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It is well with my soul

WESTLAND – I can remember as a young child listening to the lyrics of the song “It is well with my Soul” by Horatio Spafford, being sung by my grandmother in worship service and trying to understand exactly what the words meant.

Now that I am an adult this is one of my all-time favorite hymns to listen to when I just need some reassurance from the Lord. Around this time of the year the holidays are hard for some people dealing with grief, loss, and loneliness. With God we will never be alone in this world. God is with us through all our life’s journey.

Psalms 46:1-3 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. Therefore, we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with its turmoil.”

This scripture gives us reassurance that no matter what we are going through, we must go to the Lord with it. Trying to handle our problems on our own won’t get us anywhere, but further and further in a hole. When we feel sad from the loss of a loved one the Lord will ease all your pain.

I am not saying that the pain will go away over night, but he will be there for your every need. Before we can hear the sweet words from the Lord we must start with prayer. You can start like this... Lord, help me to be more intentional when it comes to being in your word! Lord, help me to build a closer relationship with you! Romans 8:28 says “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” CSB

Some of us may be dealing with loneliness at this time of the year. Not all of us have large families, or families that we have close relationships with that we could be around for the holidays. As Christians we should be those open arms for people that you know who would benefit from being around you and your family for the holiday.

If the holiday is over it's okay to open your home to invite someone over for a meal or for coffee from time to time. The Lord blesses us with things so that we can share them with others, not to hold everything to ourselves. Sometimes even if you offer a phone call just to chat with someone who lives alone, it may be just as good as an invite to your home.

When I wake up in the morning, I ask the Lord how can I be used today? That is a great way for us all to start our day. Everyday my hope is to be more and more like Jesus so that when the storms come, I can say, “It is well with my Soul.”

The writer wrote this song because he lost his whole family in a short period of time. He couldn't see the big picture at the current moment, but he knew that it would be okay because of his trust in God.

What do you do in trying circumstances? Can we say "it is well with my soul" when everything is going badly? I know that God has a purpose for all our lives, and we must trust him in everything that we do.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Wimberly is the 1st Lady of One Mission Church in Westland Michigan. Jessica and Pastor Antonio have 4 children, Savannah 18, Antonio II 11, Alexandria 1, and Anthony 7 months. Jessica is the Director of the Children's Ministry, Women's Ministry, and assists with the Media Ministry at One Mission Church. A nurse by profession, loves art and spending lots of time with her family. Outside of family time, she enjoys arts and crafts, writing, fellowship with her church family, and helping seniors in the community.

In planning for 2025 improvement, think realistic and enlist others

DALLAS (BP) — The road to building better habits doesn't start tomorrow, and it doesn't start alone, GuideStone Financial Resources director of Pastoral Wellness Mark Dance says in an upcoming episode of SBC This Week.

Speaking with Executive Committee vice president for Convention Communications Brandon Porter, Dance relayed when a year ago he realized the time he spent traveling for work was excessive.

"It was not sustainable," he said. "So I had to apologize to [my wife] and ask for her help. Before I said 'yes' to another event this year, I ran it by her so that she could help look at my calendar and see if this was something that was too much."

Speaking as someone in finance would, Dance encouraged an audit of one's physical, financial and mental health. Create small, short-term goals where the wins can be celebrated early and often and results can be felt at home and in leadership roles.

“I want to manage my life as well as the Bible tells us to do. As in 1 Timothy, 3, all the leaders of the church are to manage our lives, lead our lives before we can lead our family in ministry,” he said. “It’s just a practical way of doing that.”

Dance covered these topics in his book “Start to Finish: The Pastor’s Guide to Leading a Resilient Life and Ministry.”

Areas of health are assessed in light of the Great Commandment with a 30-day challenge assessing spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health goals. Readers are encouraged to use whatever word or phrase they wish – resolution, spending plan, budget, etc. – to establish something sustainable and shareable with someone for accountability.

Discipline with a measure of flexibility help us take small steps toward goals.

“One-year [goals] work for some people. But for most of us, we need some early wins,” said Dance. “It might even help ... for someone to do a one-week or one-month goal instead of 30 days, or 30 days instead of a quarter, or a quarter instead of a year.

“Break down a short-term goal and share that to celebrate along the way. Don’t freak out when you fall short, but get back on it because it’s really more about the kind of person you want to become than it is about the goal that you want to achieve.”

Just as the “why” is crucial for any steps toward self-improvement, he pointed out, so is the simple act of moving forward.

“In James Clear’s ‘Atomic Habits’ he said when preparation becomes a form of procrastination, you need to change something. You don’t want to merely be planning; you want to be practicing. You want to master a habit.

“The key is to start with repetition, not perfection.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley is chief national correspondent for Baptist Press.

The Southern Baptist President – More or Less

Editor's note: *Former President Jimmy Carter died on Dec. 29, 2024, at the age of 100 after spending more than a year in hospice care. Rosalynn, his wife of 77 years, preceded him in death at the age of 96 on Nov. 19, 2023.*

Jimmy Carter put a new face on Southern Baptists, one that Southern Baptists weren't always comfortable with. Elected in 1976, he came into office as the Evangelical wave was rising. Billy Graham was the defining father of the movement. Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Jim and Tammy Bakker were beginning their ascent, and the Moral Majority hadn't yet been named.

For America, Carter bore the promise of peace after Vietnam and trust after Watergate. He was down to earth, literally, a Georgia peanut farmer who downplayed his education as a nuclear engineer. He was an outsider to a Washington that had lowland character long before the Potomac basin was called a swamp. Most important, he was a man of faith. With Jimmy Carter, America would have opportunity to see how a born-again Christian would be governed in his leadership by his personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Carter, the 39th president, wasn't the first Southern Baptist in the Oval Office. Harry Truman identified as Baptist, although he had connections to two other denominations. In his later years, he supported First Baptist Church of Grandview, Missouri, attending their building dedication in 1960. Truman lamented that he couldn't attend worship more often, but felt he was a bit of a spectacle and a distraction when he showed up in the congregation.

And, of course, Bill Clinton identified as Southern Baptist. He attended a couple of the large National Baptist churches in D.C. on occasion, and he went with his wife to Foundry United Methodist sometimes. But some of his political positions and moral choices put him at odds with many Southern Baptists. So Carter, in my mind, stands as the Southern Baptist President. Until he wasn't.

After President Carter took the oath, he danced with his wife, Rosalynn, at the inaugural balls. There was much talk about a dancing Baptist at the time. Then he said he would allow wine to be served at state dinners, but to his credit, no hard liquor. Teetotaling Baptists were glad to hear that about whiskey, even if wine seemed a compromise.

And some of the Carter family was comical. His brother, Billy, if not a black sheep, was a speckled one, with a beer brand named for him. His mother, Miz Lillian, was the opinionated, hard-edged deep South grandmother many of us knew. There was a sitcom called *Carter Country* about a small-town sheriff in rural Georgia that played the Carter brand of Southernism for laughs. Even Lucille Ball returned for a TV special as Lucy Carter, who learned she was related to the president.

But Jimmy Carter was serious. He was genial, affable, and pleasant, often seen smiling, but he was serious about peace in the Middle East and the implications of his faith on his work. He also wrestled unsuccessfully with the economy. And when he was unable to free the U.S. hostages in Iran, America wanted a new direction. Southern Baptists, in the main, were with them. The former president teaching Sunday school.

It is Carter's work after his presidency that is best remembered and celebrated at the time of his passing. Carter cast the model for former presidents, advocating for peace and combatting homelessness. How many videos have we seen across 40 years of Jimmy and Rosalynn on worksites for Habitat for Humanity, encouraging others to help build houses and opportunity for poor people? Carter put feet to his faith. And hands and nails.

After returning to Plains, he taught Sunday School every weekend he was in town, often filling the sanctuary at Maranatha Baptist Church with tourists. It should be noted that Maranatha, built in 1978, supports both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. And the church declares its adherence to 1963 version of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, rather than *BF&M (2000)*. And as Carter has moved in one direction while the Convention moved in another, some have asked how Southern Baptist this president was.

But today, how much does that matter? Our Baptist brother and president led by faith, in and out of office, and set a high standard for us all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Reed is the editor of the Illinois Baptist Media

This article first appeared in the [Illinois Baptist](#). Used with permission.

Church planter reaching Appalachia's booming Hispanic population by looking, listening

HUNTINGTON, W. Va. (BP) – Henry Garcia had no desire to leave his native Colombia. The college-educated and seminary-trained Christian leader was responsible over 20 years for more than 30 church plants in Colombia, Costa Rica and Peru, and for the development of most of the pastors serving the ever-multiplying plants.

But then, "God put the United States in my heart," Garcia said. "I asked God, 'I want to go to the United States to plant churches and learn English.' Two weeks later I received a message from

the U.S.: ‘Do you want to come to West Virginia to plant churches in Spanish and have an opportunity to learn English?’

“God answered my prayer! I stopped praying and said yes,” Garcia told Baptist Press in fluent if somewhat accented English. “God connects everything.”

That was in February 2014. Five pastors in the tri-state area of West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky who wanted to begin a Spanish-speaking ministry had heard of Garcia’s church planting success. They saw the need but none of them knew how to reach Hispanic people hiding almost in plain sight of the dominant English-speaking culture.

“They told me, ‘We don’t know how to plant Hispanic churches; that’s the reason we brought you here, but we want to help you,’” Garcia said. “This was a new experience for me, this context and the help it requires. This is why we pray to God for team members, for support and for help.”

The tri-state area located in the Appalachian Plateau is mostly small towns down mountain roads. The Hispanic church planter was lent a Jeep Cherokee and several other vehicles to use for the ministry before being given a Toyota Edge.

“I follow Jesus’ example, looking for people, listening for people who speak Spanish,” Garcia said. “This state – West Virginia – and the tri-state area is very different contextually from other places in the U.S. with Spanish-speakers. Not so many people here, but from more varied countries.”

Soon after he arrived in Huntington, [W.Va.](#), which turned out to be a strategic location for ministry among Hispanics throughout the tri-state area, Garcia met Evelyn “Evie” Davis, now a cardiovascular medicine department administrator and then a member of the missions committee, worship arts team and choir at River Cities Community Church.

A single missionary set for departure to a former Soviet Union nation, she nonetheless agreed to sing for a Christmas program Garcia led because she had learned to sing in Spanish when serving a Spanish-speaking church as a pianist while living in Annapolis, Md.

Both quickly realized God had brought them together. They entered a traditional – family to family – courtship that grew into marriage in February 2016, canceling her plans for Kazakhstan though in the future their ministry might include missions outreach as God allows, Evie Garcia told Baptist Press.

“Pastor Henry learned the people and their cultures,” she said. “He might have a dozen people at a Bible study, with two from Venezuela, two from Mexico, four from Colombia, three from Honduras and one from Ecuador, for example.”

Garcia said he realized he needed to change from his typical methods of starting churches because the Spanish-speakers he met included people from professional backgrounds – physicians, attorneys, business leaders, people usually with stable families – as well as the more transient restaurant workers, landscapers and others in service industries, both documented and undocumented.

“I prayed, ‘Lord, I need you God to give me instructions and wisdom for what is the best strategy,’” Garcia said. The word “pie” (pronounced “pee-eh”) – which means “foot” in Spanish – came to his mind: “‘Planting Iglesias [churches] Extraordinaria,’” [PIE] as in, *How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news* (Isaiah 52.7).

Garcia held the first service of Iglesia Hay Esperanza – There is Hope Church – in Huntington in October 2014. Since then, he has started Spanish-speaking churches in Ashland, Ky., in 2022; Cross Lanes, WVa., in 2023; Beckley, WVa., in September 2024; and in 2025 plans to start work in Lewisburg, WVa.

The concentration in West Virginia is because the Spanish-speaking population in West Virginia has increased by 167 percent since 2020 and is expected to double within three years, West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists Executive Director Eric Ramsey told messengers at the state convention’s early November annual meeting.

There were no Spanish-speaking churches in West Virginia before Garcia’s arrival.

The reason for the Hispanic influx, Garcia believes, is the relative low cost of living and the rise of companies moving into the area who need employees.

The church planter’s strategy is to build relationships, such as by playing soccer or volleyball after 10 p.m. Sunday evenings, which is the only time restaurant workers are not working; meeting up for lunch with a college professor; or just walking the streets and past stores, listening for the sound of Spanish-speaking voices.

Another way is to provide a meal after services. This might put a landscaper at the same table with a businessman, where they talk as equals. The mealtimes (which routinely last longer than the 90-minute worship services) often attract people who do not attend services, people eager for conversation in their heart language.

“We pray for God to give us wisdom to integrate the different cultures in our churches,” Garcia said. “We need to pray these people out of hiding. Documented and undocumented, they all need Jesus.”

The church planter spoke of a man from Mexico resistant for months to his invitations to church services. “There was a moment when I think I am wasting my time with him, but one day he was in the church and continued coming every Sunday,” Garcia said. “Every Sunday he would have a question about the Bible.

“He was discovering many things from the Bible when he was alone in his life and one day told me he was going back to Mexico to get his documentation to be able to stay in the United States,” Garcia said. “Now he is a pastor in Mexico.”

Garcia made friends with another man who in time left the area for Wisconsin, where he died. The only thing in his wallet was Garcia’s business card.

‘Finally the fruit is coming’

After the COVID pandemic, Garcia started a twice-monthly free medical clinic still in operation for Spanish-speakers, staffed by Christian physicians who are bilingual.

Project Eliana is planned to start in 2025 as a pro-life center for Spanish-speakers. There also is a need for a classroom setting for the residency training of pastors and church planters, as well as a home for church planters and missionaries who move to the area to help reach Hispanics.

The Garcias recently purchased a building on a large corner property where they plan to house all three endeavors: Project Eliana, training center and missionary home. There is a need for renovations and expansion of the three-bedroom, two-bathroom residence on the expansive property.

“This was a faith act,” Garcia said. “We are asking God to provide the team members, the financial and prayer support, and the help to do the work He has called us to do.”

Garcia remains committed also to the work in Colombia, where his workers minister each week to about 60 youngsters from the poorest neighborhoods in Medellin, by providing food and Bible instruction. Mission teams, both Spanish- and English-speaking, from the tri-state area assist at least once a year.

“We have people in different stages of the [training] process,” Garcia said. “Many years ago I am training people, and now have people ready to serve, and also new people at the same time. I ask God to provide for workers.”

A couple is coming in March from Costa Rica to start in a residency program with Garcia. “Pastor Henry needed to shift his strategies many times because of what was going on and what we were learning, and now, just now, finally the fruit is coming,” Evie Garcia said. “It’s a beautiful thing the Lord is doing.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen L. Willoughby is a national correspondent for Baptist Press.

Looking forward, moving forward

FLUSHING – As we enter 2025, it's easy to let it arrive before we've truly prepared for what's ahead. At the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM), we're not only looking forward to the opportunities God has in store, but are also committed to moving forward to see His plans fulfilled. If we want to experience everything God has for us, we must do more than look ahead—we must take active steps of faith to move ahead into His purpose.

Looking Forward

The Bible reminds us in Jeremiah 29:11:

“For I know the plans I have for you”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

God has incredible plans for us, plans that we may not even fully understand yet. As we look forward, we need to seek His direction for our churches and ministries. Together, we have the opportunity to advance the Gospel in ways that transform lives, communities, and even nations.

At the BSCM, we are committed to helping churches take their next step to accelerate Gospel movement. But this cannot happen without seeking God first. I invite you to join me in prayer, asking God to reveal His plans and to give us the wisdom and courage to follow His leading. What role is God calling your church to play in this greater movement? How can we, together, embrace His vision to make disciples and spread the Gospel to every corner of Michigan and beyond?

Moving Forward

Looking forward is vital, but it is not enough. We must also be willing to take intentional steps toward what God is calling us to do. James 1:22 challenges us:

“But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” The time for action is now.

In 2025 we want to provide opportunities for churches to:

- **Build Kingdom Bridges:** Collaborate with other churches and partners to strengthen Gospel unity and advance God’s mission together.
- **Pursue Focus:** Embrace who God is uniquely calling your church to be, rather than trying to replicate another church’s strategy or vision.
- **Normalize Sentness:** Actively participate in sharing the Gospel boldly near and far around the world and planting churches everywhere for everyone in a world in desperate need of the hope of the Gospel.

God's call on our lives and our churches is not passive—it demands that we act. This means embracing both the opportunities and the challenges ahead, trusting that He is working through us as we step out in faith.

What Is Your Next Move?

What is God calling you and your church to do in the days ahead? Are you willing to do more than just see the vision? Will you take the steps to make it a reality?

Together, we can accomplish far more than we could ever achieve alone. By building strong relationships grounded in the Gospel, we can partner effectively to see God's Kingdom advance. The Gospel unites us in mission, reminding us that we are one body with one purpose: to proclaim Christ to a lost and dying world.

As we move into 2025, let's commit to seeking God's vision, taking bold action, and partnering together to accomplish His work. The future is bright because it is held by the One who is faithful. Let's move forward with confidence, trusting that He will guide us every step of the way.

Are you ready to look forward and move forward? Let's take this journey together—advancing Gospel movement, planting churches, and sharing the hope of Christ in every community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ed Emmerling is the Executive Director of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM). Ed was privileged to be the pastor of Westside Church Flushing since 2002. Ed and his wife Reneé have 4 children and 5 grandchildren.

3 Kick-offs in 2025

PLYMOUTH – Kick-offs, turf-stained jerseys, injury reports, and stadiums filled with tens of thousands of screaming sports fanatics help us make it through the cold winter in Michigan. If you have not put these important dates on your calendar, let me help you with three upcoming events:

College Championship

First, the College Football Playoff National Championship will be held on Monday, January 20, at 7:30 p.m. at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia. ESPN will broadcast the game.

Super Bowl

Second, the 59th (LIX) Super Bowl will occur Sunday night, February 9, at 5:30 pm at the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana. FOX will televise the AFC-NFC match.

Language/Ethnic – Send Network Michigan

Third, in 2025, along with key leaders, I will roll out a platform providing a robust gathering, online and in person, where Send Network Michigan and Michigan Baptists can rally together with a vision to “join in God’s activity to see His Kingdom expand in Michigan by at least 1% over the next decade” among the language/ethnic peoples who live between our shorelines, state borders, and the international border.

“Language/Ethnic—Send Network Michigan” is part of the Send Network’s “family of churches planting churches everywhere for everyone.” That mission will be on display every day in 2025, and five values will guide our work together.

1. **Seek First the Kingdom** – God is at work locally and globally.
2. **Deepen Devotion** – Without prayer and the Word, we are powerless.
3. **Stick Together** – We are a family united by a mission.
4. **Think Multiplication** – God’s global mission demands disciples and churches that multiply.
5. **Engage Your City** – The gospel changes lives, families, and communities.

Frequently Asked Questions?

Question: Who is welcome to join Language/Ethnic – Send Network Michigan?

Answer: Everyone is welcome to join! From English speakers to every other language/ethnic group in Michigan, we want everyone to participate. This effort is about a family of churches planting churches everywhere for everyone. We are inviting pastors, lay people, men and women.

Question: What will we do?

Answer: We will pray during Scripture-fed, Spirit-led gatherings, share best practices in open discussions, discuss current trends and innovative solutions, and invite you to participate in ministries within the state and take international mission trips.

Question: Where will all of this take place?

Answer: We will invite you to gather online and in person. We know you are busy and have many demands on your time, so we will schedule our gatherings in various ways and at multiple times to allow everyone to participate without making you travel long distances.

Question: When will we gather?

Answer: We will invite you to various gatherings until we discover a specific meeting rhythm that meets the needs of those serious about taking the Gospel and church planting from our neighborhoods to the nations.

Question: Why create this special focus group?

Answer: We are creating this unique group because language/ethnic groups face challenges, unlike English speakers. For example, how do you continue a church ministry with new generations growing up in the United States while respecting a spiritual heritage from the past?

Question: How will Language/Ethnic – Send Network Michigan work?

Answer: I will invite many into the conversations, collaborations, and the creation of strategies to help us fulfill our vision and mission. Through prayer, preparation, practice, partnership, and persistence, we will see the Lord do Ephesians 3:20 things that will exceed our requests and imaginations.

Coming First Quarter of 2025

Seek First the Kingdom – Hear from a two-year, fully-funded female missionary with the International Mission Board who lived in Europe while sharing the Gospel and discipling university students and young adults from other nations.

Stick Together – Meet a couple who are precious friends leading an English as a Second Language ministry in Dearborn, Michigan, which has the largest Arab-language population outside the Middle East. Annually, the Gospel is shared with hundreds of Muslims, and some follow through with salvation experiences or requests to learn more about the Gospel.

Engaging the Community – Listen to a Christian career woman who knows how to use resources from other readily available sources to assist incoming refugees and immigrants coming to Michigan to strengthen local church ministries.

Think Multiplication – Hear from a local pastor who created a new English church for the second and third generations whose parents and grandparents came from other countries in the Middle East. Hear how that need and vision spread throughout other language/ethnic groups.

Updates

Throughout 2025, I will share news of Language/Ethnic—Send Network Michigan on my social media sites, Facebook, X, and in emails sent out by the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Monthly articles in the Baptist Beacon, like this one, will be helpful if you share them on your social media pages and with others in your social network. Let's start passing on the news of this kick-off during 2025.

Final Thought

The National Championship and the Super Bowl will be over in less than six weeks, but we will continue to strive to plant churches and accelerate the Gospel movement every day. Would you please join the Language/Ethnic—Send Network Michigan movement in 2025? You may be the answer to the next big challenge or the ideal person for the next initiative.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tony L. Lynn is the Send Network Director for Michigan and the Language/Ethnic Church Planting Catalyst. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as a lead pastor in Michigan churches and as an international missionary, along with his wife Jamie, in the Niger Republic, France, and Canada.

How real is adoption?

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – Brown Beaver, Riki Tiki Tavi, Ricardo Montalban, Ricky, Richard, even Richard Harris Thomas. He answers to all these names. But not Kenneth James Jones.* He knows it once was his. It's on his social security card, his passport, his citizenship papers.

Once in a while he and his parents say the words out loud, "*Kenneth ... James ... Jones!*" They smile at each other like co-conspirators in a game of Monopoly or Clue. That name belongs in a story, a special kind of love story.

Richard is adopted.

As a Jones this little boy suffered rejection, beatings, and scorn. He was not loved. But now that he's a Thomas, that's all changed! He is nine years old, strong and healthy. He swims on a team, plays soccer and baseball, and does well in school. All the hours he can spare he spends hunting and fishing with his dad. Sometimes you would find it hard to reconcile this Richard with the Kenneth James Jones of seven years ago.

He's a different boy.

Last month, as we moved toward Christmas and the celebrations that go with it, God whispered the word "adoption" in my quiet time on several occasions. I began reading more about it and pondering the marvel of being adopted into the family of God. "Do parents love their adopted

children as much as their own? How natural can an adopted child feel? How real is adoption? What ideas cross-over into the conversation about spiritual adoption?"

For Richard and his parents, adoption is very real. It is for every genuine believer in Jesus, too, in a profound theological sense.

Richard did absolutely nothing to earn the love and kindness of his new parents, but they lavished their love on him from the first day they saw him. Similarly, there is nothing that we can do to earn God's love. He loves us because. Because he wants to. Because it will bring him more glory. Because of his mercy and grace.

Titus said, "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Tit. 3:5 NIV). "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God..." (Eph. 2:8 NIV). He sees us for what we really are. But he loves us anyway. He gently leads us to salvation by his Spirit, pouring out grace on every step along the way, making us part of His family. In other words, he *adopts* us.

"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba, Father*" (Rom. 8:15 NIV).

Adoption means a parent takes a child who isn't a natural son or daughter and makes the child the same as one who is naturally born. Parents give the adopted child all the privileges and love of a natural child, and it's very real.

When God adopts us, he does that, and more. He blesses us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He gives us eternal life. We become brothers and sisters to Jesus Christ (Mk. 3:34-35), heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). We are really part of the family!

Our adoption into God's forever family involves a change in our identity, our purpose, and our destiny. All of that was planned from eternity. "In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will..." (Eph. 1:4b-5 NIV). We move from slavery to sonship. From darkness to light. From curse to blessing. And once we are adopted, all the family rights become ours.

One day a teacher asked Richard when his birthday was. "January 1, 1979," Richard replied.

"When is your brother's birthday?" asked the teacher.

"April 3, 1979," he said.

"How can that be? It's the same year as yours!" said the teacher carefully.

The boy answered, "My Dad said it's ok, because one of us is adopted."

The teacher looked at Richard and cautiously asked, "Which one?"

The answer came with a big smile: "I can't remember anymore!"

Friends, when the Father adopts us, he makes us feel like we have always belonged. He gives us the Spirit of sonship, and by him we cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). The Spirit of God testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Our adoption by God is real. It’s a very special kind of love story, too.

God so loved the world and gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him could receive eternal life and be adopted into his forever family.

For that we give thanks daily and, by the grace of God, seek to live a life that will bring even more fame to the Name of Jesus.

* Note: Kenneth James Jones is not his real name

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Nebraska church welcomes prisoners to break bread ... and bonds

LINCOLN, Neb. (BP) — It happens every weekend. On Saturday the men have breakfast and join for a Bible study at Bethel Baptist Church, then do some work on the grounds. The next day they return for Sunday School and worship. Lunch follows in the fellowship hall.

Then it’s back to the Community Corrections Center of the Nebraska Penitentiary System.

For 10 years now this church that routinely runs 50-70 in attendance has welcome the men on work-release and within at least a year of fulfilling their sentence. George Darlington brought the program from the previous church he attended.

“The ministry gives these men sound Bible teaching and the feeling of acceptance,” said Darlington. “Some come to faith in Christ; some don’t.”

Any first-time visitor to a church wonders how they may fit in. Now imagine doing that and people knowing you are currently incarcerated. Suffice it to say, acceptance is big to the men, even if just for four hours.

Drug-related offenses dominate as to why they are there. No guards come with them from the prison, though Pastor R.D. Fowler's wife, Deborah, is a former corrections officer. The men receive transportation from a van rented by the church.

"It's a ministry of love," said Fowler. "You love on the guys, who are going to hear the Gospel every week. Some have said they never felt accepted before like when they came to church. You have victories and you have setbacks. But you hear how it has changed their lives."

Bible leaders from throughout the area lead the Saturday studies. Many inmates in the ministry's decade of existence have gone on to join the church alongside their families. About a dozen come Saturday, with up to around 16 on Sundays. Fowler has performed three weddings for them. Seven men were baptized this year.

They have also become part of the church's ministry. Two former prisoners play guitar for the church's worship band.

Churches have a tendency to fall into routines where things can become homogenous. Sometimes the ways the men participate and "salty" language that slips out has a healthy, [Hermans-type of influence](#) on how others see the Gospel and the need we all continually have for it.

Darlington knows well the need for giving second chances. As a defensive coach on Tom Osborne's Nebraska teams for 30 years, he observed gifted young men who made mistakes. Some took advantage of grace extended to them; some didn't.

For the church's part, Darlington has observed the impact just from where you sit during a meal.

"There is no expectation that the men sit somewhere else. People see them as human beings who happened to have gotten in trouble for something. In some cases, [church members] can relate if they have had trouble with their own children," he said.

Every prisoner's release is celebrated by the church.

"We have a party for them," Fowler said. "The men talk about how the impact this has made. Some have shared with me that it was the first time someone had baked a cake for them."

Sometimes the men remain in the area while others return to their hometowns. Unfortunately, the latter tends to lead to falling in with old crowds and bad habits. Some have found themselves back in prison and, eventually, back at Bethel with promises that this time changes are going to stick.

The ministry is geared toward helping those find solid footing in their faith. Becoming a consistent, contributing member of a local church is crucial, and a role Bethel continuously serves.

“We talk about reacclimating often for after they are released,” Darlington said. “If they return to us, it means a lot.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley is chief national correspondent for Baptist Press.

IMB missionaries make ministry a family affair

Seven-year-old Shawn will tell you all about it

If you give seven-year-old Shawn a little of your attention, he'll tell you a lot about his life in Korea. He'll also tell you about Jesus and the work his family is doing. He can describe it in English or in Korean.

One day, he came home and needed to tell his mom something. His friend at school didn't want to hear about Jesus anymore, and he wasn't sure how to share the gospel. Rather than stay disappointed, Shawn came up with a new plan.

The next day he happily reported. “I drew my friend a picture of Jesus and wrote stuff about Jesus. I told him if he didn't want to hear me talk about Jesus, then he could look at this picture and read what I wrote!”

Growing up in Seoul, Korea, Shawn is learning a lot about sharing the good news of Jesus from his parents, IMB missionaries Matt and Evelyn Podge. Both Shawn and his two-year-old sister, Corbin, are learning what it's like to live among the lost for the sake of the gospel. For the Podes, advancing the gospel in Korea means living among other families and building relationships.

“We've made our home a very open space,” Evelyn said. Referencing a group of mothers she hosts each week, Evelyn explained that people in their community don't host people in their homes or gather to talk about what's bothering them or challenges they face.

The Podges have intentionally organized their apartment to be a gathering place. Matt and Evelyn took the smallest room in the house, leaving the master suite available as a space for guests to relax on the sofa or even spend the night, if they need to. They lifted Shawn's bunk bed high so the floor was open as a larger play and learning space for children. On Mondays, when the moms gather, Matt leads the children in Bible lessons.

God blessed their efforts, and a Korean-language church plant now meets each Sunday afternoon in their apartment for worship and Bible study. Parents are learning the Bible, but they are also seeing that kids are capable of learning biblical principles and following them in obedience.

"Shawn has shown them that he has a grasp of what the Bible teaches!" Matt said. "When they doubted that kids could learn, Shawn showed them that he understood to the point he could verbalize biblical lessons in Korean."

Evelyn said when they saw Shawn has grasped the gospel, things changed with their Korean friends.

"Suddenly, they were taking notes about everything and paying attention," Evelyn said. "It was like they knew then that the Bible could change things for them."

With the moms' group, Evelyn invites them to anonymously put parenting questions or family struggles into a hat. Then they choose a situation to discuss, and Evelyn points them to guidance from the Bible.

On a recent evangelistic outing before Seoul's International Fireworks Festival in October, Matt and Evelyn were greeted warmly by many people who recognized them from the community.

Some stopped to talk, others happily took a gift of snacks and evangelistic material.

Matt explained that heavy outreach by cults in Seoul has made efforts like this difficult.

"People assume we're from cults, and they often don't want anything to do with us," he said. "But it helps that we live here and have developed trust with a lot of people."

Evelyn is quick to add how helpful the kids are to these outings. "People love the kids. Who can say 'no' to adorable kids giving you free snacks?"

And the kids happily involve themselves in the ministry. Though Corbin is too young to fully understand the reasons behind the events, she happily reached for small gift bags to give to strangers; she wanted one in each hand. And as soon as she gave—or sometimes tossed—them to strangers, she reached for more.

Shawn said confidently in Korean, “Here’s a gift for you!” He was an active helper during the event, before finding a spot along the river to enjoy the fireworks with his family.

Most of the Podges’ ministry in Seoul is focused on their neighbors and families they connect with through Shawn’s school. But beyond that, they host volunteer teams, encourage Korean Baptists in their sending efforts, and join with other believers to reach the mega-city for Christ.

Their work with refugees coming to Korea makes it necessary to use publicity names and keep their faces out of photographs. They must be careful to protect this ministry and the vulnerable people who have fled their home countries.

No matter what each day holds, the Podges are sure of God’s leading and His work among Korean families. They are grateful for the ways Southern Baptists provide them the opportunity to live and serve among those with little-to-no understanding of the gospel.

The Podges were sent and supported through generous giving through the [Lottie Moon Christmas Offering](#) and Cooperative Program. The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® is a registered trademark of Woman’s Missionary Union.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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First-Person: Life’s 5 great lessons

Psalm 119 teaches us that the word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. The message of the Bible is God’s amazing love for us, that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

We know from John 3 that when one does that, the person has been born again. Old things have passed away and all things have become new. Romans 12 tells us that we are to be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. The Bible is complete in explaining the Christian life — a life of love for God and for others which results in us doing for others, of esteeming others higher than ourselves, of sacrificing our wants to minister to the needs of others.

Years ago, my daughter sent me an article, “Life’s five great lessons,” which reflects that spirit. Although at least a decade old, the article’s lessons are as relevant today as they have always been — and here they are:

1. No one is insignificant.

During my second month of school, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions until I read the last one: "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?"

Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman at times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50s. But how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before the class ended, one of the students asked if the last question would count toward our grade.

"Absolutely," the professor said. "In your life you will meet many people. All of them are significant. They deserve your attention, even if all you do is smile and say hello." I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy

2. Your kindness makes a greater impact than you might imagine.

At 11:30 p.m., an older African American woman was standing by the side of an Alabama highway trying to endure a lashing rainstorm. Her car had broken down and she desperately needed a ride. Soaking wet, she decided to flag down the next car.

A young white man stopped to help her, generally unheard of in the conflict-filled 1960s. The man took her to safety, helped her get assistance and put her into a taxicab. She seemed to be in a big hurry but wrote down his address and thanked him.

Seven days went by, and a knock came on the man's door. To his surprise a giant console color TV was delivered to his home.

A special note was attached. It read: "Thank you for assisting me on the highway the other night. The rain drenched not only my clothes, but also my spirits. Then you came along. Because of you, I was able to make it to my dying husband's bedside before he passed away. God bless you for helping me and unselfishly serving others."

Sincerely, Mrs. Nat King Cole

3. Be a generous giver — not just with your money but with your time.

In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less, a 10-year-old entered a coffee shop.

"How much is an ice cream sundae?" he asked. "Fifty cents," replied the waitress. The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied the coins in it.

"Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream?" he inquired.

By now people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing impatient.

“Thirty-five cents,” she quickly replied. The boy again counted his coins. “I’ll have the plain ice cream,” he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and left. When the waitress came back, she began to cry as she wiped down the table. There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and four pennies. You see, he couldn’t have the sundae, because he had to have enough to leave her a tip.

4. Look at obstacles as opportunities.

In ancient times, a king had a boulder placed on a roadway. He hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the king’s wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by and walked around it. Many loudly blamed the king for not keeping the road clear. But no one did anything about getting the stone out of the way.

Then a peasant came along, carrying a load of vegetables. Upon approaching the boulder, the peasant lay down his burden and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded.

After the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the king — indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway.

The peasant learned what many of us never understand. Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition.

5. Jesus laid down His life for us. Be willing to do that for others.

Many years ago, when I worked as a volunteer at a hospital, I got to know a little girl named Liz, who was suffering from a rare and serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her 5-year-old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness.

The doctor explained the situation to her little brother and asked the boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. She saw him hesitate for only a moment before taking a deep breath and say, “Yes, I’ll do it if it will save her.”

As the transfusion progressed, he lay in the bed next to his sister and smiled, as we all did, seeing the color returning to her cheeks. Then his face grew pale, and the smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked in a trembling voice, “Will I start to die right away?”

Being young, the little boy had misunderstood the doctor. He thought he was going to have to give his sister all of his blood in order to save her. You see, understanding and attitude, after all, is everything.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chip Hutcheson has served as interim managing editor of the Western Recorder, interim communications director for KBC and now is content strategist for Kentucky Today. He has a journalism degree from the University of Kentucky, and was a community newspaper publisher for 41 years, retiring from that role when called into ministry at age 68. He left retirement to begin working at KBC in March 2019. He and his wife, Karen, are members of West Broadway Baptist Church in Louisville, and he does supply preaching and interim pastorates.

Prison ministry sees your prayers answered

God answered [your prayers](#) for someone to work alongside International Mission Board missionaries in a prison ministry in Lusaka, Zambia. He didn't just send one Zambian believer. He sent three!

Meet Charity, Florence and Ivey. Their hearts broke when Kimberly Windham and Jane Thompson, IMB missionaries, told them about the spiritually lost women in this prison. Charity and Ivey said no one ever thinks about those in prison. They knew someone needed to encourage the prisoners.

"These women often feel that no one loves them, but they are not outcasts. God loves them," Ivey said. "How will they know this if we do not go?"

The Baptist women and missionaries visit once a week, partnering with the prison chaplain. Thompson noted this prison is special in the fact that it is home to many who are mentally ill, have been abused or suffer from addictions. They receive care and counseling.

Many inmates dream about freedom, Florence explained. The ministry team teaches Bible stories and shares the gospel.

"Even when they feel incarcerated here, they can have freedom in Jesus Christ," Florence said. "And some are responding. They accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They are free even when they are in prison."

Charity pointed out the lessons go beyond the inmates but also apply to the guards, nurses and other workers at the prison. They hear the Bible stories and answer questions, too.

The Baptist women and prison chaplain ask for your continued prayers:

- **Pray** for the hearts of female inmates to be open to the Holy Spirit. The goal is to introduce the gospel and disciple the women so they may take the Bible stories back to their villages upon release.
- **Ask God** to send someone to work with the male inmates on a regular basis.
- **Pray** for more Zambian believers to see these men and women as worthy of hearing the gospel and respond to God's call to share with all peoples.

The work of the IMB is sustained through faithful giving of Southern Baptists through the the [Lottie Moon Christmas Offering®](#) and the [Cooperative Program](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Sprenkle writes for the IMB.

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Bucket Ministry provides clean water, Living Water to contaminated slum in Kenya

KIBERA, Kenya (BP) – Matt Beasley, lead pastor of Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, Ky., conducted global missions the two years he and his wife Valerie were International Mission Board church planters in Prague.

“They refer to sharing the Gospel in Prague as plowing concrete,” he said of the architecturally rich Czech Republic capital that enjoys a vibrant economy. “I mean, people are very hardened, and their hearts are very hard against the Gospel.”

In stark contrast to luxurious Prague is Kibera, a poverty-stricken, overcrowded square mile slum in Nairobi, Kenya, with no permanent running water, scant electricity, no indoor bathrooms and no food preparation areas. About 82,000 households share 78 latrines that are emptied into the Ngong River.

Families of four typically live on \$26 a month, with many of them working in trades, operating small businesses, or working in neighboring communities in the service industry.

Beasley found hearts ripe for the Gospel and inexplicably full of hope when he went on a mission trip to Kibera in September 2023 with The Bucket Ministry, an international clean water evangelistic outreach to communities with contaminated water supplies.

“You’re romanticizing it if you say that the first thing you experienced was anything other than the smell,” Beasley said of Kibera. “It’s a constant reminder of the dire situation that many of them find themselves in – open and exposed wiring, water lines running through open sewage, the open sewage leaching into the water lines.

“They live in complete, utter, abject poverty,” Beasley said, “but the hope of the Gospel has transformed their outlook on life.”

Christopher Beth, a Southern Baptist whom Beasley pastored at Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Greenville, Texas, hosted the trip to Kibera through The Bucket Ministry he founded in 2012 to provide both clean water and Living Water to communities in need around the world.

In Kibera alone, where The Bucket Ministry completed its work in mid-December, the ministry’s 100 local missionaries shared the Gospel more than a half million times, heard 21,000 professions of faith and baptized 1,400 people over a five-year period, The Bucket Ministry told Baptist Press.

The ministry equips individual households with [Sawyer](#) PointOne water filters that last 20 years and are proven to reduce levels of E. coli and total coliform bacteria in drinking water by up to 99 percent. In turn, households agree to keep the filters clean and to allow indigenous ministers into their homes three times in the following months, ensuring the filters are properly maintained and building relationships that facilitate sharing the Gospel.

No one needs to be convinced they need clean water, Beth said, but many simply don’t have access to it. The World Health Organization puts that number at 785 million internationally.

“So when you’re able to deliver a simple solution for clean water, it immediately starts building relational equity with the recipients,” Beth said, “and you get to earn the right to share the Gospel and earn the right to disciple them.”

When Beth encountered Kibera for the first time, he was paralyzed by the scene.

“This is going to be the closest thing that most of us in the Western world would think ... hell looks like ... except for the fire,” Beth said. “If I could be brutally honest, it terrified me. I did not really think that I could do anything. I mean, I’m just an ordinary person.

“And God kept on bringing me back to this place. And finally, once we committed that we were going to serve this entire area, then He provided the resources. He provided the people, just like He said He would do.”

Many of Beth’s fellow Southern Baptists are among those God provided to help, including not only Severns Valley Baptist Church, but also Cross City Baptist Church in Euless, Texas, where John Meador is lead pastor.

Meador visited Kibera on the same mission trip as Beasley, and several teams from both churches have participated in the outreach there.

Meador is impressed by the ministry’s efficiency in partnering with the Sawyer Products water filter company, its practices of partnering with stateside churches and training Indigenous ministers as local missionaries, and its encouragement of pastors in countries where the ministry serves.

“But the process itself is so impressive to me because everybody needs water, of course,” Meador said. “And people come in and they look at what the water filter is, and they of course are already interested in getting that water filter, but there’s a certain amount of training that has to go on for them to use it well.”

The ministry provides the instruction necessary for households to use the filters, and the indigenous missionaries continue the work long after visiting missionaries are gone.

Residents use the filters on water that runs from the tap when available, or is otherwise purchased from trucks. But Beth said tests show all water available in Kibera is contaminated without the use of filters.

Today, every home in Kibera has a clean water filter. In the five years The Bucket Ministry worked in Kibera on the \$4.8 million outreach, its missionaries and volunteers distributed 81,788 water filters attached to buckets, conducted 240,569 follow-up visits, taught 419,514 discipleship lessons and baptized 1,440 new converts among the 400,000 or so residents the ministry counted, according to numbers collected through the ministry’s mission mapping system.

Meador saw living conditions similar to Kibera on the numerous mission trips he took to India during his pastorate at Woodland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn., but conditions in India were not as dire.

“Well, the Gospel is what’s needed there,” Meador said of Kibera. “And when people have a lot of need and they’re at a crossroads in their life with need, then when you come to meet that need, they’re really willing to listen to why you’re there. And of course, the reason we’re there is because of Jesus and the Gospel.”

“That’s pretty big motivation for all of us.”

Other Southern Baptist congregations supporting the ministry include Flint Baptist Church in Flint, Texas; Central Baptist Church in Crandall, Texas, and Crosspoint Community Church in Rockwall, Texas, among others.

Beth founded The Bucket Ministry after accompanying his daughter on a mission trip to the Brazilian Amazon in 2012.

“I saw things that I wasn’t prepared to see,” Beth said. Residents drank water from the Amazon River as a normal way of life, but because of the high infant mortality from waterborne diseases, delayed naming their children for two years after birth.

“And I saw people that thought that diarrhea was normal, and that’s the way that you had to live,” he said. “And so I came back with this burden on my heart and started searching for solutions.”

He stumbled upon the Sawyer water filter at a Dallas camping supply store, and his own family served as human guinea pigs, filtering and drinking otherwise untreated water from Lake Ray Hubbard for a week, and remaining well.

“The owner of the company (Kurt Avery) is a believer. He’s a kingdom man, and he believes that the filter can end the world water crisis as well as advance the Gospel,” Beth said. “So we have identified this perfect partnership between us and Sawyer, that we use a product that they manufactured for camping and backpacking to reconcile people back to the Father and to deliver them with sustainable clean water over generations.”

In addition to Kibera, The Bucket Ministry has provided clean water and The Living Water to the Kawangware and Athi River slums of Kenya, the Jenta slums of Nigeria, the Namatala slums of Uganda, the Nima slums of Ghana, and in Ciudad Victoria, Mexico.

The Gospel ministry grows where it is planted.

Kibera “churches are telling us that they’re growing,” Beth said. “They need more room in that area now because of all the new believers. So we’re seeing this as a point of revival for Africa, and we’re seeing ripples from that campaign going out further.

“Our team of missionaries answered God’s call to serve their neighbors and because of that, lives have been changed both physically and spiritually. I’m in awe of how God continues to use ordinary people for His rescue mission.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

Nations Church casts global vision from D.C.'s backyard

Hearing the Call

WASHINGTON D.C. — Greg Gibson had already planted one church in Washington, D.C., so he chuckled when his friend Clint Clifton called him three years ago and asked, “Do you think you have another church plant in you?”

But the more Greg thought about Clint’s passing comment, the more he couldn’t get it off his mind.

“God has always used moments like that through his people, where a seed gets planted in my heart that then starts to blossom and grow over time,” he shares.

Mere months after that phone call, [Clint Clifton was killed in a plane crash](#), and the Gibson family found themselves back in the D.C. area to attend his funeral. Sitting in a crowd of several hundred people who had been impacted by Clint’s life and ministry, Greg felt an overwhelming sense of void in the city he’d once called home.

“Clint had an amazing gift set and influence in D.C. with his ability to come alongside planters and train, galvanize, and send them,” Greg reflects, “so by no means did I think there was any one person who could fill his shoes, but I knew that enough of us needed to carry the baton.”

In the days that followed, the Gibson family began to feel an aching pull to return to D.C. to plant another church. So, the following summer, they packed yet another moving truck in Knoxville and moved back to the Monument City, expectant for what God would do next.

Engaging the City

The Gibson’s [Sending Church](#), Foothills Church in Knoxville, knew the Gibsons as a church-planting family, and were excited to partner with them in ministry again.

“When we moved here last August, I spent the first couple of months building a team doing a ton of personal evangelism and the ministry of invitation,” says Greg.

The Gibsons opened their home for a weekly Bible study that grew to 50 people in a matter of months. Every Sunday evening, kids swarmed through their halls while adults gathered in the living room.

“The Bible study became the net. We were inviting everyone into it, and then out of the Bible study, we built our core team,” Greg explains. “Church planting is a team sport. If you’re planting on your own, there’s going to be deficiencies and blind spots in the church early on, so the first step is always to build a team.”

Making Disciples

But building a team to plant a church in a fast-paced environment like D.C., where time is often the biggest premium in people's lives, doesn't come without its challenges.

"It creates an interesting dynamic for churches and church planters, because people are ultimately going to give their time to something that will add value to their lives," Greg observes.

Nations Church faced that challenge head-on by offering a gospel-centered life purpose to the people they interacted with. As they introduced people in their city to God's greater mission, they started to witness these goal-driven individuals get excited about the role they can play in expanding God's kingdom.

"We're seeing a lot of people come into our orbit who are saying, 'I once had a mission. I was once former military. I was once working in the State Department, or whatever it might be. But now I have a greater mission,'" shares Greg.

Not long ago, Greg shared with one such individual a message like the one Clint Clifton relayed to him three years ago in that phone call that Greg still can't get out of his head.

"I shared with him that I could see him being an amazing church planter," he says. "And since then, he has this transformed belief in himself, and we've started meeting together every week for pastoral development."

Planting a Church

Today, Nations Church regularly sees 75 people engaged in weekly services and activities, which are held weekly at a middle school in Louden County. Much like the city of D.C., their church welcomes people from all over the world, including Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Korea, China, Columbia, Peru, and Vietnam.

This summer, the church launched kids' and student ministries to reach the next generation and started more life groups for adults. An entire family recently followed in believer's baptism, and the church continues to grow.

"Our vision is to reach the nations by loving our neighbors," says Greg.

Reaching the Nations

In a city as diverse as Washington, D.C., reaching the nations is a mission that feels close to home. That's why Nations Church regularly invites international pastors ministering to ethnic groups in D.C. to share about their ministries with the congregation.

“If we can plant churches in Washington D.C., I think we can also plant churches with different ethnic groups in Washington, D.C., and then maybe God will allow us to plant churches and help catalyze church planting work in different places around the world,” Greg shares.

Just weeks after their public launch this past March, the church commissioned and sent their first overseas missionary to Warsaw, Poland to work with Ukrainian refugees.

“We want to be a multiplying church,” Greg says. “And our goal is to plant as many churches as God would allow locally and globally.”

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

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