

Facts and Trends

WINTER 2013

10 tips

for making a great first impression

LifeWay launches

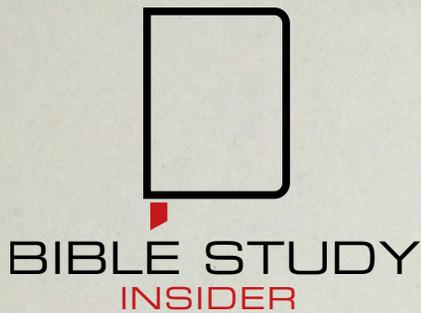
new curriculum

Sluggish economy

no match for **vision**

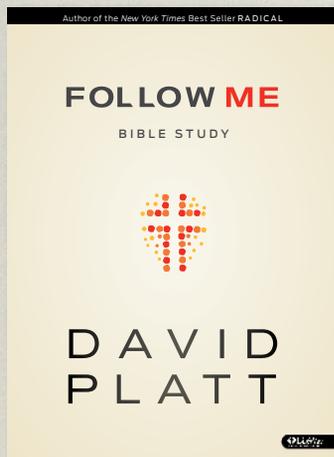
FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN AMERICA

DEVOUT FAITH IGNITES
SPARKS OF HOPE

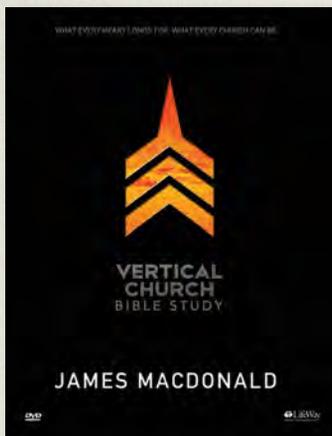


TOP PICKS

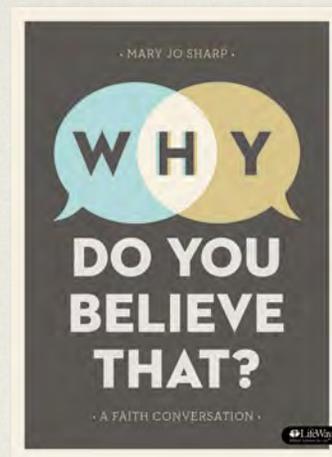
Want help finding your group's next study? Bible Study Insider gives you that and more—VIP access to our newest resources, tips and advice for improving your groups, and other ways to connect to the best from LifeWay.



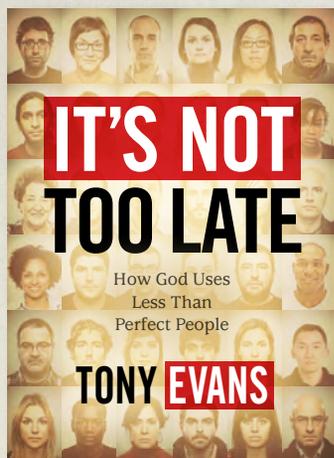
Lead your group or entire church to fuel their affection for God, to share His love, to spread His glory, and to make other disciple makers.



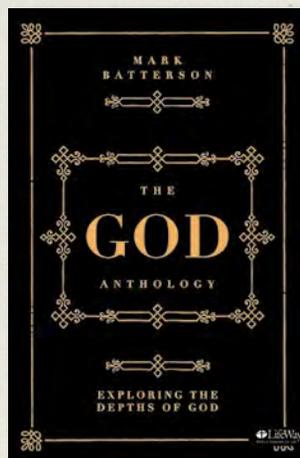
Find out how putting a focus on the glory of God can naturally yield results in discipleship, evangelism, and community impact.



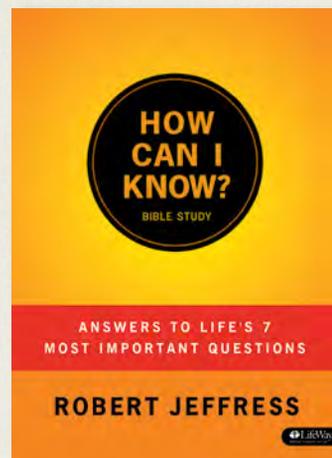
Gain understanding and skill to share Jesus effectively with others and begin to understand your own faith better.



Discover how to focus on the potential of your future, not the missteps of your past. God can still use you, especially if you're broken.



Explore six critical aspects of God's character and personhood through a powerful mix of personal study, media, and music.



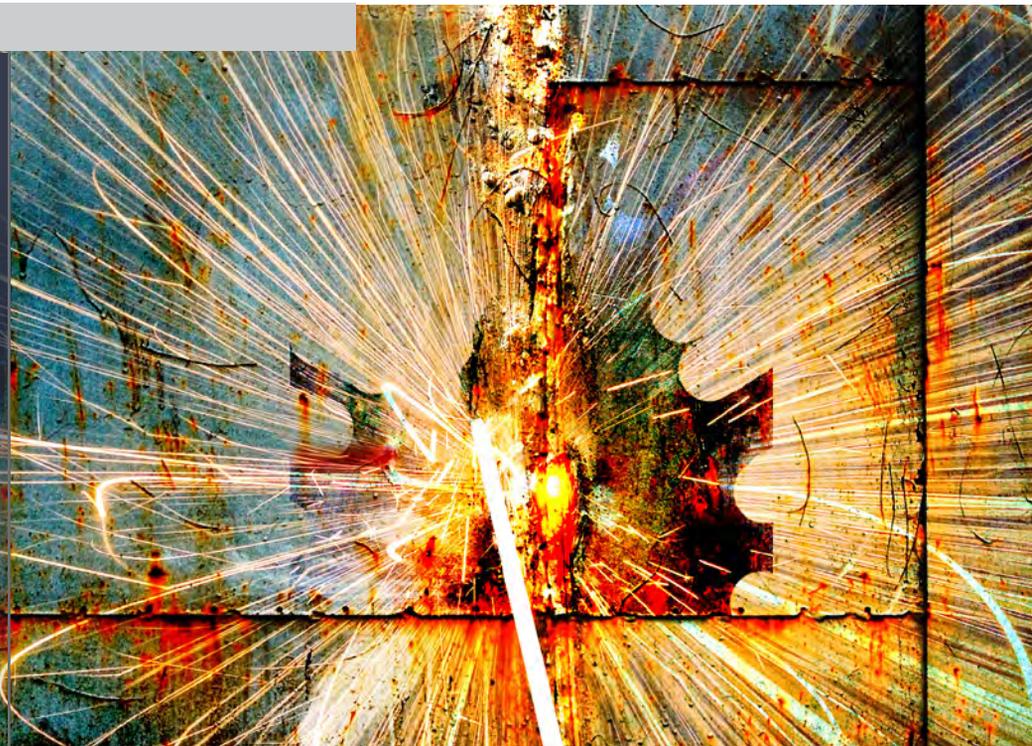
Learn the answers to life's most important questions. Subjects include God, the Bible, suffering, forgiveness, heaven, and more.

Contents

Cover story:

16 | Future of the Church in America

While the decline of mainline Protestants and the rise of the “nones” has some claiming the end of Christianity, others see the sparks of a devout and robust faith in the Church’s future. LifeWay Research President Ed Stetzer says statistics show a clearer picture of the fall of cultural Christianity. And that’s good news.



Features

22 Bible Studies for Life

LifeWay’s new curriculum line – Bible Studies for Life – promises to be an experience where the Bible meets your life. General Editor Ronnie Floyd answers questions about why this might be exactly what your church needs to help engage your members and their unchurched friends.

27 Transformational Churches

LifeWay’s Transformational Church Assessment Tool helps churches get a realistic picture of who they are. Many churches are learning they just might be in pretty good shape. Sometimes just a little refocus gets them back on track.

34 Leading on fumes

When God said to remember the Sabbath, it wasn’t a suggestion. Pastor Mark Dance found out the hard way that God was serious. He offers four reasons for giving the Sabbath the honor it requires.

38 Sluggish economy no match for vision, connection

Despite the bad economy, The Harvest Church in Dallas and Willow Pointe Church in Hattiesburg, Miss., are thriving. What’s been the key? Casting vision and communicating how God honors faithful financial stewardship.

Features:

32 First Impressions

If you indeed want people to come to your church – hopefully more than once – you have to make them want to come back. A good first impression is crucial!

37 Battling burnout

Help your church's leaders fight burnout with these five tips.

42 Making Connections

Are you overlooking a communication tool that is interesting, engaging, effective and free? Find out how a presence on Facebook can benefit your church.



In Every Issue:

5 Inside F&T

8 From the Publisher

9 From the President

What are non-Christians saying about Christians? Thom Rainer lists the seven most-common comments.

10 Facts and Trends

Beliefs, issues and trends impacting the church and our world

44 Calibrate: Practical ministry ideas for your church

What pastors need to know to engage Boomers.

45 Technology: 21st century giving

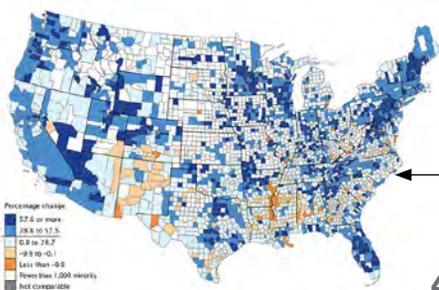
10 reasons to consider online giving at your church.

46 On Our Radar:

Relevant and practical resources for you and your church

50 The Exchange:

Ed Stetzer says cultural Christianity is dying and explains why that's a good thing.



Facts and Trends

Volume 59 • Number 1 • Winter 2013

Facts and Trends is designed to assist pastors, church staff and denominational leaders in their roles of ministry by informing them about LifeWay resources and how they relate to current issues in Christian ministry.

Production Team:

Editor | Polly House

Graphic Designer | Katie Shull

Editorial Manager | Carol Pipes

Contributing Writers: Carolyn Curtis, Ken Braddy, Mark Dance, Marty Duren, Devin Maddox, Russ Rankin

LifeWay Leadership:

President | Thom S. Rainer

LifeWay Research President | Ed Stetzer

Director of Communications | Marty King

Advertising:

Rhonda Edge Buescher Director,
Magazine Advertising and Circulation

Send advertising questions/comments to:

One LifeWay Plaza, MSN 136,
Nashville, TN 37234

Email: magazineadvertising@lifeway.com

Media kits: Lifeway.com/mediaoptions

This magazine includes paid advertisements for some products and services not affiliated with LifeWay. The inclusion of the paid advertisements does not constitute an endorsement by LifeWay Christian Resources of the products or services.

Subscriptions: For a free print subscription to *Facts and Trends*, send your name, address and phone number to factsandtrends@lifeway.com.

Permissions: *Facts and Trends* grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for use in a local church or classroom, provided copies are distributed free and indicate Facts and Trends as the source.

Scripture: Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, copyright 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

Contact Us: *Facts and Trends*

One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0192

factsandtrends@lifeway.com
LifeWay.com/FactsandTrends

Facts and Trends is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources. Our goal is to help you carry out your ministry more effectively.

INSIDE F&T



The start of a new year is the perfect time to reflect on the previous year, evaluate how we handled the challenges and celebrate the victories. With the past in perspective, we set goals for the future—resolutions for a new year.

In preparation for 2013, the staff at *Facts and Trends* has been evaluating our mission and purpose for the magazine, and we've made some changes to reflect a new vision.

We'll continue to bring you research articles that provide insight to cultural and religious trends that are sure to impact the church. In this issue's cover story, "The Future of the Church in America" on page 16, Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research, talks about the decline of U.S. Protestants and the rise of the religiously unaffiliated. But he's not ringing the death knell of Christianity in America; instead, he sees hope for a rise in robust believers and healthy churches.

In addition to key research findings, we'll begin to include articles on leadership, effective church ministry and practical resources you can use in your church. We've added a few new departments to give you easy access to information we believe will be beneficial to you and the leaders in your church.

Expanding on our name, the **Facts and Trends department (page 10)** provides a snapshot of current issues, cultural and spiritual beliefs, as well as church trends. We'll also report on what churches are doing to connect with their communities. This section is filled with bite-sized content you can read in a few seconds and chew on for days.

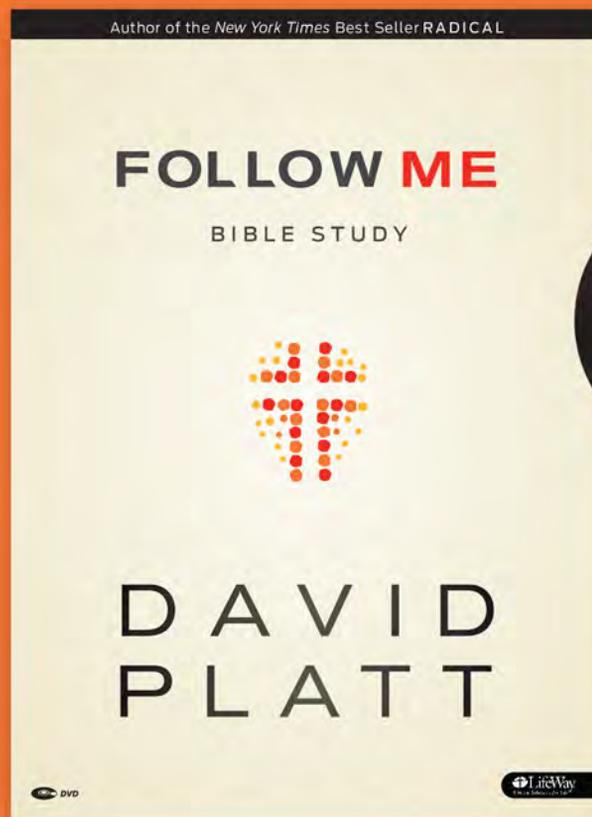
We understand life and ministry get busy and it's impossible to keep up with everything. So, we've put together a department called **On Our Radar (page 46)** to give you highlights of the best books, apps, conferences and more. Here you'll find relevant and helpful resources to keep you focused and equipped for leading your church. Occasionally, we'll include what some of your favorite authors, musicians and other Christian leaders are reading and talking about.

Calibrate means to adjust precisely for a particular function. In this department (**page 44**), we'll offer practical ministry ideas you can use right now in your church or tweak for your particular ministry context. We'll also give you examples of churches that have adjusted their ministries to meet the needs of their communities.

In each issue, we'll strive to bring you articles that explore the challenges and joys of ministry. But don't expect us to have all the answers. We're hoping you'll pass along the lessons you've learned while ministering to others.

We're here to help you navigate those issues and trends impacting the church in today's world. Most of all, we want to be an encouragement and a resource to you as you lead your church to live out the gospel. Our New Years' resolution at *Facts and Trends* is to serve you, our readers, as we see what God has in store for His church in the days and years ahead.

DO YOU GO WHEREVER HE LEADS YOU?



BIBLE
STUDY
APP ALSO
AVAILABLE

Are you a follower of Christ? Are you sure? When Jesus says, "Come, follow Me," it is not an invitation to say a prayer. It is a summons to lose our lives. But have we? In this much-anticipated follow-up to *Radical*, David Platt continues to challenge cultural Christianity. And it just might challenge you and your entire church. So get with your group. Watch Platt on video. Take some time to retreat, reflect, and genuinely respond to Jesus' invitation, "Follow Me."

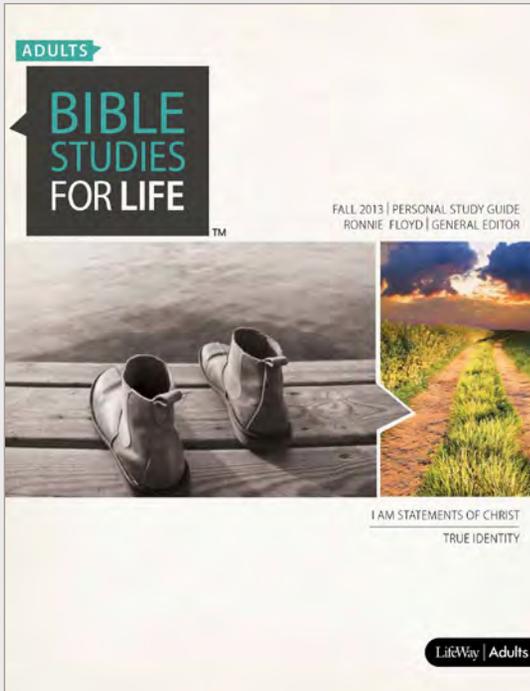
lifeway.com/followme | 800.458.2772 | LifeWay Christian Stores

Invite your entire church to follow Jesus.

When you see the dramatic impact *Follow Me* can have on just one group, you may be inspired to take your entire church through the study. Resources for students and preteens will be available, as well as a *Church Kit* to help with promotion. Lead your church to fuel their affection for God, to share His love, to spread His glory, and to make other disciple makers. Go to lifeway.com/followme to learn more.



Dr. David Platt, pastor at The Church at Brook Hills, is deeply devoted to Christ and His Word. He has authored several books, *Radical*, *Radical Together*, and his most recent book, *Follow Me*.



Bible Studies for Life

This year, LifeWay is launching Bible Studies for Life, an ongoing Bible study curriculum for groups of all ages designed around the three main spheres of life: Christ, community and culture. Through the studies, LifeWay desires to develop people who know Christ and His gracious work, are contributing servants in the community of faith, and can effectively engage the culture without losing distinction.

For more information:
LifeWay.com/BibleStudiesforLife

LifeWay Events

Find the most up-to-date information on LifeWay's events and conferences online. Visit LifeWay.com/Events and search for a training or enrichment opportunity by date, type, age group, product family, church strategy, subject, gender, format, ministry role, language, featured speaker, publisher, event length, location and even venue name! Hundreds of opportunities are available for you and your church in 2013.

For more information: LifeWay.com/Events

Turn Your VBS Upside Down

Through every twist, turn and dive, LifeWay's 2013 VBS, "Colossal Coaster World," will challenge kids to face their fears and trust God. There's excitement around every curve as kids learn that God has given them a spirit of power, love and sound judgment. This evangelistic VBS is the ultimate ride. At the end of the week, kids will want to do it all over again! Need ideas for your church's VBS or Backyard Bible Clubs? Visit LifeWay's VBS blog and don't forget to reserve your VBS Super Sampler.

For more information:
LifeWay.com/VBS2013

LifeWay Resources

LifeWay.com • LifeWay.com/PastorsToday
BHPublishingGroup.com • LifeWayResearch.com
LifeWay.com/DigitalChurch • LifeWayWorship.com

LifeWay Students

With the addition of Student Life to the family of student camps offered by LifeWay, your youth have even more opportunities to experience life change this summer. Choose from more than 360 different weeks and locations available through Fuge Camps and Student Life. Challenge your students to be the hands and feet of Jesus at a summer mission project. Choose from more than 180 weeks of summer missions opportunities through World Changers, P2 Missions and M-Fuge.

For more information:
LifeWay.com/Students

The Gospel Project

Some people see the Bible as a collection of stories with morals for life application. But it is so much more than that. The Gospel Project is a Christ-centered curriculum that examines the grand narrative of Scripture and how the gospel transforms the lives of those it touches. Separate study plans for kids, students and adults ensure the proper focus and depth. Sign up to preview a free month of The Gospel Project.

For more information:
LifeWay.com/GospelProject



Seven common comments non-Christians make about Christians

One of my greatest joys in research is talking to and listening to those who clearly identify themselves as non-Christians. Don't get me wrong. I'm not celebrating their absence of faith in Christ. My joy comes from listening to those who don't believe as I do, so that I might be better equipped to witness to them.

Over the past several years, my research teams and I have interviewed thousands of unchurched non-Christians. Among the more interesting insights I gleaned were those where the interviewees shared with me their perspectives of Christians.

Here are the seven most common types of comments in order of frequency followed by a direct quote from a non-Christian.

1. Christians are against more things than they are for. "It just seems to me that Christians are mad at the world and mad at each other. They are so negative that they seem unhappy. I have no desire to be like them and stay upset all the time."

2. I would like to develop a friendship with a Christian. "I'm really interested in what they believe and how they carry out their beliefs. I wish I could find a Christian that would be willing to spend some time with me."

3. I would like to learn about the Bible from a Christian. "The Bible really fascinates me, but I don't want to go to a stuffy and legalistic church to learn about it. It would be nice if a Christian invited me to study the Bible in his home or at a place like Starbucks."

4. I don't see much difference in the way Christians live compared to others. "I really can't tell what a Christian believes because he doesn't seem much different than other people I know. The only exception would be Mormons. They really seem to take their beliefs seriously."

5. I wish I could learn to be a better husband, wife, dad, mom, etc., from a Christian. "My wife is threatening to divorce me, and I think she means it this time. My neighbor is a Christian, and

he seems to have it together. I am swallowing my pride and asking him to help me."

6. Some Christians try to act like they have no problems. "Harriett works in my department. She is one of those Christians who seem to have a mask on. I would respect her more if she didn't put on such an act. I know better."

7. I wish a Christian would take me to his or her church. "I really would like to visit a church, but I'm not particularly comfortable going by myself. What is weird is that I am 32 years old, and I've never had a Christian invite me to church in my entire life."

Do you see the pattern? Non-Christians want to interact with Christians. They want to see Christians' actions match their beliefs. They want Christians to be real.

In one study, we found that only five percent of non-Christians are antagonistic toward Christians. It's time to stop believing the lies we have been told. Jesus said it clearly: "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2, HCSB).

Satan is the author of excuses. There is no reason to wait to reach those who don't know Jesus Christ. We must go now. The harvest is waiting. And the Lord of the harvest has prepared the way. ■

In His Service,



In the Word

When it comes to reading the Bible, 32 percent of Americans say their most significant frustration is they “never have enough time to read it.”

The second biggest frustration?

21 percent of ages 18-27 say, “I don’t feel excited about reading it.”

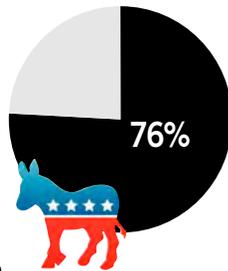
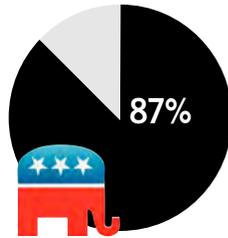
16 percent of ages 28-46 say, “The language is difficult to relate to.”

Source: American Bible Society



Pro abstinence

A majority of Republicans and Democrats are pro abstinence, according to a survey of 1,683 likely voters with children ages 9 to 16 released in October 2012. Eighty-seven percent of Republicans and 76 percent of Democrats support abstinence education, with overwhelming majorities voicing approval of sexual risk avoidance (SRA) education’s major tenets, which, among other things, include:



- encouraging renewed abstinence for the sexually active
- providing contraceptive information within an abstinence context
- providing information on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- informing students of the limitations of condoms
- alerting them to the emotional consequences of sex

Source: National Abstinence Education Foundation

Life Interrupted

Amid a sluggish economic recovery, both the number of unemployed persons (12.1 million) and the unemployment rate (7.9 percent) showed little movement in 2012. Almost half of the current unemployed have been without jobs for 27 weeks or more – some for multiple years. While churches across the nation have felt the effects of layoffs, many are finding ways to help those in their congregations. Here are four ways to help the unemployed in your church:

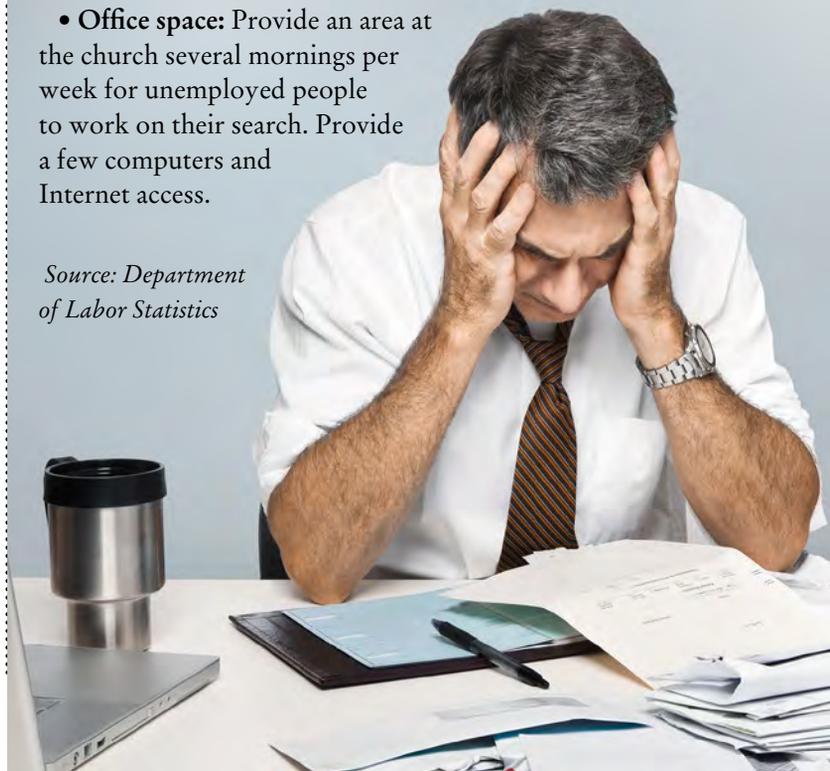
- **Networking:** Sponsor a monthly breakfast or lunch for jobseekers and business leaders in your church. Invite a speaker to give a brief presentation on leadership skills, organizational tactics or team building. Or start a new small group or prayer group especially for jobseekers. Recruit unemployed individuals to lead the ministry to the unemployed.

- **New skills:** Workers released from long-held positions may need a refresher course on job hunting. Invite a career counselor to teach resume writing, online job-hunting and interviewing skills. Offer financial training to families who now are living on a tighter budget.

- **Counseling:** For many, career and job performance is linked to self worth. Those who have been out of work for a long period of time may begin to suffer from self-doubt in areas of their personal lives often leading to severe depression. Consider bringing in a professional counselor to serve your church for limited hours during the week or on weekends.

- **Office space:** Provide an area at the church several mornings per week for unemployed people to work on their search. Provide a few computers and Internet access.

Source: Department of Labor Statistics



QUOTABLES

The church in America has become like a bear fed by tourists, Ed Stetzer said, because of so-called seekers willing to return to church to recapture their childhood religious memories.

“What happens when you feed the bear is eventually it can’t fend for itself,” he said. “I think the people of the church have to learn to fend for themselves by going out and proclaiming the gospel, not counting on a really cool church to preach the gospel for them.”

– Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research

“You know you’re on mission when it gets messy... The gospel is so powerful you can be in the middle of the mess and still be different. That’s how powerful the Gospel is.”

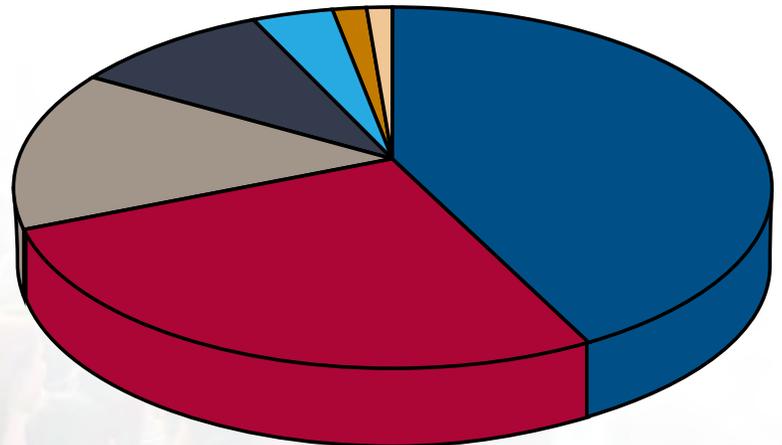
– Jeff Vanderstelt, pastor with Soma Communities, speaking at the Verge Conference



Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths

As the number of Asian Americans rises in the U.S. (now 18.2 million), they contribute to the diversity of the religions landscape. While they have been largely responsible for the growth of Buddhism and Hinduism in the nation, most Asian Americans belong to the country’s two largest religious groups: Christians and those who say they have no religious affiliation.

Percentage of Asian American adults who say they are ...



- Christian 42%
- Unaffiliated 26%
- Buddhist 14%
- Hindu 10%
- Muslim 4%
- Other 2%
- Sikh 1%

Source: Pew Research



Meals and ministry

Some 50 million Americans, including 16 million kids (one out of five), struggle with hunger. Fortunately, churches throughout the U.S. are responding to the growing needs of those who need food.

For two years, Mission Yucaipa, in Yucaipa, Calif., has collected, sorted and distributed bags of food door to door—enough to feed 250 people. The food ministry has opened the door to meet other needs.

The first week mission pastor Freddie Rodriguez and his wife, Yvonne, and other volunteers went door-to-door in a mobile home community to offer bags of food, they met a middle-aged woman who answered her door and invited Yvonne in with one insistent question: “Who told you to knock on my door?” Yvonne tried to explain, but the woman interrupted: “No, who told you to knock on my door right now?” The woman said she had just turned on her gas stove with the intention of committing suicide when she heard the knock on her door. “God brought you

to my house,” she exclaimed. She recommitted her life to Christ that day.

“The most powerful impact is the door-to-door approach,” Freddie says. “There are so many needs, and you just don’t know them till you knock.”

Most of the food recipients are Hispanic single mothers or elderly Anglos who are sick or disabled, explains Rodriguez.

“We just knock on the door, ask how they’re doing and say, ‘We’ve been blessed with so much. How can we bless you?’”

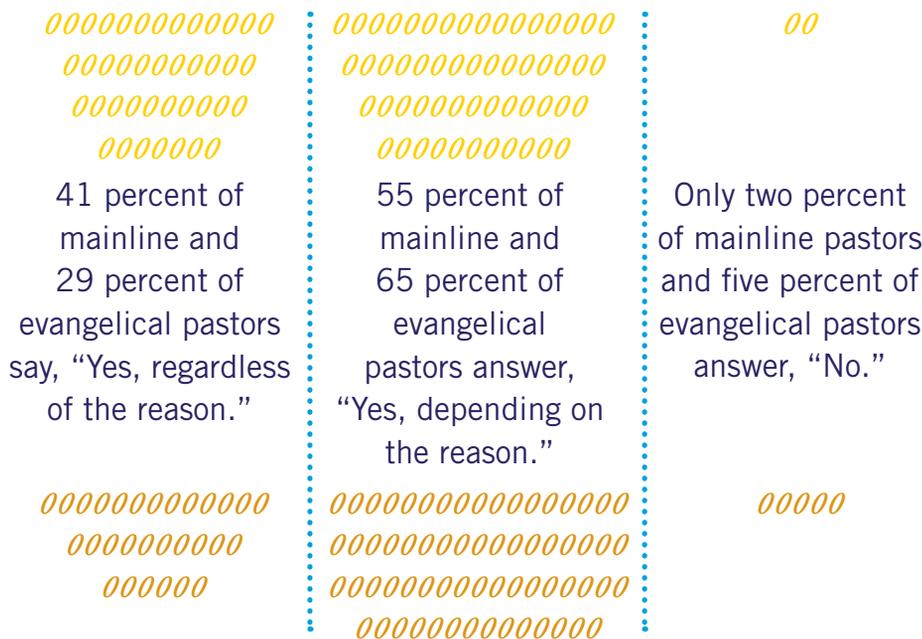
—Amanda Phifer



Pastors split on performing marriages for divorced people

Mainline and evangelical pastors are divided on the issue of performing marriages for divorced people. In response to the question, “When asked to do so, will you perform a marriage ceremony if the man or woman has been divorced?”

Mainline



Evangelical

Saying I Do

The U.S. Episcopal Church became the largest American denomination to put its stamp of approval on same-sex unions, as delegates at its triennial convention last year adopted a provisional liturgy for such occasions.

Source: Baptist Press



5,000

The number of congregations that host worship services at more than one physical location. Multisite churches have grown from fewer than 200 in 2001 to 1,500 in 2006, to more than 5,000 today.

Source: Leadership Network

Pastor education and compensation

When it comes to determining pastors' compensation rates, education level, tenure at current church and higher weekly attendance resulted in more compensation. In fact, each additional educational degree level adds, on average, \$2,878 in annual compensation. Seminary graduates receive, on average, \$7,012 more in total annual compensation than non-seminary graduates and they receive more vacation time.

Source: LifeWay Research (LifeWay.com/CompensationSurvey)

Time for family

Roughly **10 percent** of Protestant pastors nationwide say they spend nine hours a week or less with their family members.

Source: LifeWay Research

Are all faith books true?

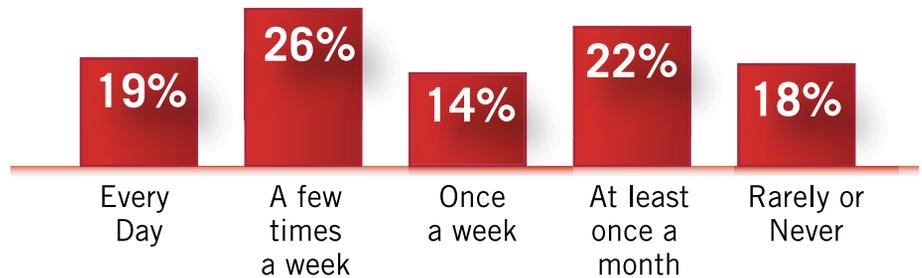
46 percent believe the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are different expressions of the same spiritual truths; 46 percent disagree.

Source: American Bible Society

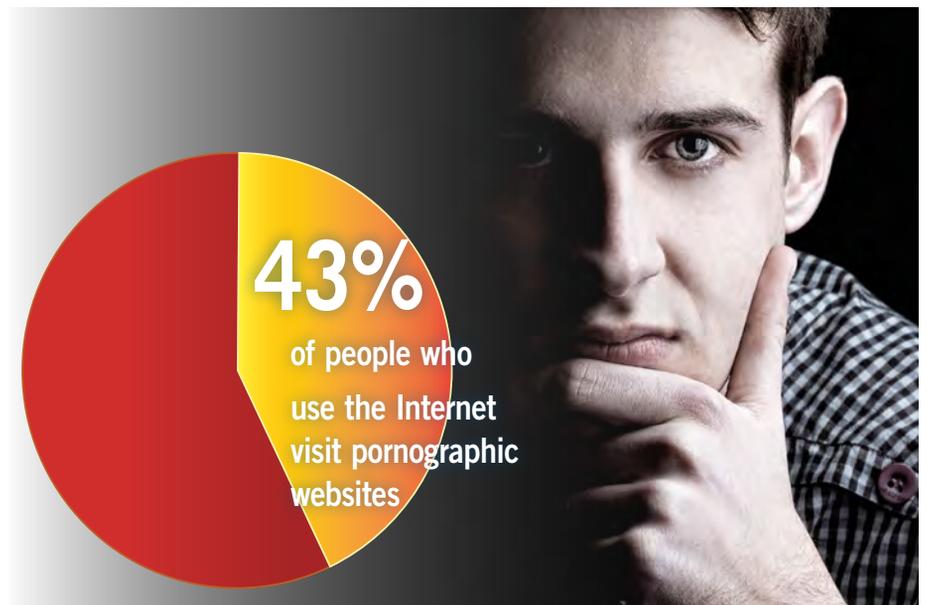
What they say/What they do

Ninety percent of American Protestant churchgoers say they desire to honor Christ with their lives and even profess to think on biblical truths, but few actually engage in personal reading and study of the Scriptures. In this survey by LifeWay Research, 2,900 Protestants were asked,

“How often do you read the Bible?”



Source: LifeWay Research



Internet porn viewing

Close to half (43 percent) of people who use the Internet visit pornographic websites. Some 40 million Americans are regular visitors to porn sites, with pornographic downloads representing 35 percent of all Internet downloads.

Of the 40 million regular visitors, 33 percent are women. A full 70 percent of men age 18-24 visit porn sites monthly. Not sure how to help those in your church struggling with this addiction? Pick up a copy of John Bisagno's *Pastor's Handbook* (B&H) for practical insight on handling issues like porn addiction. And *Picking Up the Pieces Series: The Secret Seductress* is a resource for men's groups. Visit LifeWay.com to order or visit your local LifeWay store.

Source: Education Database Online



Suburbs becoming more diverse

The U.S. is rapidly becoming more diverse says a new demographic study by Brown University. While big cities traditionally have been the nation's melting pots, today it is smaller cities and suburbs that are on the front lines of changing demographics and culture.

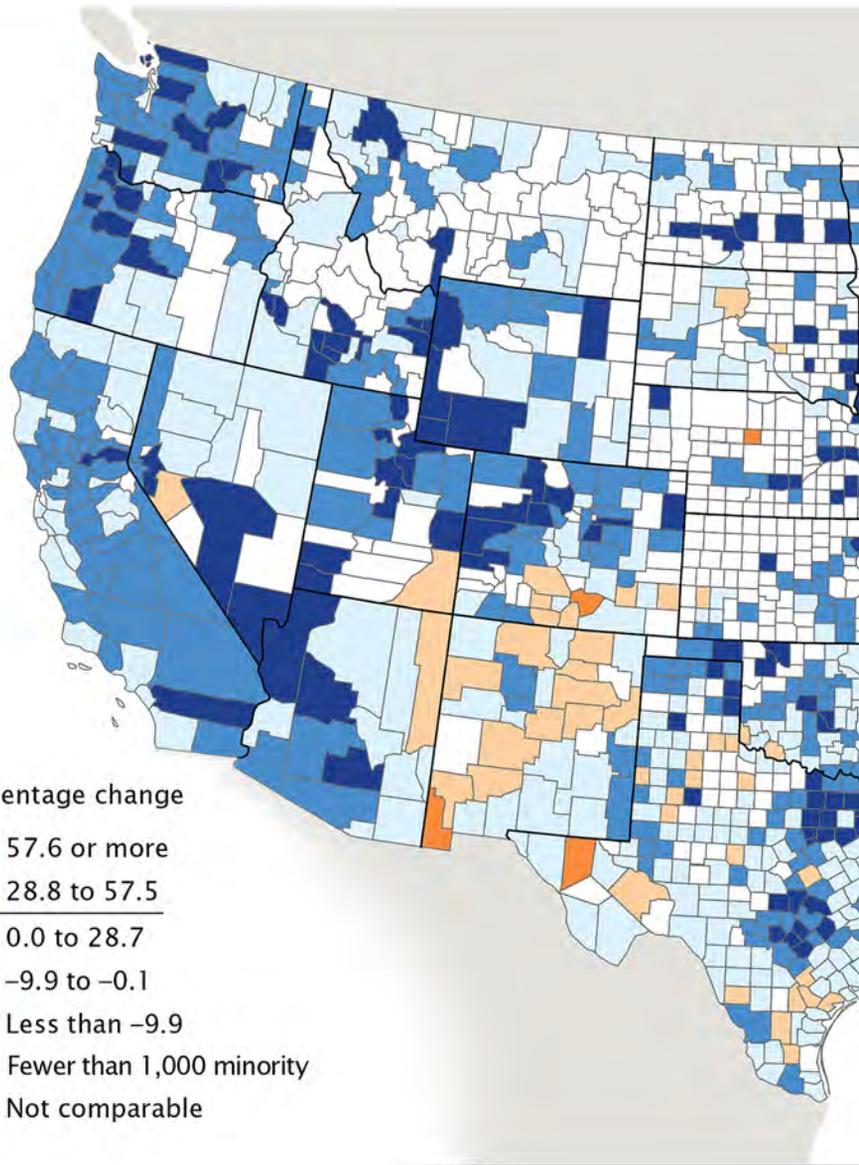
According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau figures, 44 percent of suburban residents live in a diverse community, defined as places that are 20-60 percent nonwhite – up from 38 percent in 2000.

The booming Hispanic and Asian populations are driving today's demographic changes. Hispanics, at 50.5 million, now account for 1 in 6 Americans and constitute the biggest minority group in the nation. Asians account for 6 percent of the total U.S. population.

A perfectly diverse city or town would have a population with exactly 20 percent of each category, and would get a diversity score of 100 on the diversity scale.

In 2010, the most diverse metropolitan area in the country was Vallejo, Calif., north of San Francisco. It had a score of 89.3 and the population was 41 percent white, 24 percent Hispanic, 15 percent Asian, 14 percent black and 6 percent other.

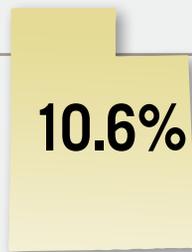
Source: Wall Street Journal and U.S. 2010 Project, Brown University



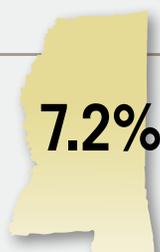
The generous South

Religion plays a major role in how much money Americans give to charity, according to a study by The Chronicle of Philanthropy. The parts of the country that give the highest percent of their discretionary income to charity are also the most religious. Seven out of the top 10 giving states are in the Bible Belt:

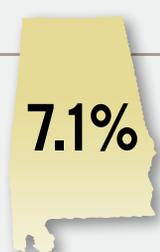
Source: The Chronicle of Philanthropy



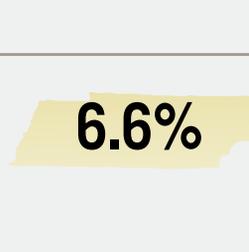
Utah



Mississippi



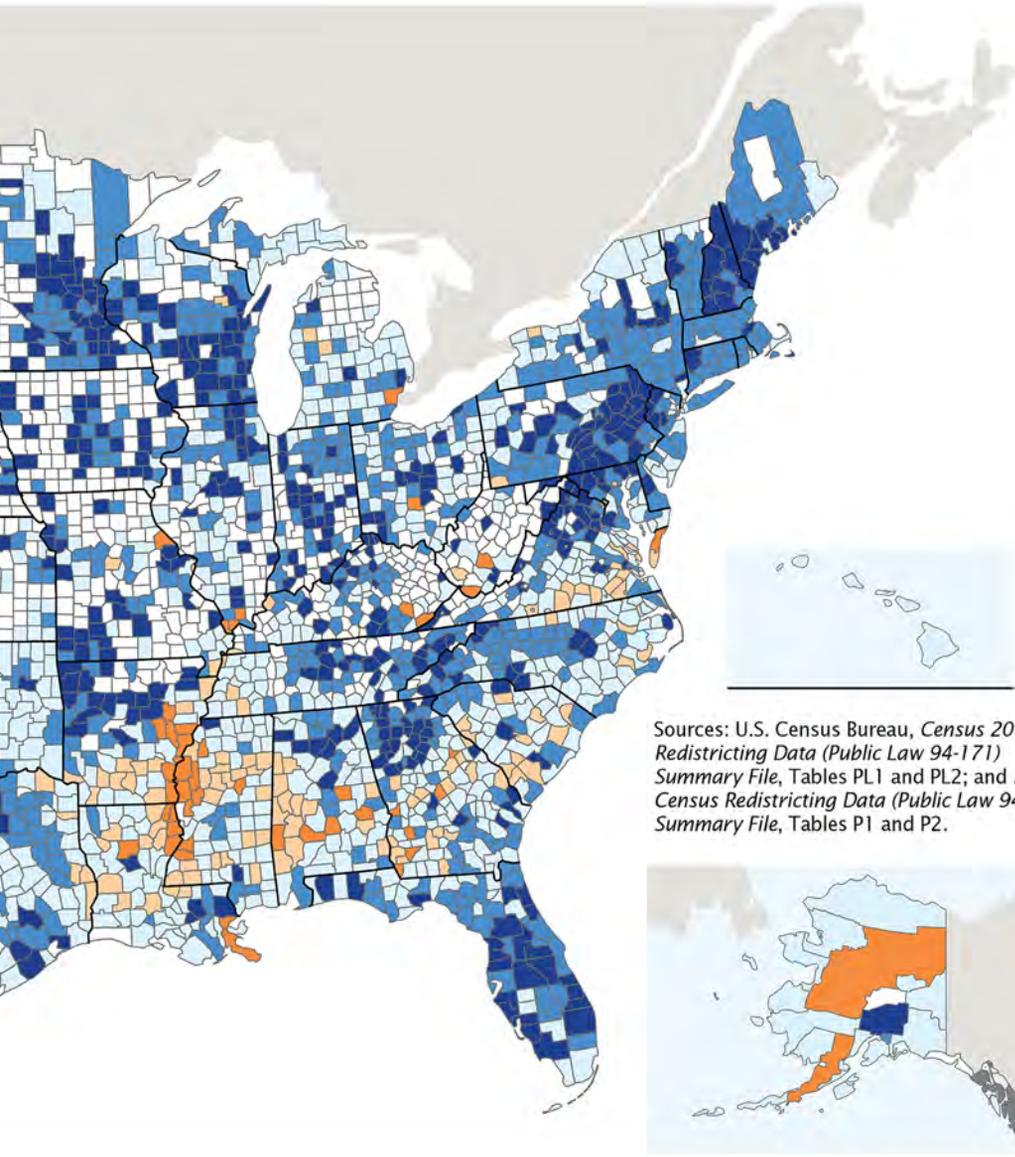
Alabama



Tennessee

Percentage Change in Minority Population by County: 2000 to 2010

(Counties with a minority population of at least 1,000 are included in the map. Minority refers to people who reported their ethnicity and race as something other than non-Hispanic White alone in the decennial census. For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/pl94-171.pdf)



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables PL1 and PL2*; and *2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables P1 and P2*.

Highest church attendance Sundays

1. Easter
2. Christmas
3. Mother's Day

Source:
LifeWay Research

Increase in Islam

The number of Islamic houses of worship in the U.S. has increased significantly in the past decade. The nation saw a 74 percent increase in the number of mosques from 2000 to 2010, bringing the number from 1,209 to 2,106. With the religious landscape of the United States steadily changing, consider how your church can best reach out to those of other religions living in your community.

Source: *USA Today*,
February 29, 2012

6.4%

South Carolina

6.4%

Idaho

6.3%

Arkansas

6.2%

Georgia

5.9%

North Carolina

5.7%

Maryland

FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN AMERICA

by Carolyn Curtis





A rise in robust believers and healthy churches ignites sparks of hope

The sun shines on this January day in Oregon. Pastor Tom senses lightness in his step.

The New Year or my new normal? he wonders, checking his niece's text: "Five inches of partly cloudy." He laughs, texts back and gets a sunny response about Chloe's study of The Gospel Project: "Weighty, relevant, applicable."

Pastor Tom is thrilled that across the continent his 20-something niece, once ready to bolt from the church, is now a strong believer. Her Vermont congregation meets in a white steepled church on the verge of becoming a museum before a visionary pastor moved in and began preaching, to use Chloe's words, "the unvarnished Truth."

"He's not dangling promises to be everything to everybody," she told her uncle at Christmas. "He's not pleading and cajoling."

No stunts, no grubbing for members or money. No labels either. In Oregon, that's become Pastor Tom's new reality too, and he loves it. Thanks God for it daily.

No compromising. No more framing the gospel to appeal to people with nominal faith at the expense of people who get it, who are happy—hungry—for depth.

Pastor Tom ponders the process he sees in his flock. As their faith flourishes, his well fed sheep experience radical life changes. Family and friends, who long ago abandoned any pretense of belief, take notice from their positions well outside the church. A few suddenly glimpse the forest, no longer blinded by the trees ... as if

their absolute separation from "religion" shook out their mental cobwebs, allowing them to see the effects of "relationship" with Christ.

A funny thing is happening. Pastor Tom's small church is growing—albeit slowly—and the people are staying. No more piling through the front door and out the back months later.

Pastor Tom no longer hears the death knell of impending failure. On this January day he senses the wellspring of success.

The present future

An Oregon pastor with a growing congregation and a vibrant believer in Vermont. Characters in a science fiction movie?

It's a scenario representing what Ed Stetzer borrows from Reggie McNeal to call "the present future."

The president of LifeWay Research is responding to a statistic: The percentage of U.S. Protestant adults has dropped to minority status at 48 percent, according to the Pew Research Center. And the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion has increased to just less than 20 percent. People who had loose religious affiliations are finally admitting they don't have one at all.

But Stetzer sees good news in bad numbers.

With the collapse of the squishy middle, he believes the future of the American church looks much like today's Pacific Northwest and New England, dichotomies where believers are not a majority but often more serious about living out their faith in Christ.

In those regions, people who were nominally Christian have dropped out, no longer project-

ing a façade through church membership nor willing to pay the price where it's culturally unpopular. The church in North America is quickly losing its influence in society and culture.

"Fifty years ago being an active member of a robust church was almost necessary to get on the school board," says Stetzer. "Today it might keep you off."

Stetzer says the culture has pushed the church to the margins of society, and the popular media, literature, arts and politics reflect the results; secular spirituality is on the rise. However, Stetzer assures: "No serious scholar believes Christianity in America is on a trajectory of extinction."

Instead, he sees clarification that devout faith is what will last.

"With cultural Christianity in a freefall, I see a rise in robust believers and healthy churches. I'm not discouraged. Effective churches will attract and keep strong believers who are motivated by their faith and not by cultural norms."

Bad numbers

Today Stetzer is in a mood. He's threatening to name troublemakers.

It's this week's edition of his webcast, *The Exchange*. Stetzer is talking (loyal viewers might say ranting) about the Pew report, not that he disagrees with it.

America has been polarized—not just politically but religiously—and he welcomes what some see as carnage. He wishes more people would stop self-identifying as Christians, if they're clinging to the label but aren't really devout.

Today he's vexed about people using bad numbers "to drive people to conferences, which don't

necessarily fix problems ... and people putting out bad information that actually discourages Christians and churches. We need to be careful that we don't abuse statistics to make points with the end result being that we demoralize the very people we're trying to mobilize for God's mission."

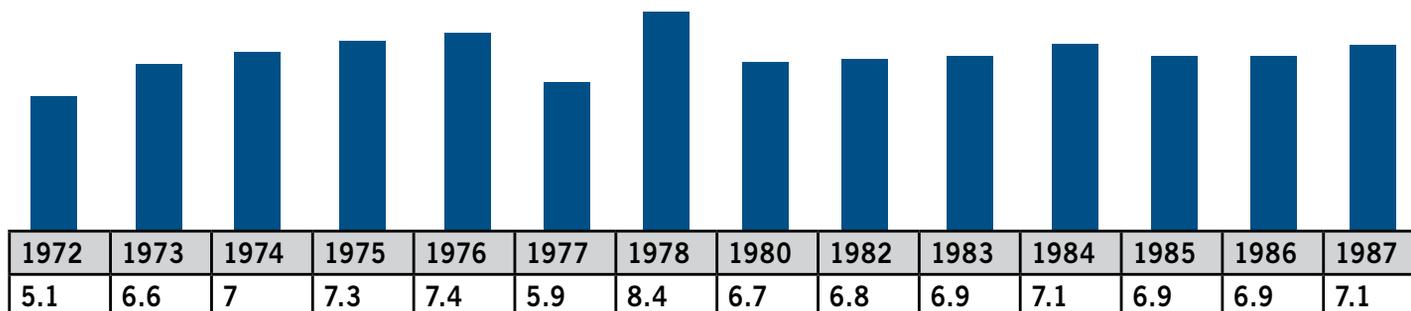
Stetzer uses *The Exchange* webcast to unpack the facts

"With cultural Christianity in a freefall, I see a rise in robust believers and healthy churches."

— Ed Stetzer

Rise of the "nones"

Americans were asked, "What is your religious preference?" This chart shows the percentage of people who answered "none."





with his brand of no-nonsense analysis that's sharp, relevant, often witty, and appealing to an audience of church leaders and culture watchers.

For starters, he's not amused by people who hear statistics from reputable researchers—he counts Pew among them—and conclude the sky is falling. He calls it “hype, breathless reporting.” Stetzer says Pew's study did not catch his LifeWay Research team by surprise.

“We know Christian influence is on the wane. We know many denominations are declining, along with the percentage of self-identified Christians. But I'm not discouraged, because we've known for a while there need to be changes ... a missional emphasis ... a passion for lostness ... more theological consideration.”

Stetzer on statistics

A native New Yorker who holds his Tuesday viewers' attention with rapid-fire ideas, Stetzer is not a silver-lining-in-the-clouds sort of guy. He's more likely to drive home the good news that God is calling the world to Himself and not abandoning America.

Pastors and leaders tune in from North America and far-flung places like the Mid-

dle East and South America. Viewers include laypeople with hearts for evangelism, discipleship, church planting and other ministry efforts they know demand excellence.

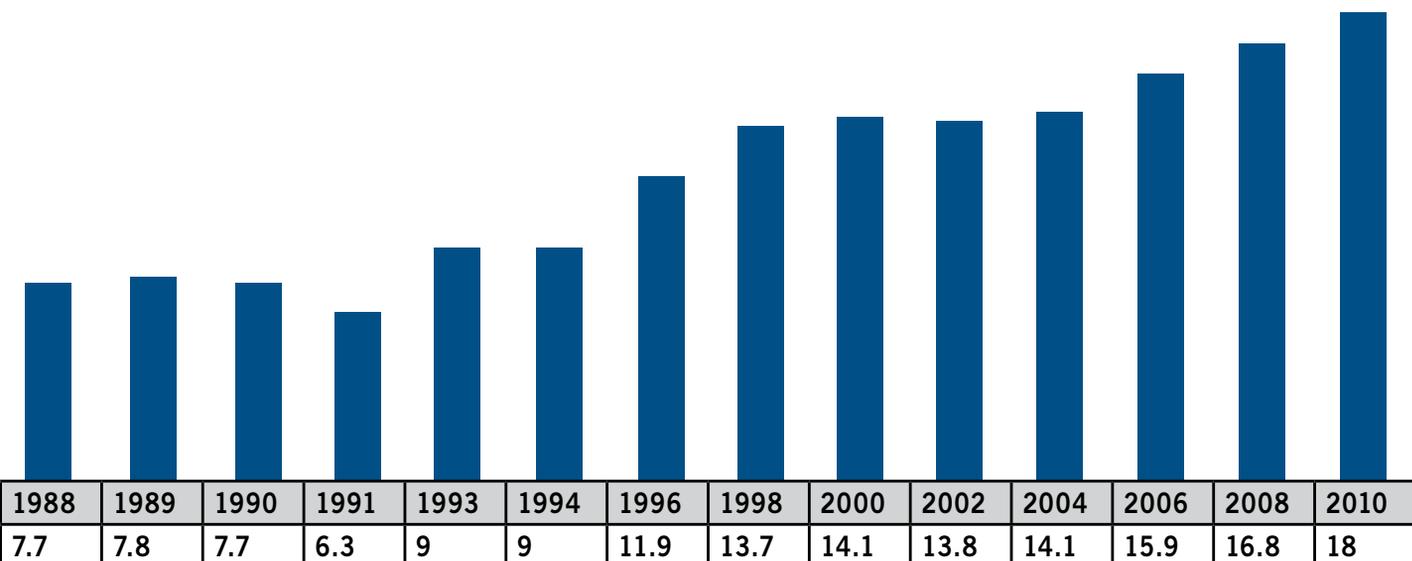
They also tune in for a few laughs.

The colorful head of LifeWay Research is not above throwing in some humor. That's because Stetzer loves research but knows many think it's boring. For him it is not. It's beneficial, even fun. He knows that research, if properly done and interpreted, is as useful for the Kingdom of God as for medicine.

“Facts are our friends,” he says. And viewers see why. He explains their relevance with a bit of showmanship that's engaging and educational.

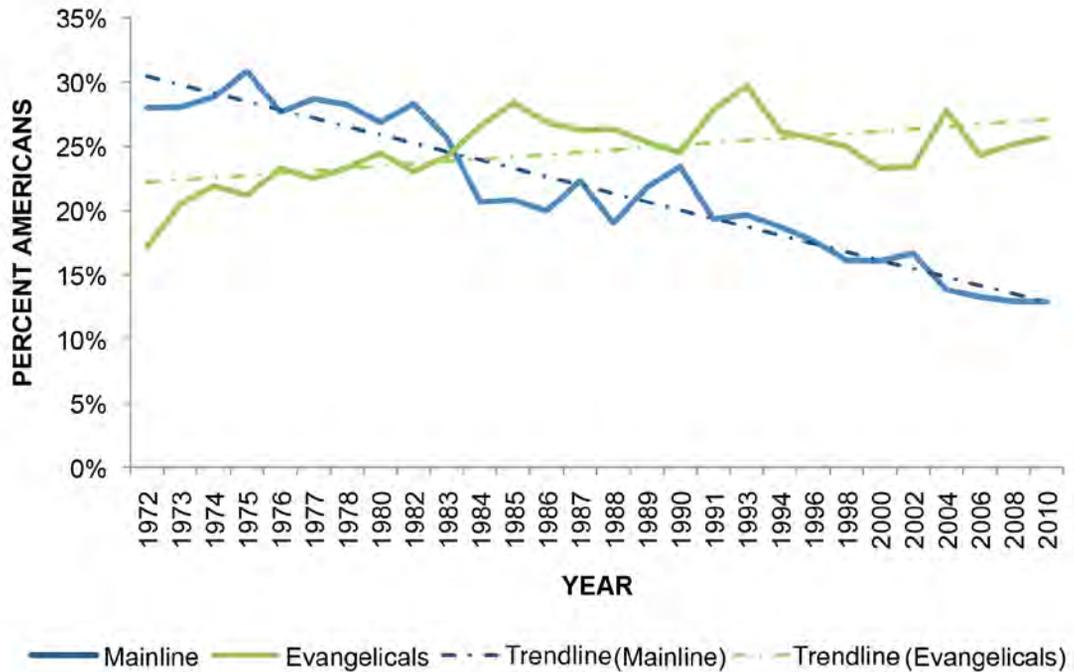
Unpacking statistical terms

- Census Christians mark “Christian” on surveys rather than another world religion, because they know they are not, for example, Hindu or Jewish.
- Churchgoing Christians identify as such because they occasionally attend services.
- Conversion Christians claim a true faith experience in which they were transformed, resulting in a deeply held belief in Jesus as their Lord.



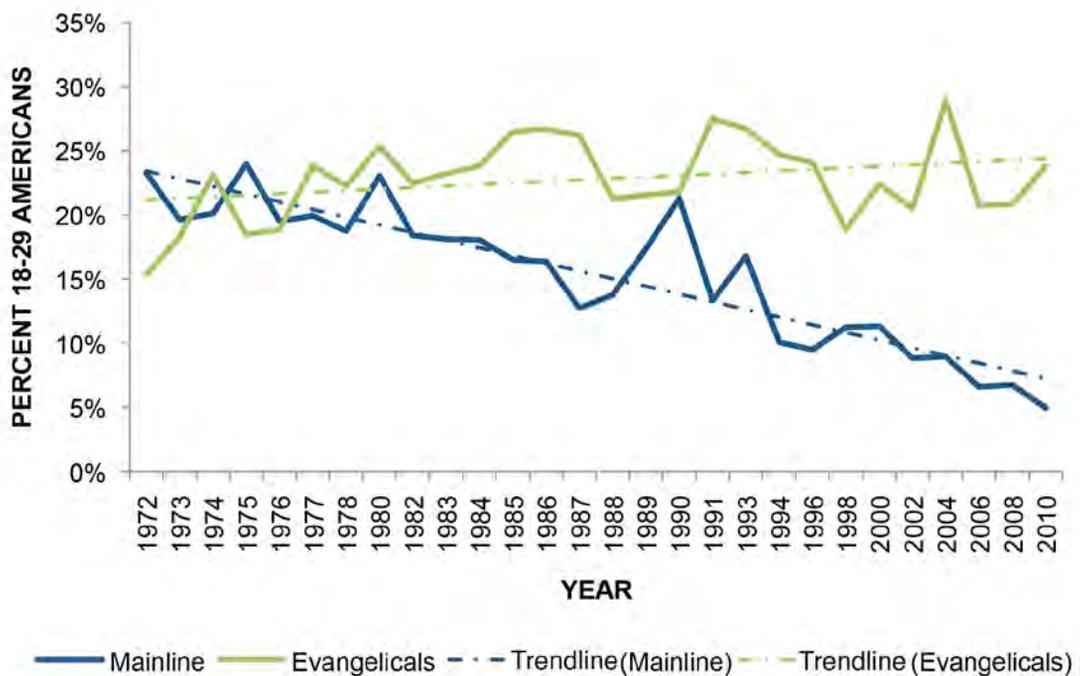
Rise and fall of denominational groups in America

The percentage of Americans in mainline denominations has steadily decreased. The amount of people affiliating with the term “evangelical” has slightly increased from 1972 to 2010.



Percentage of 18-29 year-olds within denominational groups in America

The percentage of 18-29 year-olds in mainline denominations has rapidly decreased in the last twenty years. “Evangelical” 18-29 year-olds have remained somewhat flat, with a slight increase.





Today Stetzer moves to a whiteboard to draw trend lines, explaining the decades-long decline of mainline churches. He draws the intersection of immigrants' massive increase in recent years to demonstrate how people coming with religions such as Hinduism and Islam mathematically drive down America's percentage of Christians.

Then good news: "While mainline denominations have been hemorrhaging and there's been an increase in those who

identify as having no religion, the percentage of people who identify as born again has increased during this time."

He draws the upward trend using a green marker, then gives his audience a look. "Green for new life. Get it?" ■

Carolyn Curtis is an author, editor and speaker who lives in Fort Worth, Texas.

Q&A with Ed Stetzer

Facts and Trends: You told *The Exchange* viewers: "I wish more would stop self-identifying as Christians." Why will the "end of Christian America," when understood correctly, help us to live out the gospel?

Ed Stetzer: Many people who don't fit the biblical term "Christian" still use it as a cultural term. "Cultural Christianity" confuses what Christianity is. It's not a demographic category. It's a life-changing relationship with Christ.

As I see it, about one-third of Americans are not Christians, about one-third are cultural (in name only) Christians, and about one-third have strong connections to some kind of church. That means two-thirds have no real church connection.

I think the nominal population, statistically, will go away. Half of those disconnected with church will soon stop calling themselves "Christian," bringing helpful clarity to what a Christian actually is.

F&T: You've also said the term "evangelical" is becoming less helpful. Why? What term might be better?

STETZER: "Evangelical" has lost its meaning for many people. It's become politicized—as if it's a voting block. The idea of "biblically driven" Christianity is what matters. That's why we [at LifeWay Research] help churches, pastors and leaders understand cultural context for more effective ministry and be on mission. We provide research and training. Biblically solid Christians and churches make up the



*Ed Stetzer in a recent episode of *The Exchange**

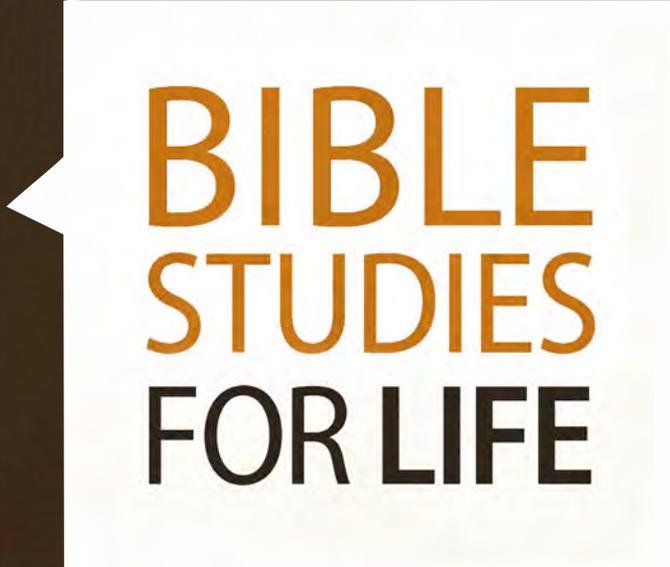
robust group of believers we have the privilege of helping—they ask us and we can help them.

F&T: How can churches reach the unchurched in this less Christian culture?

STETZER: Reaching secular people requires us to rely less on religious memory—you can't call people back to church. Instead, we need to teach believers to live on mission in their communities. Less "come to us" and more "go to them."

F&T: Talk about engaging non-believers with the grand narrative of Scripture.

STETZER: Engaging secular people is really a contrast in worldview. We need to be unapologetic about ours—the story of what God is doing in Christ through the grand narrative of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. We do that in our new curriculum, *The Gospel Project*, preparing people to know their faith so they can share it. ■



BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

TM

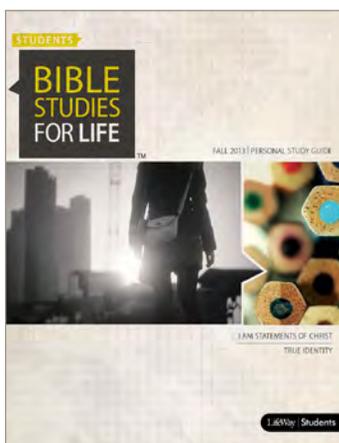
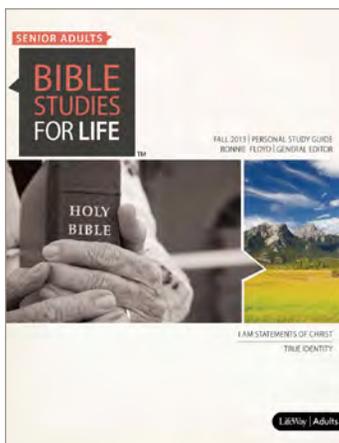
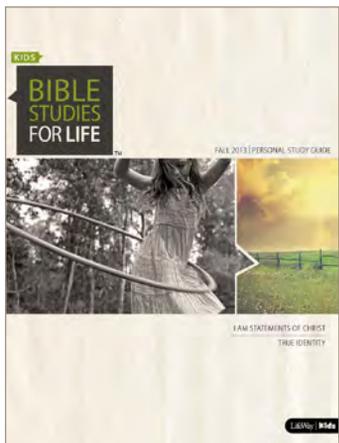
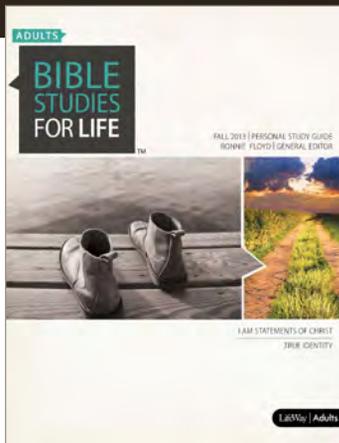
Interview with General Editor Ronnie Floyd

Interview by Carol Pipes

This fall, LifeWay will launch Bible Studies for Life, an ongoing curriculum series for all ages. Bible Studies for Life General Editor Ronnie Floyd spoke with *Facts and Trends* about how the new curriculum will help the local church meet the spiritual needs of its members and engage unreached people in its community with the gospel.



Ronnie Floyd is senior pastor of Cross Church in Springdale, Ark., listed by Outreach magazine as one of the 100 largest and fastest-growing churches in America. In 25 years of ministry in northwest Arkansas, the church has baptized more than 17,000 people.



Facts and Trends: What are the benefits of the Bible Studies for Life curriculum for a local church?

Ronnie Floyd: The No. 1 benefit of this curriculum series is it will be an experience “where the Bible meets your life.” Weekly, we will communicate the power of Christ as people engage both their spiritual community and this Christ-less culture. Without any doubt at all, this is “from the church to the church” as spiritual leaders from all walks of life have poured their intellect, heart and passion into this curriculum.

F&T: How did you choose the topics that will be the focus of each unit?

Floyd: As general editor my vision, along with the LifeWay team’s vision, was to enlist a diverse, gifted and responsible advisory council of leaders from all segments of the local church to help us design a curriculum series that addresses the challenges of daily life. As we mined their gifts and desires, this group of pastors, small group leaders, theologians, scholars and teachers worked with us to determine the scope and sequence for the next three years of the Bible Studies for Life curriculum series. Our commitment is to ensure the promise “where the Bible meets your life.”

F&T: What are the distinctions of Bible Studies for Life?

Floyd: We have created at least three distinctions in this series:

First, we created several series to help our churches offer relevant subjects that will provide what we are calling

“ramps” to help them engage unreached and unchurched people effectively. We want to see the small group ministries of churches, however and whenever they meet, return to a commitment to evangelize unreached and unchurched people through the ministry of their groups.

Second, we are creating an option for the same subject matter to be addressed over a six-week period from the pulpit and in the small group ministry a couple of times a year. Resources will be provided to assist pastors in this process. Such church-wide experiences can have a huge payoff for our churches spiritually and directionally, resulting in biblical unity.

Third, we want to teach people the Word of God from the Word of God. Therefore, while addressing the needs we face in life, we will do so through various books of the Bible and always with a commitment to explain how the text speaks to real life. For example, Chip Henderson, pastor of the fast-growing Pinelake Church in Brandon, Miss., is writing the first six-week series to the church straight from the book of James. This series will address the subject of pressure. People will learn the Word of God and see how it addresses the pressures we face throughout life.

Once again, we believe the Bible will meet your life.

F&T: Bible Studies for Life is meant to help strengthen families. How so?

Floyd: Our desire is for families to experience, as much as possible, the same subject or principle each week. When

they go home, we want families to have spiritual and biblical subjects to talk about together. In addition, there will be support materials to help parents reinforce what their children have learned in their Bible study group, share what they learned in their group and connect the two together. We want to help parents in their role as the primary disciple makers of their children.

F&T: How can Bible Studies for Life help churches connect with those unconnected from church?

Floyd: As I mentioned earlier, this is one of the distinctions of this curriculum series. As we create these ramps for connecting with the unreached and unchurched by addressing relevant subjects the Bible speaks to, we will also be able to engage new people into groups. Some of these may take place on your church campus, while others may occur in a coffee shop, a home or a conference room. We also believe these relevant subjects will help many people who may already attend our worship services connect with an existing or new group.

F&T: What are some of the new elements in the curriculum for kids and teens?

Floyd: The series will have two six-week units each quarter plus an extra lesson. These sessions will conceptually align with the adult and student lessons – and align completely during the two campaign units each year. Additionally, there are many exciting new elements being designed for kids and their leaders. These experiences will be enhanced with videos that will challenge kids to learn and apply the truths of the Bible. Leader packs—with all new teaching pictures—are being improved so those who teach kids will have a joyful experience.

Bible Studies for Life Advisory Council

- **Freddy Cardoza**, Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, Calif.
- **Jordan Easley**, Second Baptist Church, Houston
- **Grant Ethridge**, Liberty Baptist Church, Hampton, Va.
- **Bruce Frank**, Biltmore Baptist Church, Arden, N.C.
- **Chip Henderson**, Pinelake Church, Brandon, Miss.
- **Alex Himaya**, The Church at Battle Creek, Broken Arrow, Okla.
- **Mark Howell**, Canyon Ridge Christian Church, Las Vegas
- **Rhonda Kelley**, New Orleans Seminary, New Orleans
- **Will Mancini**, Auxano, Houston, Texas
- **Kelly Minter**, Village Chapel, Nashville, Tenn.
- **Eddie Mosley**, LifePoint Church, Smyrna, Tenn.
- **Kerry Shook**, Woodlands Church, The Woodlands, Texas
- **Reid Smith**, Christ Fellowship Church, Palm Beach, Fla.
- **Heath Thomas**, Southeastern Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.
- **K. Marshall Williams**, Nazarene Baptist Church, Philadelphia
- **Pete Wilson**, Cross Point Church, Nashville, Tenn.
- **Jeff Young**, Prestonwood Church, Plano, Texas



Ronnie Floyd reviews Bible Studies for Life with the members of the Bible Studies for Life Advisory Council

PHOTO BY DEVIN MADDOX

To order Bible Studies for Life, visit LifeWay.com/BibleStudiesforLife.

F&T: How is the curriculum organized? Can it be used in different environments (i.e. small groups/Sunday school)?

Floyd: Bible Studies for Life will offer what we call narrowly graded and broadly graded options. We've developed materials specifically for babies, for senior adults and every group in between. Regarding environments, we are designing the materials to be used in on-campus weekend groups and off-campus weekday groups. This is especially true for the adult materials. The six-week units will be available individually as short-term studies, as well as in the 13-session ongoing editions.

F&T: What resources are available to Bible Studies for Life leaders?

Floyd: We think leaders will love the improved leader guides and leader packs. In addition, there will be robust helps available online for leaders of kids, students and adults. Adult and student leaders will also have rich, additional commentaries available if they want to dive deeper into the background text for each session. *Biblical Illustrator*, the popular and colorful supplemental publication, will continue to provide articles in support of Bible Studies for Life, as well as LifeWay's other ongoing adult curriculum lines.

F&T: What will individuals take away from this new curriculum line?

Floyd: We pray they will experience life change as they interact with the biblical material in their groups each week. We are optimistic that as Christ followers are disciplined through the teaching of God's Word by a caring shepherd, serving the Lord through His church will be highlighted and engagement of the culture will occur without compromise. The Christian life is experienced in three spheres: Christ, community and culture. Bible Studies for Life will help churches equip their people to experience the abundant life Jesus offers in all three spheres. ■



Bible Studies for Life Advisory Council members (clockwise from left) Reid Smith, Kerry Shook, Grant Ethridge, Pete Wilson and Kelly Minter discuss curriculum topics in breakout groups during a recent meeting.

PHOTO BY DEVIN MADDOX

Transformational churches

A new scorecard offers better measure of spiritual maturity

by Polly House

While no church is likely to ever say, “We’ve arrived!” when talking about their spiritual journey, there are churches happy to say, “We’re moving in the right direction!”

But how do you know where your church is spiritually if you have no means of measuring the issues that bring transformation to lives and communities? Fortunately, quality church assessment tools can help leaders identify strengths and weaknesses in your church and where your church is following Christ and living on mission.

Why use an assessment tool?

Assessment tools give churches a practical view of where they are and can inform next steps. They also allow leaders to learn what God is doing in other churches and to gain wisdom from those churches.

Church assessments can help your church focus on strengths and

weaknesses and guide conversations about the important issues in your church as well as offering clarity to the church staff about where and how to lead the church.

While you can take your church through an assessment at any point in the year, there are key times in the life cycle of a church when an assessment would be beneficial. For instance, the kickoff

Take a closer



look.

of small groups or Sunday school classes and planning for the new year or an upcoming sermon series are all times when having a spiritual snapshot of your congregation is helpful.

Transformational churches

In 2012 hundreds of churches participated in LifeWay's Transformational Church initiative, giving their congregations an accurate look at where they believe they are in their spiritual journey. LifeWay developed Transformational Church by surveying thousands of churches from multiple denominations that are leading examples of spiritual transformation providing a biblical framework for the Transformational

Church Assessment Tool (TCAT). This framework helps churches evaluate how they are doing with a new scorecard.

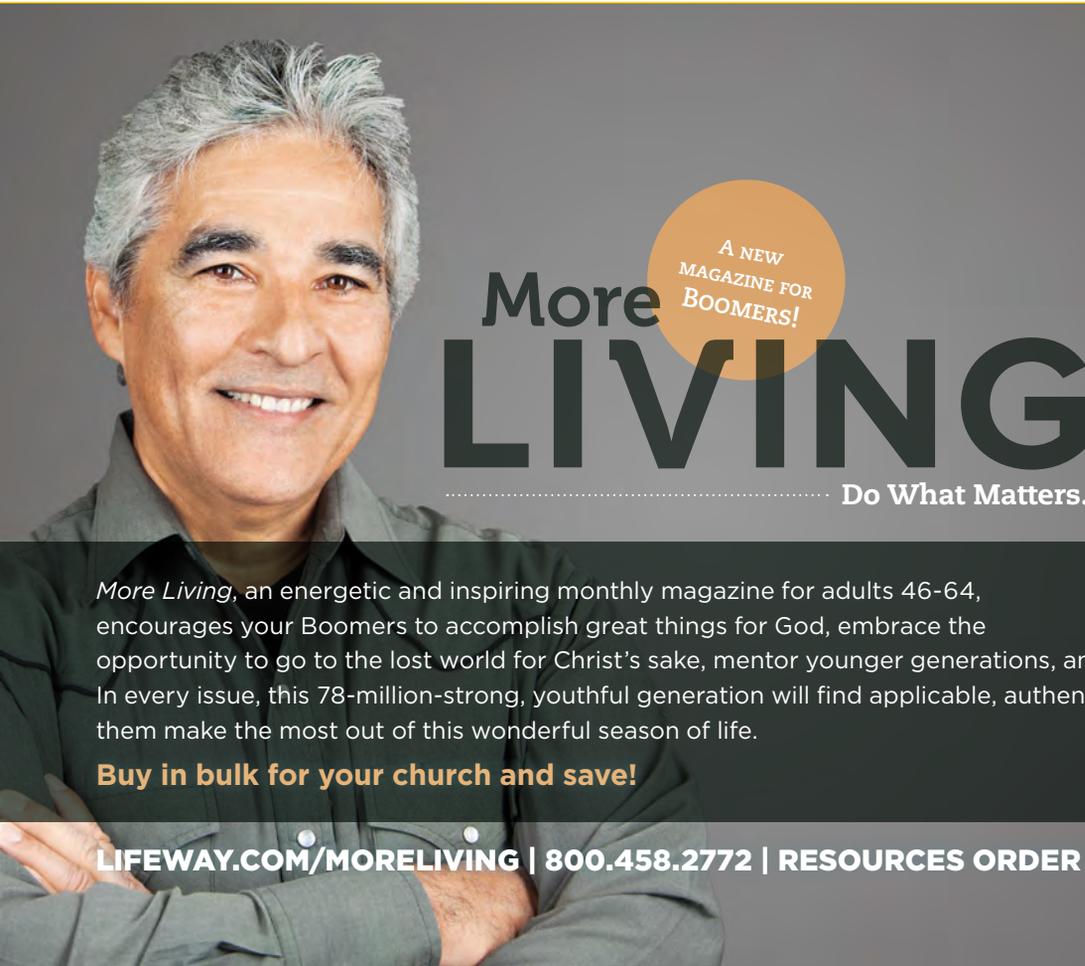
While this new scorecard measures the tangible—leadership training, worship attendance and number of people participating in some type of Bible study—it also measures the more intangible elements of church life.

The TCAT helps churches get an honest look at how their members perceive they are doing in relation to spiritual transformation. The results provide them with a snapshot of perceived strengths and perceived challenges based on the seven elements of a transformational church: missionary mentality, vibrant leadership, relational intention-

ality, prayerful dependence, worship, community and mission.

Before diving into the assessment tool, it is recommended to prepare your key leaders by reading *Transformational Church* by Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer and watching the *Transformation Church* DVD. Some pastors have opted to take the entire church through a sermon series on the elements of a transformational church before taking the assessment.

When it comes to interpreting the results and determining next steps, churches have several options. They can work independently with their key leaders or in peer learning groups with other churches going through the TCAT al-



A NEW MAGAZINE FOR BOOMERS!

More LIVING

Do What Matters.

More Living, an energetic and inspiring monthly magazine for adults 46-64, encourages your Boomers to accomplish great things for God, embrace the opportunity to go to the lost world for Christ's sake, mentor younger generations, and so much . . . more. In every issue, this 78-million-strong, youthful generation will find applicable, authentic information and wisdom to help them make the most out of this wonderful season of life.

Buy in bulk for your church and save!



Here's what you can expect to learn through the TCAT:

- How well you are integrating new members into the life of your church
- How well members understand the vision and mission of your church
- How members perceive the leadership of the church
- How they feel about small group ministry (Sunday school, small groups, etc.)
- How meaningful their worship experience is
- How prayer fits into their daily lives
- How members approach the lost within your community
- How they think they should engage the community

Go to LifeWay.com/TC or more information.

lowing them to gain objective insights from each other.

Many churches find the most productive path is to work with a trained TCAT consultant who facilitates the discovery process to understand the strengths and challenges of the church, where God is already at work in the church, and where He's leading them in the church's spiritual transformation. Consultants are available through a church's district, state convention or church network. Even with a trained TCAT consultant, it is essential that decisions and insights gained from the process come from within the body of the local church and not from an outside source. The consultant simply brings an objective outside perspective and a plan to walk through the process together.

Self-evaluation

Andrew Morgan, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Salisbury, Md., said one thing he appreciated about the TCAT was it is a self-evaluation, not a program.

"There was no one coming in making a judgment about who we are," Morgan said. "We did that ourselves. The TCAT allowed us to look in a mirror and get a realistic picture of how we see ourselves as a church."

He said one thing they learned is that while they considered themselves very much a family church and thought they were communicating that well to others, that may not have been the case.

"We saw that people outside our congregation may not have been getting that message," he said. "We've

been at our location long enough that we weren't really communicating with the neighborhood, and they weren't communicating with us. There wasn't a problem or anything, we were all used to each other being there. That recognition is leading us to be more intentional about engaging our community."

Consultants beneficial to success

Sergio Arce, who leads LifeWay's Transformational Church consultant training said a consultant can be a helpful third party "who can look at the results with an unemotional and impartial eye and help the congregation understand how their perceptions will set the track they need to take toward spiritual transformation."

River Cross Church in Gainesville, Fla., worked with Transformational Church consultant Susan Silvers. River Cross pastor David Patterson said Silvers was particularly crucial to their success.

"For the first time ever, we were able to see objective feedback on the effectiveness of our church, something that is

difficult to see," said Patterson.

He said Silvers coached him and other church leaders through the process of the TCAT and then helped them understand the results in preparation for the discovery retreat where 25 people discussed how to move their church to a place of spiritual growth.

"Afterwards she did an excellent job of following up with me as we put together some action plans ... to improve our assimilation process to better connect and orient new attenders and members," he wrote.

"We have also improved our leadership development."

"These churches are seeing significant movement toward spiritual growth," Arce said. "One very positive thing we are hearing is how many churches are seeing that they are doing OK. They don't need to make major changes; they just need to go ahead and do what they already know they need to do."

Obviously, assessments are not flawless. However, when based on sound research, they can reveal weaknesses and blind spots local churches often don't see. Churches willing to take a deeper look at themselves are no longer satisfied with just filling seats week after week, rather they are seeking change.

Said Arce: "This tool helps churches discover new ways to focus on helping people become more like Jesus; churches act more like the body of Christ; and communities reflect more of the Kingdom of God." ■

Polly House is editor of Facts and Trends.



LifeWay's
**COLOSSAL
Coaster
WORLD**

FACING FEAR, TRUSTING GOD
2 Timothy 1:7

**HANG ON
TIGHT!**

Through every twist, turn, and dive, kids to face their fears and trust God. Raise your hands in the air and feel the rush as kids learn that God has given them a spirit of power, love, and sound judgment.
**Let's get going—
it's gonna be a wild ride!**

Scan with your smartphone then place phone on outline to experience the rush!



The **VBS 2013 Super Sampler**
(005487652 • \$199.99) is your ticket to ride!

Order today: 1.800.458.2772 • lifeway.com/vbs • LifeWay Christian Stores

LifeWay | VBS

New Twist on VBS!

Take
Colossal Coaster World
into your neighborhoods
with the brand-new
Backyard Kids Club™.

NEW!



**BACKYARD
KIDS CLUB**



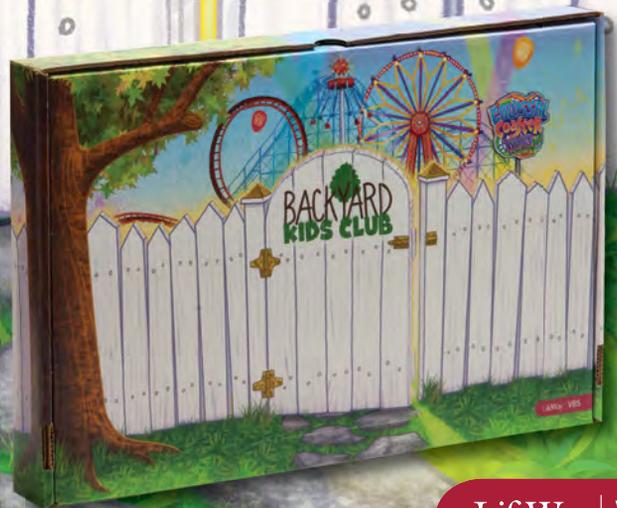
VBS in a Box!

The **VBS 2013 Backyard Kids Club Kit** provides all the basics each team needs to host and lead a Backyard VBS: children's and preschool Bible study, activities for crafts and music, snack ideas, and promotion instructions. Plus, recreation cards, children and preschool music CDs, and a choreography DVD are included.

005532691 • \$34.99

The new **VBS 2013 Backyard Kids Club Directors Guide** is filled with step-by-step directions for planning and organizing teams to host and lead Backyard Kids Clubs.

005532692 • \$14.99



LifeWay | VBS

Order today: 1.800.458.2772 • lifeway.com/vbs • LifeWay Christian Stores

First Impressions

10 ways to make visitors feel welcome

by Devin Maddox

People never get a second-chance at a first impression. Neither do churches.

My family recently visited a church (no, it wasn't your church) and were able to get in and out undetected. Had it not been for our toddler's need for childcare, we could have avoided human contact altogether. Needless to say, we didn't feel very welcome.



Nearly everything about a Sunday morning worship service communicates something to first-time visitors. From the church bulletins to the parking lot layout, churches demonstrate how much — or how little — they care about people. Here are some things I learned from my last church visit.

1. Create a culture of hospitality.

Hospitality is not just for Martha Stewart types. In fact, the Bible exalts hospitality as a godly virtue (3 John) for all believers. Emphasize, as often as it takes, the value of hospitality with your leaders.

2. Train your greeters.

Not everyone at your church is qualified to be a greeter at the door. Not only should you be selective when you choose greeters, you should invest time in training. A genuine smile that engages the eyes, a handshake and a friendly “Hello!” all go a long way to make visitors feel welcome.

3. Design a logical flow of traffic.

This point applies both to large churches and small ones, both cars and pedestrians. First-time visitors can become easily frustrated when it’s unclear where they should go.

4. Spell-check everything.

Typos on your website, signage, worship guides and even song lyrics can send the message you don’t care. Set up a system to ensure all written communication is checked for spelling errors.

5. Mark your entrances.

When visitors come to your church, do they know what entrance they should use? A well-marked entrance takes some of the pressure off of visitors who might be too nervous to ask for help.

6. Avoid awkward greeting times.

Many churches include a time of greeting between members at the beginning of a worship service. For visitors, it’s the first day of school all over again.

Explain the purpose behind the greeting time and coach your people on how to do it well.

7. Have a concise explanation of the child care system ready.

Families with young children will be anxious about leaving their kids with strangers. Don’t overwhelm them with information, but explain your church’s plan for taking good care of their children while they attend the worship service.

8. Be careful how you gather information.

Some churches are too pushy. While it’s important to gather information for follow-up with visitors, be careful you don’t send the wrong message in how you ask. Consider including a communication card in your church’s worship program. Ask everyone, including members, to fill out the card and drop it in the offering basket.

9. Train members to assume they’re the only point of contact.

Unless everyone has this mindset, everyone will defer their responsibility to be hospitable. Don’t miss an opportunity to take an interest in visitors. Invite them to lunch after church if you attend a morning service.

10. Treat visitors like VIPs.

Most of all visitors want to feel respected and welcomed. Offer reserved parking close to the front door. Have volunteers escort visitors from the parking lot to the child care area and auditorium.

Remember, first impressions matter. With a well thought out, pre-service plan, your church can show visitors just how much you care and want them back. ■

Devin Maddox is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

Leading on fumes

4 reasons to remember the Sabbath

by Mark Dance

I had run through my adrenaline and serotonin. I was simply going through the motions. I was bone tired and worn out. My physical, mental and spiritual gas tanks were empty.

I had been called as pastor of Second Baptist Church of Conway, Ark., in 2001. We began a period of rapid—and unexpected—growth. We bought 50 acres of property to expand our footprint. I was busy!

For an extended season, I was meeting with planning teams, consultants, potential donors, small groups, staff, etc. I justified my schedule—and my ambition—to myself, my family and staff as a temporary seasonal burst. “Like a sprint,” I said. I rationalized CPAs do it every year during tax season, athletes do it before offseason, politicians do it before an election ... blah, blah, blah.

But, just like when my car gets low on gas, my warning light came on.

So I did what most terminally driven people do when they get close to running out of gas. I began to go faster! While I thought I could leap (or build) tall buildings in a single bound, I came to realize I was a man of flesh, not steel. I paid the price for that stupidity. So did my family, staff and church.

I had nothing left to give. There were no scandalous train wrecks, no suicidal thoughts or immoral actions, but the erosion had clearly crept into my relationships.

I reached out to my doctor and learned I was clinically depressed. A week later a licensed psychotherapist confirmed it. They helped me understand how to get out of it with the help of God and other people on my “Dance Team.”

Fortunately my depression was temporary and treatable since it was diagnosed early. But, I also believe it could have been avoided.

I am healthy now and want to use my experience to help other people. A good plan for staying healthy is to apply the Sabbath to your life.

1. The Sabbath is a gift.

Humans have been hard-wired to both work and rest. If we stop doing either, we stop living full and abundant lives. Each of God’s commands was given to be a blessing, not a burden.

The Sabbath originally was a gift to freshly emancipated slaves. Slaves don’t usually get gifts, much less days off.

Yahweh wanted them to know that they were no longer slaves, but His sons and daughters.

He not only provided deliverance, but rest and food as well. God provided twice the amount of daily manna they needed on the day before Sabbath, so they would not have to collect it during their only day of rest. What a generous God! He enjoys blessing us, if only we will let Him.

“If you keep from desecrating the Sabbath, from doing whatever you want on My holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it not going your own ways, seeking your own pleasure, or talking too much; then you will delight yourself in the Lord,” (Isaiah 58:13).

You would expect high-fives all around, but the Israelites were awkward with the new normal.

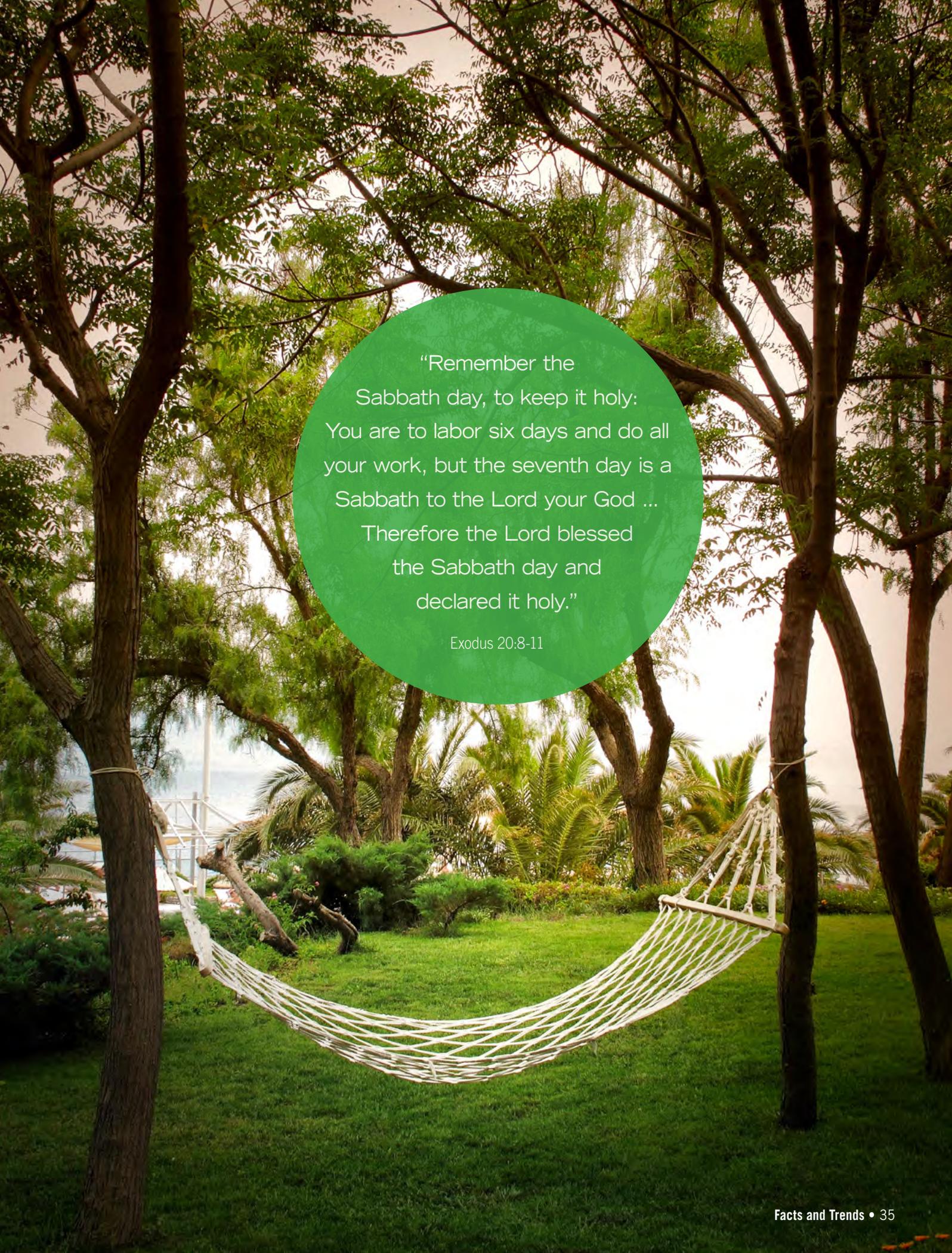
The people of God were not yet used to life without their Egyptian taskmasters. Some even wanted to go back to that awful life of slavery. Embracing a new lifestyle on God’s terms took a considerable amount of courage. Many resisted and rejected His gift, which was also a significant sign of their new covenant with Yahweh.

We still resist and reject His Sabbath gift, don’t we? I sometimes marvel at how quickly I slip back into my chains of slavery. A terminally driven life has the lure of Egyptian bondage, yet the pressure to succeed still draws me back there. But there is a better way to live.

I have personally experienced the pleasures of this wonderful gift and passionately want you to also. I’m not saying I have perfected the art of Sabbath keeping, because I still struggle every single week. But I am not going back to Egypt without a fight! I have found the rest of God right where He left it for us, in the open pages of His Word.

God not only blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy, He blesses those who courageously and consistently observe it. He wants to bless you as you explore and apply Sabbath principles to your busy life. You will find those closest to you will also be blessed when you consistently receive God’s gift of rest. At first, you may want to resist these practical Sabbath principles, as the Israelites did. Your courage will be tested, but the payoff is worth the effort, I assure you.

The Sabbath is a practical gift as well. It stops you for short periods for rest



“Remember the
Sabbath day, to keep it holy:
You are to labor six days and do all
your work, but the seventh day is a
Sabbath to the Lord your God ...
Therefore the Lord blessed
the Sabbath day and
declared it holy.”

Exodus 20:8-11

and refueling. Work six days, then take the seventh day off. Rest is refueling for another week to accelerate.

2. The Sabbath is a command to obey.

Rejecting or neglecting this gift is nothing short of open rebellion. It wasn't optional and initially was enforced with a death penalty. While those desert rules were intense (and fortunately temporary), they do give us glimpse into the seriousness of the Sabbath to God.

Number 4 on God's top 10 list is a 24 hour cease and desist order! Sabbath rest is not a punishment, just a reminder that we were created to work hard and then rest easy. We do not need to choose between the two.

We pastors are among the worst at ignoring the Sabbath command. Motivated people like us don't comply because we don't want to, don't think we need to or, frankly, don't know how to stop. Many of us are conservative in what we believe about the Sabbath, but are liberal in our practice of it.

As a pastor, I work hard on Sundays, so it is not even close to a Sabbath rest for me. But does that get me off the hook?

Like others who work on Sundays, I must find a way to disengage from my occupation for a full day every week. God won't let your job and family and ministry fall apart because you obeyed Him and unplugged for a day.

"Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

3. The Sabbath is an example to follow.

"So the heavens, the earth and everything in them were completed. By the seventh day God completed His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it He rested from His work of creation," (Genesis 2:1-3).

Balance is an illusion for driven people. Life is too unpredictable to balance. A better biblical goal is to live a life in rhythm. Athletes understand the need for a pre-season, season and off-season. So do accountants and politicians. Even nature's seasons and cycles remind us of God's rhythm.

Jesus demonstrated how our lives can be in a healthy rhythm between life and vocation. We see Him oscillating between work and rest. Sometimes He would encourage the crowds to stay and

eat, heal one more person or pray all night. Other times He would retreat to the lakes, mountains or wilderness for rest and renewal. One time Jesus even slept through a life-threatening storm. Why? Because He was tired!

A healthy Sabbath lifestyle includes seasons of intense work, followed by periods of intentional rest. Rhythm is a series of sprints and recoveries. A life of work and rest and worship is an abundant life. Jesus wants and expects us to live abundantly and fully.

4. The Sabbath is a person to love.

"Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light," (Matthew 11:28-30).

In Matthew 12 we see a Sabbath showdown between Jesus and the Pharisees. These Sabbath saboteurs tried unsuccessfully six times to place their rabbinic restrictive yoke of man-made rules on Him. Telling the Lord of the Sabbath how to observe it was almost laughable. But we do the same thing; we make up our own rules and ignore His.

The application is flexible, but the command is not. One day a week disconnect from work and connect through worship and rest. ■

Mark Dance is the pastor of Second Baptist Church, Conway, Ark. You can connect with him online at MarkDance.net or on Twitter @PastorDance.

Battling Burnout

5 ways to keep the leaders in your church refreshed

by Ken Braddy

Battling burnout isn't easy. It's hard work. Recovery is often slow. Burnout can leave the teachers and leaders in your church feeling sad, depressed, angry, tired and unappreciated.

People who experience burnout often feel they are alone, no longer effective, and are disappointing others. They simply go through the motions of ministry but without the passion they once had. Teaching is draining not energizing like it once was.

To help your church's teachers (or ministry staff) fight burnout, consider these pieces of advice:

1. Implement a practice that all teachers take a sabbatical from their teaching role on a regular basis—perhaps a six-month or yearlong break. Make this part of your small group's or Sunday school's DNA. I was awarded a 30-day sabbatical at a church I served, and the break from the routine—plus time to study, read and simply relax—was key to my re-energizing. The break didn't make me want to leave my role; it restored passion to continue a job I loved.

2. Remind the one experiencing burnout to talk to God about it. He already knows how they're feeling. He's their Father; so encourage them to run to Him and ask for His help. Ask Him to restore the joy and passion they first felt when they became leaders in your church.

3. Seek out godly counsel from others. Encourage them to let someone on the church staff know how they're feeling. Remind them that chances are the staff members have been there, too, and will totally understand what they're going through.

4. Simplify life. Part of burning out is doing too much, so ask them if they've said "yes" to too many things, even good things. Perhaps they've taken on too many roles at church because others wouldn't. Challenge them to give up some of the roles and keep only one they can focus their attention and energies on.

5. Help them realize they are not alone and they are not failures. The Prophet Jeremiah followed God's plan for his ministry, preached messages God gave him, yet he battled burnout even as he was at the center of God's will. Burnout doesn't make anyone a failure. It just affirms that they are human. ■

Ken Braddy is manager of LifeWay's adult ongoing Bible studies.

ARE THEY GETTING THE MESSAGE?



Find out how churches **improve communication** by using **VoiceWave™**

YOUR MESSAGES ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO MISS

888.204.1746



phonetree.com/LW13

Automated phone, text, email & social media messages

Sluggish economy no match for vision, connection

by Russ Rankin

Some churches are not only weathering the sluggish economy, they're flourishing.

According to a study by LifeWay Research, the lethargic economy has continued to negatively impact the financial situation of many congregations in the United States. However, some congregations are finding that the gloomy forecast hasn't necessarily translated into slashed budgets and financial damage control.

A May 2012 LifeWay Research survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors found a large percentage of pastors serving in large cities and the suburbs (72 percent in both areas) cite a negative impact on their church from the economy in 2012.

Steve Collins, senior pastor of The Harvest Church in North Dallas, does not count himself among that statistic.

When the economic downturn began to take a toll on ministries and churches in 2009, The Harvest was still getting used to being in an actual church facility on a plot of land after spending a decade in a storefront location in Plano, Texas.

The congregation moved north in 2006 from Plano to the city of Allen, a fast-growing community in North Dallas, with the intent of reaching a largely unchurched and multiethnic population, explained Collins.

The Harvest purchased an older church building in Allen with sufficient space to accommodate their congregation with the intention to purchase adjacent land for expansion. When other churches began feeling the economic pinch in 2009, The Harvest found itself already outgrowing its space.

"We had about 250 people in 2009, and now we're close to 500 in four Sunday morning services," Collins said, adding that nearly doubling attendance in three years has naturally led to higher giving.

"I'm exhausted, but God is so good," he said with a laugh.

LifeWay Research found the trend indicates a stabilization of giving rather than widespread increases. Through May 2011, 36 percent of churches saw giving the same as 2010. And through May 2012, 40 percent of churches saw giving the same as 2011.

Collins said giving at The Harvest rose 40 percent in 2011 and is up 50 percent in 2012.

"The key for us has been about communicating with our folks how God honors faithful financial stewardship," Collins said.

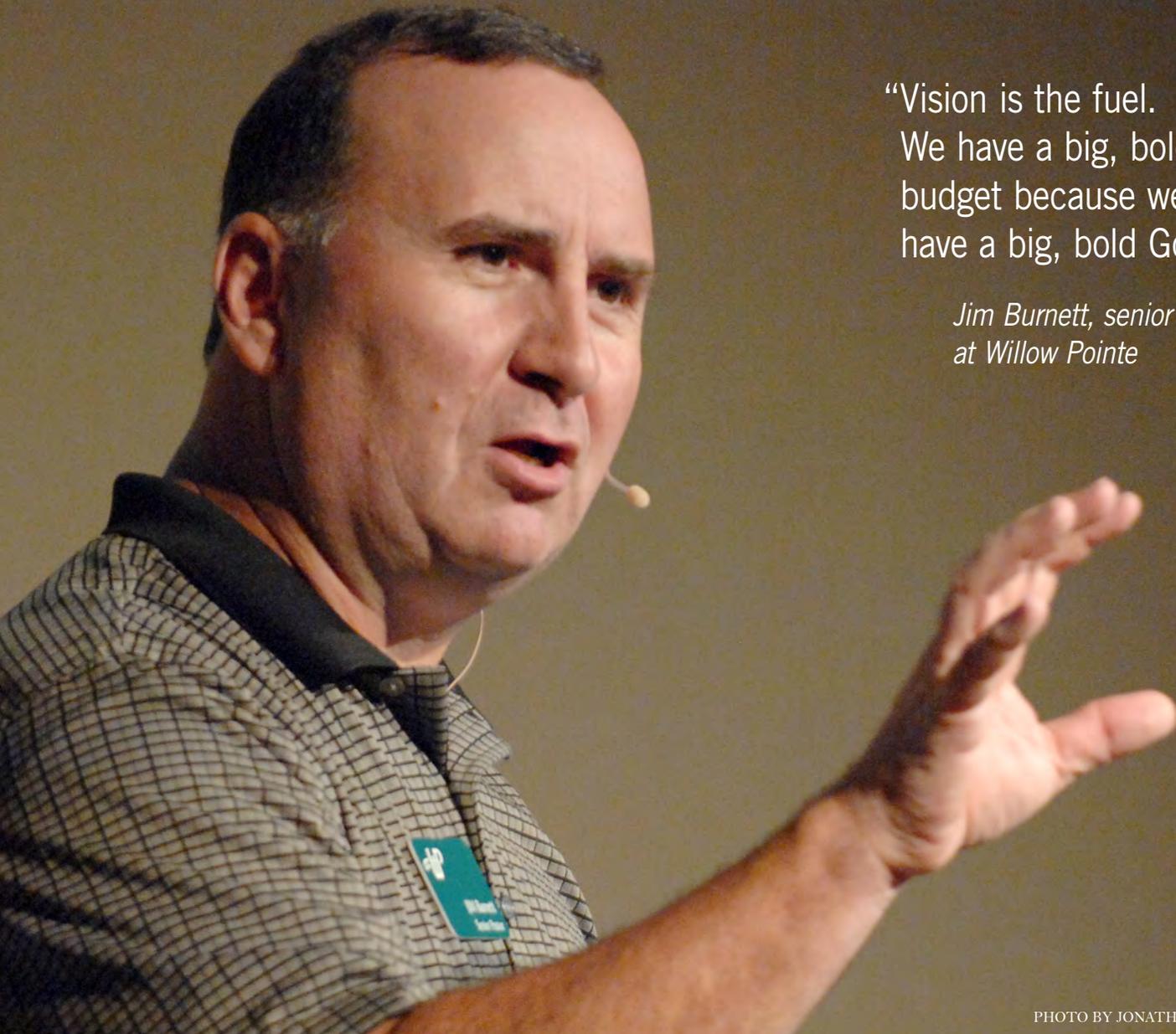
As a church, The Harvest also prays intentionally for members to be used in the marketplace for Kingdom impact.

"The fact is, when you reach the hearts of the people, you reach their pocketbooks," Collins said. "We pray our people generate creative business ideas that would lead them to make



Pastor Jim Burnett baptizes Foster Mitchell, 9, at Willow Pointe Church in Hattiesburg, Miss.

PHOTO BY JONATHAN BLAIR



“Vision is the fuel. We have a big, bold budget because we have a big, bold God.”

Jim Burnett, senior pastor at Willow Pointe

PHOTO BY JONATHAN BLAIR

an impact in the business world and through their finances.

“We’ve always been very open with where we are financially,” Collins said. “We make quarterly financial reports a part of our regular church communications and anyone can see the breakdown on what we’re doing financially.”

Even in the midst of recession, “we’ve been able to buy that adjacent land which will double our footprint,” Collins said. “We’ll be breaking ground in the next couple of months on a new sanctuary, which will greatly help our seating capacity,”

As churches have adjusted to the depressed economy, the LifeWay Re-

search survey found fewer churches are failing to meet budget expectations. Through May 2011, giving for 27 percent of churches was below budget. At the same time in 2012, only 22 percent of churches reported giving below budget—a 5 percent decrease from the year before.

Willow Pointe Church in Hattiesburg, Miss., has weathered the economy, and like The Harvest Church, has continued to grow.

“God has blessed us so much these last few years, even at a time when other churches around us are dying,” said Jim Burnett, senior pastor of Willow Pointe.

Planted 10 years ago, Burnett said he believes Willow Pointe has thrived in

part because of its outward focus.

“There are a lot of churches that are suffering and even shutting down because of a lack of vision,” Burnett said. “From the onset, Willow Pointe has been about teaching our people to look outward instead of inward—how are we going to meet the needs of our community and share the gospel? A lack of vision turns a church inward.”

In spite of the economic challenges faced by other churches, Willow Pointe’s 2013 budget is 25 percent larger than the previous year.

“It’s a God thing,” Burnett said. “We ask God specifically for clear vision on where to step next.”

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Surveys of 1,000 Protestant pastors

In May 2011, giving for **27 percent of churches** was below budget.

In May 2012, only **22 percent of churches** reported giving below budget.

Meaning, there was a **5 percent decrease** in below budget giving from the year before.

Burnett described the budget process at Willow Pointe as being driven by vision. He said it is something they evaluate constantly even if it means stopping a particular ministry project in midstream or infusing a new ministry or process.

“Vision is the fuel,” he said. “We have a big, bold budget because we have a big, bold God.”

Burnett said the church does not budget according to what they can afford, but rather what God is leading them to do. “One of our elders made the statement ‘Where God guides, He provides.’ The church has really bought into that.”

With a vision to impact their city,

Willow Pointe piloted a mentoring program in the local school district that has now been replicated in every school district in the county. The church also facilitates Celebrate Recovery and hosts block parties and community leader luncheons.

The church does maintain a frugal “if we don’t have it, we don’t spend it” approach, Burnett said, but when “our folks see God in something, they go for it.” As a church, Willow Pointe committed to make four extra payments in 2012 toward reducing debt.

“We wanted to attack the debt so we could move on to the next phase,” Bur-

nett said. “Our people are all behind it. We actually made two extra payments one quarter.”

According to Burnett, Willow Pointe is not feeling the stress of the current economic situation because they have been called to be available.

“God has called us to be obedient and available, and He will do the rest,” Burnett said. “We believe we’re to get ready to be used in an even greater way for a greater impact upon our community.” ■

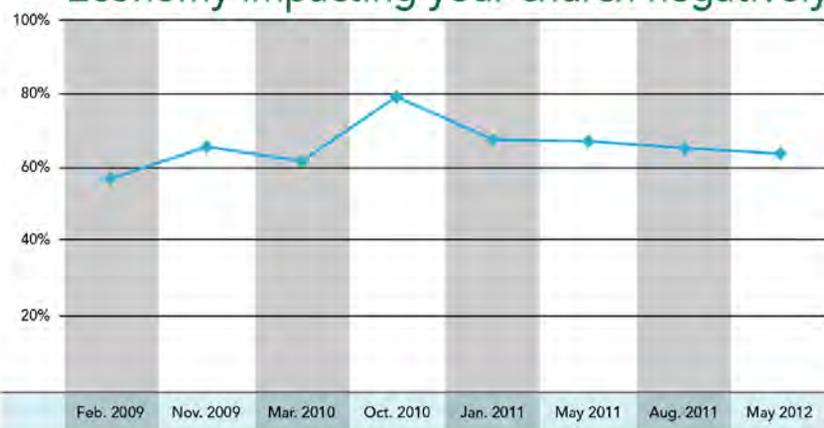
Russ Rankin is a writer at LifeWay.

Total offerings below prior year



Percent of churches that reported lower total offerings so far in calendar year, compared to prior year.

Economy impacting your church negatively



Percent of pastors indicating “somewhat negatively” or “very negatively” when asked “How is the economy impacting your church?”

LifeWay
RESEARCH

LifeWayResearch.com



Making Connections

How your church can use Facebook

by Marty Duren

If your church doesn't have a presence on Facebook, you are overlooking an effective communication tool for engaging members and potential visitors.

More than 1 billion people are now part of this social media phenomenon. With so many people already connecting on Facebook, it's an easy way for your church to stay in touch with your congregation and reach out to your community.

It's easy to create a page on Facebook:

1. Ask a responsible person to go to his or her own home page (not the profile page) on Facebook. In the left column under the picture and name will be a "Pages" section. Click on the word "Pages" or on a page already listed. On the upper right of the page that comes up, click "Create a Page."
2. You get a page called "Create a Page." Choose the "Company, Organization or Institution" option.
3. Click this to get a drop down menu that offers a "church or religious institution" option. Click again and now you are ready to create a page for your church. It takes just a few minutes.

(Depending on your computer, browser and software, the creation process may be slightly different, but if you use these instructions as a guide, you'll be fine.)

Unlike a website your page will allow likes, shares, comments and conversations. You can use the page to link to an upcoming event, your pastor's blog or an important news article. All of this stands to build the relationship between your church and the people you want to reach.

A page on Facebook can be used for church members and interested guests. I recommend a single page for your church rather than separate pages for each and every ministry. You can create a more practical "group" for ministries, classes and small groups.

In this day, more people know less about the gospel, so we need to use all available tools to reach them. A page on Facebook for your church will allow the sharing of information and the building of relationships both inside and outside the church body. It is a win-win.

For more information on using social media for your church, download the free e-book *Be Social: The social media handbook* from LifeWay.com/digitalchurch. ■

Marty Duren is LifeWay's social media strategist. Contact him at marty.duren@lifeway.com or follow him on Twitter @MartyDuren.



Free Download:

Be Social: The social media handbook from LifeWay.com/DigitalChurch.



Check out some of these churches with Facebook sites:

Bridge Church of Grant Ranch, Denver: www.facebook.com/mybridgechurch

Church 180, Montrose, Colo.: www.facebook.com/church180montrose

New Community Church, Las Vegas, Nev.: www.facebook.com/NewCommunityChurchLV

Granger Community Church, Granger, Ind.: www.facebook.com/gccwired



secret  church

SIMULCAST WITH DAVID PLATT

COMING

**GOOD FRIDAY, 4.6.12
6 PM—MIDNIGHT (CDT)**

LIFEWAY.COM/SECRETCHURCH

Presented by:  **DMI**
disciple-making international

*Event subject to change without notice.
Sales tax applied to event cost, if applicable.*

 **LifeWay**
Biblical Solutions for Life



The Big Boom

What pastors need to know about Boomers

This year the first Boomer turns 67 and the last Boomer hits 49. Since their birth, this group has changed the world and the church. They've influenced everything from pop culture to politics to societal norms. When Boomers hit their teens, they ushered in what is now modern-day church youth ministry. Decades later, they are making churches rethink ministry to seniors.

Born between 1946 and 1964, this 77 million-strong generation is highly educated and possesses a wide range of business and technical skills. They are healthier, more active and have a longer life expectancy than the generation ahead of them. As churches explore how to minister to the Boomer generation, it's a smart move to consider what makes them tick and how to engage them in ministry.

Boomers care about causes. They want to change the world for the better. The calling of James 1:27 – to care for widows and orphans – resonates with this generation. Church leaders can tap into Boomers' desire to make a difference by

providing opportunities for up close and personal ministry.

This generation thrives on relationships. Add to this the fact that younger generations look up to Boomers because of their collective experience and wisdom, and you have the recipe for a thriving discipleship and mentoring ministry at your church.

Boomers have adopted the philosophy of "Go big, or go home!" as their battle cry. Never a generation to sit passively by, Boomers have always been about making changes that count. They are ready, willing and able to serve in areas where they feel they will make the biggest difference.

To engage Boomers in discipleship and service, try these things:

1. Give them opportunities to do meaningful and hands-on ministry.
2. Ask them to be involved in helping people personally rather than expect them to support people they don't know or feel they can never know.
3. Encourage them to help build ministries that develop relationships with their peers and with younger generations.
4. Give them problems to solve rather than tasks to finish.

Boomers have a lot to offer to their churches, their communities and their world. They may be a force to be reckoned with, but they are also a valuable resource to be tapped into for greater ministry in your church. ■



For more ideas on how to harness the power of today's largest and most influential generation, subscribe to More Living, a new resource from LifeWay. Visit LifeWay.com/moreliving.





21st century giving

10 reasons to consider going online

Churches are jumping on the online giving trend in record numbers. Most find it a safe and efficient way to help their members with consistent stewardship. Has your church started offering it yet?

Here are 10 reasons your church might want to consider online giving:

1. Your members will appreciate the church making it easier for them to give. And many of the people in your congregation already are accustomed to the process of using credit or debit cards online.

2. Many of the younger people in your congregation don't carry cash or check-books.

3. It's not just young pastors doing this. According to a LifeWay Research study, 62 percent of churches that use online giving have pastors over age 50.

4. People *spend* money online; why not encourage them to *give* money online?

5. The Federal Reserve said the number of checks written between 2006 and 2009 declined by more than 7 percent. In the same period, electronic payments increased more than 9 percent. Electronic payments counted for more than 75 percent of all financial transactions in 2010.

6. It's easy to remind people on your website, in your newsletter or in the bulletin that online giving is an option.

7. If you are uncomfortable suggesting people use credit cards for giving, you still have options. They can use debit cards, automated bank drafts, mobile giving, online bill pay, etc.

8. Online giving can help members keep their giving consistent during the "slump" times like holiday seasons and summers. When they sign up for auto-

matic payments, they can be obedient in their giving if they have to miss church for some reason. And it also allows homebound members the opportunity to give even when they can't attend.

9. Many of your members are already giving online to other charitable organizations.

10. While only about 4 percent of Americans practice tithing, online giving can help church members be more consistent in their giving through automatic withdrawals from their bank accounts or credit cards. ■

Go to LifeWay.com/Envelopes to learn how your church can offer electronic giving to your congregation. Call 866-716-6484 or email egiving@lifeway.com.



Pastor goes first

Pastor Ken Patton introduced online giving to his church last spring with a bold statement. He and his wife were the first church members to take advantage of electronic giving, contributing their offering to missions online, on the big screen, in front of the whole church.

"That let them see it was easy, and I was in favor of it," Patton said.

Bethel Baptist Church in Concord, Calif., has been using online giving for less than a year, and Patton said he is pleased with the results already.

"We have a mostly older congregation, so I really didn't expect them to use it that much," he said. "But our younger members have jumped on it. They do the online bill pay and everything online anyway, so this is really convenient for them."



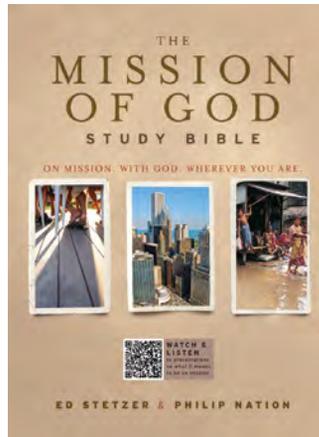
A look inside

The Mission of God Study Bible

Holman Bible Publishers

In *The Mission of God Study Bible*, readers will hear from today’s top thinkers, theologians and leading voices in the church about what it means to live in the mission of God.

Excerpt from one of the “On The Frontlines” features, describing some Christian believers who endured persecution or martyrdom :



Haralan Popov (1907-1988)

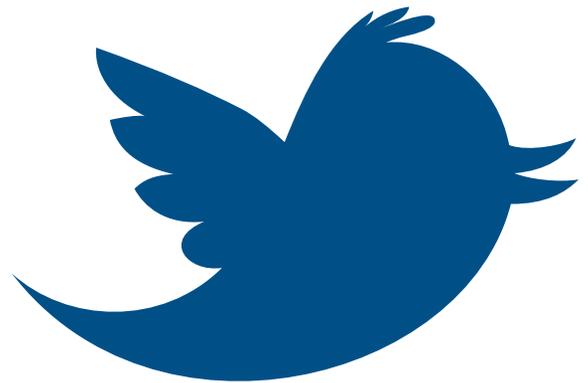
Some believers can strongly identify with the life of Joseph (son of Jacob) and the apostle Paul. Haralan Popov is one of them. Born March 7, 1907, in Krasno Gradishte, Haralan Popov was a professed atheist early in life but became a Christian as a teen. After graduating from a Bible school in London, he later became the pastor of the Bulgarian Pentecostal Church, the nation’s largest Protestant church, in 1929. He also married Ruth, a citizen of Sweden.

Popov pastored during a time of turmoil—the Communists’ occupation of Bulgaria. His faithfulness to the mission of Christ made him enemies. On July 23, 1948, Popov and fourteen other ministers were arrested in Sofia, Bulgaria’s capital city, and charged with treason and being spies for the United States and Britain—completely false charges. After being tortured by the KGB for eight months, Popov pled guilty to the charges and received a fifteen-year prison sentence. He served thirteen years in various prisons and labor camps, suffering abuse, before being released on September 25, 1961. Another year passed before he was reunited with his family in Sweden.

Popov and his family moved to the United States in 1970. There he founded Evangelism to Communist Lands, Inc., in 1972, which later became Door of Hope International. This organization was established to offer relief to persecuted Christians and alert others to their plight.

Popov wrote his autobiography, *Tortured for His Faith: An Epic of Christian Courage and Heroism in Our Day* (Zondervan, 1980), which details the story of his life in prison. It has been published in more than twenty languages all over the world.

In 1988, Popov was allowed to return to Bulgaria to visit the church he once pastored. A month later, November 14, 1988, he died of cancer in Glendale, California.



Folks we’re following

“Every believer is a theologian whether they realize it or not. The only question is whether they’re a good or bad one.”

@RickWarren

Pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif.

“Looking forward to reading this new book by @AndyStanley Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Un-churched People Love to Attend”

@WarrenBird

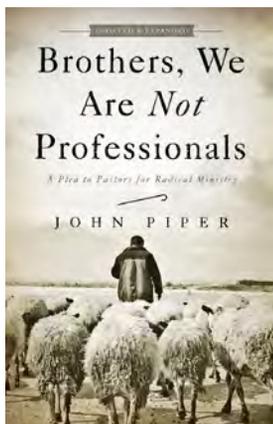
Research director at Leadership Network, author, seminary professor, pastor (leadnet.org)

“When you must always be the smartest person in the room there is no reason for anyone else to think.”

@Geoff Surratt

Speaker, consultant, author and director of Exponential

Books



Brothers We Are Not Professionals

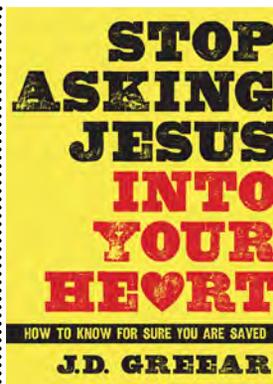
by John Piper
B&H Publishing Group
(February 2013)
Originally published more than 10 years ago, B&H releases *Brothers We Are Not Professionals* for a new generation of readers with six new chapters. Fighting against the dilution of the role of pastor into just another job, Piper reminds those called to shepherding the church of the high calling they've received.



Center Church

by Tim Keller
Zondervan

Tim Keller's newest work looks and feels like a textbook. Keller, who planted a vibrant and growing church in one of the world's most challenging contexts, New York City, offers his answer to a question he gets all of the time, "How did you do it?" More than 20 years later, Keller communicates his vision for church planting in an urban context, educating America's next wave of church planters.



Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart

by JD Greear
B&H Publishing Group
(February 2013)

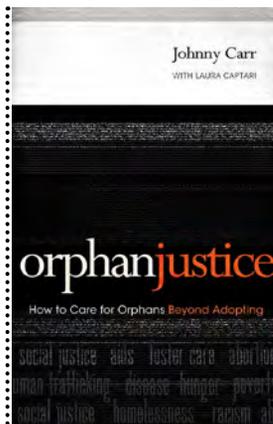
Everyone struggles with assurance for salvation. The Bible is full of both assurances and warnings regarding salvation. JD Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh, N.C., addresses the topic with insight he's gained by counseling people in the Research Triangle for more than 10 years.



Embracing Obscurity

by Anonymous
B&H Publishing Group

The world is filled with people who will live and die in anonymity, never achieving notoriety. True success, though, as modeled by Jesus, begins not with fame but with humility, service, sacrifice, and surrender, contends the anonymous author of *Embracing Obscurity: Becoming Nothing in Light of God's Everything*. Living up to the title of the book, the author chose to publish under the name "Anonymous."



Orphan Justice

by Johnny Carr
B&H Publishing Group
(March 2013)

With millions of orphans worldwide, how can Christians neglect the ministry James labeled "pure religion?" Though certainly a vital part, adoption is not the solution to orphan care. Johnny Carr guides readers toward a broader understanding of orphan care, beyond intellectual premises to the practical advocacy and rescue of children around the world through every means available.

For more new releases visit LifeWay.com.



Conferences & Events



Secret Church Simulcast
 March 29, 2013
 Worldwide (from Birmingham, Alabama)
 Speaker: David Platt
 Secret Church has grown from the basement of the underground church to a worldwide gathering of believers around the simple teaching of God's Word. Pastor David Platt teaches six hours of in-depth study on the topic Heaven, Hell and the End of the World.
LifeWay.com/SecretChurch



Verge

March 1-2, 2013

Austin, Texas

Speakers: John Perkins, Matt Carter, Jo Saxton, Neil Cole, Alan Hirsch, Dave Gibbons, Mike Breen, Jeff Vanderstelt, Dhati Lewis, Kevin Peck, Hugh Halter, Sally Breen, Doug Paul, Brandon Hatmaker, Matt Smay, Todd Engstrom, Caesar Kalinowski, Stew and more

Verge is all about making disciples. It's an experience to equip church leaders, students, entrepreneurs, artists, urban innovators, business leaders, community development specialists, non-profit leaders, church planters and everyday leaders—anyone pursuing the mission of God, in community, whatever the context, for the sake of the gospel.

vergenetwork.org/2013



Priscilla Shirer Live Simulcast

April 27, 2013

Richmond, Va.

Speaker: Priscilla Shirer; Musical guest: Anthony Evans
 Priscilla Shirer's ministry to women across the country and around the world is focused on the expository teaching of the Word of God. Her desire is to see women come to a full understanding of who they are in Christ by hearing the uncompromising truth of Scripture.

This live simulcast of the April 27 Priscilla Shirer Live event is a great way to bring her to your church. Options available for individuals, small churches and large churches.

LifeWay.com/PriscillaShirerLive



The Gospel Coalition

April 6-10, 2013

Orlando, Florida

Speakers: More than 80 speakers

The Gospel Coalition's 2013 national conference will be a five-day event, including a weekend world missions conference and three-day main conference focused on the mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. As one of Evangelicalism's fastest-growing conferences, TGC is definitely on our radar.

thegospelcoalition.org/2013



Exponential

April 22-25, 2013

Orlando, Florida

Speakers: Francis Chan, Wayne Cordeiro, Craig Groeschel, Alan Hirsch, Darrin Patrick, Greg Surratt, and more

Exponential's mission is to equip movement makers with actionable principles, ideas and solutions for the accelerated multiplication of healthy, reproducing faith communities. This year's theme, DiscipleShift, will explore the crucial shifts the church needs to make in our thinking and practices to plant and grow churches that make and deploy biblical disciples.

exponential.org

Digital



PastorsToday

Designed as a practical resource to serve pastors, PastorsToday features helpful content to equip pastors for real-life ministry. Though the content is featured on the website, many pastors opt to receive articles, videos and other recommended resources in their inbox by signing up for the e-newsletter.

LifeWay.com/Pastors

LifeWay e-reader

- Read everywhere using your tablet, mobile phone, or computer.
- Your current page and bookmarks are synced automatically across devices.
- Access a growing library of your favorite Christian books, Bibles, and studies.

LifeWay.com/eBooks



Discipleship in Context

Imagine discipleship materials written with your church's culture and structure in mind. Aligned with your core practices and doctrine. Lifting up key initiatives from your church body. Even built around the sermon series being preached. Discipleship in Context is a new initiative from LifeWay that embraces the core compounds of discipleship and blends them with the specific needs of your church's context.

DiscipleshipinContext.com



Cultural Christianity is dying, and that's a good thing

Gloom. That's what many Christians feel about our culture today. We live in a time when many cultural trends are headed in a direction away from biblical values—morality, life, attitudes and so much more.

Yet, I am not discouraged. I've read the end of The Book—and Jesus wins. However, I think there are other reasons to be encouraged, including the fact that cultural Christianity is dying. Churches are becoming more focused and fruitful, and Christians are engaging their communities.

Cultural Christianity is dying because nominal Christians are becoming more and more comfortable with giving up their labels.

I typically see three types of Christians. Census Christians mark “Christian” on a survey rather than another world religion since they know they are not Hindu or Jewish. Churchgoing Christians identify as such because they occasionally attend a church. And conversion Christians claim to have had a true faith experience in which they were converted or “born again,” resulting in a deeply held belief in Jesus Christ as Lord.

The recent decline in American Protestants, I believe, comes from census and churchgoing Christians shifting to the category of those who don't have any religious identification at all. As culture changes and no single belief system is broadly held, the value of identifying as a Christian decreases. When that happens, if the connection was more an identifying mark than a deeply held belief, the label doesn't really matter anymore.

Having no affiliation at all is more acceptable than choosing one that is in name only. Rather than this representing a collapse in Christianity as a whole, it

points to a clarification of sorts. In a sense, the real Christians are standing up.

While cultural Christianity declines, biblical Christianity has the opportunity to shine. I'm encouraged that many churches are seeking to be places of real transformation—not being satisfied with just doing church but actually seeking to be the church.

In our research for *Transformational Church*, we encountered great hope. Some churches were seeing great conversions, robust discipleship and church unity in mission.

Thriving small groups, evangelistic outreach and community ministry are all around us. These are not “pie in the sky” ideas—these are realities of churches right now all across the U.S.

As our culture becomes less Judeo-Christian, in a sense, we lose some of our home-field advantage. Yet, this gives churches the opportunity to be the church—to show and share the love of Christ. This, indeed, helps people understand what Christianity is and what Christians do—joining Jesus on His mission in the world.

So, challenging times? Sure. Yet, whoever thought we should be the exception? The gospel has always advanced in challenging times—and we should be no different.

God is at work, and I am encouraged.

Let's seize these moments and be about transformation—seeing people, churches and communities changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

Ed Stetzer is president of LifeWay Research.

“Having no affiliation at all is more acceptable than choosing one that is in name only.”

Ed Stetzer

The grass withers,
the flowers fade,
but the word of our
God remains forever.

THE LIVING, BREATHING WORD OF GOD TRANSFORMS PEOPLE WHEN ITS POWER TAKES HOLD IN THEIR HEARTS AND MINDS. Start 2013 by ordering *Journey* and *Stand Firm* for the men and women in your congregation. Each monthly issue is filled with timely, focused daily readings—(substantive but not overwhelming) that will inspire them to mine the truths of God's Word.

Order in bulk (3 monthly issues) and save:
Journey 005075231 \$4.80 per quarter
Stand Firm 005075233 \$4.80 per quarter



Resources Order Form | lifeway.com/magazines | 800.458.2772
Pricing and availability subject to change without notice.

LifeWay | Adults



Facts and Trends is published by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention®
One LifeWay Plaza, MSN 192, Nashville, TN 37234

Non profit
Organization
U.S. Postage

PAID
Nashville, TN
Permit No. 2

Winter 2013: January, February & March

005174998

LifeWay® | Films

MOVING PICTURES

LEARN MORE AT LIFEWAY.COM/FILMS