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‘I could write a book about what God’s done,’ says Tennessee pastor after Helene

LIMESTONE, TN – Craig Ponder’s first impression of the ATV four-wheeler gang congregating in the church’s parking lot was not good.

“I thought they were a bunch of tourists coming to check out the flood damage caused by Hurricane Helene,” he said. “I was wrong, and I’ve since apologized. They were people coming to check on family members and friends cut off and stranded on the other side of the river.”

Ponder is pastor of New Salem Baptist Church, set atop a hill near where the Nolichucky River normally meanders through a countryside that could appear in a “Beautiful Landscapes” calendar. However, the usually placid Nolichucky became a destructive force on Friday, Sept. 27, ripping its way downstream through four East Tennessee counties and washing out four of six bridges in the area, damaging the other two. Snapp Bridge, near the church, held its ground but took significant damage.

“Brothers from the Mennonite community on the other side went to work almost immediately and got the bridge passable,” Ponder said. “That opened a way for the ATVs to get across.”

Within 36 hours, New Salem became a drop-off point for supplies, and by Sunday afternoon, the pavilion adjacent to the church was like a warehouse stocked with diapers, flashlights, batteries, gloves, shovels, Pine-Sol, water, canned goods, peanut butter crackers, dish soap – you name it, and it arrived. And if it wasn’t there, God was in the process of sending it.

“We’ve taken in supplies coming from everywhere,” Ponder said. “From Kentucky, Arkansas, across Tennessee, Florida. This thing is growing substantially. I could tell story after story of how God is at work through all this.”

For instance, New Salem provided supplies for a Cowboy Church in nearby Greeneville that is working with people who are helicoptering those supplies into the most cut-off areas.

Ponder said the Cowboy Church had distributed via social media a “list that was quite substantial,” and New Salem began to compile the goods for delivery. However, there were several items on the list New Salem didn’t have.

“As we were pulling things together for Cowboy Church, a truck rolled in from a church in Brookland, Arkansas,” Ponder said. “My team lead pulled me aside and said, ‘Pastor, everything that’s coming off that truck is on that list from Cowboy Church.’ So we were literally taking it straight off their truck, putting it in boxes and loading it for Cowboy Church.”

That's just one story. Ponder also shares the story of not knowing he needed wooden pallets, but God did.

"This great big truck shows up here last week with 8-foot stacks of pallets," he said. "What am I going to use pallets for? So, I put them on the backside of the church. This morning, I got a phone call from Bristol Motor Speedway (where people are dropping off supplies) and a lady up there asks, 'Pastor Ponder, you don't happen to have any extra pallets sitting around, do you?' I said, 'I've got stacks of pallets on pallets!' They drove down and got them."

"One more. Coffee cups. My wife told me we were out of coffee cups. I turned around, and there were two big giant garden bags. You guessed it, full of coffee cups. Before we even knew we needed coffee cups, God had folks bring us coffee cups. I could write a book about what God's done."

With the magnitude of the operation escalating, God has sent volunteer help too. New Salem church members stocking, sorting, stacking and loading have been supplemented by volunteers from near and far coming to help, including the ATV gang who are loading up, crossing the bridge, and disappearing across the countryside to some of the hardest-hit areas.

"God is even using that," Ponder said. "Those guys have become friends, and several have already come to church. We're just trying to get out of the way and let God work through us in this disaster."

For more information about how to be involved or to financially contribute to the Hurricane Helene flood relief effort, visit tndisasterrelief.org.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Turner is director of communications for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

God's been good in my life

SOUTHGATE – The invitation came during an extremely busy season. It was an opportunity to sit in on an ordination council and to take part in the service to follow. The problem was, it was planned for a Sunday afternoon.

Now, I'm not sure about you, but I find adding things into my Sunday schedule can be problematic, simply because of the time consumption that the preparation and participation in (2) Worship Experiences, plus the need to meet and greet as many visitors as possible after each of those events.

And did they know it was football season? I can count on three fingers the times the Lions have been a relevant team past Halloween in my life! Now, they are "must see" TV! But I knew that in the scope of eternity, the ordination was far more important than a Lions game, and I figured with a couple of extra cups of coffee, I would be fine.

The day came, and off I went to be part of one of the most important days of the young candidate's life. I was thoroughly overmatched by the others in the theology department (after all, I was a music major), so I came up with a practical question or two. But it was evident early on that the testimony and call were definite, and the answers were scripturally-based and shared with confidence.

When the time came for a vote, there was no doubt he would pass with flying colors. Then, it was time for dinner and the service. I briefly considered coming up with a polite excuse to make an early exit, but thought better of it and remained.

Finally, the program began. I did my part, sat back down, and they invited a gentleman from the hosting church to sing a special. When the track started, something caught my attention. This was a Southern Gospel song, which is right up near the top of my personal preferences on the music spectrum. But I was unfamiliar with the tune. Then he began singing the lyrics.

"Lately I've been looking back, along this winding road.
To the old familiar markers of the mercies, I have known.
I know it may sound simple, but it's more than a cliché,
there's no better way to tell you than to say..."

"God's been good in my life. I feel blessed beyond
my wildest dreams, when I go to sleep each night. And
though I've had my share of hard times, I wouldn't change
them if I could, cause through it all...God's been good!"

I didn't even make it through the chorus. I was a mess...tears streaming down my face as I reflected on what he was sharing, while sitting right in the front trying in vain to hold it all together! "God's been good in my life!" To be honest, I was going through a period where I was beginning to question that very notion. One of those seasons everyone goes through where it just seems like nothing is breaking in your direction and you begin to wonder if God remembers what you are trying to do!

"Times replay and I can see that I cried some bitter tears
But I felt His arms around me as I faced my greatest fears

You see I've had more gains than losses
And I've known more joy than hurt
As his grace rolled down upon me undeserved!"

Ecclesiastes 11:8 says, "Indeed, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all (CSB).

The very next part of that verse states that there will be difficulty and challenge, but that should never deter us from the praise for the good nor should it distract us from the promise that "weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5) In every year of life, 12 months are divided by weeks, which break down to days, which are an accumulation of 24 hours, which gives to us 60 minutes, and within those minutes are the moments that memories are made of. When the pictures of the memories of your mind rewind, would you find yourself echoing the words I heard that night? "God's been good...in my life!"

So, here's a homework assignment for you at some point during this month of Thanksgiving. Take out some paper and a pen (or simply use your MacBook if you must). Put at the top of one page, "Burdens," and list the challenges that are part of your life right now. As you list them (and don't leave anything out), take the opportunity to pray, asking God to work in and through the situation and move you to the other side.

On another page, put the word, "Blessings," and begin to list all of the ways which God has shown favor in your life. Again, don't leave anything out! Even the items that we take for granted in this country. What I think you will find is that your list of blessings will be far longer than the list of burdens. Even in the discouragement of loss we can remember and rejoice in the memory of what was. The bridge of the song says,

"For God has been my Father, my Savior, and my friend.
His love was my beginning and His love will be my end.
I could spend forever trying to tell you everything He is,
but the best way I can say it is this. God's been good!"

Hope that says it for you! Happy Thanksgiving!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Billy Walker became Lead Pastor of Calvary Church in 2006. He also serves as the Vice President of the Billy Walker Evangelistic Association and Hiawatha Youth Camp. Billy and wife Laurie have two adult daughters, Whitney and Kaylie, and a son-in-law, Eric.

Gratitude is a choice

WESTLAND – As a Christian woman, pastor's wife, mother, daughter, nurse, and all the other titles that I hold, I'm grateful for so many things. Those blessings that God gives is only because of my strong faith in Jesus Christ. Out of everything else that I do in my life, my first job is to be a follower of Christ.

Nothing else matters if Christ isn't the head of your life because he is the one that does the ultimate planning of my everyday steps. I am called to live a life full of gratitude because of all that God does for me on a regular basis.

Gratitude is not just a feeling, but a choice. It's a mindset that recognizes the blessings and goodness of God in our lives, even amid challenges. We all experience challenges at times, even as a pastor's family, this Christian life isn't always perfect for anyone, but through the ups and downs of life I must thank God for my salvation and his death on the cross for me because life could be a whole lot worse.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever. I thank the Lord everyday for his faithfulness. His faithfulness allows me to remember. Psalm 107:1

"The Lord is the one who will go before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or abandon you."

Deuteronomy 31:8 (CSB)

I don't have to worry or fight my own battles because the Lord goes before me to do that part.

Every day that I wake up I must thank God for all the "Gifts" that he has given me. Yes, I call them gifts for me to enjoy and take care of while I am here on earth because God didn't have to give them to me.

I am speaking of my family. I thank God for my husband and my children every day. My parents are truly a blessing and help so much with our children. They are a big part of our village, and help so much with raising our children. God is so wonderful. I truly live a grateful life, and I give all the glory to God.

As I write this, I can hear this Scripture:

"Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

I Thessalonians 5:16-18, (CSB).

Here are a few ways to cultivate your gratefulness to God in your life:

- **Daily reflection:** Take time to reflect on the blessings that God has given you.
- **Journaling:** Prayer boards (listing people that you've prayed for, prayers answered) Journal books. (daily journal entries)
- **Prayer:** We should continuously be in conversation with the Lord. A deep relationship and connection show our gratefulness to Him.
- **Serving others:** Helping in your church or your community where help is needed. Give back a little bit of what God has given to you. God wants our time, talent, and treasure.

I am grateful for so much of what the Lord has done for me and what He is doing for me behind the scenes. I know I don't deserve any of it, and that's what makes me so grateful for the life He gives me. I am a sinner in need of a savior. He came and saved me from my sins and now I can live forever with him in heaven. Being grateful allows us to witness to others along the way and bring other people to Jesus Christ. We can do his works by reflecting his goodness to the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Wimberly is the 1st Lady of One Mission Church in Westland. 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.

Lessons from a waiting season

I have a friend who is particularly good at identifying spiritual seasons in her life. With or without the benefit of hindsight, she seems to be able to "sit" in whatever season she's currently in, while also enumerating the blessings and challenges of seasons that have passed.

She told me recently of a prolonged "waiting season" she was in, when she had to trust God was at work even if she didn't immediately see the evidence. I don't think it was a particularly trying season, just a quiet one that lasted long enough to foster doubt if she had allowed it. In her heart, she knew God had called her to the deep purpose of living faithfully, and even to a few more pressing endeavors that were just out of reach. Thus, the waiting.

I certainly can relate to waiting seasons, although I've not been astute enough to call it that. My waiting seasons have generally been times I've been too quick to give up on good, small habits. Or times when I should have relied on decades of experiencing God's faithfulness, only to flap around wildly because I didn't get the answer I wanted when I wanted it.

Mostly, though, my waiting seasons have lacked energy. My mind and heart have taken their cues from the quiet of the season, atrophying despite the opportunity presented by the drop in activity. But I have an inkling that waiting will mark the rest of my life, so I'd like it to count for more than just an intermission between louder seasons.

With my friend's faithful testimony ringing in my ears, here are a few ways I'm resolving to wait out a waiting season:

1. **I will stay watchful.** A quiet season doesn't have to result in apathy.
2. **I won't idolize deliverance,** as easy as it would be to set my mind on the next, non-waiting season.
3. **I won't go it alone.** Like my friend shared her waiting season with me, I'll look for opportunities to bear witness to God's work.
4. **I will trust the process.** I'll pray for patience and the slow growth of new fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Believing that God is author of every season, I will trust him to reveal beauty and purpose in this one.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meredith Day Flynn is a wife and mother of two living in Springfield. She writes on the intersection of faith, family, and current culture.

Effort

PLYMOUTH – Living a good and decent life takes a great deal of effort. It doesn't just happen. As human beings we have a nature that deviates to the lowest common denominator, and are born with the powerful pulling propensity to do evil.

Now some of you may find that hard to believe, but it is nonetheless true. We humans are born with rottenness in our souls and the decay therein is progressive. But a thought has occurred to me. What if we spent as much time trying to be good as we do to be bad? The effort we exert in our fallen endeavors could and should be redirected to do that which is good and wholesome.

A case in point is the life of Emmanuel Ninger who I recently read about in an article by John Maxwell. Emmanuel was arrested for passing counterfeit \$20 bills. A warrant was obtained to search Ninger's home. During the search, they found a \$20 bill in the process of being painted.

They also found three portraits that Emmanuel Ninger had painted. Ninger was an artist, and he was a good one. He was so good; he had hand painted those \$20.00 bills!

Meticulously, stroke-by-stroke, he had applied the master's touch so skillfully that he was able to fool everyone until the wet hands of a grocery clerk exposed him.

After the arrest, his portraits were sold at public auction for \$16,000.00 -- over \$5000.00 each. The irony of the story is that it took Emmanuel Ninger almost the same length of time to paint a \$20.00 bill as it took him to paint a \$5,000 portrait.

The problem with men like Emmanuel (by the way his first name means *God with Us*) is just the opposite of his name. God is not with us because of our fallen natures so we are putting all our efforts toward the wrong endeavors. What we need is a change of direction and thus our motivation to do what is right and that only comes with a change of heart.

The work and the effort are no greater for good than evil. Pick up a local newspaper and read about the extraordinary efforts criminals go to in order to commit a crime. Or think about the effort it takes for present day politicians to pontificate and pound away at their party opponents. If they put as much effort into making our country a better place as they did abusing one another, how much better this country would be. (What a novel idea!)

I know you, as well as I, have grown weary and quite frankly, nauseated by the way our public officials and political candidates have verbally accosted and molested one another in recent months. Disgusted is not a strong enough word to describe my feelings. As a result, it has become my habit to "mute" all commercials and advertisements on all my media feeds until sufficient time has passed for primary programming to return.

We are judged by our words and works by those with whom we associate and those who are carefully observing our Christian walk. We also will one day stand before the Great Judge on the same basis.

Since we all spend our energies on something, wouldn't it be a wonderful idea to make our efforts count for that which is good and godly? It takes the same amount of effort. As my Daddy used to say, "If you can't say something good about someone, then don't say nothin'."

"He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip."
Proverbs 20:19

"For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down."
Proverbs 26:20

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.

Saying "thank you"

PLYMOUTH – It is rare to hear this exchange. One person says, “Thank you.” The other replies, “You are welcome.”

Too often in our busy world and rushed pace, no appreciation is expressed. Occasionally, someone says, “Thank you,” and the other replies, “Thank you.” Which seems confusing.

I love the intonation of these five gentle words of respect: “Thank you,” followed by “You are welcome.”

So, as the approaching Thanksgiving preheats the oven of my mind and heart, bringing up the aromas of memories of special people in my life, I will publicly say, “Thank you” to three people I value.

Endurance

A former drug addict and hard nosed Michigander turned over his life to the hands of Jesus Christ years ago. I was fortunate to work alongside him in a local church ministry. He always took what many of us thought was the most difficult ministry of the church. He consistently took time out of his week to preach and lead Bible studies at a long-term prison and the local county jail. After each inmate was released, my friend in the ministry was the first one to offer to meet with the newly freed man to coach him through his reentry into normal life – but this time with Jesus. Thank you, Dale, for being an example of faithful endurance to men whose chaotic lives scared most of us. Your title of chaplain does not completely express the burden and responsibility you took on yourself to help so many men and their families throughout the years. Only the Lord knows the full impact of your influence.

Service

A former truck driver with a lot of smarts and an intimidating strength got to know me in the place where I served my last pastorate. He is one of those men who seems to know something about everything in life. His knowledge is as big as a Michigan forest. He has aged like me, and for both of us, our strength is not what it once was in the past. Yet during these recent years, I saw this man plant his life at Bambi Lake as a resident handyman and guide, helping to build

something new or refurbish something worn. His ingenuity and drive overcame just about any challenge he faced. Thank you, Tim, for being an example of service to so many different people under so many different circumstances. Enjoy your racing days until you are 100 years old.

Encouragement

This woman has spent her life helping others become successful. She managed many a professional office. She is shy about rewards and recognition. She would rather spend her breath and energy on seeing others succeed at their dreams than rally even one person to serve her. We returned from overseas as international missionaries so I could become a pastor at a local church. She and her husband, who served in Iraq, generously offered a portion of their house to my wife and me until we bought and moved into our own house. There was never any mention of a deadline, nor did I ever see a moment of impatience on either of their faces. Thank you, Sue and Les, for sharing your home, life, and love with Jamie and me. You are such incredible examples of encouragement. Your hospitality and kindness to us and many others is a gift to the entire church and community. You two inspire us.

Saying "thank you"

I encourage you to say thank you often to others during the month of November. Try to say thank you more times than the number of leaves that pile up on the lawn. Say "thank you" to strangers who hold the door for you at the store. Express gratitude to the children who do their chores. Say "thank you" to the closest and farthest ones in your lives. Let each November day be filled with gratitude.

Inspirational quotes for your table settings

"God has promised to supply all our needs. What we don't have now, we don't need now."

– Elizabeth Elliot

"It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy that makes happiness."

– Charles Spurgeon

"Gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it."

– A.W. Tozer

"I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all, but whatever I have placed in God's hands, I still possess."

– Corrie ten Boom

"It's one thing to be grateful. It's another to give thanks. Gratitude is what you feel. Thanksgiving is what you do."

– Tim Keller

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.

Pushing others to victory

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – On December 2, 2012, Spanish athlete Iván Fernández Anaya was competing in a cross-country race in Burlada, Navarre. He was running second, some distance behind race leader Abel Mutai - bronze medalist in the 3,000-meter steeplechase at the London Olympics.

As they entered the finishing straight, he saw the Kenyan runner - the certain winner of the race - mistakenly pull up about 10 meters before the finish, thinking he had already crossed the line. Mutai was just a few feet from the finish line, but became confused with the signage and stopped. He thought he'd finished the race.

Fernández Anaya quickly caught up with him, but instead of exploiting Mutai's mistake to speed past and claim an unlikely victory, he stayed behind and, using gestures, guided the Kenyan to the line and let him cross first. Fernandez pushed him to victory.

A reporter asked Ivan, "Why did you do this?" Ivan replied, "My dream is that someday we can have a kind of community life where we push and help each other to win." The reporter asked again, "But you could have won! Why did you let the Kenyan win?"

Ivan replied, "I didn't deserve to win. I did what I had to do. He was the rightful winner. He created a gap that I couldn't have closed if he hadn't made a mistake. As soon as I saw he was stopping, I knew I wasn't going to pass him. What would be the merit of this medal? What would my mother think of it?"

Contrast that powerful example with the lies, deceit, and conspiracy theories flooding our news channels and social media feeds today. It's tempting to believe that dishonesty has become the best policy — and political strategy.

It feels like "alternative facts" are twisting norms in our society. Too often, we're hearing about, or personally experiencing, broken promises, bitterness, cheating, "shading the truth," cutting corners, or failing to follow through, even in the church.

This year has seen a number of North Texas mega-church pastors become subjects of controversy, with some stepping down from their positions. Multiple pastors have received allegations of sexual misconduct -- with two being charged -- while other pastors face less clear allegations.

The leaders most of us admire — and follow — embody the leadership clichés like “walk the talk” or “lead by example.” Strong leaders maintain a close connection between what they say and what they do. Their video is synchronized with their audio. They push others to victory.

In Matthew 20:26–28, Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

We need more pastors and church leaders who understand this and live daily in the sphere of servanthood, pushing and helping others to win. Instead of clamoring for the spotlight, we must learn to be *slaves* of the Most High God so we can *serve* God’s people, not be served by them.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Pay careful attention to yourselves! Spiritual leaders need first to guard their own spiritual and moral purity. Clearly, we cannot lead the flock of God under our care until we have learned to lead ourselves.

As we enter this Thanksgiving season, let’s focus our hearts and minds on the Master, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11 NIV).

He must increase. We must decrease, for the glory of God and the good of His people.

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.

Gratitude

PLYMOUTH – Is living a life of gratitude to God key to finding peace and contentment in life? What does a grateful life look like? Is it walking around with a silly grin on our faces and being unaffected by our crazy lives, disappointments, and rough situations? What does gratefulness look like?

There is something about being grateful for all that God has done for you that makes you live differently. Soak in this Scripture verse in Hebrew 12:28 NLT, *“Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.”* My daily walk-through life, my homelife, at work, in my neighborhood, at church, are all affected by my acknowledgment and thankfulness to God.

I can hear it when I talk with people, their ingratitude for God’s provisions, His care, His guidance, and His plan for their life. They are disgruntled, discontented, and are striving for more, always more. God knows how easily we drift from Him. His Word in Ephesians 5:20 NLT instructs us, *“And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

I find God’s provision for me to be over-the-top. He doesn’t curse me when I sin against Him, but instead provides His Son as a way for me to be set free from my sin guilt. He doesn’t just clothe me with the bare necessities, but gives me enough clothing to fill my closet. He doesn’t just give me simple sustenance for each day, but fills my refrigerator with an abundance of foods. He doesn’t just provide me a shack to shelter me from the Michigan weather, but supplies me with a warm, cozy home. In thousands of other ways, I see His hand of generosity and care for me. How can I do anything else but pour out my thanks to Him?!

Last week, I asked my discipleship group to pray for me because I was close to being overwhelmed by my workload right now. I feared falling behind or dropping the ball on something important. They prayed all week for me. I had a hugely productive week and was filled with energy and a clear mind.

My group asked me about how my work week went, and I told them how amazingly fruitful it was. I immediately realized that I hadn’t thanked God for His strength that He had given me to complete so much work. I had asked for His help and then after He answered the prayers, I didn’t even think to thank Him. I didn’t acknowledge that it was a gift from Him. Forgive me Lord.

Is praying, *“Thank you God for all You’ve done for me (salvation in Christ, daily provisions, care, guidance, and love)”* enough? The words thank you sometimes don't feel like enough. I think that obedience is somehow tied to showing gratitude.

I John 5:3 says, *“Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.”*

Choosing to obey His commands shows our gratitude and love. Breathing out gratitude shows that I recognize who is in control of life. By not acknowledging God and thanking Him for His care, I am showing that I think that I am in control.

Saying thank you to people I interact with, also has an impact on my day. From my spouse to the stranger who holds the door for me, thanking them changes the moment. When I look people in the eyes and thank them for something they did, they often glow with pleasure at having been shown gratitude. I especially see it in teenagers and older, overlooked people. I know it is good to show gratitude to both God and others.

Here it is, plain and straightforward, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 NLT, *“Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.”*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie Lynn is a Jesus follower who is passionate about helping others find a deeper faith in Him. She loves her work at the Baptist State Convention of Michigan and leading discipleship groups of women. She has been married for 47 years to Tony, a wonderful husband and ministry partner.

Living a grateful life

BIG RAPIDS – As the coronavirus began to take root and thousands of people in China became infected, social media and the news media was flooded with headlines such as “Deadly Outbreak in China Headed to the U.S.” It wasn’t long before fear overtook our nation. Fear and dread filled our hearts; and our hope seemed to be as empty as the toilet paper shelves all across America. It was a time where we found ourselves shut inside our homes, waiting for some glimmer of hope. A sense of normalcy again.

In fact, I remember when my wife and I ventured out for the first time in weeks, into Mt Pleasant. Now Mt Pleasant, a college town, is always a hopping place especially on a Saturday! However, this time it seemed almost like a ghost town, oh sure there were a few cars and people out, but nothing like a normal Saturday. It just seemed empty, so many storefronts closed, parking lots empty. It simply seemed like a grim sight. As we were heading to do our “essential” shopping, we couldn’t help but think about the uncertainties that lie ahead.

It was a time that most of us truly learned the value of togetherness, fellowship, socializing, and serving; all things we often take for granted when going to Church. In fact, the blessing behind Covid, was it revealed to so many of us how to truly be thankful. However, even though Covid taught me to be grateful, this would be a lesson I would learn 6 months prior to the Covid outbreak.

At the time, I was serving as pastor of a small flock in Mt Pleasant for nearly five years. It was a struggling church. Nonetheless, it was the most loving and giving bunch of people I have ever had the privilege of serving. Prior to this church, I served as an Associate Pastor of a rather, *unruly bunch of misfits. (but to be fair, most of us would likely fall into this category!)*

So, you see, when God called me to Mt Pleasant, I was ecstatic! To have an opportunity to serve as their pastor was exciting! I was young in ministry, energetic, eager, and, quite frankly, full of myself! I came there with big dreams! This church needed life, and I was gonna bring it! *"I'm gonna grow this church... This will be great! I'll make it a well-known church and I'll be a well known pastor!"*

Oh, my folly! I did none of the above. Quite the opposite! God closed that church six months prior to Covid sweeping across our nation! Here I am still new in ministry, just called to this church a mere five years beforehand, and He rips it out from under me! Why? I didn't understand... I did everything right, I was faithful, I preached the truth, I evangelized. I read every book I could find on how to grow a small church, plus attended countless small church conferences and seminars. Why would God allow this to happen?

I spent the entire year of Covid praying, often fasting, trying to figure out where it went wrong. What I did or didn't do? God called me into ministry, called me to a church only to take it all away! It took me some time to realize it, but I believe He took it away because my focus was on "my" wants and ambitions, not "His".

It was all about me, not Him, not the people, not the mission. He took it away because of my arrogance and pride. You see, for me, the closing of that church, and Covid, was like eating a giant slice of humble pie! First off, before Covid, I had lost focus on what's important... Worship was important, yes, but worship should never have been restricted to the building! So, God took the building and the flock away, long before He took away the ability to gather in a building.

I had to first be grateful for what He had given. Hebrews 13:5 tells us to "Be content with such things that ye have..."(KJV) I realize everyone is quick to quote the latter part of that verse, "for He hath said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"(KJV). The part about being content is often ignored. It certainly was by me! *"I'm gonna grow this church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, because He has said I will never leave you or forsake you"!*

Again, oh, my folly! I had ignored the most important part of it all! To be content with what He's given! I was not content, I wanted more! More knowledge, more recognition, a bigger church

with more church attendance. However, in the want of all of that, my want for Him, His mission, seemed to slowly slip away.

I learned the key to living a grateful life lies in our humility. It was difficult to be grateful when I was never satisfied, when what I had wasn't enough, when it was all about me, my ability, my knowledge, my wants and my ambitions. I had to realize that God had already given me enough. Who I was as a pastor was enough, the people I serve are enough, the opportunities to serve are enough. God has given me more than enough.

I am now living a grateful life because of my experiences, both pre and post Covid. Because my experiences are enough, because I am enough, but mostly, because God is enough! Everything He has given is enough. The wonderful church that He has now given, is enough. When we truly realize and believe with every ounce of our soul that what we have, who we are, and what He's given, is enough, that is when we shall truly live a grateful life!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Terry Wilson serves as Pastor of Charity Baptist Church of Big Rapids. He received his seminary degree at Grace Christian University. He has served many capacities both at the State level and local. He currently serves as the Moderator for the Bay Area Baptist Association as well as many other committees within the Association. Pastor Terry is relatively new in ministry, less than ten years, However, his experience in ministry doesn't come from the number of years, but instead, from the number of experiences. He has learned from those experiences how to "Live a Grateful Life".

Another lesson of gratitude

BATTLE CREEK – When I was asked to write this article, little did I know that God was about to lead me through a journey where, once again, I will learn to be grateful for another lesson in which God would be showing me His goodness and strength. Now, if you are like me, when these "journeys" come, you are so excited you can hardly wait to see what is going to happen. NOT!! Really. My thoughts are, "Here we go again. How do I learn to be grateful?"

I recently came across a definition of gratitude or being grateful that I have tried to apply each time I am about to, and or face another journey. ***"Being grateful enables us to see the hand of God guiding our lives; it strengthens our will to keep His commandments."***

As I keep adding years to my life, I want to be closer to my Lord with each journey He leads. I would like to share a recent journey that caused my lovely wife Carol and I to seek God's guidance and direction, and that taught us again to be grateful for God's word.

I was in my office preparing for Sunday's message. All day I had felt a troubled spirit upon me. I prayed. I tried to seek direction from the Word yet there was this uneasiness upon me. I was truly concerned. Was God preparing me for something where I needed His direction? Then, the challenge came.

We received a very disturbing phone call that shattered our lives. When we hung up from the call, we were both numb, hurt, and disappointed. All of the emotions a person can go through, we were experiencing. It was tough trying to sleep. What was God doing? Where was He leading?

I rose up early, as I do, got my coffee, and proceeded to the couch where I spend my morning time. I prayed especially for God's guidance for help in facing this difficult journey. And as always, the Creator provided Scripture for that moment and to talk about peace. I felt God's precious Spirit move into the room and it was like He was saying, "We've got this!"

Yes, I am grateful for the difficult journeys that I travel. It is there that I have learned to completely give everything to God. It is also during these journeys that my wife and I have learned, ***"Worry about nothing – Pray about everything!"***

The reward of being grateful is knowing God is with us, guiding us through life's difficult challenges. It is my prayer as you journey through the difficult times, God will teach you and show how great He is and be grateful for His direction.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Ken Hale is the pastor at Harper Creek Baptist Church in Battle Creek.

As militants kill Nigerian Christians, pastor risks life to evangelize Muslims

PLATEAU, NIGERIA (BP) – Pastor Eli Abdullah Tinau lives in the charred room that remains of his home after an attack by militant Fulani Muslims, an increasingly violent group accused of killing thousands of Christians in middle and northeastern Nigeria.

But Tinau, a Fulani Christian who converted from Islam, is committed to sharing the Gospel with Fulani Muslims as a missionary and pastor of Evangelical Church Winning All in Nkiendoro, about 60 miles from Jos in the Bassa Local Government Area, International Christian Concern (ICC) reported.

“I expect persecution because I am no longer of this world,” ICC quoted Tinau days before Southern Baptists and other Christians worldwide mark the Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church Nov. 3. “I hold firm to my faith in Christ.”

Militant Fulani have killed more Christians in Nigeria in the past four years than Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) combined, according to a report from the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA), a research, training and advocacy program promoting religious freedom on the continent. ORFA terms the Fulani terrorist group the Fulani Ethnic Militia (FEM), which includes a mix of armed Fulani herdsmen, Fulani bandits and others.

For years, Christians in Nigeria have complained of attacks by militant Fulani without adequate response nor protection from Nigeria’s government.

“Millions of people are left undefended,” ORFA Senior Analyst Frans Vierhout said upon the release of the data in August. “For years, we’ve heard of calls for help being ignored, as terrorists attack vulnerable communities. Now the data tells its own story.”

FEM killed at least 42 percent of all civilians killed in community attacks, while Boko Haram and others combined killed 10 percent, contends the [report](#) “Countering the Myth of Religious Indifference in Nigerian Terror,” which spans October 2019 through September 2023.

Among 55,000 killed by terrorists in Nigeria in the study period, ORFA counted 30,880 civilian deaths, including 16,769 Christians, 6,235 Muslims, 154 African Traditional Religionists and 7,722 whose religion was not known.

In its 2024 World Watch List, persecution watch dog Open Doors lists Nigeria as the most dangerous place for Christians to live.

In September and October alone, Fulani militants are blamed for the deaths of at least 36 Christians in Nigeria’s middle belt, Church in Chains reported Oct. 17. And on Oct. 26, FEM attacked a Benue community during ongoing peace talks, killing two, injuring one and torching several homes that had withstood previous attacks, Truth Nigeria reported Oct. 28.

The FEM attack, the fifth on the community since June, occurred in the middle of the afternoon during a Peace and Security Meeting convened by a delegation of Fulani and representatives of Agatu Local Government Area, as well as representatives of the Igala and Ibira ethnic groups from Kogi and Nasarawa State, Truth Nigeria reported.

Many times in Nkiendoro, Tinau has come close to being a victim of Fulani militants, ICC reported. Terrorists have confiscated his livestock, robbing his family of their livelihood as he and his wife continue their education – he in seminary and she at the National Teachers Institute. The couple can afford to send only one of their daughters to school.

Tinau has seen fruit in his ministry, bringing two Fulani to Christ, ICC said.

“I will never go back to Islam,” Tinau said. “Christ has not compromised. I will not compromise. I will continue to preach and bring additional souls to Christ.”

Tinau is among many persecuted Christians the International Mission Board is encouraging Southern Baptists to remember in prayer Nov. 3, with resources available [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

Porn use grows among Christians, study says, urging church to offer healing

VENTURA, CA (BP) – Christian men and women use pornography more today than in 2016 when Barna spotlighted the sin among pastors and congregants, an updated study found in calling the church to be a place of healing for those impacted by the pervasive and destructive phenomenon.

This time around, Barna teamed with Pure Desire Ministries and its partners in presenting “Beyond the Porn Phenomenon: Equipping the Church for a New Conversation About Pornography, Betrayal Trauma and Healing.” The report tracks and defines the problem, calls on the church to offer a healing balm and offers practical guidance to that end.

“The average Christian is not experiencing freedom in this area; 75 percent of Christian men and 40 percent of Christian women report that they are viewing pornography at least occasionally,” wrote Pure Desire Ministries Executive Director Nick Stumbo, a former pastor who overcame porn use more than a decade ago. “The numbers for today’s youngest adults are even worse.

“But what may be more troubling is that well over half of Christians who use porn say they are comfortable with their porn use.”

In the general population, porn use has increased 6 percentage points among U.S. adults in the past eight years, rising to 61 percent, Barna reported, with use increasing to 44 percent among women from a 2016 mark of 39 percent.

For Christians, 54 percent reported viewing porn in the latest study, compared to 68 percent of non-Christians, a disparity of 14 percentage points that narrows when considering frequency, Barna reported. Nearly a quarter of practicing Christians, 22 percent, view porn at least weekly, compared to 31 percent of non-Christians.

But most churches are not addressing the problem, respondents said. Only 10 percent of Christians and churched adults said their churches offer programs to help those struggling with porn use and addiction, but 58 percent of Christian or churched adults want their church to do so.

Despite the low percentage of churches addressing the problem, 75 percent of pastors said they are individually ministering to those struggling with porn, and 51 percent of those seeking help are married men, pastors said.

Among pastors themselves, 18 percent cite porn use as a current personal struggle, and 67 percent have a history of porn use. Most of them, 86 percent, believe porn use is common among Christian pastors, study authors wrote.

When churches do address the issue of pornography, they often overlook the full problem, [said Sam Black](#), an expert in pornography recovery with Covenant Eyes. Churches often don't see past the spiritual harm, he said in a roundtable discussion included in the report.

"Churches often miss the physical healing that is necessary. They miss that spouses need healing from their partner's betrayal. And they often completely miss that women watch porn," Black said. "Leaders often fail at providing people with an understanding of how pornography can be damaging.

"Most churches fail to recognize that pornography undermines every ministry of the local church."

While churches offer children's ministry, host marriage seminars, date nights and weekend retreats, inappropriate content is available to children as never before, Black said, and porn is cited as a contributing factor in many divorces.

But Christian respondents disagree on whether porn use is problematic, researchers found. Most Christians, 62 percent, said a person can regularly view pornography and live a sexually healthy life. While research shows a correlation between porn use and poor mental health and well-being outcomes, researchers were slow to confirm a causal relationship.

“This data doesn’t tell us if porn use leads to lower well-being scores, or if people with lower well-being scores are more likely to use porn,” researchers wrote. “Further research is needed to explore potential cause-and-effect relationships. If porn consumption contributes to diminished well-being, it’s concerning; conversely, if lower well-being prompts individuals to turn to porn, that’s also undesirable.”

Porn use is more common among younger generations including Christians, researchers found. Among practicing Christians ages 18-38, more than half – 53 percent – have sent a nude image of themselves via text, email, social media or app. Usually, they send nude images to their boyfriend or girlfriend (87 percent) or a friend (24 percent), and 89 percent of the time it was a nude image of themselves.

Most youth leaders, 89 percent, say they wish parents would teach teenagers about sexual health and behaviors, but most youth leaders (69 percent) believe teens are learning such things from friends or social media.

How can the church make a difference?

Black hopes the church will provide a safe place for honesty, vulnerability and grace in community.

“The Church is God’s plan A. It is within the Church where God seeks to restore those who have become ensnared. God isn’t embarrassed, fearful or ignorant of our sin,” Black said in the report. “Today, the local church has choices. It can largely ignore the problems of pornography because they are too unseemly. It can chastise, rebuke and cast out, which will send more people into hiding.”

Among key tips for pastors and Christian leaders are:

- Insights from the study call on pastors and Christian leaders to intentionally cultivate vibrant faith communities that empower individuals to live with sexual integrity, confront the challenges of the digital age and experience the fullness of God’s design for sexuality.
- Prioritize equipping congregations with a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding porn. With the data in mind, this could look like biblical teaching and support groups, but also partnering with counselors and other medical professionals for a combined approach to reconciling (or preventing) the damages of porn use.

The findings are based on an online survey of 2,976 U.S. adults, with an oversample of Christians, conducted Oct. 20-30, 2023; a survey of 462 U.S. senior Protestant pastors conducted Sept. 27-Oct. 9, 2023, and a survey of 205 U.S. Christian youth leaders conducted Nov. 16, 2023-Jan. 16, 2024.

Barna and Pure Desire Ministries offer key findings from the study here, along with the report and additional [resources](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' senior writer.

Separation of church and state on education front heats up across nation

BATON ROUGE, LA (BP) – A U.S. district judge heard arguments Oct. 21 over whether Louisiana public schools should be required to post the Ten Commandments prominently in each classroom, as the Legislature now stipulates.

In Oklahoma, several organizations are suing the State Board of Education over its mandate that the Bible be incorporated in public school lessons in grades five through 12 statewide. The Oklahoma Board of Education has approved the expenditure of \$3 million this fiscal year and next to purchase 55,000 King James Version Bibles and accompanying publications of select historical documents for classroom instruction.

Also in Oklahoma, attorneys have filed an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court seeking permission to open what would be the first publicly funded religious charter school in the nation, St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School.

In Ohio, a handful of private religious schools received a total of nearly \$4 million in public funds for renovations and structural improvements including a playground this fiscal year, according to a [listing](#) on the Office of Budget and Management website, which many local leaders said is the first for the state.

The cases test the separation of church and state guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution, but variously interpreted by legal experts and judges.

In the Louisiana case, U.S. District Judge John W. deGravelles heard arguments in a lawsuit filed by nine families including Christian pastors, Jewish leaders and others, as well as groups including the state and national American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The plaintiffs are trying to block the new law that requires all schools to display the Ten Commandments by Jan. 1, 2025, citing the scripture's historical significance. But those opposed to the law say it violates the Constitution.

"That's why we have a separation of church and state," State Senator Royce Duplessis, who voted against the measure, has said. "We learned the Ten Commandments when we went to Sunday School. As I said on the Senate floor, if you want your kids to learn the Ten Commandments, you can take them to church."

But Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill, fighting to keep the law active, has countered, "Tell your child not to look at them."

Louisiana is the only state to mandate such a display since the U.S. Supreme Court declared [unconstitutional](#) and solely religious a 1978 Kentucky law mandating the same. Louisiana bases its mandate on historical significance rather than religion, according to the [text of the law](#) on the legislative website, describing the commandments as "foundational" to Louisiana and the U.S.

Ohio's distribution of \$4 million in grants to private religious schools includes \$1.5 million for Mansfield Christian School, \$1 million for Holy Trinity Orthodox Christian Academy and Preschool, and other grants ranging from \$800,000 for Saint Edwards High School, \$250,000 each for Temple Christian School and Bellefontaine Calvary Christian School, and as little as \$4,000 for playground enhancements at St. Mary School.

The allocations are included in the \$190.7 billion biennial budget for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

In Tennessee, an effort to pass a statewide voucher program to fund private education with public funds died in 2024, but Gov. Bill Lee pledged to try again in 2025.

In Oklahoma, four organizations representing dozens of Oklahoma residents filed a lawsuit Oct. 17 in the Supreme Court of Oklahoma seeking to block State Superintendent Ryan Walters from spending \$3 million to purchase Bibles in support of his mandate, and seeking to block the mandate itself.

The lawsuit points out Article 11, Section 5 of the Oklahoma Constitution, which states, "No public money or property shall ever be appropriated, applied, donated, or used, directly or indirectly, for the use, benefit, or support of any sect, church, denomination, or system of religion, or for the use, benefit, or support of any priest, preacher, minister, or other religious teacher or dignitary, or sectarian institution as such."

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law & Justice filed the lawsuit on behalf of a diverse group of more than 30 residents, including parents, students, teachers and pastors.

Oklahoma's mandate comes with guidance to focus on the Bible's historical, literary, artistic and musical influences.

"The Bible has been a key cornerstone in the development of Western thought, influencing legal systems, ethical frameworks, and cultural norms," Walters wrote in his guidance. "Teachers must focus on how biblical principles have shaped the foundational aspects of Western societies, such as the concepts of justice, human rights, and the rule of law."

Similarly, the Texas State Board of Education is considering using curriculum that incorporates Bible stories into K-5 curriculum because of the "literary and historical value of the content," 19thnews.org reported.

Questions of separation of church and state will likely be settled by the nation's highest court, as attorneys for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City hope the court will take up its case on the use of public funding for the religious charter school.

"The Oklahoma Attorney General's attack against religious educators who wish to serve their communities through privately operated charter schools is wrong on the law and even worse for families in need," John Meiser, director of the Lindsay and Matt Moroun Religious Liberty Clinic and associate clinical professor of law, said in support of the archdiocese upon its filing with the High Court.

"St. Isidore would offer an innovative schooling option to bring opportunity and educational choice to those communities who need it most. That is an act of service and generosity that we all should welcome. And St. Isidore's right not to be excluded from this program simply because of its faith is a freedom that the Constitution guarantees."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' senior writer.

Pro-life medical professionals release 'Women's Healthcare Declaration'

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A coalition of doctors, medical professionals and healthcare policy leaders

are urging dignified care for women and calling for accurate information surrounding pregnancy, pregnancy complications and state laws.

The [Women's Healthcare Declaration](#) urges professional medical organizations, state health agencies, medical boards, hospitals and hospital systems, obstetricians and the FDA to restore the medical standard of care for pregnant women and women facing miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, an incomplete abortion or other life-threatening conditions related to pregnancy.

"As physicians, we see a dire need to correct the record on induced abortion, abortion laws, and life-affirming care," said Dr. Christina Francis, a board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist, and CEO of the American Association of Pro-Life OBGYNs (AAPLOG). "This declaration offers the facts and clarity that the medical community and lawmakers need, and that our patients – pregnant and preborn – deserve."

Francis, who has delivered thousands of babies across a two-decade career, said everyone can agree that women and their preborn children deserve the best healthcare possible and accurate information about their care.

"Elective, induced abortion, which intends the death of a preborn child, does not improve women's health," she said at a Tuesday morning (Oct. 22) press conference. "Every state in the country allows physicians like me to intervene immediately to treat miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, post-abortion complications and other potentially life-threatening complications at any point in pregnancy."

Dr. Cortney Draper, an emergency room physician, said there is deceptive, inaccurate information about state-level laws that prohibit intentionally causing the death of an unborn child. But she said a permissive approach toward induced abortion does not hinder physicians from treating women facing serious or life-threatening pregnancy complication.

"I have seen the harm to both physicians and patients that results from misinformation and confusion about abortion laws and life-affirming health care," Draper said. "This declaration offers much-needed clarity on what it means to provide excellent care to pregnant women and their preborn children."

Last week, Draper treated a woman with a tubal ectopic pregnancy.

"There was no legal question about my ability to appropriately treat her emergency," Draper said.

Dr. Robin Pierucci, a board-certified neonatologist, also addressed prenatal testing and fetal abnormalities at Tuesday's press conference.

“Prenatal diagnoses do not adequately describe postnatal prognosis,” Pierucci said. “We do not know until after birth how much or how little any child will be affected by what was diagnosed before they were born.”

Pierucci said the Women’s Healthcare Declaration adds to the discussion surrounding prenatal testing, diagnosis and fetal abnormalities.

“This declaration presents concrete, specific ways to improve pregnant women’s health care and begins the complicated discussion regarding prenatal testing. All of our patients’ lives are inherently valuable, which is why we promise to ‘do no harm’; this declaration provides a route to uphold our oath.”

Declaration co-signers include the Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine, the American Academy of Medical Ethics, AAPLOG, the American College of Family Medicine and the American College of Pediatricians. Those organizations, and other co-signers, represent over 75,000 physicians and healthcare professionals.

To learn more about, sign or read the Women’s Healthcare Declaration, visit womenshealthmatters.org.

This article originally appeared in [Kentucky Today](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Executive Director/Treasurer Search Team Announces Candidate

Candidate Recommendation from the Executive Director/Treasurer Search Committee

The search committee appointed to find the Executive Director-Treasurer for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) is thrilled to announce that Ed Emmerling is the candidate that will be presented by the search team at the annual meeting on November 1. The search committee reviewed dozens of resumes, conducted several interviews, and committed time personally and corporately to prayer. They are grateful for the prayers, counsel, and trust of Michigan Baptists as they evaluated candidates seeking the will of God for the BSCM.

Emmerling has served at Westside Church in Flushing, MI since 1997 and as the Lead Pastor since 2002. He has served the BSCM in numerous capacities, most recently as president of the BSCM. The committee is especially impressed by his love for people and the state of Michigan. He is a collaborative leader who is comfortable sitting down with pastors and church leaders from diverse parts of the state with a sincere desire for their health and success in accomplishing the mission of Jesus.

In addition to his local church work, Emmerling has played a key role in BSCM partnerships with national ministries such as Send Relief, helping mobilize resources and volunteers for gospel outreach efforts throughout the state. His experience with these entities has given him a healthy perspective on connecting Michigan churches with the larger Southern Baptist family. Emmerling was heavily involved in the recent partnership with Send Relief through the Serve Tour stop in Flint. At this gathering, over six hundred believers from many states came together for two days to bring the gospel into the community and to support churches ministering in Flint and the surrounding areas.

As the ED-T candidate, Emmerling has expressed his desire to see the churches of Michigan flourish through a deepened commitment to the Great Commission. He is passionate about fostering strong, united, and mission-driven congregations that work collaboratively to see the gospel continue to spread in every corner of the state.

In response to the selection, Pastor Ken Render of Lakeside Community Church in St. Clair Shores said, "There is no better choice the search team could have made than Ed Emmerling. He knows our state. He loves and knows pastors. Ed has a passion to see our churches grow. Ed Emmerling will serve our state well."

"I was thrilled to hear that the Executive Director search committee has chosen to bring forward Ed Emmerling's name to the convention. I have known Ed for many years and have seen his faithful service in his church, association, and in our State Convention. I believe that he will provide steady leadership for us in the days ahead." adds Wayne Parker, Send Detroit Missionary and Senior Pastor of Merriman Road Baptist Church.

More opportunities to get to know Emmerling will be announced soon including a video interview hosted by search team member Travis Whitaker, Lead Pastor of Mile City Church in Plymouth, MI. In addition to the video interview, several regional meet-and-greet events are being planned where messengers and church leaders can personally engage with Ed and his wife, Renee. Dates and locations for these events will be announced soon.

The search committee is thrilled to have unanimous support for Emmerling as the candidate for the next ED-T of the BSCM. As the state convention approaches this important decision, the search committee encourages all Michigan Baptists to continue in prayer for Ed Emmerling, his family, and the Convention as they seek God's guidance for the future. May this season of discernment bring unity, purpose, and excitement for what lies ahead for the BSCM.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Messengers from the BSCM considered the search committee's recommendation during the BSCM Annual Meeting on November 1 and voted to approve Ed Emmerling as the next Executive Director-Treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan.

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

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

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