

## **Missionary's Musings**

### **Born in the SBC ...**

Not everyone knows this, but my grandfather, Charles Homer Cooper, was a Southern Baptist pastor. He was a Korean War veteran and afterward (later in life than many ministers) he went to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. When we moved to Augusta, GA in 1973, he was pastor of Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church near Fort Gordon (Gate 5) on US Highway 1 south of Augusta. If the Lord tarries, I will preach their 150<sup>th</sup> Homecoming service in October of this year (2021).

When I was a kid, we went to FBC in Twin City, GA and FBC in Swainsboro, GA. Even though I didn't internalize the truth of the Gospel until I was a young adult, I never really remember life without an SBC church as the backdrop. Before I really understood it, God was using the big spaces of those sanctuaries, Sunday school classes, foyers, fellowship halls and stairwells to open up something even bigger in me.

In those days I had no idea about the internal workings of the "largest protestant denomination in the world." To quote Bob Seger, sometimes "I wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then." It's just a reality that the longer you serve in Christian ministry the more likely you are to see its dark underbelly. When Frankie (my wife) and I first came to Christ in 1987, it was all romance, coffee, and church growth. But sometimes now I just feel a deep sadness about where we are as a denomination.

I'm not sad about God's place in the world. He still reigns. He still wins. I'm just grieved that on a national scale, when the US has become younger, more diverse, and radically unreached, we can't manage civil conversations about issues that inform our collective strategy and identity to reach those demographics. The SBC is in a decades-long state of decline, and our infighting is akin to punching the gas as we hurdle toward the abyss.

In many ways I'm a natural optimist. I'm not Eeyore. I don't usually see the glass half-empty. But I also wonder if we haven't adopted the cultural, political all-or-nothing, fight-to-the-death motif that breathes death all around us all the time. The puzzling part of this is that historically our best ideas have to do with collaboration and cooperation. And yet our fissures belie the reality that we aren't giving this adequate thought.

There are plenty of places to go read about what many feel are substantive disagreements in SBC life (although I'd venture that you might be just as well served by blissful ignorance). I think it would be great if we took a breath and meditated on Galatians 5:13-15, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

Bobby Braswell, Jr.