below are resources to help churches take their next step to accelerate Gospel movement:

1. WhosYourOne.com is a resource that 62,220 people are using as of this writing to pray for their loved ones who need Jesus. Multiple “Who’s Your One” resources are available to help churches conduct a prayer emphasis including a free 30-day prayer guide. In it, you will find Scripture-based prayers to pray over someone who needs Jesus. It’s a great tool to equip believers to pray for their loved ones to come to Jesus this Easter season.
2. Equipping God’s people to share the Good News of the Gospel is vital to Kingdom advance. A plethora of training resources are available, but it might be advisable for a church to choose one resource that fits the local context and use it to equip the church. Creating, or recreating, an evangelist culture in the church is challenging. The best resource is one that is used. That being said, we recommend churches consider using “3 Circles: Life Conversation Guide.” A free resource kit is available at: <https://www.namb.net/evangelism#free-tools>.
3. Evangelism grants up to \$1000 are available to assist cooperating BSCM churches to engage their communities with the Gospel. These grants are possible through our partnership with the North American Mission Board and the thousands of churches that give through the

Cooperative Program. The purpose is to help churches impact their communities with the Good News. Go to <https://www.bscm.org/grants> to find out more and submit a grant request.

“Inwardly strong, outwardly focused” is a refrain that echoes in my mind as I think about the mission of the Lord’s church to make disciples. It’s the ultimate declaration of outward focus in that its reach is everyone, everywhere, in every generation. Jesus’ commission goes on to say: “Teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.” Here is the picture of His church growing inwardly strong as disciples learn and follow Jesus’ teaching together. It’s always inwardly strong, outwardly focused, and never either-or. Growing deeper in Christ and broader in reach go hand in hand.

Hope has a name - Jesus - and everyone needs Him. Happy Easter!

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.

Are you all in?

by Coye Bouyer

LANSING, MI – Pastor Mark Batterson (senior pastor of National Community Church in Washington D.C.) tells a story in his book, ‘All In,’ of a band of brave souls who would become known as one-way missionaries.

“About a century ago, they purchased single tickets to the mission field without the return half. And instead of suitcases, they packed their few earthly belongings into coffins. As they sailed out of port, they waved good-bye to everyone they loved and everything they knew because they understood they would not be returning home” (pg. 13).

In this book, Pastor Mark is challenging Christians of the 21st Century western mindset that Jesus died to save us for heaven and keep us safe while here on earth. For many Christians, we believe that God wants to send us to safe places to do easy things. We are often unwilling to step out of our comfort zones, and say and do things that only God could be responsible for accomplishing.

While we like to think that we are willing to go where Jesus says go and do what Jesus says do, in actual reality we are only willing to go as far as we feel safe. In other words, we are often

unwilling to live a life of uncertainty. What we don't realize is that when we are unwilling to live a life of uncertainty, we are not living a life filled with faith.

Now don't miss what I am saying, as this does not mean that we do not have faith (faith in Jesus as Lord and even moments of faith in our lives), but what we are missing is a life that is continuously uncertain, constantly uncomfortable, and consistently being challenged as we experience a life full of circumstances we can say with great conviction, "God did it, for without His hand, this work would not have gotten done."

Too many of us have gotten good with seeing God do one, two or a few big things. But when the disciples followed Jesus, they saw miracle after miracle, healing after healing (the blind man, the man who couldn't walk and even casting out demons) and supernatural event after supernatural event (turning water into wine or calming the storm). Moreover, John says that there was not enough paper to create a book that could contain all the miracles of Jesus (Jn. 21:25).

So did the miracles, healings and supernatural events stop when Jesus left; Of course not, in fact Jesus instructed His disciples that they would do even greater works than what they had seen Him perform. That is if they remained in Him, if they continued to yield themselves to Him and His will. Moreover, if they were willing to let Him, through the power of the Holy Spirit, have complete control of their lives then they would go on a journey similar to the one He had taken them on.

If that is true for them then, then it remains true for us today. Jesus did not die to keep us safe, make us comfortable, or so that our lives would be free from sacrifices. Becoming a disciple of Christ is not for the timid or the weak, following Jesus is not always convenient, and living a life of commitment to the Bible will not always mean safety for you or your loved ones.

The will of God is not an insurance plan guaranteeing you coverage from life's unfortunate and painful circumstances. Becoming a disciple is not about convenience rather it is about being inconvenienced. Being a Christian is not about the amount of safety we will receive, but the tremendous sacrifice(s) the Lord will call us to make.

The question is simple, are you going to live your Christian life in pursuit of God's kingdom coming to earth? Will you continue to have one foot in the Word and the other in the world, or for the sake of God's kingdom will you be 'All In' going 'All Out' for the 'All in All'?

For us as Christians, especially within the comforts and conveniences of a western culture that is not plagued with poverty economically, educationally, financially, or spiritually, we unfortunately do not experience the abundance of God's kingdom in heaven, coming down here to earth. But why is this?

Because most of us are really not “All In.” I mean we are all in when it comes to an eternity in heaven, but when it pertains to our life here on earth, we are only partially in. Like, playing the “Hokey Pokey,” we stick a piece of ourselves in, only to take it back out.

But when will we, because we have become disciples of Jesus, do as He did and divulge all of ourselves to the full use of God through the Spirit who He has given us. When will we be like those missionaries of a century ago where we are packing only a few things worth holding as we look to go wherever God says, not expecting to return home, but rather to give all of ourselves to the work and mission that so many who have gone before us gave themselves too?

Today will you decide to Go ALL IN for the Kingdom of God so that just like in the days of Jesus and the Apostles we can once again see Heaven come down to earth. God Bless you my friend(s).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Coye L. Bouyer is the founding pastor of Kingdom Life Church in Lansing, MI where he has served since March of 2010. Pastor Bouyer recently stepped into the Diversity Ambassador role for the BSCM and firmly believes that he was not only called to Preach the Gospel as part of the process of reconciliation of man to God, but also using any platform as a bridge of reconciliation of man to man, and even more so amongst the brethren. Pastor Bouyer and his lovely wife Keturah (Gen. 25:1) have been married four over 20 years and have four children; Sierra, Seth, Cayla and Coye II.

Even if

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Have you ever been stuck in the quicksand of “what if?” The more you ponder “what if” your mind seems to travel further down the road of endless and sometimes even bazaar possibilities.

You feel paralyzed, unable to move and every thought seems to pull you down deeper and deeper until you are drowning in fear. This is, of course, the negative side of “what if” and if we are honest, most of us are usually quick to run to the scary side of “what if” versus the optimistic perspective. It’s how we are wired.

It's a good reaction when it gives us pause and caution, but not so good when it paralyzes us in fear. It's a good question when it keeps us safe, and stops us from making a regrettable decision. However, it can be very toxic to our spiritual life when it keeps us from obeying God.

Personally, I have at times let "what if" keep me from obeying God and experiencing His grace, presence, and power in my life. "What if" has kept me from trusting the prompting of the Holy Spirit to pray for someone, share the gospel, give sacrificially, forgive, love, stand-up and speak out - the list could go on.

Like Moses, reacting to instruction from God through the burning bush, I highlight all the reasons I'm not good enough, and all the reasons I'll fail and look stupid. You see, pride is the real motive behind most of our "what if" dilemmas'. It's me/you looking at the situation and how it will affect me/you.

The goal is to stop defaulting to "what if" and start proclaiming "even if". "Even if" means looking at God and how He will affect the situation. Just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego responding to King Nebuchadnezzar II in Daniel 3:16-18 (NASB):

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego replied to the king, "Nebuchadnezzar, we are not in need of an answer to give you concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire; [a]and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But **even if** He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods nor worship the golden statue that you have set up."*

What an amazing example of faith, trust, and worship! That's the reality in which God is calling us to live. I like how Paul says it in Philippians 1:21 (ESV):

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus gave us the ultimate example of "even if" when He was praying to His Father in Matthew 26:39:

*"And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, **if it is possible**, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."*

Being able to say "even if" when our pride and ego is on the line can be difficult, but in surrender, we experience God's abundant grace and power to overcome our fear and follow Him along the path He is leading. "Even if" places our focus directly on the source of our strength and refuge and leaves the outcome in His hands - there are no better hands.

What if we said, "even if?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mick Schatz serves on the staff of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. He is the State Director of Spiritual Enrichment and Retreats and lives at Bambi Lake.

Send your pastor to the Holy Land

by Tim Steele

ROSEVILLE, MI – Has your pastor ever gone to Israel? Unfortunately, since only 7% of Evangelical Christians have been to Israel, most pastors haven't. Some have called the Holy Land the fifth Gospel because you can understand so much more about the stories of the Bible when you visit the places where they occurred.

When pastors speak about Jerusalem, Capernaum, or the Sea of Galilee, they share what they have learned from the pages of the Bible, atlases, and commentaries. It wasn't until I traveled to Israel did I realize how much more I could understand by visiting the Holy Land and seeing the places where Jesus walked and taught. I knew about the Holy Land from a shallow, superficial perspective.

When I went to Israel, the experience transformed me. My faith was made more tangible by walking the same steps Jesus walked on and standing in the places where the Bible and history occurred. I now see the Holy Land with a much deeper and extensive view. When I read and reflect on Scripture and think about the places I visited in the Holy Land, my mind generates vivid details of the smells, sounds, and geography. Now I can attach actual places, scenery, and archaeological discoveries to passages to make the scriptures easier to remember.

Here are three reasons to send your pastor to the Holy Land:

1. Your pastor's Israel trip will teach him what his biblical seminary didn't.

- Eighty-four percent agree with the statement: "If I bought fifty books on Bible lands, they couldn't contribute what my trip to Israel has given me."
- Seventy-five percent agree: "Geography has increased my ability to remember biblical events and the life lessons they teach."

2. It will make him a better preacher.

- Eighty-six percent agree: “When I include Bible lands in my communication of the Bible, my listeners tell me they understand much better what I am teaching.”
- Ninety-three percent of Bible teachers who have journeyed to Israel say they now use biblical geography to help illustrate their teaching.

3. Your pastor’s Israel’s trip will deepen in his walk with God as a spiritual leader.

- Ninety-nine percent agree: “Experiencing the land of the Bible firsthand has strengthened my spiritual life.”

In short, pastors who travel to Israel enjoy:

- A better memory of biblical events
- A more precise understanding of the text
- A more accurate direction to its application
- A more effective level of communication

How you can send your pastor to Israel?

A trip to Israel will enhance your pastor’s ministry, and you have the privilege of making it happen. How?

1. Approach your church leadership.

Tell your church leaders that you would like to lead a movement to raise your pastor’s Israel trip funds. Explain how you would like to raise the money, either a fundraiser or a love offering. If necessary, perhaps the church budget can make up the difference.

2. Invite the congregation to participate (but keep it a secret).

Here’s how:

- Send a letter or an email to the church, and invite them to participate in your pastor’s trip of a lifetime.
- Explain that they have the chance to show appreciation to your pastor and help enhance his ministry.
- Describe how you’d like to collect contributions. For example, you could note that only 74 adults can cover the cost of sending your pastor and his wife to Israel if each member gives \$100.

- Remind everyone: “It’s a surprise!” and tell them to mark the surprise presentation date on their calendars.

3. Present your pastor’s Israel trip as a gift one Sunday morning.

Plan to announce the surprise as a gift for “Pastor Appreciation Sunday” or another occasion. Discover a reason to celebrate your pastor and his wife! This gesture will draw you closer to your shepherd. He will be as thankful for this act of kindness as the pilgrimage itself.

And here is another idea; if you can afford it, why don’t you go with your pastor. Nothing your pastor would enjoy more than going to Israel and sharing this wonderful experience with a church member.

Is it safe to go to Israel?

Yes. Tourism is a big deal in Israel, and the country goes to great lengths to make tourists safe. As a result, we feel safer in Israel than any other country we’ve visited. And no. International travel is never perfectly safe.

The State Department has travel restrictions on the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. The Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights are easy to avoid, but you need to go into the West Bank to see Bethlehem. However, when you go to the Church of the Nativity, you will be going with hundreds of other visitors that day.

Exercise the same safety precautions we use in the U.S.A. And, of course, ask God for a safe trip.

To hear more about this opportunity, [listen to the most recent episode of “Punching Holes in the Darkness”](#) where Tim Patterson and Tim Steele unpack the many advantages of sending your pastor on this once in a lifetime trip.

For more details, call Tim Steele at (586)337-4653 or email at timothysteele@mac.com. Here is a brochure of this amazing trip: bit.ly/Israeltrip2022

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim is the founding and Discipleship Pastor of Cross Waves Church. Tim received a BA in Biblical Studies from Welch College. He has also received a Masters of Theology and a Masters of Divinity from Liberty University. He and his wife Terri have two adult children and one granddaughter.

Jesus changes everything

by Seth Springs

WATERFORD, MI – This may sound odd, but my favorite Easter memory has to be Easter of 2020. Because of COVID-19, we were not able to meet as we planned, in a public school with 70+ people. But our people found a way to celebrate the resurrection!

We gathered in homes for fellowship, worship, and the Word. Church members dropped off Easter baskets for our Transformation Church Kids. And we were able to spend the afternoon grilling out with neighbors who we love very much. Even in a pandemic, Jesus is alive and that changes everything.

Easter means EVERYTHING to us at Transformation! It's a wonderful day of celebration as we reflect on the history-altering and life-changing good news of the resurrection. It's also a great day to invite friends and family who don't yet understand the hope we have in Jesus. I don't believe there's a time all year when our mission and message are clearer than on Easter Sunday.

Right now, I am stuck on Luke's account of the resurrection and a conversation that follows. After Jesus is resurrected, he walks and talks with 2 disciples on their way to Emmaus, but for some supernatural reason, they don't recognize Him.

Then, as it says in Luke 24:31-32, "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him... They said to each other, 'Weren't our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?'"

I love how the resurrected Jesus meets these 2 "discouraged" disciples right where they are, how He patiently explains the Scriptures, and how everything changes once their eyes are opened to the Good News of the Gospel!

In short, Easter is the reason we always say, "Jesus Changes Everything."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Seth Springs started Transformation Church Waterford four years ago after moving from North Carolina. He and his wife, Taylor have been married for 9 years and have 3 crazy, beautiful children, Layla (6), "D" (3), and Lily Joy (3).

When Easter got quiet

by Barry Martin

PLYMOUTH, MI – I have seen the faithfulness of God as well as His grace extend far beyond what I ever thought possible! My wife April and I are both a part of the staff at Mile City Church in Plymouth, MI. We have three incredible kids - Caleb, who is a senior in high school, Chloe, a freshman in high school and Liam, who is finishing up his 8th grade year! We love being in an environment where we can serve together as a family and are grateful seeing how God is working not only in our lives, but in the lives of our teenagers.

Growing up in a preacher's home, Easter has always been such an incredible high. It is the day we celebrate what Christ has done for us on the cross and through His resurrection. At Mile City, we love celebrating His resurrection in a different way every year. Our pastor, Travis Whittaker, is a creative type and wants to make Easter stand out to those who may only come once a year as well as for those who understand what the resurrection is all about.

I look forward to the spiritual "high" that comes on Easter morning, seeing so many people walking through the doors to hear that life changing message. Some of those people only come because of family or an invite from a friend and end up giving their life to Christ, realizing His love for them!

I have so many great Easter memories and traditions but to be honest my favorite Easter was in 2020. It may sound crazy. We had just shut down because of Covid, we knew it was going to be different, but there was something about sitting together as a family on the couch in our living room and watching our Easter service online. If you are in ministry, you know Easter is special, but also a lot of work! By the time services are over, we often just want to find a quiet place and sleep. 2020 was different because there was no big crowd but just me, my wife and our three kids worshiping the risen Savior that Easter morning.

My favorite passage when it comes to the resurrection is Luke 24:4-9, where it says: "While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest."

When I read this passage, I am reminded of two things. First of all, believe in the power of a risen Savior. My God is not dead, nor does He sleep! He is alive and interceding on my behalf before our Heavenly Father!

The second thing that speaks to me is that phrase "they remembered his words." How many times do I forget His promises in my life, taking my focus off the risen Christ and putting them

on circumstances, people, or problems in my life. When I come back to His words and promises, I am encouraged by the fact that He will never leave me nor forsake me!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barry Martin and his wife April are both on staff at Mile City in Plymouth, MI. Barry is the Plymouth Location Pastor as well as a church-based church planting catalyst with the Send Network. April is the Kids Director for both Plymouth and South Lyon locations of Mile City Church.

Easter is life...not death

by Phyllis Harbaugh

STERLING HEIGHTS, MI – Sitting in waiting rooms at a hospital is a difficult task that all of us will experience at some time in our life. The hardest is when death is close and we are waiting for a loved one to leave this world.

Saying good-bye to my grandmother was hard. In the waiting room my mind was reflecting on the years I had with her and the loss we would have without her. I cried. My heart was saying “thank you God for her life, and for the temporary separation we will have because she is your child and we will see her again someday.”

Because it was Easter season, I thought of how the disciples must have grieved as they saw Jesus die with no time to say good-bye. They had no hope of ever seeing Jesus again... until the resurrection!

It was Easter morning and I went into my grandmother’s room and opened the curtains. “He is Risen Grandmother. He is risen!” I turned to see her weakly smile as if to say “I Know... I know!” I hugged her for the last time, knowing this was not a final good-bye because I had the hope of seeing her again!

Every year Easter Sunday reminds us and gives us the hope of seeing Jesus and our loved ones in Heaven someday.

Life is hard and death is sure. But praise be to Jesus... He conquered death! We do not grieve as those with no hope! He has risen...He has risen indeed!!!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phyllis Harbaugh is the wife of Pastor Herb Harbaugh at Memorial Baptist Church Sterling Heights, MI. She is the mother of 3 daughters, 3 son-in laws and 6 grandchildren.

The candy bomber

by David Thompson

NASHVILLE, TN – He is the last of his kind—the last of what’s affectionately known as the greatest generation. He is U.S. military pilot Gail S. Halverson. A bomber in World War II, he is an American Hero. Oh! Did I mention he targeted kids!

I also failed to mention that Gail who just died the last week of February of 2022, was known as the “Candy Bomber”. That’s right... he dropped hundreds of thousands of pounds of sweets and goodies all over the Soviet controlled West Berlin as World War II was ending. What a legacy to leave. What an honor and duty for him to drop the last bombs on Soviet Berlin.... and it was something delicious and wonderful from above.

He lived to talk about it personally for 77 more years, now I am telling his story, and now you are learning his story. It’s not a stretch to relate this to a picture of what our heavenly Father is like. The very first book in the New Testament actually appears near the end. It is James, the half-brother of our Lord. In one of the first paragraphs, he says,

“Every good and perfect gift comes down from Heaven—from the Father of Lights, in whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning... of His own will He brought us forth....in order that we would be a kind of first fruits”.

James is, in very simple terms, describing what God is like. First, all that is “GOOD” is always from “GOD”. Next, this “GOOD GOD” cannot change—“EVER”. Lastly, GOD is GOOD FOREVER—not because he feels like it. GOD Is GOOD FOREVER, simply because that’s what God “WILLS”.

James states, “of His own WILL.... He brought us forth”. Another translation says, “gave us birth”. In other words, if you have a spiritual birthday, it is surely because God loved you first and He didn’t do that just because He felt like it. GOD WILLED IT!

The great C.S. Lewis puts it like this, “Being in love and loving are two different things—being in love is great but not the greatest thing—there are many things above it and many things below it”.

Lewis goes on to say, “no one can sustain the feeling of a teenager in love. True love is loving someone even when you don’t like them” and so, God doesn’t like you because He “FEELS “ like it... But because HE WILL TO!

I hope today, dear friend, that you will come to know this God just like Jesus’ own brother knew Him. Thank God today if you do know Him, and that He does not love like you and I love—EVER... (we tend to love based on feelings that change).

Instead, learn this, “Jesus loves me this—this I know, for the Bible tells me so”. I am grateful that a tiny, but very round little scotch woman, Ms. Stewart, at the Old Hickory Presbyterian Church taught me that before I could even write my name.

Be glad and rejoice brother and sister that you have a God who is responsible for all that is good in this old messed up world. No matter what happens today, or tomorrow, or this year, God is still going to be the same—causing “mercy drops” from Heaven to rain down on you, just as He has done every lifelong day of your existence! And take a moment to praise Him that he never does “GOOD” just because he feels like it... He does it because HE IS A GOOD GOD!!

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.

First-Person: What the church must provide women in today’s culture

by Jen Oshman

Surveys measuring the mental health and emotional well-being of women and girls in the United States unanimously reflect a concerning trend. By all accounts, happiness and contentment are markedly down, while stress, anxiety, and depression are way up – and this was true prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Women seeking relief have myriad options – exercise class, book club, therapy, girls’ nights out, an afternoon at the spa, a day in nature, a long soak in the tub, medication. And depending on the heart behind each of these self-care strategies, they may improve a woman’s well-being.

Our churches, though, have a unique and powerful opportunity to serve women and girls in this cultural moment. As discouragement and disillusionment threaten to take hold, women’s ministries can hold out *a particular kind of hope* – a hope that’s truth-filled, soul-deep, and all-satisfying.

As church leaders, we must make the best use of our time (Ephesians 5:16, Colossians 4:5). God ordained you and me for this specific moment in our specific contexts so that we each might seek Him and find Him (Acts 17:26). So then, how might we put the God who made us and died to save us on display for the women in our churches and communities to seek and savor Him?

We must ask ourselves if we’re offering a *distinctly Christian hope* to our women. Do we point women to the Giver of Life, or do our programs and gatherings resemble what might be offered at the local library, Mormon ward, or secular self-help class?

The well-being of women in our communities is on the line, and we, the church, have an opportunity to be a porch light in a dark night. Let’s not shrink back but rather, boldly shine. Here are three components to include in your women’s ministry to ensure you’re offering explicitly Christian hope and truth to your women.

The Word of God

This one may seem obvious, but many women’s ministries forego the Bible in an attempt to be relevant or seeker-friendly. Especially in this cultural moment when many see God’s Word as oppressive or on the wrong side of history, it can be tempting to make it secondary or to save it for later. But we who belong to the Lord know eternal life, mercy, and beauty are found in those pages. Let’s not shy away from God’s living and good Word. Let us say with the apostle Peter, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68, CSB).

This is no small thing: *we have the words of eternal life*. With the Word of God as our foundation, our women’s ministries will offer true life. Hebrews tells us the Bible is living and active and can help us know our own thoughts and intentions (Hebrews 4:12). James says the Bible serves as a kind of mirror for us (James 1:22-24). We look to it to see where we might be corrected and transformed so that we can be doers of the Word. We need the Word so that we won’t be conformed to this age, but instead have renewed minds to know God’s will (Romans 12:2). In this age of self-focus and discouragement, the Bible lifts our eyes up, off ourselves and our temporary cultural landscape, and onto our God and His sovereignty, kindness, and eternal glory.

The gospel of Jesus

In an age that teaches women they must define themselves, help themselves, and depend only on themselves, the Gospel of grace is oxygen to a suffocating generation. The deepest need of every woman attending our ministries is to receive the grace and mercy of Jesus. We must constantly remind ourselves and our women that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. Because of His great mercy and love for us, Jesus traded us our sin for His righteousness – our death for His eternal life. We’ve been given the most scandalous and generous gift in all of history.

What a relief. What a joy. What a Savior! In our flesh, we tend to believe we must conjure up our own acceptance, or that we’re beyond God’s acceptance. This age tells women, “It’s all on you.” But Jesus says, “No, it’s all on me. I paid the price. You’re forgiven. You’re mine.” Let us, therefore, make sure He’s always on full display – that His grace permeates our atmosphere, that His mercy is center stage. Do our messages and event calendars promote works-righteousness or a call to rest in Jesus, who is full of grace and truth (John 1:14)? Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). If our ministries are going to be truly life-giving, we must constantly rehearse the gospel to one another. It’s Jesus alone who sets the women in your church free (John 8:32, 36).

The people of God, led by the Spirit of God

In our individualistic and self-reliant age, we bear witness to an [epidemic of loneliness](#). Our gatherings as the people of God are a strong antidote to the sickness of isolation. Simply inviting women in to be seen and heard, embraced in warmth and welcome, is potentially life-changing. But let’s practice a particular kind of hospitality in women’s ministry – welcoming one another to gather not only with each other but with our sovereign God as well.

As we who belong to the Lord gather, our Lord gathers with us. Christ in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27), is in our midst. Jesus told His disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13, CSB). And so it is for you and me. The Holy Spirit lives inside us and guides us. By His guidance, we encourage and admonish one another; we remind each other of God’s goodness and power during turbulent times. The Holy Spirit is our counselor and our helper. When we gather, He is there, speaking truth to each of us as we speak it to one another. May our gatherings not be marked by worldly advice, but rather unity in prayer, seeking the Lord, and building up one another in Him.

Women in our communities bring real and heavy burdens with them when they walk through our church doors. We have so much more to offer than the coping strategies of our age. Women’s ministries established in the Word, rooted in the Gospel, and full of God’s people led by God’s Spirit offer life. In this generation, may our women’s ministries “shine like stars in the world, by holding firm to the word of life” (Philippians 2:15b-16a, CSB). We have true, eternal, and unshakable life – let’s offer nothing less.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Oshman is an author and has worked in women's ministry for two decades as a missionary and pastor's wife.

U.S. pastors identify their greatest needs

by Aaron Earls

Pastors face unique difficulties inherent in their career, but what are their greatest needs? Pastors themselves say they're most concerned about seeing their churchgoers grow spiritually and making connections with those outside of their churches.

After speaking directly with pastors to gather their perspectives on their ministry and personal challenges, Lifeway Research surveyed 1,000 U.S. pastors for the 2022 Greatest Needs of Pastors study to discover what they see as their [most pressing issues](#).

"The pre-existing challenges of ministry were amplified by COVID, and it's important we lean in and listen closely to pastors," said Ben Mandrell, president of Lifeway Christian Resources. "This project has shed light on critical needs they have and will point the way forward in how we partner with them to fuel their ministries and improve their health in multiple areas."

Protestant pastors identified 44 distinct issues they see as potentially one of their greatest needs. Of those, 17 were selected by a majority in Lifeway Research's 2022 Greatest Needs of Pastors study.

Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research, said his team began the study by speaking with more than 200 pastors, asking them to think beyond the current pandemic-related struggles and share some of the enduring needs of pastors and their churches today.

"Their responses to the challenges they face and the areas that are most important for them were then presented to more than 200 additional pastors," explained McConnell. "Based on those responses, 1,000 pastors were asked about almost four dozen needs to measure the extent to which each is something they need to address today."

Of the 44 needs identified by pastors and included in the study, 17 were selected by a majority as an issue they need to address.

- Developing leaders and volunteers: 77%
- Fostering connections with unchurched people: 76%

- People's apathy or lack of commitment: 75%
- Consistency in personal prayer: 72%
- Friendships and fellowship with others: 69%
- Training current leaders and volunteers: 68%
- Consistency of Bible reading not related to sermon or teaching preparation: 68%
- Trusting God: 66%
- Relationships with other pastors: 64%
- Consistency in taking a Sabbath: 64%
- Stress: 63%
- Personal disciple making: 63%
- Confessing and repenting from personal sin: 61%
- Consistency exercising: 59%
- Avoiding overcommitment and over-work: 55%
- Challenging people where they lack obedience: 55%
- Time management: 51%

"The number and breadth of needs pastors are currently facing is staggering," said McConnell. "All seven spiritual needs asked about on the survey are a current concern for most pastors, as well as practical, mental, self-care, skill-development, and needs around ministry difficulties. Clearly pastors are not looking for shortcuts and are taking their roles as spiritual leaders in their church seriously."

The need identified by the most pastors as one of the greatest needs? 77% say developing leaders and volunteers.

The 44 identified needs fall into seven broader categories. Subsequent releases in Lifeway Research's 2022 Greatest Needs of Pastors study will explore each of the categories and the related needs specifically.

Single greatest need

When asked to narrow down their list to the single greatest need requiring their attention, pastors' responses varied. At least one pastor surveyed picked each of the 44 possible needs, while 23 needs garnered at least 2% of pastors. Eight needs were chosen by more than 3% of pastors, and one reached double digits.

- People's apathy or lack of commitment: 10%

- Personal disciple making: 9%
- Fostering connections with unchurched people: 8%
- Developing leaders and volunteers: 7%
- Establishing a compelling vision: 5%
- Technology: 4%
- Consistency in personal prayer: 4%
- Consistency exercising: 4%

“When asked to prioritize their own greatest need, pastors tend to put the needs of their church’s ministry ahead of personal needs,” said McConnell. “Personally making disciples, developing leaders, connecting with those outside the church and mobilizing the people in their church are the most common ‘greatest needs’ and are among the most common needs pastors want to make a priority.”

When asked to single out their greatest need, more pastors chose people's apathy or lack of commitment than any other issue, according to the 2022 Greatest Needs of Pastors study.

Pastoral help

When thinking about getting help with their needs, pastors want to hear from their fellow clergy who have been through the same struggles.

[See also](#) **Most Americans See Churches as Helpful During Pandemic**

Three in 4 U.S. pastors (75%) say they would be interested in getting advice or guidance on the issues they are facing from other pastors who have already been through those problems. Similar numbers (74%) would like to hear from those who understand churches like theirs.

Another 70% would listen to other pastors who are currently facing the same needs. Slightly fewer (57%) want to hear from experts on those types of needs. Older pastors are the least likely to say they’d like advice from any of those sources.

“The most monumental needs of pastors are not new to this generation of pastors,” said McConnell. “They know other pastors and pastors who have gone before them are best positioned to understand and help them with the wide variety of ministry and personal needs a pastor faces.”

“The most monumental needs of pastors are not new to this generation of pastors.”
— @smcconn

Still, previous Lifeway Research shows not all pastors are actively seeking out advice from their fellow clergy. More than 8 in 10 U.S. Protestant pastors say they feel supported by other pastors in their area. Fewer than half (46%), however, know and spend time with 10 or more other local pastors, according to a [2020 Lifeway Research survey](#).

Most pastors (54%) have those relationships with fewer than 10 other area clergy, including 1 in 20 (5%) who aren't connected with any area pastors and 8% who have relationships with only one or two other ministers.

Pastors may also look to retired pastors for advice and wisdom for navigating common challenges. A [2019 Lifeway Research study](#) of retired Protestant pastors, ministers, and missionaries found some have struggled with the transition into retirement and are looking for ways to serve and connect with others.

More than 4 in 5 retired ministry workers (86%) say they have continued to make new friends in recent years, but 29% admit they feel lonely or isolated. When asked what resources would most help them with their relationships today, most say they want to make additional ministry connections: 25% say making friends who have similar experience in ministry, 23% making friends who live near me, 20% relating to a church in which I am not in leadership, and 17% making friends who have had similar experience in leadership.

"Retired pastors and other ministry workers still want to serve the church," said McConnell. "When Lifeway Research asked them how ministries could best serve those like them who are retired from full-time ministry, the most common response was to provide them with opportunities to serve or minister (16%). Current pastors looking for guidance may find retired pastors ready and willing to help."

Methodology

The phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors was conducted March 30 – April 22, 2021. The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Quotas were used for church size. Each survey was completed by the senior or sole pastor or a minister at the church. Responses were weighted by region and church size to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.1% This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Send Relief partnership strengthens response in Eastern Europe

by IMB/Send Relief Staff

As the shared compassion ministry of the International Mission Board (IMB) and the North American Mission Board (NAMB), Send Relief is working through a vast network of IMB missionaries, field partners and local churches to care for Ukrainian refugees across Eastern Europe. The IMB's long-term relationships in Ukraine have aided Send Relief efforts to quickly mobilize on-the-ground support and resources.

Thanks to the ongoing generosity of Southern Baptists, partners are providing food, shelter, transportation, clothing, medical supplies, trauma care and other essentials to more than 416,000 people displaced by the war. Send Relief compassion ministry efforts began before the Russian invasion into Ukraine, and they will continue because of the faithfulness of Southern Baptists. Gifts given to Ukraine refugee ministries through Send Relief and the IMB now stand at more than \$5.5 million.

Cade and Ginny Wheeler help lead international Send Relief efforts.

"We are working to help our IMB personnel in Europe utilize the humanitarian gifts to Send Relief to strengthen the work of the local churches as they reach out and care for needs, share hope as they meet the acute needs of the hurting and look to long-term community development," Ginny said.

Designated Send Relief funds are being utilized to provide for these needs and minister in multiple countries where IMB personnel and national partners are ministering to Ukrainian refugees. These countries include Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia, Romania, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Send Relief currently has at least 30 compassion ministry projects spread across Europe.

Looking for the gaps

Local Christians have been vital partners and are leading the way in reaching out to refugees.

"We're encouraging our workers as they're doing Send Relief projects, and as they're responding, to ask themselves, 'Where are the places where there might be a gap in the care, and how can we fill those gaps? Are there people who are not getting their needs met?'" Ginny said.

"Our workers on the field are finding those places," Ginny continued. "Our workers immediately are thinking, 'How can we meet their physical needs and meet their spiritual needs at the same time?'"

IMB missionaries assessed the situation on the border of Romania and Ukraine and determined they could come alongside Romanian Baptists who had already mobilized to provide care.

Southern Baptist volunteer teams from Texas are joining Romanian Christians. The teams hope to set up care stations. In existing stations, Christians are forming meaningful connections and providing information as to where they can shelter and connect with local churches.

Utilizing corridors

In addition to assisting refugees who've left Ukraine, Send Relief funds are helping internally displaced Ukrainians. Thousands of Ukrainian Christians remain in the country and are ministering to their countrymen.

"One of our workers wrote me and said there were 20 people on dialysis in eastern Ukraine who were going to die if we could not get them out," Ginny said. The Wheelers used Send Relief funds to provide gasoline for those patients to evacuate to Romania where they connected with local Christians.

"We just thank God for the ability to save the lives of those 20 people who had no other way," Ginny said. "Hopefully, they're going to have meaningful connections there in Romania. Those are concrete lives, souls' needs being met, provided for, right now – today. Every one of them, they matter."

Investing relationally

"We're really focused also on creating and utilizing corridors for sending aid into Ukraine with those trusted partnerships with our national churches and with the Baptist seminaries," Ginny said.

The investment of Southern Baptists in Ukraine has a long history and is well-established. Aid is going through Odesa and Lviv, two cities that are home to Baptist seminaries the IMB has partnered with for many years. People are lining up outside seminaries and churches to receive aid.

Some Southern Baptist state conventions, such as the North Carolina Baptist Convention, have long-standing relationships in Ukraine.

The Baptist state conventions of North Carolina, Mississippi, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Texas Baptist Men, California, Kentucky, Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama, Missouri and Ohio are sending teams of Disaster Relief volunteers to serve in Poland and Romania. Individuals and churches are also involved.

Teams will assist with cooking, distributing food, cleaning, caring for children, providing health screening and sorting donations.

“We’re just so thankful for those Southern Baptist state conventions that are involved and have spent years already ministering inside Ukraine, inside Romania, inside Poland, and now, also together we are doing this crisis response,” Ginny said.

Providing long-term aid

Ginny said IMB missionaries and local partners will continue to provide relief when the war is over.

“How much more is going to have to be done,” Ginny asked, “to put these people’s lives back together, to assist the churches within Ukraine and even around Europe, as they try to help these people who have no homes, who have no jobs, who have no infrastructure in Ukraine?”

“It is no small thing to think of what that’s going to take, and we want to be able to do that,” Ginny continued. “We want to walk alongside them, so that the church can be the ones to be caring for people to meet their tangible needs and to build up the national churches. All the giving, it goes toward that. We share the hope of Jesus, and we meet those needs.”

One hundred percent of your gifts to [Send Relief’s Ukraine Crisis Fund](#) support ministry to Ukrainian refugees.

“We’re so thankful for the response and for the prayers and for the support, the giving,” Ginny said. “Our workers are just so quickly able to have resources to respond to the need because of Southern Baptists’ giving to Send Relief and to the IMB.”

First-Person: 3 truths about your non-religious neighbor

by Ben Mandrell

After you go to a restaurant, you go out to the car with your group and discuss whether you want to go back. Was the food good? Was the service good? Overall, is this an experience we want to repeat?

People have the same conversations about relationships. Was that a good experience? Should we go back? Should we be friends with them?

One of the greatest dangers in relationships is you never know how you're coming across. We don't often understand or even think about how unchurched people perceive us. In fact, according to the [Greatest Needs of Pastors](#) study from Lifeway Research, 76 percent of pastors say their churches are struggling to connect with unchurched people.

Three out of four pastors are saying, "I'm not sure my people have a clue how to build relationships with those who don't go to our church." We must simplify what it means to be a good neighbor and to build relationships with the people whom God has placed around us.

Several years ago, when my family and I found ourselves planting a church in Colorado, we took a crash course in neighboring and engaging the unchurched. Here are a few things we learned about our neighbors – things we'll never forget.

1. They're discerning

Sometimes (not every time!) people want to have coffee with me because they want me to do something for them. In the same way, people can sniff out when a Christian wants to get together simply for the purpose of getting buy-in on their beliefs.

They know when they're being manipulated into a situation. One of the mantras that began to play out in the life of our family is: "We invite people into our lives, not a location." Have them over to your house and be intentional with conversation around the table. We began to do this all the time. We had a conversation cube. You've seen these at stores. It's very simple.

That made our neighbors feel special because it wasn't like, "Hey, come over to our house so we can tell you all about us and our journey and what we're doing at the church." We had them over because we had a genuine interest in them as individuals.

2. They have things to teach us

Ask for advice on or help with a project. I'm not handy. My former neighbors Neil and Kristy are both super handy and amazing with tools. I would call Neil and ask how to deal with a pipe issue or get help with my sprinkler system. Admitting that you need help endears you to people. Christians can have this idea that we don't need help because we have the Lord. While that's true, on earth, we also do need help with some practical things.

One of my favorite moments in my life and ministry was the first time our neighbor Neil heard me preach. He came over and knocked on the door. I opened the door, and he said, "Hey, I really liked your presentation."

Other times he would make statements like, "Hey, when I listen to you speak, it makes me want to be a better person." It always meant so much to me that I was communicating in such a way that he could not only understand but also appreciate the Christian faith. It gave us a lot of room for discussion. Neil went through a hard time when he lost his job, and we were able to

have some in-depth conversations about calling and why God puts us on the planet. That relationship began to grow.

3. They notice when we honor what's important to them

In one way, the connection with Neil and Kristy was natural because we have kids who are similar in age. But even if that wasn't the case, it's important to show them they matter to you by demonstrating interest in their kids and the things that matter to them.

Soon after we began to know Neil and Kristy, their son was seriously injured in a playground accident. Our whole family went over that afternoon. We didn't know them well at that point, but we showed up with a bag of treats for him to enjoy while he recuperated. We could tell this gesture meant a lot to them. And it created another on-ramp to have a piece of real estate in their life.

A note to the church leader

Neil told me he wanted to know me as a person before I was a pastor. That deeply impacted me because sometimes as pastors, we forget that we're human beings – that we were a person before we were ever called to pastor. There are things about us that people want to know apart from what we do. Neil reminds me of the importance of building trust that comes through building memories together.

Most pastors are readers, but I was an avid reader before I was in ministry. It turns out my neighbors liked sitting around a fire pit, so I suggested to a few of the guys that we read a book together – their choice. They picked a war book, which naturally led to conversations about survival and faith. And through those discussions over time, deeper things naturally came up without me having to force the issue.

Those guys taught me so much about allowing myself to be human in their presence. The tendency for all of us – especially in ministry leadership – is to guard the image, to craft the perception we have it all together. But people will identify with authentic humanity over feigned perfection (which translates as inaccessibility).

It's been said people won't always remember what you said or what you did, but they'll always remember how you made them feel. And just like the restaurant analogy I shared earlier, they'll remember their experience with you and decide whether they want to come back for more.

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

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