

B A P T I S T B I B L E
TRIBUNE

WHAT IS THE

**NEXT
STEP?**

In your personal relationship with Christ

From guest to disciplined member

As a church leader

When you feel called to ministry

In personal finances

Building community within the church

Involvement in the BBFI

For community outreach

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?

1 CONNECTING PEOPLE TO YOUR CHURCH

By Shellie Dameron, Connections Director, Orchard Church, Denver, CO

Easter at Orchard Church in Denver, CO, is an exciting time! Last year over 2,700 attended our five services and this year we are praying for more than 3,000. We expect over 200 new families will join us to celebrate Christ's resurrection. Many of our families who attend regularly had their first experiences at Orchard on an Easter Sunday and we strive to make these new guests feel the love of Christ from the moment they step out of their cars until they return home. We are intentional to greet, host, and follow up not just on Easter, but every Sunday.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Outside are signs pointing to a tent in our courtyard with a banner that says, "New Here? Start Here." At this tent are trained, outgoing volunteers who greet guests and give them bags containing a logo cup and information about our church. One team member shows each guest around (locations of restrooms, free coffee and donuts, etc), helps them get their children checked into class, and takes them into the auditorium to find a seat. The goal is for our team members to connect with these guests, not to just feed them information. We ask guests to return to the tent afterwards and give us feedback on their experience. We want everyone to have a great experience from street to seat.

Connection cards are included in each newsletter in every service and we ask guests

to fill one out with their information with a promise they will receive a coupon in the mail for a free Chick-fil-A sandwich. It is amazing how enticing a chicken sandwich can be.

In our experience, most guests, especially Millennials, do not like to be singled out, so we do not recognize them publicly during the service. On Easter, we do ask everyone who attends (both members and guests) to fill out a connection card. This helps guests not feel singled out and allows us to get updated contact information for everyone. It also provides an opportunity to ask everyone to answer a question about his or her salvation.

FOLLOW UP

Follow-up begins Monday morning when we send all guests a handwritten thank you note from the pastor with the coupon. We make follow-up phone calls within the first 48 hours and answer any questions, and send an email encouraging them to take the next step by coming to our Starting Point Class. This email also contains a link to a guest survey. Anyone who accepted Christ is mailed a follow-up booklet. Pastor personally calls the guests on Thursday morning inviting them to come back. Church management software helps make our follow-up process easier and more efficient (we use Church Community Builder).

Here are some comments from our recent guests:

"It was great! I like the time frames and the message. Folks at the doors and entries are very friendly."

"I was greeted right when I walked in, given a tour, told about the different small groups, and directed to where the service was being held. Very welcoming!"

"I loved it! Definitely coming again! The environment was wonderful! Everybody was so happy to be at church, so friendly."

FOLLOW THROUGH

At Orchard we want to move a person from first-time guest to a passionate, reproducing follower of Christ. This is done by making the steps very close together. Someone who has never set foot in a church may find signing up for small groups or discipleship intimidating. That is why we developed a Starting Point Class, to give returning visitors information about the history, values, and vision of our church, and follow up with information on salvation and baptism. We encourage them to get in a small group and start serving.

As a growing church, we have a simple process to making disciples: reach, relate, reproduce. Our purpose is to make disciples who glorify God by reaching people for Jesus, relating them to other believers, and teaching them to reproduce followers of Christ.

REACH

Most first-time guests come Sunday morning. Therefore, at the end of every message the Gospel is presented with an opportunity to respond.

RELATE

We encourage everyone to join a small group. We have two semesters allowing us to push for sign-ups twice a year and foster easy multiplication of groups. We do not want people in the same group long term. In a large church it can be hard to feel connected, so our small groups are more than just Bible studies. There is intentional time for talking and getting to know each other. If someone in a group has a need, we ask the small group

meet it. That may mean taking a meal to someone, a hospital visit, or just giving a hug and prayer. We also encourage our groups to do at least one outreach/service project a semester. Nothing builds community like serving together.

REPRODUCE

Through our small groups we encourage individuals to be involved in discipleship, pairing a grounded believer who has been through our training class with a new believer. They meet weekly and go through a workbook. Discipleship isn't about the material as much as it is about the relationship. Our threefold purpose in discipleship: to establish the believer in the Word of God, to create

fellowship with other believers, and to do the work of the ministry. The work of the ministry is what Jesus did when He was on this earth. He made disciples. We do not feel we have made a disciple until he or she has disciplined someone else. It is spiritual multiplication.

Orchard Church does not believe it is the pastor's or our ministry team's job to do the work of the ministry. It is our job to equip people to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13). A healthy, growing, reproducing body of believers will be a light in the community. In reality, some of our future disciplined believers may be our guests this Easter. We want to help them as individuals to take the next step toward that end.

2 DEVELOPING LEADERS

By Keith Gillming, Pastor, Lighthouse Baptist Church, St. Louis, MO

It seems like every vocation has requirements for professional development except ministry. Many pastors have some kind of formal training, which is absolutely priceless for the foundation of their ministry, yet most would agree our culture has changed significantly since we departed the halls of our Bible colleges and seminaries.

Changing national values have left many of us feeling detached and out of step in our society. Frustration develops over how to relate in a post-Christian world, yet, so many do nothing to adapt their outreach and their churches eventually become ingrown and marginalize their effectiveness.

It was for that reason Lighthouse Baptist Church in St. Louis created an opportunity for pastors and their staff and lay-staff to gain

some professional development. Next Step Up is a practical Bible conference that has been going for ten years seeking to fulfill a niche for Bible-believing pastors around the region.

In football, players huddle up to get on the same page and to take steps to win the game. We all know fans don't pay to watch the huddle, but they sure appreciate the preparation when the play strategically accomplishes its goal. If the quarterback keeps everyone out of the loop, the play will fail every time. He must know the play and disseminate it to the whole team.

We are leaders under construction by the Lord, for the purpose of leading people from here to eternity. We will always be learning through life experiences, and through our mistakes. Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be

diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Diligence in ministry is an all-consuming task. Modern-day ministry is overwhelming. Today's pastor must be an authority on cultural trends in order to relate to a variety of ages, yet still stand firm. He must accept people where they are with the idea of helping them grow and mature, yet do it on a shoestring budget.

Bringing our folks to maturity is a never-ending undertaking. Statistics say only 25 percent of church members read their Bibles, and 23 percent admit they never pray. Couple that with the fact that only five percent of Christians have ever led someone to Christ, and we see the challenge for pastors.

“Leadership is not something you are born with; leaders are built one step at a time.”

God has always used leaders to accomplish His work. He used Moses to take His people out of Egypt and used Nehemiah when He needed the wall around Jerusalem built. We are the ones who will coordinate ministries, establish small-group structures, lift high the importance of worship, and inspire the church to reach lost people.

Jesus Christ modeled the foundation of leadership. It is one of character, servanthood, love, sacrifice, submission, evangelism, prayer, and spiritual growth as we yield to God’s Holy Spirit. This is a lifetime process for the leader, not to mention he must have the ability and tools to lead others on the same path.

It has been rightly said, “To build a great person, keep the Great Commandment, and to build a great church, keep the Great Commission.” There is a personal side for the leader in his quest to be all God wants him to be and there is also a corporate side to leading others to do the same.

Ezra had “the good hand of His God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:9a-10). He was devout and studied

wholeheartedly. Then he taught others what he learned. This was key in seeing people’s lives changed. This was key to motivating the people to return to God and put Him at the center of their lives.

Preaching Today says, “Leadership is an art, something to be learned over time not simply by reading books. Leadership is more tribal than scientific, more weaving of relationships than amassing of information.”

Leadership is not something you are born with; leaders are built one step at a time. It’s like any construction project. You build a brick wall one brick at a time. The more brick you lay the more experienced you become. So it is with leadership. A leader is built one lesson and one experience at a time. Each experience and lesson teaches us something more about being a quality leader. Leaders need to understand they are developed by humbling adversity, humbling mistakes, and life experiences.

In our Next Step Up conference, we have sought to bring in several specialists to help pastors develop and grow in this present-day culture. Men like Eric Geiger, of Lifeway Inc., who wrote, *Simple Church*, and

Jeff Iorg, author and president of Golden Gate Theological Seminary, have been valuable to troubleshoot stalled ministries and help pastors cultivate a plan to win the day. The Lighthouse family has bought into this project by allocating \$10,000 every year to invest in these ministers and their churches. Many return to their churches with renewed passion and excitement about a new method to adapt to their church.

It is so important to continue education for your ministry. The beauty of this particular conference is its focus is not centered on helping just mega churches. Lighthouse is not a small church, but it is not a large church either. Averaging around 350 in two services, we share common methods for smaller and larger churches, so pastors can implement principles that relate directly to their size of ministry.

Let’s be godly and growing men seeking to invest our lives with results that will last for all eternity for God’s glory.

For more information about the Next Step Conference, contact Lighthouse Baptist Church at (314)291-6919.



3 SOUNDING THE CALL FOR FULL-TIME MINISTRY

By John Decker, Director of Admissions, Baptist Bible College, Springfield, MO

It happened at a youth camp in East Texas in 1994. I remember feeling God calling me to serve Him. I thought the feeling would pass, but I could not shake it. I knew no other career would satisfy my heart like serving God. My boyhood dreams of becoming a firefighter, a veterinarian, a Navy fighter pilot, or a bull

rider (I am from Texas!) paled in comparison to what God was calling me to do. No matter how hard I tried to rationalize, minimize, or deny the call of God on my life, I could no longer imagine doing anything with my life other than serving God in full-time ministry.

I was fortunate to have grown up in

an era when young men and women were encouraged to choose full-time ministry as a career. The call to surrender it all and live for Christ was constantly placed before the young people in my church. My pastor invested in me and challenged me to follow God with all my heart. Families encouraged their children

to accept and follow the challenge God placed before them. Bible colleges were full of young people excited about the call of God on their lives. When I started at BBC, I was overwhelmed by the number of people from all over the country who were being equipped to go out and change the world for Christ.

This is not the case today. Why is it there are not as many individuals surrendering their lives in service to Christ? Has God scaled back His calling? Is serving Christ no longer important?

When we consider how many churches are without pastors and mission fields are without missionaries, we see the need for Christian workers is greater than ever before. Is God still at work to raise up the next generation of leaders? What is keeping young people today from giving their lives to ministry? Some would say it is the Millennial generation's fault, lacking interest in and commitment to the church. I strongly believe it is more the fault of our churches — we are missing opportunities to reach out to this generation of young Christians and to challenge them with the possibility God may be calling them into ministry. We fail to set the challenge before them that was set before us.

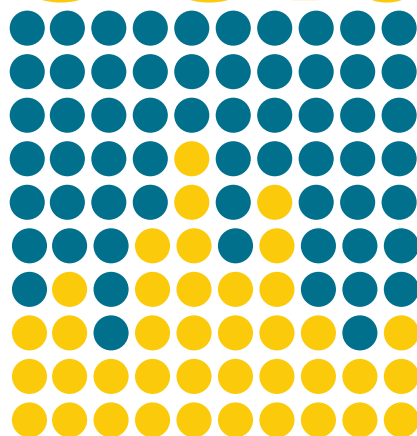
In order to reach Millennials and inspire them to be in ministry, we must understand them better. Millennials and Generation Z are more “cause-driven” than previous generations — motivated to live for a cause greater than themselves. They want to sacrifice, live out that cause, and see real change in society. Compassion International, along with the Barna Research Group, conducted research into Americans' attitudes towards global poverty. They found 86 percent of people under the age of 40 believe Christians should be playing a strong or major role in alleviating poverty. It is not hard to find Millennials today gravitating towards causes such as combating human trafficking, social

injustice, and perceived or real corporate greed/criminal behavior.

We as pastors, youth pastors, and church leaders have a chance to engage this culture with the greatest cause of all time — sharing the only truth that will make a lasting change, the Gospel of Christ!

Barna research tells us our churches are full of Christian Millennials who believe church is the place to find answers to live a meaningful life. Barna also tells us 65 percent of Christians under the age of 32 are in our

38%



A 2011 Barna study revealed that only 38% of youth pastors and 36% of senior pastors say they frequently discuss college plans with their students. The research among youth workers showed that conversations with students about college occur most frequently in churches with an ample number of adult assistants in the youth ministry, where there is a clear strategy for student ministry in the church, and in those churches that work effectively with teen leaders.

"What Teens Aspire to Do in Life. How Churches Can Help" June 14, 2011

small groups, youth groups, and worship services. They want church leaders to help them in this journey of finding God's will for their lives! Only one-third of Christian young adults feel called to their professions and 48 percent think God is calling them to different work but have not made that career change yet. It is entirely possible we have a very large group of young adults who feel the call of ministry but have not been told of or confronted with that possibility.

We have an opportunity to speak into the lives of these young people and show them feeding the hungry is great and fighting inequality is admirable, but there is nothing more important than impacting someone's

eternity. As church leaders, we must challenge them to take that next step, to surrender it all in pursuit of the “mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.”

It is time for us to challenge today's generation to consider full-time ministry and make it a viable option for them. Ask them: Who will step up and be the next pastor of our church? Who will be our next youth pastor? Worship leader? Executive pastor? Who will pastor our children and grandchildren? What if we started looking at our congregations

searching for the next church leader? What if we challenged and encouraged them to seek out what God might have in store for them? What if we were willing to invest in them and send them out? If this were to happen, we would see a great movement of God within our Fellowship. We could flood our country and the world with new, excited, and energized fellow soldiers and laborers.

So, how can the church engage this generation and help them find God's calling for their lives? Make the call to ministry a viable option for your people. One way to get young people excited about ministry is to get them involved. Set up internship programs within the church to help them seek and find their spiritual gifts. Many churches are moving towards

these internship programs or vocational discipleships and are seeing great success.

Have passion about full-time ministry when communicating to your church. Pastors and church leaders can greatly influence young people by sharing their stories of surrendering to the ministry and the ways in which God has worked in their lives.

Create a culture within your church that encourages and values those in full-time ministry. Build a team spirit between your congregation and those who are sent from your church. Put a vision before your church that helps them understand the need to train and send out this next generation of church leaders.

4

FOSTERING AN ATTITUDE OF GIVING

12%
Among born-again Christians, which includes both evangelicals and non-evangelicals, 12% tithed in 2012, which is on par with the average for the past decade.
www.barna.org

By Rick Blue, Assistant to the President, Baptist Bible College, Springfield, MO

By American law, I was required to feed, clothe, and educate my children, but that's not why I did it. I did it because I loved them. And because I loved them, I fed them much more than what was required by law. Because I loved them, I provided far more clothing than they needed. Because I loved them, I sacrificed and sent them to college when only high school was required by law. Because I loved them, I did far more than the law required. Love always does much more than law. Law says you have to, and often creates a begrudging heart. Love says you get to and creates a sacrificial heart.

Prior to Jesus, the Jews lived under a strict set of rules and commandments. The Old Testament law regulated their daily lives and their worship. They were told where to worship, when to rest, and how much to give. Their feast days were in Jerusalem; their rest was on the Sabbath; and their giving was designated as the tithe.

Under the New Covenant (Testament), the old law was replaced by a new law — the law of love. The ten commandments were

replaced by two commandments:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22: 37-40).

Under the law of love, the feast days, the Sabbath, and the tithe became relics of the past. We are not required to keep the feasts. We are not required to rest on the Sabbath. We are not required to tithe. We have been given the privilege of doing far more. Love always does more. When the church was in its infancy, those Christians (often recently saved) thought nothing of selling houses, land, and possessions, and giving it joyfully.

In today's church, many Christians are more law-type givers than grace givers. The norm is giving a tithe or less. Giving sacrificially is not even on the radar. It is time for Christians to take the next step in

sacrificial giving. Tithing was a baby step required under the law. Sacrificial giving is a giant step of love under grace. It is no accident it was said of those early Christians, “Great grace was upon them” (Acts 4: 33).

The Apostle Paul saw it clearly when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians:

“But this I say, He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9: 6-7).

It is simply a matter of the heart. The majority of our churches do not have financial problems, they have heart problems. It was said of the Jerusalem church, “And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” If we are ever going to have great power and great grace in our churches today, we have to have some Christians with great hearts.

5

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY WITHIN THE CHURCH

By Scott Harrop, Adult Ministries Pastor, Sagebrush Community Church, Albuquerque, NM

There is a cry from the human spirit that longs for friendship and community. But even in light of all the “social” connectivity and technology of this day and age, finding

true friends and community can be a challenge. The church should be a great resource for friendships, but how can we help people take the next step from being a guest

to being an involved member of the thriving church community?

One challenge to true friendship is the mobility of our culture. It is reported the

FRIENDSHIP FEEDS THE FLOCK

Faith may unite congregations, but friendship, it appears, sustains them. A 2004 study commissioned by Group Publishing, Inc., and administered by The Gallup Organization, examined the role friendship plays in the relationships congregation members have with the rest of their congregation and with God. The study provides strong evidence that congregation members are able to live out their faith more fully in an atmosphere that fosters fellowship, rather than isolation. And friendship — best friendship in particular — is the tie that binds.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Thirty-nine percent of congregation members say their best friend attends the same church, while 59% say he or she does not. What does that mean for religious leaders? Maybe plenty, in terms of attendance. Congregation members whose best friends attend their church tend to behave differently from the rest. Seventy-two percent of members who say their best friend is in their congregation attend church at least once a week, compared with 51% of those who don't.

BELONGING AND BEST FRIENDSHIP

Eighty-four percent of those with best friends at church "strongly agree" their congregation makes them feel like they belong, compared with 71% of those who do not have a best friend at church. And 82% of those with a best friend "strongly agree" that the spiritual leaders of their congregations care for them as people, compared with 67% of those without a best friend.

SPIRITUAL COMMITMENT

Having a best friend in one's congregation appears to be linked to one's individual spiritual commitment as well. More than 8 in 10 (82%) of those with best friends "strongly agree" they are spiritually committed individuals; 74% "strongly agree" their faith is involved in every aspect of their lives; and 69% spend time in worship or prayer every day.

BOTTOM LINE

Sometimes the power of a personal relationship reaches beyond the bounds of the relationship itself. The relationship between best friends in a congregation seems to bind those friends more tightly to the spiritual community, strengthening their relationships with others. The "best friend" bond also seems to be related to members' connection with God, as congregation members with best friends in their churches express a deeper spirituality than those without best friends.

by Albert L. Winseman, D. Min.
Gallup Religion and Social Trends Editor
www.gallup.com

average American will move 14 times in his or her lifetime? Usually, about the time you get to know someone and establish a friendship (or they get plugged into the ministry), they move away. Think of it this way, in the next decade, almost half of your neighbors will move out and new people will move in.

TIME'S UP

Developing friendships and community takes time, energy, and effort. It requires an investment (i.e., allotting resources) in others. No doubt, life in the 21st century is lived at a frenetic pace. Most of us struggle to maintain our schedules as is, let alone if we give up some of our precious time for the sake of others. We often don't have the relational energy or make time to put forth the effort.

BURN UNIT

How many times have you given your heart to someone else only to have that trust and friendship betrayed? How many times has a friend made a promise but didn't come through? While Jesus walked on earth he experienced that pain. He gathered 12 men to be his disciples and he poured his life into them, but one by one they let him down. They abandoned him in his time of need and left him to face his accusers alone.

God made us relational beings, but we are hurt relational beings. We guard our hearts for fear we might get hurt again, so we settle for superficial relationships — and this includes relationships in the church. We are content to spend time talking about the weather, sports, current events, or what was on TV last night.

"But how do I get close to someone without the risk of getting hurt?" The answer is, you can't. You can keep walls up close and tight, and plenty of people choose to do just that. Whether we attend a church or work at a church, the struggle is real. Sure, you won't get hurt, but you also won't have the joy and the thrill of doing life with others. God created you and me to live in community!

God put us on this earth to love one another, care for one another, cry with one another, and rejoice with one another. In spite of the challenges, how do we do this within the church so everyone who walks in the doors has an opportunity to feel they are part of this community?

SEEK INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Sustained life change occurs as we grow in a relationship with Christ. This happens best when we seek out relationships with others who are seeking this same goal. Surround yourself with people who are seeking God and His kingdom. Jesus chose 12 men; you and I would be wise to do the same.

GET INTO COMMUNITY

Jesus took a relational risk with 12 men, and because of it, their lives were changed and the world was changed. God intends for us to live on purpose and for His purpose, and that can be done with others, but the choice is up to us. Whether it's small groups, Bible classes, or whatever your church offers, make sure there is a community-building spirit that welcomes and encourages newcomers. After all, if those guests weren't seeking friendship and community, they wouldn't have walked through the doors in the first place.

6

STRENGTHENING OUR FELLOWSHIP

By Eddie Lyons, BBFI President, Pastor, High Street Baptist Church, Springfield, MO

It is great to see a resurgence of activity and interest in the Baptist Bible Fellowship. I am encouraged when I hear reports of what is going on in some of our state fellowships. These leaders are passionate and are working together to advance the Gospel here and abroad.

Earlier this year, I attended the California BBF meeting hosted by chairman Brian Moore. We heard reports of revitalized churches, missionary outreaches across the border into Mexico, and planted churches. There were leaders in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. The camaraderie, encouragement, and inspiration filled the room. The meeting wrapped up with laying hands on the church planters and praying for them. It was a true picture of fellowship.

Recently I spoke to the new chairman of the Massachusetts BBF, John Kerns. John recently took over leadership from Kurt Rowe who served as the leader for 18 years. They honored Rowe for his faithful service. Their meeting included over 60 pastors and staff members. Former BBFI President Linzy Slayden challenged them to remain faithful to their calling. John described a great unity and cooperation between pastors who, in his words, were “old school and new school” in their philosophy.

This Fellowship is important. What we can do together is greater than any of us can accomplish alone. Together we have planted churches and sent missionaries around the world. When we come together we share stories of how the power of the Gospel is

displayed in the changed lives of people in our ministries.

For the Baptist Bible Fellowship to move forward we must do three things.

STRENGTHEN THE GRASSROOTS

The Baptist Bible Fellowship is a network of leaders who have chosen to work together for the advancement of the Gospel. What we need is strong leadership at the state level who will bring pastors and leaders together.

One of the first initiatives of our executive committee was to develop a website highlighting state fellowships. We now have in one location a picture of the grassroots of the Baptist Bible Fellowship. We are able to see the state officers, state bylaws and policies, meeting schedules, recent church plants, and sent missionaries. This website provides organization, communication, and interconnection among the states. We can see states that do not have any local fellowship, implying a goal for future development.

Our virtual presence signals to leaders we are open to their participation if they agree with our 20 Articles of Faith. When we welcome new leaders and churches into our Fellowship, we strengthen the grassroots.

I am grateful for our state officers who serve within this Fellowship. They are making a difference.

PROTECT THE UNITY

The local church is Jesus’ plan to reach this world. The genius of the local church is it allows the Gospel to find full expression

within local cultures and contexts. Even within a single city there should be diversity. Our founders identified the critical doctrines in the 20 Articles of Faith — providing purity of doctrine and diversity of practice. We must acknowledge the great diversity within our Fellowship. Protecting the unity means we must be free to include the many different churches that share our doctrine. When we do not protect the unity and freedom, we invite splintering that weakens our collective efforts. When unity is not protected, pastors are not welcomed and are in fact pushed away. Every pastor matters and every church is important in this Fellowship.

CREATE A CULTURE OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND INSPIRATION

Every pastor and leader needs encouragement and inspiration. Because of the Baptist Bible Fellowship, no pastor or leader leads alone. No church planter plants alone. No missionary goes alone.

There is something encouraging about sharing hurts, hardships, and challenges with other leaders who, unlike most people in your life, do understand. The shared wisdom that comes in casual conversations can be life-giving.

In my time as BBFI president, I have been privileged to hear the success stories within our Fellowship. I sat with a pastor working to revitalize a church whose numbers had been shrinking. Since the time he took over, the church has doubled in attendance. I spoke with a church planter who now watches former drug addicts who have come to Christ

“When unity is not protected, pastors are not welcomed and are in fact pushed away. Every pastor matters and every church is important ...”

stand before groups and teach the Bible. I love to hear the boldness and the courage of new church planters. Regardless of the odds, these men are stepping out in faith. It is inspiring to hear how growing churches built new and larger buildings and now have seen the church grow even more. One church I visited started in a school and then built a building. The church grew to the point they are back at

a school to accommodate the crowds, while they work to build an even bigger facility. Men and women are still surrendering to be career missionaries and, because of this Fellowship, they have raised the support they need to go.

All these stories encourage and inspire, and there are many of them. The Baptist Bible Fellowship continues to make a difference. Bound together by our love for the Gospel, we

do so much more together than we could ever do alone.

Our Fellowship has a bright future if we will continue to strengthen the grassroots, protect the unity, and create a culture of encouragement and inspiration. What we need are pastors, missionaries, and church staff to take the next step in their commitment to this great Fellowship.

7 REACHING YOUR COMMUNITY

By Elmer Towns, co-founder of Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Our churches are to evangelize their neighborhoods for Christ. Many churches have utilized one-week evangelistic crusades, or an evangelist for a giant rally on Sunday. Some churches use Friend Day, a program for reaching unsaved family and friends. All these are strong endeavors because the Great Commission commanded churches to evangelize the world in their lifetime.

What is the next step to reaching non-Christian families in your neighborhood, bringing them to Christ and then disciplining them in your church? Perhaps the next step is a Bless the Children day.

A Bless the Children campaign is designed to attract non-Christian families in your neighborhood to your church to win them to Christ. Most parents love their children and want the best for them. When your church shows genuine love to their children and takes interest in their lives, barriers can be broken and people can be won to Christ.

Begin by getting the word out. You can do a direct mail campaign or place a door hanger

on every home in your neighborhood inviting your neighbors to bring their entire families to church so their children can be blessed by God. Catholics have sponsored Bless the Animal or Bless the Fleet services, but Jesus blessed the children (Mark 10:13-16).

In our day of public school shootings, drug abuse, sexual crimes, anti-God teaching of evolution, and extreme violence, seemingly protected by the courts, families seek hope for their children. Jesus blessed the children, giving them spiritual covering from his heavenly Father. It's not child baptism, nor is it church membership, or even getting their names on a roll. Blessing means "adding value" and your church can pray for God to add spiritual protection and value to children. After the blessing your church can supply a certificate to each child with a prayer and scripture to remind them of the event.

Part of that day's sermon should be a challenge to parents to add value to their children by daily Bible reading, prayer, and discussion of God's plan for their lives.

As I began to understand the great need for a resource in this area, I was burdened to

put together *The Family Prayer Bible* three years ago. *The Family Prayer Bible* has a Bible story for each day of the year and includes talking points, an application to life, a memory verse, and a prayer for the day. This Bible is a tool for parents to daily bless their children. When the families or child complete the year, they can email for a certificate of completion.

A church in Ventura, CA, hosted a Bless the Children day and hung an invitation on every doorknob in their section of the city. They prayed and asked God to use their outreach efforts. The church was overwhelmed with families bringing all their children to the Sunday worship service. The auditorium was packed with families; extra chairs were brought in. The children were not dressed in Sunday church clothing. There was a lot of movement during the services and of course babies crying. It's no surprise, when children are not raised in church, they don't know how to behave in the house of God! But God understands children, and smiles.

Pastors and elders, each with their spouse, were placed around the sanctuary

and outside in the yard and patio. The prayer teams of husbands and wives laid hands on the head of each child, praying for every child by name and according to a particular need. Each prayer team had a helper to register names for the prayer team, including a particular prayer need for each child. The helper also filled out the certificate for each child to take home.

FOLLOW-UP

Research tells us people make a decision for

Christ after they visit a church three times and they have seven touches with the church. This is called the “law of three hearings and seven touches.” So build into your Bless the Children outreach program a follow-up visit to the home of each family that attends. Get them to return the next Sunday to continue what was started with their first visit on Bless the Children day.

Then put together an email campaign to remind them of daily Bible reading with their children. Also include a phone call campaign

that is another encouragement. The greater the follow-up the greater the potential to see lives changed.

There are many great ways of doing outreach in your community, but perhaps a Bless the Children campaign could be a great next step for your church’s outreach to families to extend God’s blessing to them.

The Family Prayer Bible and Praying for Your Children are available at Amazon.com



WHAT IS THE
NEXT 
STEP?