



SBAOC Weekly Update

NEWS & PRAYER REQUESTS

If you have any news, prayer requests, or events that you would like to have included in this update, please email the information to spurgeonassociation@gmail.com or call us at 785-456-8513.

SMALL-TOWN SAVIOR

Small-Town Savior: For Discouraged Pastors in Forgotten Places

Article by Stephen Witmer
Pastor, Pepperell, Massachusetts

NOVEMBER 20, 2019

(<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/small-town-savior>)



My father was a pastor for thirty years in rural Maine. Many of those years were devoted to shepherding a parish of three small churches, each in a different town. I grew up knowing something of the joys and sacrifices involved in caring for churches that other Christians often overlook, in towns the world ignores.

One icy winter Sunday, so the story goes, only two older ladies showed up for the morning service at one of the churches. My father asked whether they should go forward with the service. They consented. He preached the sermon, led the singing, gave the prayers, and took the offering. God was worshiped.

In the years since, I've experienced the triumphs and travails of ministry firsthand in my own small town, and I've had the privilege of meeting rural pastors from around the country and the world. I've found that many of these small-town pastors are doing remarkable work. They have vision and energy and passion and skill. And, like all pastors everywhere, they need encouragement.

Ministry in small places is demanding, sometimes thankless, usually unnoticed by the wider world. Encouragement is precious. Mark 6:1–6 tells the story of Jesus's ministry in his hometown. This short passage provides at least three mighty encouragements for those who are pouring out their lives for Jesus's sake in small towns and rural areas around the world today.

Jesus Loves Small Places

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PURPOSE STATEMENT:

We unite as an association of Southern Baptist churches in order to manifest the glory of God above all. We purpose to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. We covenant to strengthen and support one another, motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

"If there is no church... should you not commence one?" C. H. Spurgeon

COMMENTS ON OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

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For my own part, I consider the Lord's Day as mainly intended for strengthening our impression of invisible and eternal things; for cultivating a spirit of love to God, and to our fellow-creatures; for devising and promoting plans for the glory of God, and the happiness of man; and, in short, for securing the great object of our everlasting welfare, which the Scriptures teach us depends on the use we make of this probationary state.

William Wilberforce

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Nazareth was an insignificant little place with a population of perhaps 200–400. Jesus’s disciple Nathanael, who came from the larger and more prosperous community of Cana, nine miles north, disdained Nazareth (John 1:46; 21:2). But Mark’s account shows that Jesus didn’t share that disdain. Not only did he come to Nazareth; he brought his disciples with him, and he arrived with a full ministry agenda, to teach and heal.

Consider that the Son of God, who could have gone anywhere, chose this tiny village. That’s not exactly our contemporary “reach the city center” approach! In fact, the Gospels never show Jesus seeking to escape or transcend his small-town roots. As Ray Ortlund points out, Jesus continues to identify himself as a small-town man even after his resurrection and ascension (Acts 22:8).

Importantly, Mark 6 demonstrates that Jesus’s love and concern for Nazareth wasn’t an aberration; he wasn’t giving it preferential treatment because it was his hometown. Rather, his time there reflected his care for places of every size, big and small. Verse 6 says that Jesus “went about among the villages teaching.” Later, Mark describes Jesus ministering in “villages, cities, [and the] countryside” (Mark 6:56). He even visited *farms* (a good translation of the word for *countryside*).

Small-town pastor, Jesus loves small places. Your town has not escaped his notice. He loves it more than you do. He invites you to love it more — with his love.

Jesus Knows Our Challenges

Jesus knows, very intimately, the struggles of every discouraged small-town pastor. After all, Jesus himself had a difficult small-town ministry. Things didn’t go well for him in Nazareth. I imagine a group of pastors sitting around a table on folding chairs eating packed lunches in a church basement and sharing their struggles. Jesus is right there with them. He’s saying, “Yeah, I couldn’t do any mighty work in Nazareth. Most of them rejected me. That ground was *hard*.”

In Nazareth, Jesus faced a particular problem common to small towns: over-familiarity. It turns out that the townsfolk knew him too well to really *know* him. Seeing the boy who had grown up among them, they missed the Son of God in their midst. They took offense at his teaching and miracles.

In rural areas of America that aren’t as progressive as the post-Christian cities, Christian belief and culture sometimes remain acceptable. But often that acceptance of Christianity is more of a veneer than a deep reality. It’s more about church attendance, traditional values, and cultural Christianity, and misses the power and presence of Jesus.

A friend of mine planted a vibrant church in a small southern town and has

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES & EVENTS

True Church Conference—

February 20-23, 2020.

Speakers: Justin Peters, Tom Nettles, Tom Ascol, David Miller, Jono Sims, & Jeff Noblit. “The Pretenders: Unmasking the Tragedy of Unregenerate Church Membership.”

truechurchconference.com

Midwest Founders Conference

25th Anniversary—“Union with Christ”. February 25 & 26, 2020. First Baptist Church of Fenton. Speakers: Dr. Greg Gilbert, Dr. Curtis McClain, Dr. Terry Chrisope, Dr. Bob Curtis. Register online at: <http://sbfcmw.com>

**2020 Saved By Faith Youth
Camp—**June 15-19. Webster Conference Center, Salina, Kansas. <https://www.sbfyckansas.com/>



Check out the “SBFYC Official” YouTube channel to watch the 2019 sessions.

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been opposed by the more traditional local churches. Another friend runs a ministry to school kids in a poor, rural area, and told me that the local non-Christians haven’t given him any problems — all the opposition he’s received has been from the *churches*. Familiarity (with the cultural heritage of Christian tradition) can breed contempt (for vital, lived-out faith) in our small towns, just as in Nazareth.

There are lots of other ways in which the very features of small-town life that we love can create obstacles for the gospel. Tight-knit bonds within villages may create a sinful resistance to outsiders. A valuing of continuity and the status quo may lead to a reluctance to change and adapt. The desire to resist the rat race and the innovations of the city may promote, ironically, a pride in mediocrity.

Sometimes the very things we love about our small towns will make ministry in them difficult. Jesus knows this. He encountered them himself. Small-town pastor, he understands the challenges you face.

Jesus Wants People from Small Places

While Jesus’s small-town experience is sobering, it’s also hopeful. The great little encouragement buried in this passage is that Jesus means to win some of his fellow hometown residents. Two of the four biological half-brothers of Jesus named in this passage would go on to write New Testament letters. Both Jude and James knew Jesus as their brother for many years, spending lots of time with him in tiny Nazareth. But they eventually came to understand that Jesus was more than their brother — he was their Lord, Messiah, and Master (Jude 1; James 1:1).

Jesus means to win followers from small places. He demonstrated that by personally going to small towns and also by sending his disciples there (Matthew 10:11; Luke 9:6). Later Christians continued to follow his example. After Paul’s conversion, he preached “to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea” (Acts 26:20, NRSV). Paul and Barnabas preached to the cities of Lystra and Derbe, as well as to the towns and villages those cities controlled (Acts 14:6–7). Small-town pastor, Jesus loves your own little community so much that he sent you there. He means to win followers from among your neighbors and fellow community members.

Jesus loves small places. Even though he knows small-place ministry can be demanding, he goes there and he sends his followers, too. Take heart. He has people in your town he means to save (Acts 18:10). Let’s gladly join him in reaching them.

Stephen Witmer (@stephenwitmer1) is the pastor of Pepperell Christian Fellowship in Pepperell, Massachusetts and Adjunct Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is the cofounder of Small Town Summits, an organization that serves rural churches and pastors, and has written Eternity Changes Everything and A Big Gospel in Small Places. He and his wife, Emma, have three children.

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PRAYER MEETINGS FOR SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND REVIVAL

- Fellowship Baptist Church in Onaga, Kansas—5:00 pm on Sundays
- Trinity Baptist Church in Wamego, Kansas—8:00 pm on Saturdays

The Spurgeon Baptist Association of Churches is an association of Southern Baptist Churches that are united to manifest the glory of God above all. We set out to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. As an association of churches we are bound in mutual covenant to strengthen and support one another - motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture - by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

We are a non-geographic association seeking to include any like-minded body of believers so that together we might better fulfill the great commission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our intent is to lean on His instruction and not our imaginations so that He is honored in all that we do. We welcome churches who adhere to the confessions of faith accepted by Southern Baptists throughout their history, including, but not limited to, the Second London Confession (1689) and the Baptist Faith and Message.



Baptist Association of Churches