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Who's on your list?

by Jerome Taylor

BURTON, MI – I'm about to admit something awkward. It may not be easy to digest so you have your warning now. There are portions of Scripture that I have had a tendency to gloss over from time to time. At points in my life, they seemed rather pointless.

This seems quite strange since all of Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be complete and equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). So how is it that certain segments of Scripture can be so easily dismissed in their importance during certain points of our lives.

I submit for me; this was due to a lack of understanding the immense kindness God shared through his providence of true brothers and sisters in Christ. Take Romans 16 for a prime example.

The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Rome under the authoritative direction of the Holy Spirit, writes of the glorious gift of the gospel with such passion and purpose. But in this same letter, he mentions no less than 28 people for whom he is thankful in how they have played a significant role in his life and ministry. Some of these have no other introduction or narrative in the unfolding revelation of Scripture than here.

This is not the only place you can find mention of people who have been influential instruments of grace in the mission of the church, some named and others not so much. However, in our case and for the sake of brevity I only point to Romans 16. God has used this and other often dismissed lists of names in the Bible to remind me of a gracious and glorious treasure we all may call to mind as reasons for thankfulness.

We have been granted the gift of brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the past, now in the present, and in the days the Lord is pleased to provide us for the future. As I type this article, my mind recalls those who have been instructive, encouraging, and formative in my conversion, discipleship, and ministry.

I am also amazed that in the last 9 years of my pilgrimage within the land of Michigan, God has brought alongside a band of brothers that I honestly don't know how I could have persevered without their prayer, edification, co-labor, and shaping. And I would not do justice by attempting the full list today, but I am no less grateful for each of you.

Think about the people you can thank God for and in your remembrance of them in prayer (Philippians 1:3), be renewed in encouragement towards the Lord Jesus who has brought people into your life so that the good work began in you would be brought to completion. Then, seek the Lord's help for you to be that same person in the life of another.

You may not ever have your name recorded on some semi-significant list for all posterity. If not, you are just as valued by the Lord Jesus and can be used by His grace to be influential and memorable to those whose good He means to cultivate by your brotherhood or sisterhood.

Be blessed my brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ for whom I am so thankful. Let us labor on together by His grace, through His gospel, and for His glory.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerome Taylor is the pastor of Eastgate Baptist Church, Burton. He is the husband of Melinda and father of Abigail, Jackson, Hannah, and Naomi. He is the current Recording Secretary for the BSCM, a leader in the Genesee Baptist Association, the Michigan trustee for Gateway Seminary, and a Past President of the BSCM (2016-2018).

Thankful to serve

by Matt Carter

HOLT, MI – “Why am I even here? I just want to go back to bed.” It was early and I hadn’t had any coffee. Worse, it was Saturday: the one day free of hustling school-aged kids out of the door in the morning, usually reserved for sleeping in. But not today. On that morning I was awake, busy, and grumpy.

What pulled me from my cozy bed and put me in such a splendid mood, you ask? I was in the kitchen at our church building, cooking breakfast casseroles as a gesture of appreciation to our volunteers. In about an hour, these faithful saints would arrive, and I would speak to them about-you guessed it- the joy of serving Jesus. Pastor-of-the-Year, right here.

Somewhere between chopping bacon and loathing the inventor of alarm clocks, the Lord graciously convicted me. He brought to mind the words I was about to teach in 1 Peter 4: if we are serving the Lord (and not ourselves) we can do so without grumbling because we serve in His strength, for His glory. It was as if the Lord asked me, “Who are you really serving right now?”

I stopped what I was doing, repented, prayed, and asked the Lord to give me a heart of thankfulness as I served Him. I desperately needed that reminder that it is a privilege to serve the Lord Jesus and His people.

Psalm 100 calls us to “Serve the LORD with gladness...Enter His gates with thanksgiving.” When we are thankful to serve God and others, we are living like Jesus.

After all, Jesus came not to be served, but to serve His people by giving His life for them (Mark 10:45). Jesus did not go to the cross grumbling about you and me. Quite the opposite. Scripture tells us that it was for the joy set before Him that Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). Joy, gladness, and thanksgiving. These are the marks of Christlike service. When we serve the Lord with gladness, He fills us with His joy.

Serving the Lord with gladness and thanksgiving draws us closer to Jesus. On the one hand, it reminds us of His greater service to us. When we think of the cross and empty tomb, the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with overwhelming gratitude.

That Jesus would serve a sinner such as me by dying in my place is simply stunning. “Thanksgiving” almost feels too feeble a response. But it isn’t. It is the God-honoring response. On the other hand, we can serve with thankfulness because Jesus gives us the strength to serve (1 Peter 4:11). Serving makes us more like Jesus because it connects us to His power. Serving deepens our love for Jesus because He carries us through it. Getting more of Jesus is reason to give thanks, indeed.

Serving the Lord with gladness and thanksgiving is worth it, because when we do, we get the blessing of His presence and grace. Even early on a Saturday. Press on, my friends, in thankful service to the Lord.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Carter serves as the Lead Pastor of Cedar Street Church in Holt. Prior to coming to Cedar Street, he served in various roles at several churches in North Carolina. He holds an MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Matt and his wife Anna have four kids and one marginally tolerable dog.

DR chaplaincy teams offer ‘spiritual counseling’ at FEMA request

by Jane Rodgers

FORT MYERS BEACH, FL – One Hurricane Ian survivor found dealing with the pressures of the storm and the storms of life almost unbearable ... until she spoke with Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Disaster Relief chaplains at Fort Myers Beach.

Fort Myers Beach, an oceanfront community on Estero Island—an insular strip in the Gulf of Mexico some 16 miles south of the city of Fort Myers—was a thriving vacation spot before Ian hit in late September.

On Saturday morning, Oct. 22, SBTC DR chaplain Lowell Warren of Mexia, director of missions for the Bi-Stone Association, arrived to serve survivors. He learned from the county sheriff's department that Estero Island would be closed to outsiders for two days, beginning Monday, Oct. 24, so that major cleanup operations could occur. Homeowners who elected to leave Sunday evening would not be permitted to cross the bridge from the mainland to access their damaged property until Oct. 26.

By order of local, state, and federal authorities, the only people allowed on the island for two days, besides residents already there, would be city contractors, first responders, health care workers, recovery workers, Federal Emergency Management Agency personnel, and representatives from other social service agencies, Warren said.

Then FEMA officials recognized needs among the survivors that even the most helpful social service providers could not meet.

A 'high demand' for prayer

"There was such a high demand for prayer. People were asking, 'Is there anyone here who could pray with me?'" Warren said he learned from the FEMA representative, who asked the chaplain if the Southern Baptists would establish a spiritual counseling presence at Fort Myers Beach, both during the two-day restricted period and after.

It was a deal no chaplain could refuse.

"He asked us to be available to provide spiritual guidance to people who are struggling to make some sense of what life looks like for them after the storm. He asked us to be here to pray for those who come in seeking prayer and encouragement," Warren said.

Five SBTC DR chaplains set up a table with Bibles and tracts in Spanish and English and began praying and talking with survivors at the FEMA site on Fort Myers Beach on Oct. 24.

"They aren't handing out tracts and Bibles, but they are making them available for people to pick up," said Sue Robinson, a SBTC DR administrative volunteer from Huntsville who is onsite at McGregor Baptist in Fort Myers.

"We expect to stay here as long as needed," Warren said. "People are very receptive. The fields are white unto harvest," he added, noting that the chaplains talked to 25 people on Oct. 24 and prayed with 15, supplying Bibles and tracts to all who asked.

They prayed with struggling first responders, survivors, and even agency personnel.

They also spoke with Paula (name changed), who came into the FEMA tent after speaking with chaplain Colin Hext, a retired firefighter. Another fireman had brought Paula to meet Hext, saying, "I need you to talk to this lady."

"[Paula] was ready to give up," Warren said. "She had even thought about ending her life. She said she had stood on her fourth-floor balcony contemplating suicide." Chaplains learned that Paula was a believer. "Life had just been dumping on her before the storm," Warren said.

After visiting with several chaplains for a while, Paula recalled the joy of her salvation.

"I would start a Scripture and she would finish it," Warren said. "The Lord started bringing it back. All of the stuff going on in her life she just couldn't handle anymore. The Holy Spirit took control. She left with a sparkle in her eye and hope in her heart."

Paula agreed to return to pray with the chaplains the following day and as often afterward as needed.

FEMA has requested chaplains in the past during other disasters, SBTC DR Director Scottie Stice said.

But DR chaplains were busy even before the FEMA request. Warren told of meeting Pat Marchan, a Fort Myers Beach resident and joyful Christian who proudly displayed a devotional book miraculously preserved from her flooded home. The book had comforted Marchan following the death of her son six years before. Its survival without any water damage reminded her that God had protected her family although all else was destroyed.

Recovery work goes on

Disaster relief work continues in Florida as Southern Baptist teams from across the nation serve.

After preparing more than 73,000 meals distributed by the Texas division of the Salvation Army, the SBTC DR mass feeding unit operating out of McGregor Baptist in Fort Myers ceased operations begun nearly three weeks ago, on Oct. 4.

"Yesterday [Oct. 23], the final meal count for the day was 1,950," Stice said.

A quick response kitchen unit manned by Dee and Doug Cates of Pampa is serving DR workers housed at McGregor Baptist in Fort Myers, as are shower and laundry units from Calvary Baptist in Beaumont, Arkansas DR, and Florida DR, Robinson said.

Some 100 families from McGregor Baptist were directly impacted by Ian, Robinson said.

"They've lost homes and roofs; some have been displaced. Even though it's a large church, 100

families is a significant number.” Even so, “this church has just opened their arms to everybody. It’s just been amazing,” she added.

SBTC DR teams have joined other SBDR crews to help with the massive clean-up efforts needed after the storm. Volunteers are committing to two-week stints.

Among these, Mike Phillips led an SBTC DR chainsaw and recovery team from First Baptist Bellville. David Dean continues to direct a recovery team from First Baptist Pflugerville while a team from Spring Baptist Church under the leadership of Bill Zaffos is also working out of McGregor, Robinson said.

To date, SBTC DR volunteers served 754 volunteer days and contributed 7,054 hours of service, rotating in and out of Florida, doing a variety of tasks from feeding to mud out to chainsaw work to chaplaincy, Stice said.

Other state Baptist DR teams involved in Florida have included California, Arizona, New Mexico, Tennessee, and Texas Baptist Men, Stice confirmed, adding that additional teams from Hawaii, Mississippi, and Kansas/Nebraska are expected the week of Oct. 31. Donations for Hurricane Ian relief efforts can be made [here](#).

Vegas church-planting legacy supported by Send Network, Cooperative Program

by Timothy Cockes

LAS VEGAS, NV (BP) – For Hope Church Las Vegas, planting churches throughout the city has always been a priority and a passion.

Even before he became president of the North American Mission Board’s (NAMB) Send Network, Hope’s founding pastor Vance Pitman viewed church multiplication as a priority, he told Baptist Press in written comments.

“God sometimes builds His Kingdom in the most unlikely places, and He invited us to simply join in His activity in Las Vegas by being obedient to engage that city with the Gospel,” Pitman said. “As disciples were made, churches were born.”

Pitman joined Send Network in March 2022, but not before leaving a generational legacy of church planting in Las Vegas.

One particular branch stemming from Hope Church is in the process of sending out its fourth church in the city. WALK Church has benefited from the support of both Send Network and the Cooperative Program.

Heiden Ratner is the senior pastor of WALK Church, which he planted in the very town where he grew up.

After becoming a Christian during his freshman year of college, Ratner felt an immediate calling to reach Vegas with the Gospel.

“When I became a believer, I felt like I caught a passion for evangelism, specifically in my hometown of Las Vegas,” Ratner said. “I wanted to be the change that I didn’t see and didn’t have growing up.”

Upon a recommendation, Ratner would start attending Hope Church during the summers when he was home from school.

Ratner had never been to church before and wasn’t even aware there were churches in Vegas. But he soon discovered that Hope Church met on Sundays in the very same gym where he played high school basketball.

Pitman began mentoring Ratner, who would begin a two-year church-planting apprenticeship with Send Network in 2013.

“I felt like God was calling me to plant a church one day, and I wanted Hope to be the sending church,” Ratner said.

“Pastor Vance invited me into his life in discipling and mentoring me for several years, and the Send Network apprenticeship was an opportunity for me to learn what it means to be a pastor and grow my understanding of church planting and disciple-making.”

In the fall of 2015, WALK Church was launched. A few years later in the fall of 2020, Ratner would step into a new position as the NAMB Send City missionary for Las Vegas.

He said neither the planting of WALK nor the overall planting work of Send Network would be possible without the generous partnership of Southern Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

“What I’ve seen in my couple of years being a Send City missionary is just a culture of unity among the planters in our network,” Ratner said. “There is not a competitive vibe, but it’s more of a celebration vibe. We’re seeing the great work of not only our lead church planters, but also the spouses of our planters using their gifts in the church-planting journey.”

“We believe in giving to what you believe in, and we believe in Send Network. We are not just talking about planting churches, but we really are planting churches. The dream is not just a theory; it is practitioner based, and it’s been a blessing to have resources to help meet planter needs.

“It’s not a burden to give to the Cooperative Program, it’s actually a joy because we know that the guys at Send Network are getting the job done. This wouldn’t be possible if people didn’t give. I’m not just a recipient of Send Network funds, but I’m actually a satisfied customer.”

The multiplication legacy was also part of WALK Church from the beginning, Ratner said.

“From our very first days we had church planting in our vision and timeline,” he said. “We believe that this isn’t a new way, it’s the New Testament way. You can find in the book of Acts that the pattern of Kingdom expansion has always been churches planting new churches.”

“I want Vegas to transform and be less known for being the city of sin and be more known as the city of Him. I want the world to know that God is alive and at work in Vegas, and I believe the only way we are going to see that is through churches planting churches. WALK church alone couldn’t reach the city, but a lot of churches could.”

One Vegas church planted by WALK is Favor City Church, pastored by Joseph Gibbons. Ratner met Gibbons in 2019 while guest preaching at Dayspring Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., where Gibbons was the student pastor.

“I could sense that Joseph had a calling on his life, and I wanted to try to call out the called so I began to talk with him and his wife about considering church planting,” Ratner said.

Gibbons went out to visit Vegas several times. He and his wife developed a burden for the lostness in the city and realized the rate of new churches was “not even close” to keeping up with the growth in Vegas.

“Pastor Vance always said that the Kingdom of God runs on the rails of relationships,” Gibbons said. “There is such a great need to get the Gospel out in Las Vegas, and we can’t do that with one single church. It takes different churches to reach different people. It’s strategic to be able to lock arms together in a unique way in the same city.”

The couple would decide to move to Vegas to do a residency through WALK and Send Network. Favor City launched in October of 2021 and has grown to more than 100 people.

And once again, the multiplication DNA was passed on to Favor City.

Over his years serving in Alabama, Gibbons developed a relationship with Jack Diven, a fellow graduate of the University of Mobile.

When Diven began feeling the call of the Holy Spirit toward church planting, Gibbons was there to talk him through the process.

Diven and his wife moved to Vegas to be a part of Favor City, where they will complete a residency with plans to plant another Vegas church upon completion.

“The way that God has threaded all of this together between these church plants is insane,” Diven said. “God placed me in this moment with these people, and this brotherhood between us has been a byproduct of this commitment to church planting.”

In his role with Send Network, Pitman hopes to replicate the pattern of the planters he has influenced by prioritizing the relational strategy of churches planting churches.

“For a biblical missiology, the sending church is critical,” Pitman said. “For this reason, the sending church is essential to our strategy at Send Network, and something that my own experience showed me needs to remain a high priority. This is why we do not allow a planter to be endorsed through Send Network without a sending church.

“I believe by conviction that individuals don’t plant churches, denominations don’t plant churches, networks don’t plant churches, but churches plant churches.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Timothy Cokes is a Baptist Press staff writer.

Thanksgiving: Where did it go?

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – The question I have is, where did it go? You know, Thanksgiving. Back to school sales were displayed in every store beginning in August, and then came the adornments for Halloween. The next thing I saw was Christmas decorations and those came up before the jack-o-lanterns came down. In many retail establishments Halloween and Christmas are displayed simultaneously.

My question is, what happened to Thanksgiving?

I have diligently searched for Thanksgiving specific items, (not Fall) and when I did find some decorations or advertisements for this great national celebration most of it had nothing to do

with giving thanks. A few turkeys, cute pilgrims and fall colors or leaves, but little or nothing proclaiming our thanks to our God and Creator for His benevolent provision.

Apparently it is not politically correct to give thanks to God. Happy holidays is as close as they come.

With all that has transpired over the past two and a half years, it seems to me to be a “no brainer” that we need to give thanks to God now more than ever. We need to be thankful to God for His wonderful provision and protection. We need to thank Him for our health and His healing. We need to thank Him that He is on the throne of heaven and controls the affairs of man and not our politicians. (Sorry, I couldn’t help myself.)

Many want to play the part of historical revisionist and deny the intent and purpose of this holiday but the fact remains it is a call for the people of our great nation to pause and be thankful to a benevolent and gracious God.

Just as a reminder, Thanksgiving Day in the United States is an annual day of thanks for the blessings of the past year. It is observed on the fourth Thursday in November in each of the states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. It has its historical roots as a national, and religious holiday that began with the Pilgrims.

After the survival of their colony through the first bitter winter, and the gathering of the harvest, Gov. William Bradford of Plymouth Colony issued a thanksgiving proclamation in the autumn of 1621:

"Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience. Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all blessings."

That first Thanksgiving lasted three days, during which the Pilgrims feasted on wild turkey and venison with their Indian guests. Days of thanksgiving were celebrated sporadically until, on Nov. 26, 1789, President Washington issued a proclamation of a nation-wide day of thanksgiving.

He made it clear that the day should be one of prayer and giving thanks to God. It was to be celebrated by all religious denominations, a circumstance that helped to promote a spirit of common heritage. It would be another 100 years and the end of a bloody civil war before

President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November Thanksgiving. The year was 1865. It might surprise you to learn that it took still another 40 years, the early 1900's, before the tradition really caught on.

The origin, purpose and history of the Thanksgiving holiday is complete and without question. This day was established for the sole purpose of giving thanks back to God for what He has given us.

As with so many of our religious holidays, Thanksgiving seems to have lost its meaning and purpose, or at least the way it is celebrated. As a nation, it would behoove us to return to a humble gratitude toward our Father who is our source and supply. What if He were to cease being our source? I remember one such story illustrates this well.

"One day the sun did not rise. Six o'clock came and there was no sign of dawn. At seven o'clock, there was still no ray of light. At noon, it was as black as midnight. No birds sang and only the hoot of an owl broke the silence. Then came the long black hours of the afternoon. Finally, evening arrived but no one slept that night. Some wept, some wrung their hands in anguish. Every church was thronged with people on their knees. Thus they remained the whole night through. After that long night of terror and agony, millions of eager, tear-streaked faces were turned toward the east. When the sky began to grow red and the sun rose, there was a loud shout of joy. Millions of lips said, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" because the sun had risen after one day of darkness."

The very consistency of God's blessings sometimes seems to dull our gratitude. We take for granted and assume that these blessings are deserved and will naturally occur.

The wonderful thing about the mercies of God for a Christian is that they are fresh every morning and new every evening. We don't deserve them nor His gracious provision yet because He is God and He cannot do that which is contrary to His nature, we are the blessed recipients of His divine favor.

Let us remember to be constantly thankful to our gracious God.

There is a story in Luke 17:11-17 that tells of 10 lepers who were healed:

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found

who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

We must never forget it is always a good and godly thing to be thankful.

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.

Send Network president Pitman announced changes

by Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – Last month during two warm and sunny October days in Alpharetta, Georgia, approximately 275 field personnel of the Send Network of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) gathered with eager anticipation to hear about the changes and the refined focus that the President of the Send Network, Vance Pitman would share. Six from Michigan were part of the mission force: Tony Lynn, Wayne Parker, Ken Nether, Matt Thompson, Barry Martin, and Dan Carty.

Pitman introduced one word to the most often heard and repeated phrase within the mission organization. Mission personnel in the past often said, "Planting churches everywhere for everyone." Pitman added one word to remind all of us that congregations are the leading force in the mission, so from now on the mission force will say, "Churches planting churches everywhere for everyone."

Pitman took the time to display and explain five new guiding values. Pitman said during his presentation, "As a family of churches planting churches everywhere for everyone, we want to be clear about the values that drive our decisions. These values impact everything we do." Here are those five Send Network values:

1. Seek first the kingdom
2. Deepen devotion
3. Stick together
4. Think multiplication

5. Engage your city (community)

During one of the sessions, Pitman introduced five men as members of the Send Network executive team who will serve alongside him with specific tasks assigned to each man. Pitman spoke of the respect he had for each man regarding their personal lives and ministry service. In turn, it was obvious that each man had responded affirmatively to Pitman's invitation to serve the Send Network because they believe in the mission and are confident in Pitman's vision and leadership. The members of the executive team are:

1. Vance Pitman, President of the Send Network
2. Travis Ogle, Executive Vice President
3. Felix Cabrera, Vice President of Send Network Español
4. Matt Carter, Vice President of Mobilization
5. Michael Crawford, Vice President of Strategies & Development
6. Bryan Loritts, Vice President of Regions

The field personnel were touched by the humility of each vice president who accepted an important role in the Send Network while simultaneously continuing in his personal, vibrant ministry. Today's Send Network mission personnel are continually impressed and inspired by those who actively practice ministry while offering administrative and visionary leadership in larger mission collaborations. The two day event marked a renewed focus on the urgency and sacrifice it is going to take to see churches planting churches everywhere for everyone.

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.

Revitalization

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – Michigan Baptists are making church revitalization a priority in 2023. The entire Frances Brown State Mission Offering for 2022 is being given by Michigan Baptists to

help churches seeking revitalization and will continue to be received through the end of the year. Churches helping churches is just one of the many benefits our network provides.

Why revitalization? Every year approximately 900 Southern Baptist Churches close their doors forever. It's an alarming number!

Rob Peters, founder of a revitalization focused ministry called Corpus Vitae, points out that the need for revitalized churches is becoming more urgent. If 80% of American churches are in some stage of decline or plateau, that means around 38,000 Southern Baptist churches fall into that category.

"We need a new wave of church revitalization to sweep across America," says Peters. "We need to see something in God's churches that we haven't seen in our lifetimes. And that is a renewal and revival that only God's Spirit can do."

Multiple state conventions and churches in several countries are using the six-step biblically based process Peters developed to come alongside churches seeking revitalization. It is a resource that the BSCM is making available to Cooperating Michigan Baptist Churches that see the need to revitalize ministry for the days ahead. The Corpus refocus process equips pastors and church leaders to lead their church to experience renewed mission and ministry. The goal is to help restore purpose, vibrancy, and health to the ministry.

With the tools the ReFocus process provides, pastors and church leaders evaluate the current state of the ministry, consider how to reposition it for maximum impact, develop all the directional aspects of ministry, create a custom plan for disciple making, tailor a leadership development strategy, and build a custom plan for implementation (www.CorpusVitae.org).

This plan incorporates six Biblical steps of church revitalization:

Discovery

A multi-step process designed to synthesize data and discoveries, helping you to accurately evaluate the current state of the church.

Convergence

We look together at your church's purposes, your leadership's passion, and your community's potential. As we look at these three areas and where they meet, it helps us to identify where to position your church's ministries for maximum impact.

Pyramid

An in-depth series of exercises designed to develop all the directional elements for the church, including mission, strategy, vision, values, annual plans, and goals.

Path

A process that helps develop a customized plan for evangelism and discipleship through your church.

Ladder

Creation of a customized plan for leadership development and deployment through your church, using a four-fold framework (character, competency, chemistry, and concern for the mission).

Toolkit

Practical resources and ideas (provided throughout the year as you implement your plan) to help pastors and church leaders launch the new vision and build momentum toward its fulfillment.

For more information or to sign up for a Zoom call with Rob Peters, contact Mike@bscm.org.

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.

An invitation to solitude and silence

by Coye Bouyer

LANSING, MI – Suddenly, out of nowhere she was consumed with thoughts that led her to believe she was functioning in selfishness. Had she somehow extricated herself from all her responsibilities? Would her husband really be able to handle a full-time job along with managing the home front? What about work, can I really afford to be so completely out of the loop at such an important time at the office? What about the girls; I am the mother of two teenagers who have their own share of high school dramas, and what if I am not there. Overwhelmed by such questions, Martha pondered, as she sat in silence, suddenly feeling ambushed by her own fears. She asked herself, *“Do I really have the right to pull away*

completely to attend a silent retreat in order to give God my undivided and uninterrupted attention?"

Often, when we allow ourselves to become aware of such concerns, we feel anxiety, we sense and experience overwhelming questioning of our behavior and even our motives when all we really want is simply break-away and spend some much-needed time with the LORD.

In the Bible, Abraham is invited to the desert to experience God. Moses requests that Pharaoh allow the Israelites to go out into the wilderness to celebrate a feast and spend time with Him (Ex. 5:1). God will also request that three times a year the men of Israel go up and meet with Him (Ex. 23:17). We find David in the shepherd's field or in some cave running from Saul. He is alone, in silence and solitude, taking time to pray, reflect, write, and simply spend time with the LORD. Even Jesus (God in flesh) will arise early in the morning, find a secluded place so that He might pray (Mark 1:35).

So why do we feel guilty when we take time to stop our regular daily lives in order to spend what is probably much needed time with the LORD?

Martha, sitting there in the airport wrestling with her thoughts and the overwhelming sense that she was so selfish to even have considered this time away for a retreat with the LORD, began to sense a gentle voice from the inside asking her, *"Will you trust me to care for these things? Can you trust that I love your family, friends, co-workers, etc. more than you do and I will care for them while you are giving this time and attention to our relationship? Will you trust Me? Will you trust Me to keep working to bring forth my good intentions in our life without your direct involvement, at least for a few days?"*

In that very moment Martha took a deep breath, closed her eyes and simply said, *"Yes Lord, I trust You."* For the first time in a very long time, Martha let go of her cares and concerns, she relinquished her responsibilities' and decided to let God be God.

Why don't you and I make a concerted effort to spend some alone time with God. To separate ourselves from the busyness of life, the stress of work and the chaos that is often in our homes. But not simply a vacation, although they are nice, but a retreat with the LORD, a time where we can sit in silence, pray periodically and simply rest in the presence of our God. But how do we do this when life seems to have so much that we must do? Isn't that selfish to fall back from our responsibilities?

No, in fact we should not only want to do this, we need to do this because it is when we take time away from what we do to allow God to do what He can do that we really begin to TRUST Him even above ourselves. We are not selfish when we do this, but we are selfless as we not only begin to trust God to take care of them, but we also allow God to take care of us. God Bless!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

There's always something to be thankful for

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Here at Bambi Lake we have a sign in our lobby that reminds us “there’s always something to be thankful for”. On multiple occasions reading this sign has altered my attitude and changed my down-look to an up-look at our heavenly father in thankfulness.

So since this article is for the “Thanksgiving” month of November I felt compelled to write down a few thoughts of thankfulness. Maybe you and I can both be encouraged and reminded that “there is always something to be thankful for.”

I am thankful - for life, for my heavenly papa, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, the Bible, the power of the Gospel - my wife Jackie, my kids-Julia, Noah, Emily, Grace (Noah’s wife), my dogs, my job, my church, my parents, my brother and his family, all my relatives, my too many to list friendships from multiple ministry assignments in multiple states, my Bambi family, my BSCM family.

I am thankful - for the family of God, for being chosen to be a son of God, for the salvation of all my children, for being called to serve the Body of Christ, for all the pastors and fellow ministers I’ve served with who have taught me much, and still continue to do so. For death and new life, for the life-giving, victorious, redemption power of Christ’s blood shed on my behalf, for amazing Grace and endless mercy lavished on me by Jesus just because it brings him glory, and pleasure and He loves me so much!

I am thankful - for miracles, God’s divine healing and interventions in my life, for the journey and the process of becoming more like Christ, for the smooth sailing and turbulent seas, for circumstance beyond my control and blessings I don’t deserve, for givers and takers in my life, lovers and haters because they teach me humility and how to show grace.

I am thankful - for material stuff I can share with others, for money, for food-especially barbecue and pizza and low country boils and bacon, for modern technology, cell phones and face-time, for air conditioning and heat, for fast cars, for fun hobbies, for music, for musical instruments especially cool guitars I can't play well but love to look at, for a good book, for my house, a warm bed, a big TV that I won for free, for my clothes, for my shoes, for a good winter coat and waterproof boots, for snow (except after march), for beautiful lakes, for the ocean, sunrises and sunsets, for starry nights and full moons, for bonfires in the fall and s'mores, for wildlife and wildflowers, for the colors of fall and the green of spring - the magnificence of God's creation is beyond human words!

WOW! Thank-you Jesus for how much you love us - because of You "there is always something to be thankful for"!

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.

A cheerful heart

by Karen Blanchard

SHELBY TOWNSHIP – Have you ever been around someone who just radiates positivity? This type of person lights up the room with their presence and vibrance for life. I have a friend like this; she loves life and loves people. She makes it her mission to make people feel loved and cared for. My spirits are always lifted after spending time with her. I don't know about you, but I like to be around people like this. Positive people have a way of helping others see the good in the world, which in turn helps to shift our perspective higher.

The Bible says,

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.
– Proverbs 17:22 NIV

When we surround ourselves with positive, Spirit-filled people, they begin to rub off on us and make a difference in our lives. Proverbs says, having a cheerful heart is *good medicine*. Do you ever wonder why you feel the way you do or act a certain way - whether good or bad? Below are a few suggestions on how to develop a cheerful heart.

1 – Take inventory

I am a firm believer that we need many different types of people in our lives. However, we need to be careful whom we allow in our inner circle. The people we allow to speak into our lives make a huge difference to the state of our hearts. Our inner circle of friends should be people who know the Lord, build us up, hold us accountable, and encourage us to be better.

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.
– Proverbs 13:20 NIV

2 – Recognize negativity

Have you ever heard the saying, “Negativity breeds negativity?” This is true! Negativity does not come from God! The more you are around negativity, the more it seeps into your soul and will affect your heart. Negative people are draining and toxic. It is important that you recognize negativity as soon as possible and put a stop to it. Negative talk and behavior will spread like a cancer if not stopped!

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation...
– Philippians 2:14-15a NIV

3 – Speak life

The words we say reflect the state of our hearts. Are you careful about what you share with others or do you allow whatever comes to mind come out of your mouth? This takes some training and discipline, but by the power of the Holy Spirit we can overcome it. We want to speak words that are life giving and not life sucking.

Do not let unwholesome talk come from your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
– Ephesians 4:29 NIV

4 – Stay connected

It is vital to the state of our hearts to stay connected to our true source of life, Jesus. We must make time to meet with God and read his Word. By reading God’s Word, he will teach us what we need to know and guide us down the right paths. When we take time to meet with him, he breathes new life into our dry bones. He lifts our spirit and gives us what we need to face the days ahead. As we go deeper into the Word and learn more about God, we begin to realize he is all we need.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

– John 15:5 NIV

As we enter this season of thanksgiving, I pray you reflect on the state of your heart. Ask God to reveal to you anything in your heart that is keeping you from having a cheerful heart. Then pray and confess those things to God and ask him to give you a new heart, *a cheerful heart*.

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!

The attitude of thankfulness

by Chip Faulkner

HILLSDALE, MI – Have you ever received a word of encouragement or a gift that improved your whole attitude? Opening a card from our local hospital, I was shocked to find a handwritten thank you note and a \$100.00 gift certificate to a nice restaurant in town.

Over the decades of ministry, I've been to many hospitals making countless pastoral visits, but this was the first time a hospital ever sent me a gift! The hospital administrators wrote of their appreciation for the difference I was making in their patients' lives. Their kindness and generosity lifted my outlook, and I've been telling others about what was done for me.

In Psalm 16 we don't find David in a hospital, but his heart did need healing. What began with a prayer asking for protection soon turned into praise in recognition of God's unexpected manner of provision. David's whole mindset improved as he learned that the safest refuge during any attack is in finding his ultimate pleasure in the presence of God.

David realized that the strongest defense was in trusting God as his highest delight. From this vantage point David was then able to look beyond his mortal life towards a secure eternity of abundant joy.

Attitudes are shaped from habits of thought which in turn influence behavior. The inspired truths of Psalm 16 can be used to diagnose our attitudes, particularly when external enemies or inner fears are festering. We can allow our conduct to be held captive by our circumstances, or we can choose to find freedom within the "beautiful boundaries" provided as a portion of our

inheritance in Christ.

Because God is always present to guide us, we can rejoice in the security He provides. Delighting in God is a product of learning to trust in His counsel. The path of life God has chosen for each of us will hold challenging days and long nights yet practicing appreciation in all situations will help keep attitudes well adjusted.

Receiving a thank you card with a gift certificate is encouraging. Even better is finding joyful contentment and blessed calm in the presence of our God who holds our future. We can be grateful for the confidence that no matter what we face, God is always near as our refuge. Praise really does change perspective.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

First-Person: More are answering the call. Now what?

by Brandon Porter

More than 1,100 potential IMB missionaries are now in a pipeline awaiting preparation and assignment. Isn't that exciting? It is an answer to prayer and a work of God.

This encouraging response to the call of the Great Commission is evidence of God's work to bring all people to Him through Jesus Christ.

When I hear that others are answering God's call to go to the nations, I want to do my part. Don't you? Maybe we aren't all called to physically go to the nations, but there is a role for all believers.

Upon hearing the news of the 1,100 missionaries in the pipeline, I was immediately reminded of an [article IMB President Paul Chitwood wrote](#) in 2021. In the piece, he specifically asked us to focus on increasing the mission force, to give toward it and to pray for it.

In that piece, Chitwood lamented, "Those of us who have been in a Southern Baptist church since at least 2008 should be sobered by the fact that gospel troops have been cut by nearly half on our watch."

He issued a call to action for frontline missionaries, “We have a target of seeing the number of frontline missionaries grow by 500 over the next five years. And here’s what we need to do right now: we need to deliver the draft notice. We need to get the word out. We need to call out the called and encourage every pastor and preacher across the SBC to call out the called.”

God is at work and His people are responding.

We may not all be sent to the uttermost, but we are all called to pray and give for the sake of the Great Commission.

This is a not a new call to action. Another Paul, the apostle Paul, called on Christians to contribute to the needs of the saints. ([Romans 12:13](#))

That same apostle looked forward to his own personal help from those Roman Christians as he continued in his mission work ([Romans 15:24](#)). He was counting on them to help carry the gospel to those who had never heard.

The need for us to increase our giving to reach the nations is great. “I’m asking Southern Baptists for more money, the money it will take to support those 500 more missionaries,” Chitwood said.

The apostle Paul was also counting on Christians to pray for missions and church planting. In at least five different places in the New Testament, he asks believers to pray for his mission work.

In the summer of 2021, messengers to the SBC annual meeting in Nashville passed [Vision 2025](#). Two aspects in that urgent vision play a key role in news of the increased pipeline. First, messengers agreed to pray and act to see a net gain of 500 full-time, fully funded missionaries through the IMB.

God is at work and His people are responding.

There is also a call to increase giving through the Cooperative Program (CP). The way to get the missionaries from the pipeline to the field is by giving generously through the Cooperative Program.

God is at work. Will His people respond?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Porter serves as associate vice president for Convention News at the SBC Executive Committee.

Pray for gospel transformation

by Hugh Johnson

Help reach the worshipers of Santa Muerte

Casting a long shadow across one of Mexico City's poorest and most crime-ridden neighborhoods stands a seven-story image of Santa Muerte – the Saint of Death. She takes the form of a human skeleton clad in black plastic sheeting with arms outstretched, inviting residents in from the streets to make offerings of flowers, fruit, burned cigarettes and alcoholic drinks.

Even in a country known for its fascination with death (which is celebrated every November during the Day of the Dead festivities), Santa Muerte seems macabre and gruesome.

The Catholic church denounces devotion to the folk saint as cult, but for her many worshipers, the city's poorest-of-the-poor, Santa Muerte promises prosperity, healing, protection and vengeance in criminal gang battles. "The bony lady," as her followers call her, is believed to be the one who will come to collect us when it's our time to die.

The cult of Santa Muerte was popularized by Jonathan Legaría, the ambitious son of a middle-class family in Mexico City. Always fascinated by magic and the occult, Legaría convinced many that he had healing powers.

After his violent death in a hail of bullets in 2008, at just 26, the cult grew rapidly under the organization of his now-deceased mother, Enriqueta Vargas. There are now an estimated 10 million followers — not just in Mexico, but across the Americas. You can even find altars to the saint in various cities in the U.S.

Carlos Llambes, International Mission Board missionary, has ministered among followers of this cult.

"They think the only thing in life that is sure is death, so we better be on good terms with her," Llambe says, explaining the mindset behind the worship of death.

As many parts of the United States participate in fall festivals and Halloween, join IMB missionaries in prayer. Use the decorations as a visual reminder to pray for:

- the people in Mexico City who are deceived by this false saint and its false prophets. Pray that they will see their sin in taking shelter from death, covenanting with her for eternal security. Pray for them to understand that the only truly sure thing in this life is Jesus.

- God to sustain missionaries and evangelical Christians ministering in the midst of much spiritual darkness. Join them in praying that people will choose to follow the true God of eternal life who casts out fear.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hugh Johnson is a retired IMB worker.

Gloria Gaynor of ‘I Will Survive’ shares God in sacred, secular music

by Diana Chandler

GREEN BROOK, NJ (BP) – Gloria Gaynor recalls the heyday of her iconic Grammy-winning disco hit “I Will Survive” when the Lord reined her in.

“I think I was about to go off the deep end, to make a long story short, and the Lord grabbed me in my collar and said that’s enough. I mean, literally,” she told Baptist Press years after the jolt she experienced during a party she hosted in her home in 1984.

“I was visibly shaken. I thought everyone else in the room saw it, and I went into the bathroom shaking and crying and realizing that the Lord had grabbed me, that I was about to go beyond what He was willing to allow me to go as His child.”

Gaynor spent a year’s sabbatical in 1988 discerning God’s call on her life. Musically, would she adopt the sacred and let go of the secular? Would she sing a combination?

“There’s a long way between the secular and the sacred, but not everything is purely sacred or purely secular,” Gaynor said. “After that year, He sent me back with this. ‘My Word speaks of all of the issues of life. What would make you think that I wouldn’t want you to sing about all of the issues of life from My point of view?’ And that’s what I do in my show.”

Gaynor’s sole Gospel album would come decades later. The Grammy-winning “Testimony” released in 2019 by Gaither Music Group includes vocals by Bart Millard, Jason Crabb, Yolanda Adams and Mike Farris. The 20th studio album of her career garnered her second Grammy, this time for Roots Gospel Album.

“I’ve always believed that Gospel music or Christian music should minister to people and should do what the Bible does; it should make known to them the love, the knowledge, the design and

desire of God's life for every human being. My purpose was to have songs that did that," she said of Testimony. "That was what I had in mind, trying to get across to them the character of God, the design of God for the life of His children."

Now 79, [Gaynor](#) spoke with Baptist Press in the midst of several projects including live performances in the U.S. and France, and a biographical documentary set to release next year.

On Nov. 1, Pure Flix will release the inspirational Christmas movie, "[The Thursday Night Club](#)," featuring Gaynor as a physician and encouraging good deeds particularly among young adults.

"I love the idea that it's young people who are learning to give back, learning to be altruistic, learning to pay it forward," she said of the movie. "I stand in awe of a God Who gives you gifts, talents, abilities, wealth and welfare to share with other people, and then blesses you even more as you share it and use it to bless others. He's amazing."

Gaynor was in her 30s when the Lord drew her back to Himself. At that time, she was riding high on I Will Survive, her disco hit in the days of vinyl records. The song was originally produced as a B-side recording designed to take a back seat. But it soared.

"When I read the lyrics, I was thinking about the fact that I'd just had surgery on my spine and I was actually standing there recording in a back brace and hoping that I would survive the surgery," she told Baptist Press. "I was thinking about the fact that my mother had only passed away a few years prior, and I was hoping to survive all of that, and survive not only her death, but survive keeping intact her memory and the things that she taught me about life. Those were the things that the song was about to me, at that point."

Her mother Quinnie Mae Proctor had been Gaynor's compass when the performer was baptized as a teenager at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Newark. But Gaynor had lost her way when God drew her back to Himself at the house party she hosted in 1984.

"That's when I really changed my life, and about a year later I found a baptismal certificate that I had completely forgotten about. When I found it, all of these memories came rushing back, about how when I was 16 years old, I'd told my mother I wanted to be baptized, I wanted to give my life to the Lord.

"And I did that. I was baptized and then I forgot about it," Gaynor said. Her mother died in 1970. "She was my rock. I lost my moral compass and completely forgot about the Lord, but praise God, He never forgot about me," Gaynor said. "And I believe that at that at that party, whatever might have gone on, He just said to the enemy, 'Not this one. This one's mine.'"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' senior writer.

How actions and attitude equal success!

by David Thompson

NASHVILLE, TN – Like beauty— success is often in the eye of the beholder.

Plato believed “Good actions give strength to ourselves and inspire good actions in others.” Let us never ever forget that the world is a stage— and others are always watching. Everything you do inspires someone to do something...good or bad.

Yet still— at the heart of true success is the idea of “Resolve.” That’s why Peter Drucker noted, “Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes, but no plans.” So, in a world of very little commitment— please know that ultimate dedication wins the day! Having noted this—it is what you do, not say that matters. Said Andrew Carnegie, “As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say, I just watch what they do.”

In a world of too many “talking heads” with too many “talking points” let us do more than we say! Along that vein, it’s relevant to know how our framers understand success.

“Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have NO meaning.”— Benjamin Franklin. Ole Ben was right.....why? Who you are carries more weight than words and even more than what you do.

So, what is success? Hear from one of the most successful coaches of all time, John Wooden who had similar beliefs when he preached to his team, “Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of the self-satisfaction of knowing you did your best to become the best you are capable of becoming.” And believe it or not, halfway around the world, and in a completely different society with completely different ideas, one idealist notes a very similar thought said Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, “The meaning of earthly existence lies, not as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but in the development of the soul.”

You may be thinking this, “Well they don’t know the struggles I have had” maybe not, but my guess is they learned to deal with it. And so, Frederick Douglas touted, “If there is no struggle.... there is no progress.” If I have learned anything— it is that successful folk never ever allow themselves to make excuses!!

Parenthetically— the attitude and mindset of achievers is often a matter of the heart, soul, and spirit. Ralph Waldo Emerson believed— “Don’t be pushed by your problems. Be led by your dreams.”

Also, herein lies yet another matter of the heart to consider. So, what is your crowning achievement? What is the crown you wear? (The Invisible Crown). Said William Shakespeare, “My crown is called content, a crown that seldom kings enjoy.”

And that being factual, the opposite is true to form “worry” must be the opposite of said contentment. Hear the lighthearted heart of Robert Frost, “The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work.” So even though it sounds like a line from a cheesy song, “Don’t worry...Be Happy!” Now surely there is more than that. I love what Albert Einstein taught, “Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value.”

So maybe you just need a new motto, by the way, each state has one, Ohio finally got one, it took them 156 years but they finally did and they got it right, “With God, all things are possible.”

So, if everything else has failed for you, I dare you to just try that and trust the God who alone can be trusted!
That equals success!!

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.

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