

THE BARNABAS PAPERS

Table of Contents

Associational
Missionary Article.....1

Church
Ministry.....2

Rural
Ministry.....3

Pastoral
Ministry.....4

Discipleship/Sunday
School.....5

Worship
Ministry6-7

Pastor's Wife
Ministry.....8-9

Technology10

Evangelism.....11

Youth
Ministry12

Senior Adult
Ministry13

Children/Family
Ministry14

Revitalization.....15

Camp Ministry.....16

Church History.....17-19

Missions20-21

During the week between Christmas and New Year's, I attended the wedding of one of my cousins. It was held at the church I considered my home, while I was growing up. There were many faces that I recognized. Some of these people represent years of ministry that was poured into me. Bro. Allen Earls, now the pastor, was my youth pastor for a while and even officiated my wedding. In the church that day was another major influencer in my life, Mike Nichols. He was youth pastor when Allen became the pastor. Mike just recently retired from the student ministry after some 20 years in the trenches. These men among others have had a major impact on my life.

I can honestly say that the wedding ceremony a month ago was one of the most God honoring that I have ever seen or been a part of. There was not one point in which the Gospel was not represented. But what struck me even more than that, was the best man. At that time, I was not related to the groom, for he was marrying Emily, my cousin. Therefore, I did not know much about his family or friends. James, the groom, just graduated from MU so he is much younger than I am; yet his best man was a bit older than me. As I looked around the church I noticed that this man was not the father, uncle, or even a relative. It was not until the reception and his speech, that I realized who this man was.

His speech did not begin with an address to the bride and groom, like most others do, but rather to the parents of both the bride and the groom. He sang praise to the Godly way that the parents had raised their son and daughter. You see, this man, who was asked to be the best man, was James' Sunday school teacher and mentor. Did you read that correctly? The best man at a wedding was the Sunday School teacher!

I was taken aback. I was stunned, encouraged and challenged all at the same time. Here stood a man who had poured his life into another. He walked with James through life. He had taught him God's Word. And he was asked to stand next to James to be his best man, on one of the biggest days of his life.

As I sat there with tears streaming down my face, I asked myself, if I was ever this type of a man to someone else? Have I poured my life into someone unconditionally? Not that I would want to be recognized in that manner, but would I be someone's choice in being their best man, because of the ministry I had in their life?

What about you? Hundreds of people attend the churches of GCBA each week. They come and go, but I wonder if there is life-on-life discipleship going on under the surface of a church program or worship? Like a Sunday School teacher not just teaching from a larger seat, but the investment outside of the classroom into the lives of the children, youth, families, or adults of the church.

You can hear me often talk about my desire for healthy pastors, churches, and ministries. I believe that what you read above is a picture of healthy. Pastor, who are you pouring into in a small group or one-on-one setting? Better yet, who is pouring into you? Leaders and teachers in the church, who is it for you? For me, at the most crucial times in my life, it was the two men above. One conducted my wedding; the other was one of my groomsmen. Thank you Alan and Mike for pouring into my life. You are my best men!

Preston

Church Ministry

Do You Make Life Decisions with Your Church in Mind?

by Joshua Hedger December 28, 2016

<http://ftc.co/resource-library/1/2529>

In Philippians 1:22-26, we have the Apostle Paul's dialogue, if you will, with himself. In this back and forth of thought, he wrestles with a major life decision. His decision is this, "If I had the choice to live or to die, which would I choose?"

Now perhaps that questions strikes concern into you for Paul's mental stability, but it gives us an incredible glance at the treasure of his heart because Paul will continue on to say, "I would choose death because it's much better for me. When I die, I get Jesus!"

Paul so treasured Jesus that he'd rather die, lose all that this world has for him, and therefore gain Jesus! He truly thinks that death would be a better choice for him. But what follows this is what I want to focus on for the next few paragraphs. Paul follows up his realization of what would be best for him by saying what would be best for the church -- to live.

In Paul's reasoning, it's personally beneficial if he dies because then he gets the ultimate treasure, Jesus! However, if he lives, he can keep encouraging, strengthening, and equipping the church, which is better for them. So Paul's question moves from "What is the best decision for me?" to "Do I choose what is best for me or what is best for the church?" You know what he chooses:

In verse 25 we get these words from Paul, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith..." Paul reasoned what was the best decision for himself, then reasoned what the best decision was for the church, and when those two things contradicted each other, he chose what was best for the church.

Let that sink in for a moment. Paul's choice was what would be best for the church, not what was best for himself.

Do you consider the church in the decisions of your life? Do you ask yourself how your job change could affect your church? Do you consider how your moving would impact the work of God through your church in your community? Do you seek insight into how your decision to leave or stay at your local church would affect the advancement of the gospel?

Chances are, like so many of us so many times, you don't think about the church very much in these decisions. "If decision A was better for me, then it must be the right decision." I didn't pay much attention to how that decision impacted the rest of the church. But what we see in Paul's thought process here was a communal and missional mindset in his decision process. He thought about how his decision would affect the community of Christians (the church) and the mission (the advancement of the gospel).

I think it is safe to say that most of us have much room to grow in our consideration of the church in life's decisions.

Here are 6 practical ways you can do this:

1. Discuss your decisions with your community group for wise counsel and insight.
2. Discuss your decisions with your pastors for godly counsel and wisdom.
3. Consider how it affects the relationships of those you are sharing the gospel with.
4. Consider how it affects those whom you know and who know you deeply through confession of sin. Will your decision drastically change these relationships?
5. Consider how your decision will affect the church financially.
6. Consider whether the ministry you are involved in will be able to flourish or if it will wilt through your decision.

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Rural Ministry

Four Mistakes Rural Pastors Make (That All Pastors Need to Avoid)

Article by Jay Sanders

<http://www.lifeway.com/pastors/2016/09/01/four-mistakes-rural-pastors-make-that-all-pastors-need-to-avoid/>

Being the pastor of a small, rural church comes with its own set of challenges.

You know what it's like when people ask for directions to your church and you have to say, "It's on Old County Line Road, a mile or so past Big Deek's Pharmacy and Chainsaw Repair." You know that the only coffee shop where you can sit and be missional is the one that is opened 24 hours and also serves waffles. You know what it's like to preach in front of 75 people and consider that a really big crowd.

But there might be a few things that you don't know about the small, rural church that you pastor. Don't worry. It's not all your fault. Most of the authors you read and professors you learned from assumed that you would end up being the pastor of a church a million miles away from Big Deek's fine establishment. But that doesn't take away from the fact that you need to be prepared to faithfully lead Christ's church.

While there may not be a ton of books or seminars to help rural pastors, we can learn from the mistakes of others. Here are four such mistakes.

Laziness

The ministry is a great place for lazy people to hide out. The old joke is that pastors only work one day a week. For some, that old joke is more like a life philosophy. But if you carry this approach with you into a rural setting, it will come back to haunt you. If your congregation is made up of people who wake up at 4 in the morning to feed cows, they're not going to have a whole lot of respect for you if they know you struggle to make it out of bed by 11 a.m. because you spent all night playing video games.

The remedy is not to become a workaholic. Nor is it to constantly talk about how hard you work. Just work. Show up on time and stay late to help put up the tables.

Comparison

Your church isn't in Los Angeles so stop comparing yourself to your friend from seminary who got to counsel a crack addict last Sunday morning before having lunch with Justin Timberlake. And stop thinking that the same things that work out there will work where you are. Most likely, they won't. The people in your church are much more likely to be distracted than engaged by a dimly lit sanctuary and smoke machine. Stop trying to bring the suburbs to the sticks. Bringing Jesus to the sticks is good enough.

Gossip

Gossip is a cancer in any type of church but it's much more dangerous in small towns. There is a greater than 90% chance that the lady who plays the organ is related to the guy who cuts the grass so keep your comments to yourself about how off key the music was last week or how terrible the grass looks. Even if you're guaranteed not to get caught, you should still hate gossip. But in a small town, you will get caught.

I once had someone approach me who was in desperate need of help. When I asked her if she had spoken to her pastor, a look of horror came over her face. "Are you kidding? He'd tell everyone in town!" Don't be that pastor.

Kingdom Building

Wait. What? Aren't pastors supposed to be Kingdom builders? Yes, we are. But in a rural setting it's awful tempting for us to care more about building our own kingdoms. After you've counseled hurting people, preached a few funerals and stuck around longer than all of the previous pastors, people will begin to appreciate you. And that's a good thing, until you manipulate that appreciation into more and more power and money for yourself. As a result, the church will be too scared of you to hold you accountable and too broke to actually take part in building God's kingdom.

Be encouraged, pastor. A lot of your best work goes unnoticed. Sometimes it even feels like you're just treading water. Don't stop swimming. God is honored by your faithfulness. And your community is blessed. Don't get discouraged by the fact that you never get invited to preach at some big city conference with a bunch of big city preachers. If you hang in there long enough, you just might get invited to go skeet shooting with Big Deek.

Now that's missional.

Pastoral Ministry

Imagine that tomorrow you decided to start a new diet. You wake up in the morning and have a glass of milk. You like milk; it tastes good and it's good for you. You can drink a whole glass in about five minutes while you're checking out the news online or looking at your Facebook feed before you start your day. Then you're off, to work, or to school, or to your responsibilities at home. You don't eat anything else until the next morning. Then you have another glass of milk. And you do the same the next day, and the next, unless you forget or get busy, and then you don't eat anything, day after day. Of course we know that if that way of eating becomes your new normal, eventually you'll grow so weak that you might pass out or get sick or be unable to fulfill your responsibilities from the lack of nourishment and substance in your diet.

And yet how many of us try to survive that way spiritually? Our faith, our relationship with God through our Savior and King Jesus Christ, feeds on the Word of God. Of course as pastors, we can immediately push back against this. "I'm in the Word all of the time, studying, writing sermons, and putting together lessons." But how much time do we spend with God on purpose for no other reason than drawing closer to him? How often do we dive into the Word for worship and edification instead of always trying to figure out what other people need from it?

Without a steady diet of the Word, a time where we focus on the God of the Word and not our responsibilities to minister to others, our faith, our relationship with Jesus, will get weaker and weaker. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). Psalm 78 commands parents to teach the word of God to their children so that they would have faith in him, because the Word produces faith (5-7). Proverbs 22:18-19 tells us it is pleasant and good to have the Word of God within us, to have it ready to come from our lips, because that state of being allows us to trust in the Lord, to have faith, to follow him.

If we're at all unhappy or disappointed with our ministries, with our witness, our joy in Christ, our family, our courage, our service, or our heart for God, the first thing we need to check is if we're really feeding our faith. The weaker our faith is, the harder it is to trust God, to worship him, to resist sin, and to rejoice and experience the fullness of the life he offers us in Christ through the Spirit. And a glass of milk each morning might keep us alive (maybe?), but it won't do much else. So make sure you're spending time with God. Make sure that being in the Word is a priority not just because it's your vocation, but because it's the lifeblood of your relationship with your Savior.

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Discipleship / Sunday School Ministry

Finding New Teachers

Article by LP Cook III
1/25/2017

If you have more teachers than you need, stop reading this article and put that out on Facebook. Get ready for a barrage of calls and emails! Most, if not all, of us are continually looking for more teachers and group leaders in our ministry. This is not just the pastor's job or the Sunday School director's job. Anyone who is leading now should be engaged in developing new teachers.

There, I've tipped my hand. If you are hoping to *find* new teachers, you are going to have limited success. Leaders need to be *developed* in our ministries and Sunday School is usually the greatest need and the greatest opportunity.

If you are a teacher, who in your class is ready for the next step? Now this might be a shocker but the best way to figure that out is to pray. Amazing and profound, I know, but true! When you know who, the how is easier than you think. You are getting a lesson ready every week, just include your new apprentice in the time you already spend. This can be done over coffee or over the internet. We have the most amazing technologies but we fail to put them to use. Face Time, Google Hangouts, Skype, or even a regular phone call can all be used to prepare together. Simply showing someone what you do is the best way to train them to lead. It's a whole lot less intimidating for them also to be able to join you for prep rather than preparing on their own to teach a lesson sometime in the future.

If you are a pastor or director, the best way to find new candidates is to pray. You're not surprised *again* are you? Nobody I know has capable teachers joining their church fast enough to supply the need. Join your current teachers in encouraging members to join their teacher in preparation. Use your best teachers to show new folks the ropes.

This is not rocket science and, funny enough, it's what Jesus did. He took people with Him as He worked and then sent them out to try it once they had seen it. Give it a whirl. I'm praying for you and God has people in mind already to fill the needs you have.

LP Cook III is a veteran Sunday School and discipleship practitioner here in the Mid-Missouri area. He has led Ridgecrest in the Midwest workshops and is the Associate Pastor at Union Hill Baptist Church in Holts Summit, where he practices these methods every week. He serves also as the Church Strengthening Team leader for GCBA.

Worship Ministry

Singing Songs from Questionable Sources

Article by Bob Kauflin, May 13, 2016

<http://worshipmatters.com/2016/05/13/singing-songs-from-questionable-sources/>

I had already been working on this post when I received this email from Ethan:

"For the past year, I've struggled with the idea of playing 'good' songs (obviously room for defining some terms there...) from questionable ministries. In playing their songs, am I advocating for their entire ministry? In playing their songs, am I necessarily pushing my people towards their church (i.e., when the CCLI info pops up at the end of the song)?"

I took a stab at this question eight years ago when I wrote "Does it Matter Who Writes the Songs we Sing?" Since then, I've been asked the question so frequently I've tried to refine my thinking on this topic.

What Makes a Song Source "Questionable?"

Songs can be from "questionable" sources in at least three ways:

1. It's recently come to light publicly that the composer of a song is living or has been living in unrepentant sin.
2. A composer is part of a denomination that teaches what you consider a distortion of the gospel.
3. The song springs from a church or ministry that has theology or practices you think are unbiblical.

Interestingly, I've visited websites and blogs that view Sovereign Grace Music as one of those "questionable sources," usually because we're continuationist, Reformed, or use contemporary music styles.

So whatever your reasons for questioning the origins of a song, here are some thoughts.

First Things First

Let me start with some general observations.

First, to dismiss this conversation as irrelevant, petty, or unnecessary (e.g., "Who are you to question my sincerity?"), fails to appreciate the diverse and deep ways songs affect our thoughts and emotions. It also minimizes the importance Scripture gives to singing (Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16-17). To say, "It doesn't matter who writes the songs we sing," isn't helpful, because it does matter to many people. In fact, I'm asked this question more than any other. By a long shot.

Second, exercising discernment isn't the same thing as sinful judgment. Our culture often wrongly equates disagreement with disdain and insists that to make distinctions is to be condescending. But God tells us in Scripture to judge rightly, distinguish between those who should hear our message and who shouldn't, be able to discern who a fool is, avoid people who cause divisions, and know the difference between sheep and wolves in sheep's clothing (Jn. 7:24; Mt. 7:6; Prov. 13:20; Rom. 16:17; Mt. 7:15).

Third, singing a song from a questionable source doesn't mean your church is racing down a path of heresy, worldliness, or sin. We want to avoid "demonizing" songs or composers, expecting Satan himself to be unleashed in our congregation if we sing that song. God can bring forth biblically faithful songs from a variety of sources, and he can work through them in spite of their origins.

Fourth, choosing not to use songs from a particular church, ministry, or individual doesn't give us the right to unilaterally criticize everything that is associated with those songs or other churches who sing them. Song choices should be the result of pastoral choices made within the context of a local church. God has often glorified his name and worked in people's lives through songs whose origins we might find suspect or disagree with. Jesus is too great, glorious, and generous to give the best songs only to people who look and think exactly like us.

Fifth, I'm not calling out ministries and people by name nor trying to establish universal rules that everyone should follow. I'm suggesting ways to think through this issue biblically to serve our local churches and honor God.

Continued on page 7

Worship Ministry (continued)

Thoughts to Consider

With those caveats, here are some thoughts about using songs from questionable sources.

1. Edification involves minimizing distractions.

1 Corinthians 14 makes it clear that when we gather as the church God wants us to do what edifies, or builds up, those around us (1 Cor. 14:1, 3, 5, 12, 17, 26). Mutual edification brings God glory. If I lead a song that tempts a large part of my congregation to be distracted by the sins of the person who wrote it or the theology of the ministry it originates from, that's not edifying. So if a songwriter/artist publicly announces they're living in unrepentant sin or it's discovered that they have been, it might be wise to set their songs aside for a season. Yes, God is gracious and we're all imperfect people, but he also calls us to live holy lives (Heb. 12:14; Titus 2:11-12). And if removing one artist's or church's songs from your repertoire for a time leaves you with only a handful of songs, it's a great opportunity to start drawing from more sources.

2. Choose songs to teach theology, not simply avoid heresy.

At the recent Together for the Gospel conference Al Mohler encouraged us to aim for a higher standard in our songs than "avoiding heresy." Our songs should help people think and act biblically. A song from a questionable source might seem "pretty good," but that's a low bar. The practices, emphases, or teachings of churches are often reflected in the songs that emerge from them. If your church sings 4-5 songs each week, that's only 200-250 songs in a year, and many of those are repeated. Choose them wisely.

3. Using only one song from a ministry/writer also makes a statement.

When a ministry puts out dozens, if not hundreds, of songs, and you only sing one or two of them, you're communicating intentionality. You're saying you've chosen this song for its content and not for its associations. You're expressing gratefulness for any solid, biblically faithful song that enables the word of Christ to dwell in people richly.

4. Develop a culture that appreciates lyrical content over a brand name.

Leaders are often concerned that singing one song will lead people in their congregation to YouTube or a website to hear more songs from the ministry/person. But if the people in your church know you choose songs based on their theology and not their popularity, it won't be as much of an issue. Doing one song by an artist or ministry doesn't necessarily mean you endorse everything about them, just as using a quote from a writer you don't completely agree with doesn't mean you commend their entire theological perspective.

5. Incorporate more old songs into your repertoire.

We can minimize the problem of who writes our songs by singing songs that have stood the test of time and are known more for their content than their composers. By the end of his life, Horatio Spafford had come to deny hell, affirm purgatory, and teach universalism. Yet God has used his song, It is Well with My Soul, to encourage hundreds of thousands of Christians in the midst of suffering. The same can be said of William Cowper's song, God Moves in a Mysterious Way. Even though Cowper endured severe bouts of depression and tried to commit suicide at least three times, his words have edified Christians for centuries. When composers are no longer living, older songs don't run the risk of suddenly becoming questionable because of a distracting theology or struggle.

Bottom line, if you find a song that communicates biblical truth in a clear, uncompromising, beautiful, singable way, and your congregation is trained to value truth over popularity, you're probably in a position to benefit from it. If you're unsure, you've got plenty of other songs to choose from.

The article above along with the Technology in Ministry article, were both submitted by Brad Kerr, Associate Pastor of Worship and Education at FBC Fulton. Along with ministering in the church in multiple capacities, he is an avid runner. Currently he is training for a marathon.

Pastor's Wife Ministry

Fighting Burnout as a Pastor's Wife

Article by Erin Wheeler 01.31.2017

<https://9marks.org/article/fighting-burnout-as-a-pastors-wife/>

We've all had those days. You know, the ones where you crawl into bed, makeup still on, wondering if it's okay not to brush your teeth just this once. All the while, you wonder what actually happened to the minutes that evaporated into history.

There have been plenty of days like that for me, particularly as a young mother. But even now, when "new season" after "new season" seems to steam-roll over me, I find myself asking my heavenly Father, "Where is the time going? When do I get to catch my breath? I don't have anything left to pour out or give to all the needs and cries for help around me. God, what does faithfulness look like when I'm empty like this?" Sometimes the old adage "the days are long, but the years are short" begins to feel more like "the days are long *and* the years are long."

So, what do we do, as those God has called to be "help-mates to under-shepherds," when the never-ending demands pummel us? Well, in many ways our calling is the same as every Christian woman's—and every Christian man's. We're to take up our cross *daily*, and follow him (Luke 9:23). And often, that cross we bear is a call to give out of poverty, not abundance.

BEING FILLED WHILE FEELING EMPTY

While teaching his disciples one day in the temple, Jesus used a curious example of godly giving:

"And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'" (Mark 12:41–44)

This widow—likely lonely and rejected by her society—literally gave everything she had. She held nothing back from the Lord, entrusting herself to the one who cares for the least of these. Do you live like that with your time and energy? Do you pour yourself out like a drink offering for him, striving after lasting things, like people's souls? Do you surrender precious extra time with your husband in order to free him up to minister to others?

I don't intend to encourage a reckless kind of sacrifice that leads to utter burn-out, bitterness, and exhaustion, which is a genuine possibility for those in full-time, vocational ministry. I'm simply asking fellow pastors' wives to look hard into their hearts and examine their own expectations and perceived limitations.

There's nothing quite like watching God work through your life when you bring absolutely nothing to the table. Those times strengthen our faith as we watch his strength supernaturally infuse us. So often, I've found myself dreading some commitment we'd made together only to find that our supposed giving turned into receiving. I can't even begin to count the times I've watched God bless others through me when I felt absolutely incapable of loving or caring for a sister in need. In fact, it's often been *my* tears of exhaustion and discouragement that encouraged someone more than my wise words on a "good day."

How many times has the Lord encouraged me while I sat and listened to a friend share when I so selfishly wanted someone to listen to *my* hurts? Every time, I walk away reminded that God is good and everything he has for me is good (Ps. 119:68). It's a 2 Corinthians kind of comfort we offer, wherein our desperation and lack actually highlights God's power and strength in and through us: "For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."

We should praise God for opportunities to display his power in our perceived weaknesses.

Continued on page 9

Pastor's Wife Ministry (continued)

GOD'S WORD FILLS OUR EMPTY SOULS

But it's necessary to ask a question: what should we do when our hearts have turned cold? When we've got nothing left to give, where should we turn?

Gratefully, God tells us in his Word. He says, "Come, everyone who thirst, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Is. 55:1). Jesus offers us rest in himself through the comfort we find in his Word.

Too often, we toil in our own strength and wonder why we're so exhausted. Other times, we work and work only to forget that man cannot live by bread alone. He can only live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3).

Like oxygen masks on an airplane, we must attach ourselves to the oxygen of God's Word before we're going to be of any use to others who are suffocating on the fumes of this world.

Sister, you also might need to learn how to say no to some things in order to be alone with your Lord. We must never neglect our first love for what we perceive to be more important work. To re-energize, perhaps we should take some time in solitude to feast on Scripture, listen to expositional sermons, journal about the ways God has provided, or pray through the "rumblings" of our souls. Striving for balance requires insight from the Holy Spirit.

GLORIFYING HIM, BY TRUSTING HIM

The widow Jesus praised at the temple had the kind of faith we should aspire ourselves; it was supernatural. I've often wondered how many times she may have done that in her life, giving all she had and entrusting God to meet her needs. Pray for God to grant you opportunities to walk forward without sight, knowing that in faith he will provide. After all, Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." When our spirits are poor in him, we're promised the kingdom of heaven. What an exchange!

CRAWLING TOWARD HEAVEN

If you feel like you can't walk today, are you crawling toward heaven? Are you reaching your hands heavenward while grabbing a church member along the way, entrusting your grasp will pull them along too? He's strong enough, you know. In times of discouragement and exhaustion, we're so prone to forget his past faithfulness. As the hymn says, we're "prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." But look at the next line, an invitation to trust him: "Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for thy courts above."

But what if you're so depleted you feel like you can't even crawl? Burnout and depression are real problems that demand attention and often outside help. But as best you can, make sure not to confuse this feeling with the day-to-day struggles of the Christian life. Our exhaustion and poverty of spirit can be met with the best kind of exchange: our burdens for his yoke. There, we'll re-discover that his yoke is easy and light, and in it we'll find rest for our souls (Matt. 11:28-30).

So, the next time you crawl into bed, fully clothed with your makeup still on, wondering what happened to your day, remember the widow. But don't stop there. Remember the Lord's faithfulness in your own life. He will not call you to something that he will not equip you to handle. He only gives things in our lives for which he will provide. And sister, you know from the track record of your own life that he will certainly provide!

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Technology in Ministry

7 Reasons to Cultivate an Online Presence

Article from Todd Wright, September 27, 2016

<http://www.lifeway.com/pastors/2016/09/27/7-reasons-to-cultivate-an-online-presence/>

In recent years the church I pastor has invested extra time, energy, staff, and money to improve and increase our internet and social media presence. I have often wondered if our investment was working. After receiving this message via Facebook page yesterday, I have no doubt! Here's a slightly edited version of it:

Hello Friends! Today was my 1st day at Midway Church. I have been following Pastor Todd online, since Oct. 2013. Today changed my life in the most amazing ways! I had prayed for 3 months asking for God to reveal HIS plans for my life. I have been thirsty for HIS word and fellowship with others for quite a long time.

One night (Three Years Ago!), I was looking up "churches near me, Villa Rica", and Midway popped up. The very words on the website ("YOU BELONG HERE") hit my heart so deeply. I was so overwhelmed by what I felt, and I had to know more. I read everything I could on Midway, Pastor Todd, and LIFE groups. I signed up for e-mails and Pastor Todd's weekly Blogs and then, I started listening to previous sermons. My new journey had begun. The more I listened, the more I wanted to hear.

Today, I knew I wanted to be in service and among other disciples of Christ. God filled me with courage to be there today. From the moment I walked in, I felt the LOVE of GOD surrounding me. I was trembling and realized, I was finally where I belonged. I had brought some food donations and walked straight to the table where I met Ms. Jenny. She introduced me to Mr. Charlie and they made me feel like family. God is really working in me and HE has known my needs better than I. I was very nervous and I have Social Anxiety disorder, so BIG crowds can be a bit overwhelming. Several ladies helped me through that with prayer and Mr. Charlie; well he sat with me through service, just in case I needed anything.

After service, I met Pastor Todd and I felt so at ease finally. His sermon today, resonated with me in so many ways. I was meant to be there today. Mr. Charlie and Ms. Jenny took me down to FAN day and introduced me to so many wonderful new friends. They adopted me and made me feel so very welcome to be there. I had the most amazing time today. I cannot stop smiling! I am so excited to start my new journey with all of you there. I'm looking forward to finding the right fit with a LIFE group, and begin fellowship with others. Thank you for making me feel so welcomed and like family. God Bless!

After reading our new friend's message, I realized just how God had used our internet presence for His glory! As I thought it over I saw seven things about our virtual that touched her actual life. All of this was before she ever stepped foot on our campus.

1. For many people the front door of the church is not the front door of the church, the online presence is.
2. If you are depending on your parking lot team or your door greeters to be the initial face of your church, it may already be too late to make a first impression. Many internet-savvy people are looking for a website for even a Facebook page that lets them know what is in store for them when they arrive.
3. Your website front page should speak the unchurched. "You Belong Here!" is what greets every person who visits our website. Why? Because we really believe every unchurched person belongs with us. In our view "unchurched" refers to any person who for any reason is not regularly attending a local church whether or not they are believers already. We want every person in our community to be impacted by the gospel and we'd love to be the ones to get it to them!
4. Regular blog posts, emails, Facebook posts, and the like can build a bridge for the unchurched to your church. If you are a pastor with a blog, create an email list and make sure a subscribe button is on your blog. You never know who might be reading. If you use other social media channels wisely you can begin relating to people in your community before they visit.
5. Your website and social media are safe-zones for the unchurched. By "safe zone" I don't mean safe from the gospel; I mean safe from confusion or misunderstanding. Many people hesitate before going to a church. There is a sense of uncertainty with any new venture. When a person can see what your church stands for, how it ministers, and how your members carry themselves before they come the first time, there is actually a sense of belonging built in. Allowing for this is a good thing. Note the lady who recently visited monitored our website (and my personal blog and Facebook) for three years before coming the first time.
6. Unchurched people can connect to mission through online information. When is the last time someone showed up at your church for the very first time, and brought something to support a mission effort you were already doing? When this lady visited Midway the first time, she brought bags of groceries. Why? Because she had received online information about our food drive and came prepared to support it.
7. Your website should include free archived sermons. It amazes me how many people would climb Mt Everest in a t-shirt for all the printed volumes of Spurgeon's sermons yet do not make their own sermons available digitally. As easy as it is to host audio online, or turn recorded sermons into podcasts, there really is very little reason not to give the unchurched who find your website or blog the ability to listen to sermons before they attend.
8. Your website should feature easy to find information on how to connect. At the bare minimum a person should know exactly where to go on campus from information on your website or Facebook page. Beyond that they should be able to join a group or find when and where they meet from your website, Facebook page, or app.

In short, design your online presence with more than church members in mind. If your website or Facebook page are only rehashes of the Sunday morning announcements you are missing a huge opportunity to create a brand new front door of your church.

Evangelism

Steps Toward Evangelism

chucklawless.com/2017/01/steps-toward-evangelism/
January 23, 2017

Most Christians struggle with telling the gospel to anyone. In fact, many believers will *never* evangelize another person. If you struggle with this task, here are some simple starting points:

1 Ask God to restore your wonder and passion for Him.

When we're most amazed by Jesus, we're much more likely to talk about Him. That's the primary reason I wrote my little book, *Nobodies for Jesus* – to help us be fascinated again.

2 Start wondering about the spiritual condition of everyone you see.

Make yourself do it—ask in your mind, “I wonder if that bank teller knows Jesus.” Or the convenience store clerk. Or your neighbor. Or your co-worker. Or that driver who cut you off in traffic. Learn to see people as Jesus did, as sheep without a shepherd.

3 Focus on five non-believers you know, and pray every day for them.

Ask God to open their blinded minds to hear the gospel (2 Cor. 4:3-4). Your daily praying – even if it's brief – will deepen your burden for people to know Jesus.

4 Every day, tell somebody you know *something* good about God.

All of us can speak about the way God cares for us. Even if all you say is, “God has been really good to me today,” that's a start. If you speak about God at least once each day, you'll learn to speak more.

5 Connect with a church leader who seems to be doing evangelism.

Learn what steps he's taking to do evangelism. Ask if you can accompany him when he evangelizes. Watching somebody else do it might give you the courage to do it.

6 Participate in your church's evangelism training.

If your church isn't providing any, ask your pastors for guidance. A church that isn't training people to evangelize isn't fulfilling its responsibility.

7 Be upfront and honest with a non-believer.

I realize this approach isn't always possible, but I'm increasingly doing evangelism this way: “You know, I'm a follower of Jesus, and one of our responsibilities is to tell others what He's done for us. May I take a few minutes to tell you how He's changed my life?” It's honest, it's to the point, and . . . I've found some folks willing to listen.

What steps would you add?

Youth Ministry

Don't have a lock-in

Thoughts on Youth Ministry 1-24-17

Article by Martin Stukenborg

As we do our best to minister to students, one necessity is to plan fun events that your students can invite friends to. When your average non-Christian student hears the word "Church" they do not picture something that they want to be involved in and getting up early on a Sunday morning to attend Sunday School is not very inviting.

So what should you do? Start with a small event that you like to do.

Following a school event is perfect. Do you like band, choir or sports? Plan to have the kids over to your house afterwards for ice cream sundaes or nachos. Let your students know that you will be going to the school play to watch Sally and you want as many people as possible to sit with you at the play and then afterwards come over to your house.

Plan ahead and make sure that your students know that this is a great opportunity to introduce them to you, the youth group and the church. This is probably not a good time to have a Bible study; save that for Wednesday night. Instead, concentrate on getting to know your students and their friends. Write down the names of the visitors and start praying for them.

Maybe you are not able to stay up that late. No problem. Have a "tailgate" before the next ball game. In great weather you can do it at the parking lot of the school. In the winter have it at your house. A couple of packages of hotdogs, chips and a case of bottled water doesn't cost much, but can make a big impact.

Join in with big associational events. Communicate with Preston Thompson about what is coming up and plan to attend. This will probably take a little more work to transport your students to and from the event, but will allow them to be a part of something bigger than just your church.

Seriously, don't plan a lock-in! Over time, I have done several of these events and I have found that nothing really great happens between 1:00am and 7:00am. Plan a great event, have a devotional time, eat food, play games and send everyone home. 7:00pm till midnight is five hours; that's plenty of time to have a great event that is meaningful and creates some excitement in your group.

Remember this... you cannot compete with Six flags, but you can have a well planned event that allows you to get to know your students, show them your love and share Jesus with them.

Martin has been on staff at FBC Fulton for 15 years and has been doing youth ministry for over 17 years. If you have questions about youth ministry or you would like to stop by and see what a typical Wednesday night looks like for him, email him. mstukenborg@hotmail.com

Senior Adult Ministry

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

by Dr. Frank E. Fain, the Director of Adult Ministry Services for The Baptist Home.

He serves as a resource person to churches, congregational leaders, senior adults and their families on issues related to aging and adult ministries.

"There are four kinds of people in this world:

*Those who have been caregivers,
Those who currently are caregivers,
Those who will be caregivers, and
Those who will need caregivers."*

-Rosalynn Carter

December 23, 2014, my wife's father died at age 93. His first 91 years he lived very well, but in his last two years his health declined. During his health decline, he was able to live in his home because his wife, for over 70 years, became a full-time caregiver. At age 90, she did all she could to take care of him. However, in his last month, this wife, mom and now caregiver had to hire hospice staff to help her.

A caregiver is a person who provides unpaid assistance for the physical and emotional needs of a person who is called a care recipient. Depending on the care recipient's condition, the caregiver's work ranges from partial assistance to full-time, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week assistance.

Notice the person is a "volunteer" caregiver. This volunteer will provide a wide range of services depending on the degree of disability of the care recipient. The goal of the caregiver's services is to help the care recipient live in their home for as long as possible.

A care recipient can be of any age, but the majority are older adults. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, care recipient's families make up ninety percent of all caregivers. Of the family caregivers, about eighty percent are women including wives, mothers, daughters and daughter-in-laws. Seventy-seven percent of caregivers are employed outside the home in at least part-time work. Caregivers spend on average 17.9 hours per week providing care for the care recipient. Sixty-five percent of caregivers do not receive consistent help from other family members. Being a caregiver is a major task that often the person does alone.

For many years The Baptist Home has been leading Caring for the Caregiver workshops in churches, associations, conferences and retreats. We believe local congregations should be offering assistance to church members who are caregivers. Dianne Swain wrote in the June 2013 Mature Living magazine "Unfortunately, the church often does not know how to offer care as a ministry to caregivers. How many times have you seen the names of caregivers on prayer lists?" We pray for care recipients, but very seldom do we ever recommend praying for the caregivers.

The Caring for the Caregiver workshop covers a lot of material. Allow me to share a few suggestions taken from this workshop designed to help congregations develop a ministry to caregivers.

1. Place caregivers and care recipients on church prayer lists and pray for them.
2. Incorporate caregiver issues into sermons and church educational classes.
3. Create in church libraries informative material on caregiver's issues and needs. For example: "Caring for Aging Loved Ones" published by Focus on the Family.
4. Train laypersons, deacons and church staff members in care ministry and counseling skills with caregivers and care recipients.
5. Develop a homebound ministry to provide regular Bible study, fellowship, visitation and prayer support in the care recipient's home.
6. Provide regular Lord's Supper services in the caregivers and recipient's home.
7. Develop and host a Caregiver Support Group
8. Develop an Adult Daycare Ministry or Caregiver's Respite Ministry Team that will take care of the care recipient to allow the caregiver to have a few hours of personal freedom.
9. Provide ministers with opportunities to counsel with caregivers who need assistance or emotional support regarding health problems, treatments and funeral plans of the care recipient.

Kay Marshal Strom wrote "Care giving is a journey that should not and need not be made alone." If your congregation would like more information or assistance in developing ministries to walk with caregivers in their caring journey, please contact us at (866) 454-2709 or www.thebaptisthome.org/resources. The Baptist Home would like to help.

Children / Family Ministry

Connecting with Guests

By Delanee Williams

<http://www.lifeway.com/kidsministry/2017/01/11/connecting-with-guests/>

Being new to a church can be difficult. Think of what it was like on your first day in your church. Did you know anyone? Did you feel welcomed? Did you feel that people genuinely cared that you were at church? For most of us who have served on church staff, it's hard to remember and understand the perspective of being new to a church and not knowing anyone. Through my recent experience of finding a new church home in a new city, I discovered it's easy to quickly forget the perspective of being a new person in a new setting. This reminded me of the necessary empathy for our church guests. I've found if we aren't intentionally and purposefully finding ways to connect with guests and new members, more than likely it's an area that needs improvement. Here are 4 actions to help you connect with guests:

- 1. Wear name tags.** I understand you may know everyone in your group, but to the guest who meets several people quickly, it's hard to remember all the names. Then, it can get embarrassing to ask the name. When everyone is wearing name tags, it limits the awkwardness of asking someone's name you've met before. Name tags can also convey safety and security. They easily identify approved teachers in your kids' ministry. It helps communicate to parents who the teacher is and let's them know they have been screened and approved to teach their children.
- 2. Ask genuine questions.** Ask questions to get to know them and to learn about their story. As a reminder, please don't make the other person feel as though they are being interviewed. You are genuinely wanting to learn about the person and trying to find a point of connection with them. You may know something about the area where they lived previously. Maybe you have a mutual friend or the same hobbies. You can even ask how you can pray for their family.
- 3. Intentionally connect with new members.** During the week, send a quick text or make a quick phone call to say hi. Plan to meet for coffee or invite the family over for play. Families in our kids' ministries want to connect with other families and build relationships, but often don't know how or don't feel comfortable doing this. Help foster these relationships by identifying families in your church who have a heart for connecting with new families to your church family. Encourage them to build connections.
- 4. Follow-up with a family who has recently joined your church.** Ask them to be honest with you and their family's experience. What helped them get connected? What could your church do better to make it easier to get connected? Make sure to give them the freedom and comfort to share honestly with you. Thank them for their honesty. Then, ask them to help you make the changes needed to help new families feel connected.

What other ideas would you add the help connect with guests and new members? Make an effort today to help ease the transition for families to your church and helping them feel connected.

Delanee Williams serves as a Ministry Specialist with LifeWay Kids. She is a graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Delanee has served in kids ministry for over twenty years and is passionate about developing, equipping and encouraging leaders.

Church Revitalization

Leadership Challenges in Church Revitalization

Church revitalization is messy, but love people and lean on the faithfulness of Jesus.

Article by Ed Stetzer

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/april/leadership-challenges-in-church-revitalization.html>

I fell in love with church revitalization early in my ministry when I served a church of senior adults during a brief stint teaching at a seminary. The median age of the people was 68. It seemed like there was an oxygen tank or a walker at the end of most pews. They came to me and said, “Dr. Stetzer, help us reach the young people.” Leading a church in revitalization has taught me some invaluable lessons. While the process is often difficult and slow moving, if approached correctly it can reinvigorate and empower God’s people to produce lasting fruit.

You Will Meet Resistance

Leadership, especially with church revitalization, is a long and slow labor of love in the face of resistance. Not every member will be on your side during revitalization. If you want everyone to love you, go sell ice cream, don't revitalize churches. No matter how difficult, look past the resistance remembering that revitalization is like basic physics. Momentum results from movement against the inertia.

Love Your People

In revitalization, you need to love, not drive people. Talk to them. Listen to them. Get them excited about God’s mission for their life and their church. Love your people, and not just as a means of getting them to do what you want. I've led a few churches through revitalization and found that, in each case, when we took the time to love one another, people became excited and were more ready to go on mission. They wanted to love their neighbors and engage the community around them.

Messy Happens

Any disconnected church that seeks to reengage with their community will find the experience to be messy. There may be physical messes like mud on the carpet, smudges on the walls, dirty bathrooms, or broken vases. The way of church life to which your people had grown accustomed will suddenly change. But, there are also relational messes—things changing that some do not want to change. In revitalization, it's hard to transition to a missional mindset. Kids will break things. Life will change. But in the end, it's worth it all.

Changed Churches

Church revitalization is an opportunity to lead God’s people to a renewed focus on God’s mission. Such an endeavor will undoubtedly change lives, communities, and have a gospel impact on generations to come. In that first experience, I fell in love with church revitalization. The church recalibrated its sense of mission and reengaged in the growingly diverse community. I also learned that strong leadership was not driving but loving and empowering my people to make the necessary decisions to live on mission in their community. The fact is we need a mass movement of revitalization across our context. When we do, the mission force will engage the mission field and churches will be refocused on their mission.

Camp Ministry

Camp Cedar Crest Committee

Our committee is busy with all of the changes that have been taking place in the last few months. We are in the process of bringing on a new children's camp director as well as a new treasurer for the committee. We hope to have both of these roles filled in the February committee meeting which is always open to the public. It takes place on the first Monday of the month at 7 pm at FBC Fulton. There is much going on and we as the committee ask for your prayers as we lead our camps into 2017 with a renewed vision of building Christ's kingdom through evangelism and discipleship. There will be more substantial updates in the very near future.

If you have any questions or comments feel free to call me, Terry Delaney, President of the Cedar Crest Committee at 618-541-8803 or email me at tdelaney017@gmail.com.

Camp Committee Meets the first Monday of each month at FBC Fulton @ 7pm.

Youth Spring Retreat

LP Cook, Associate Pastor/Pastor of Youth at Union Hill in Holts Summit, is directing the Spring Youth Retreat which will take place Friday, March 31 – Saturday, April 1.

Associational Camp Dates

Youth Spring Retreat - March 31st - April 1st - Cost \$45

Youth Summer Camp - June 25th-30th - Cost \$90

Children's Camp I (Co-ed) - July 9th-14th - Cost \$90

Children's Camp II (Co-ed) - July 16th-21st - Cost \$90

Camp Cedar Crest Board

Camp Work Dates

The Cedar Crest Camp Board has scheduled work days at the camp to get it ready for the camp season. There has been a lot of construction work done over the fall and winter months and now they are turning their attention to the camp season. If you can help with the work, please contact Steve Kreyling at 573-581-7899 or cardinalsandbluesfan@gmail.com.

Scheduled Work Dates

February 18th - General Work

February 28th - Deep Clean Camp Kitchen

March 18th - Prepare Dorms for Camp

April - 18th - Prepare Dorms for Camp

Camp Board Meetings are the third Monday of each month at Richland Baptist Church @ 7pm.

Church History

On October 31, 1517, a Roman Catholic monk named Martin Luther was moved to post 95 Theses to the Wittenburg Door, a place where entire towns would communicate information. Martin Luther did not want to leave the Roman Catholic Church. He was merely hoping to reform it from within. That was not to be as this act of publishing these 95 Theses launched what we now know as the Protestant Reformation. All of us in the Grand Crossing Baptist Association owe much to this Catholic monk.

This year, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we will take a look at a very brief history of the players and the doctrines that launched the Reformation. This month, we would like to publish the 95 Theses for you to read (perhaps for the very first time).

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.
7. God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive to the vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to the canons themselves, nothing should be imposed on the dying.
9. Therefore the Holy Spirit through the pope is kind to us insofar as the pope in his decrees always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.
10. Those priests act ignorantly and wickedly who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penalties for purgatory.
11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept (Mt 13:25).
12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.
14. Imperfect piety or love on the part of the dying person necessarily brings with it great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater the fear.
15. This fear or horror is sufficient in itself, to say nothing of other things, to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.
17. It seems as though for the souls in purgatory fear should necessarily decrease and love increase.
18. Furthermore, it does not seem proved, either by reason or by Scripture, that souls in purgatory are outside the state of merit, that is, unable to grow in love.
19. Nor does it seem proved that souls in purgatory, at least not all of them, are certain and assured of their own salvation, even if we ourselves may be entirely certain of it.
20. Therefore the pope, when he uses the words "plenary remission of all penalties," does not actually mean "all penalties," but only those imposed by himself.
21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.
22. As a matter of fact, the pope remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to canon law, they should have paid in this life.
23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few.
24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.
25. That power which the pope has in general over purgatory corresponds to the power which any bishop or curate has in a particular way in his own diocese and parish.
26. The pope does very well when he grants remission to souls in purgatory, not by the power of the keys, which he does not have, but by way of intercession for them.
27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.
28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.
29. Who knows whether all souls in purgatory wish to be redeemed, since we have exceptions in St. Severinus and St. Paschal, as related in a legend.
30. No one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition, much less of having received plenary remission.
31. The man who actually buys indulgences is as rare as he who is really penitent; indeed, he is exceedingly rare.
32. Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.

Church History (continued)

33. Men must especially be on guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to him.
34. For the graces of indulgences are concerned only with the penalties of sacramental satisfaction established by man.
35. They who teach that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessional privileges preach unchristian doctrine.
36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.
37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters.
38. Nevertheless, papal remission and blessing are by no means to be disregarded, for they are, as I have said (Thesis 6), the proclamation of the divine remission.
39. It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bounty of indulgences and the need of true contrition.
40. A Christian who is truly contrite seeks and loves to pay penalties for his sins; the bounty of indulgences, however, relaxes penalties and causes men to hate them -- at least it furnishes occasion for hating them.
41. Papal indulgences must be preached with caution, lest people erroneously think that they are preferable to other good works of love.
42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend that the buying of indulgences should in any way be compared with works of mercy.
43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences.
44. Because love grows by works of love, man thereby becomes better. Man does not, however, become better by means of indulgences but is merely freed from penalties.
45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath.
46. Christians are to be taught that, unless they have more than they need, they must reserve enough for their family needs and by no means squander it on indulgences.
47. Christians are to be taught that they buying of indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.
48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting indulgences, needs and thus desires their devout prayer more than their money.
49. Christians are to be taught that papal indulgences are useful only if they do not put their trust in them, but very harmful if they lose their fear of God because of them.
50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that the pope would and should wish to give of his own money, even though he had to sell the basilica of St. Peter, to many of those from whom certain hawkers of indulgences cajole money.
52. It is vain to trust in salvation by indulgence letters, even though the indulgence commissary, or even the pope, were to offer his soul as security.
53. They are the enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others.
54. Injury is done to the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word.
55. It is certainly the pope's sentiment that if indulgences, which are a very insignificant thing, are celebrated with one bell, one procession, and one ceremony, then the gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.
56. The true treasures of the church, out of which the pope distributes indulgences, are not sufficiently discussed or known among the people of Christ.
57. That indulgences are not temporal treasures is certainly clear, for many indulgence sellers do not distribute them freely but only gather them.
58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints, for, even without the pope, the latter always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outer man.
59. St. Lawrence said that the poor of the church were the treasures of the church, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.
60. Without want of consideration we say that the keys of the church, given by the merits of Christ, are that treasure.
61. For it is clear that the pope's power is of itself sufficient for the remission of penalties and cases reserved by himself.
62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.
63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last (Mt. 20:16).
64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.
65. Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth.
66. The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men.
67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.
68. They are nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.
69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of papal indulgences with all reverence.

Church History (continued)

70. But they are much more bound to strain their eyes and ears lest these men preach their own dreams instead of what the pope has commissioned.
71. Let him who speaks against the truth concerning papal indulgences be anathema and accursed.
72. But let him who guards against the lust and license of the indulgence preachers be blessed.
73. Just as the pope justly thunders against those who by any means whatever contrive harm to the sale of indulgences.
74. Much more does he intend to thunder against those who use indulgences as a pretext to contrive harm to holy love and truth.
75. To consider papal indulgences so great that they could absolve a man even if he had done the impossible and had violated the mother of God is madness.
76. We say on the contrary that papal indulgences cannot remove the very least of venial sins as far as guilt is concerned.
77. To say that even St. Peter if he were now pope, could not grant greater graces is blasphemy against St. Peter and the pope.
78. We say on the contrary that even the present pope, or any pope whatsoever, has greater graces at his disposal, that is, the gospel, spiritual powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written. (1 Co 12[:28])
79. To say that the cross emblazoned with the papal coat of arms, and set up by the indulgence preachers is equal in worth to the cross of Christ is blasphemy.
80. The bishops, curates, and theologians who permit such talk to be spread among the people will have to answer for this.
81. This unbridled preaching of indulgences makes it difficult even for learned men to rescue the reverence which is due the pope from slander or from the shrewd questions of the laity.
82. Such as: "Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church?" The former reason would be most just; the latter is most trivial.
83. Again, "Why are funeral and anniversary masses for the dead continued and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded for them, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"
84. Again, "What is this new piety of God and the pope that for a consideration of money they permit a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God and do not rather, because of the need of that pious and beloved soul, free it for pure love's sake?"
85. Again, "Why are the penitential canons, long since abrogated and dead in actual fact and through disuse, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences as though they were still alive and in force?"
86. Again, "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?"
87. Again, "What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?"
88. Again, "What greater blessing could come to the church than if the pope were to bestow these remissions and blessings on every believer a hundred times a day, as he now does but once?"
89. "Since the pope seeks the salvation of souls rather than money by his indulgences, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons previously granted when they have equal efficacy?"
90. To repress these very sharp arguments of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies and to make Christians unhappy.
91. If, therefore, indulgences were preached according to the spirit and intention of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved. Indeed, they would not exist.
92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace! (Jer 6:14)
93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross!
94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, death and hell.
95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace (Acts 14:22).

This article on Church History - The 95 Theses of the Reformation, was prepared by Terry Delaney, pastor of Unity Baptist Church outside of Mexico. Pastor Delaney can be found at Dairy Queen each Monday for study and community research. He is also a seminary student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where he is working on a Masters of Divinity.

Missions

5 secrets to build a GREAT Missions Strategy

POSTED BY JUSTIN LATHROP

<http://robhoskins.onehope.net/5-things-young-pastors-need-to-build-a-better-missions-strategy/>

I speak with a first-time lead pastor almost every week. And one question that consistently comes up in those conversations is this:

How do I develop an engaging missions program at the church?

Many people who come into their new role as a lead pastor are hesitant to change too much about the way the church does missions right away, and rightfully so. It's never good to accidentally cut the board member's nephew from the missions budget in your first year.

At the same time, a church can't thrive without a strong missions program. And if the lead pastor doesn't take the initiative to create this program—no one else will.

So without scrapping everything and starting from scratch, here are some ways to build a strong missions strategy:

1. Have an extensive audit done on your current missions efforts.

It is crazy how a lead pastor will measure and evaluate everything in the church—they'll know who is doing their job well and who needs more support. They'll know where there are budgetary problems and funding problems and when giving is falling short. But when it comes to the missions budget, so many pastors choose to stay in the dark.

Don't allow yourself to fall into this trap. Ignorance might seem like bliss, but it won't be blissful later when you are confronted with the reality that you weren't stewarding the resources you have to help the most people.

Put a team or committee together to look at each missionary supported by your church and give you a report on the following questions:

- How did they originally become a part of the missions program at our church?
- Was the money committed to a specific outcome?
- Has that outcome been accomplished?
- Are they giving regular communication of what is being accomplished?

2. Come to a strong understanding of the DNA of the Church.

I highly recommend Will Mancini's book, *Church Unique*, for this. Why is this so important? Because the church *mission* should directly align with the church *missions*. The closer your missions strategy resembles the *mission strategy*, the greater impact you will actually have on the world.

3. Identify the stories of people you want to help and communicate them clearly.

It can be hard for your congregation to connect with numbers or statistics, so give them a chance to connect with stories instead. Use the technology available to you—videos, photos, etc—to allow those who are giving faithfully to see how their resources are being put to work, as well as to give newcomers opportunities to pitch in and give. Stay connected to the stories of the people you're supporting and use your creative teams to communicate those clearly to your congregation. You'll be much more effective at generating and keeping funds if you can help your members connect with stories, rather than statistics.

Continued on page 21

Missions (continued)

4. Empower your congregation by giving them tangible ways to get involved.

If you, as the lead pastor, feel overwhelmed by the scope of missions at your church, imagine how the average churchgoer feels. Chances are, they have no idea how to jump in and help—and you can't do this alone.

Work with a team of people at your church to brainstorm creative ways you can engage your congregation, besides just having them write checks.

- Can they go on a trip?
- How can they be praying?
- Could they meet non-financial needs by donating their time or something from their home?

The more tangible opportunities you give people to help, the more likely your congregation is going to feel ownership over what you're doing.

5. Develop a list of what you are looking for in a missions partner.

Having a list like this will help you not be overly influenced by emotion when meeting with the various ministries/missionaries who are looking for support. This doesn't mean you should never respond in emotion to the missionaries, but it will give you guidance when those decisions come.

Here are some examples of what you might include on that list:

- Key countries that have a special place in the history of your church
- Longevity on the field (you may want either new or seasoned missionaries)
- Passions of the church locally being expressed globally (e.g. your church is known for the food bank it runs so you are supporting a similar ministry overseas).

Creating a strategy for missions will be one of the most difficult things you do as a lead pastor, but it will also be one of the most important. Don't let this task fall through the cracks and don't push it aside to avoid stepping on toes.

As you lead your community to engage in the Great Commission, they will follow.

You should also read:

[Missions audit: 5 steps to evaluate the strength of your strategic vision](#)

[7 missions trends you need to know about RIGHT NOW!](#)

[3 keys to answering God's call](#)

Justin loves connecting people and resourcing them for Kingdom impact.

He recently founded YoungPastors.com to help inspire, resource, and connect young pastors. On top of being involved in this local church, he has also founded Helpstaff.me (now Vanderbloemen Search), Oaks School of Leadership, and MinistryCoach.tv. He currently serves as a consultant in the area of strategic relations for organizations like Assemblies of God, Leadership Network, and Convoy of Hope helping build bridges between people and ministries for more effective reach. He lives with his wife, Andrea, and their two children in Red Oak, Texas leveraging connections to make the world a smaller place.