

The OKLAHOMA BAPTIST

Serving Churches of the Baptist Missionary Association of Oklahoma

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“An Acceptance of Witchcraft in Modern Media”

Bro Chris Gonthier
BMAO Moral Action

The Entertainment Industry has very effectively and efficiently aided in the corruption of the moral values in society. Ideas that violate scripture, that would have been unacceptable 50 years ago, have been systematically introduced and glorified.

Satan is known for being very subtle, many times introducing ideas and people are not aware of the present danger. Television programs used to be very conservative and cautious in how they presented sexuality and other areas that could affect morality.

We can see all too well how there is very little restraint now on many



things that should not be acceptable viewing for entertainment.

One thing that has been glorified of late is the idea of witchcraft. We remember the genie in the bottle, as well as the nose twitcher. These characters were portrayed to be moral and good people, something to aspire to be like.

There was no taboo when they skillfully practiced their art, which was seemingly used for the good of people. There were “good” witches, and not so “good” witches. We find that society has wholeheartedly latched onto the idea of good witches and wizards.

The biblical question is, “are these shows something we should allow to be a source of entertainment for the believer?”

As new movies are coming our way, where should the Christian draw the line? Is it ok to be entertained by witches and wizards flying on broomsticks? What does the bible say to address this matter?

Below are some scriptures to consider as you make these decisions. I know I have crossed the line into meddling, but I only wish you to consider what the bible says about this matter.

Deuteronomy 18:9-12 tells us, “When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations.

There shall not be found among you

any one that maketh his son or daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of time, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because or these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee.”

Leviticus 20:6 “And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people.”

Galatians 5:20-21, “Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Revelation 21:8, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

Galatians 5:19-21, “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Exodus 22:18, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”

Leviticus 19:31, “Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither see after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your god.”

Latest News from New Generation

Chris Lorenz

We're kicking off anew years still doing what we know how to do best, evangelism and discipleship. I don't thin we know how to do anything different, but thankfully this is God's plan for the church!

This past week I had the opportunity to share the Gospel with a man named Brian at Mission Norman. Brian has had his struggles, including homelessness. But through a mental health program, he was able to receive housing after three years of living on the streets.

We know providing housing isn't the greatest need people have. This is only a Band-aid that ultimately does not solve the problem. We know, of course, the greatest need people have is Jesus.

Thankfully, on Thursday Brian received Jesus as his Lord and Savior and wants to visit church this Sunday. Please pray for him that he has truly begun a relationship with the Lord and becomes rooted and grounded in Him.

God is certainly giving us a front row seat to what He's doing in the lives of the needy. Another example is Natalie and her sister Evelyn.

When Natalie was a teenager she was involved in a terrible car wreck on the

highway that caused the vehicle to roll. She was not wearing her seatbelt and tragically was thrown from the vehicle on the side of the highway.

Miraculously, Natalie survived but has undergone countless reconstructive surgeries and has been experiencing homelessness with her sister for years as well.

Recently, one of her doctors was very gracious to pledge at least six months rent for her just before the last brutal cold snap we had. Local charities have also furnished their apartment.

In answer to our prayers, God has been adding to our number those who

are being saved! Not only Natalie and Evelyn, but Taraz and Lee who become new believers in the last six months through the ministry of New Generation, and have committed themselves to the discipleship and care of our little church.

God keeps saving souls, and bringing them to us, which is a great encouragement. Please pray for the strength and perseverance we need to continue this work the Lord has called us to and that 2022 will be the most fruitful year yet!

Please continue to support and pray for the ministry here. Our attendance has been up the last few weeks. As always, pray for revival.

Steve and Lynn Puckett

Enlistment for Women's Missionary Auxiliary

February is the month that has been set aside by the National WMA to encourage women to become active in their local church's women's ministry. Due to COVID, many of our churches and their ministries have experienced a decline in attendance during the past two years. Hope-fully we will soon see an end to this pandemic.

The National WMA theme for 2021-2022 is "**INTENTIONAL**". Ephesians 5:15-16 says "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." As we try to build our attendance back up, I challenge each lady of your women's ministry to be "intentional" in encouraging new ladies to attend your meetings by making the most of every opportunity.

Ways to be Intentional:

- Individually invite each lady in your church to come to your meetings or Bible Study (in person, by telephone, text, or email)
- Have the meetings or Bible Study times printed in your church's bulletin, Facebook Page, and website
- Promote the topic of your meeting or study with colorful posters placed in strategic places in the church
- Be excited about your ministry and share the things you are learning in conversations with those ladies not attending
- Look for ways your group can meet the needs of all the ladies in your church
- Poll the ladies of the church to see what they would like to get from your ministry
- Have an informal get-together with finger foods to let the ladies of the church become more personally acquainted
- Have special events such as Mother/Daughter teas, Valentine's Banquets, painting parties, etc. to get the ladies interested in meeting together
- Make sure your meetings and Bible Studies are bathed in prayer and are structured to provide spiritual growth for each lady in attendance

Let's strive to enlist new ladies in our women's ministries during this new year.

Brenda Hornaday

National WMA 1st Vice President

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"I Was Just Thinkin' "

By Narita Roady

"Love 'em While You Have 'em"

He had lived a good life, and he knew his time had come. As he had wished the elderly gentleman was in his home as he faced his final hours. Breathing was difficult and his distress was great.

Suddenly wafting into his room, he smelled the sweet fragrance of his favorite cookies baking in the kitchen downstairs - Chocolate chip.

Weak with the battle he was facing he mustered up what little strength he had left and crawled from his death bed. Slowly, painfully, hanging onto the wall, he started down the hall.

With a Herculean effort he clung to the stair rail carefully made his way down each step. One last chocolate chip cookie, that's all he wanted.

By the time he made it to the kitchen his breathing was ragged. Clinging to the door frame he leaned into the kitchen. If it had not been for his suffering, he would have thought he was in heaven at that moment.

In front of him, covering every inch of table and counter space lay hundreds upon hundreds of his treasured, chocolate chip cookies.

A tear trickled down his cheek as he thought of this great labor of love his darling wife of 50 years was doing just for him. What a jewel she was, putting aside her pain and grief to make his last moments happy.

With the last bit of life that remained him, he threw himself at the kitchen table, landing on the floor near by.

Stretching his wrinkled weakened hand, he reached for a cookie at the table's edge. Just as it was in his grasp, he felt the sharp sting of his wife whacking his hand with her spatula.

"Leave those alone," she barked, "those are for the funeral!"

It is hard to imagine a family member being so harsh to a dying loved one. I would venture to say that the day of the funeral this wife cried bitter tears of grief.

You may be shaking your head in disagreement with me right now and thinking, "There is no way this woman would be sad over her husband's death with the way she treated him!"

You think not? It happens on a daily basis in all our homes at one time or another and I would be safe to guess in yours also. "Not me!" you probably want to shout at me right now, "I would NEVER treat my dying loved one like that!"

Dying, no, but what about your LIVING loved ones. We do not have one day or minute that we are guaranteed another moment with those we love. That harsh word or dirty look you just gave them might be the last memory you have.

Don't get me wrong, I am not trying to be morbid, or encourage fear, but I do believe it is an area we each fail in miserably. Therefore I am sharing this as, you might say, a reminder.

We need a reminder to pay our bills, change the oil in our car, change the batteries in our smoke alarms, and many other important responsibilities in our lives. Yet none of those responsibilities compare to remembering to love those closest to us on a daily basis.

Families get so caught up in the pressures of day to day life and unresolved conflicts that they forget to show each other love. The feelings of affection they once possessed for those most precious is smothered out by

resentment, bitterness, and even hatred.

I have heard people say that if their family member died, they wouldn't miss them at all. Yet when the news comes of cancer or some other terminal illness, their minds and hearts are suddenly cleared and they plainly see how very much they love them.

There are many ways to show your love but more important keeping your love affection alive, well, and active in your family relationships.

Prayer is God's all in one perfect gift to us, and it is the greatest gift we can give our family. Pray for them daily, in fact, several times a day! Set them before the Lord's throne, their needs, health, problems, even your problems with them!

When we pray not only does God work on them, but He works on us too. God transforms our sight, and we see the one we are praying for (whether they change or not) through His eyes and with His heart. Prayer is always a win, win situation!

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Matthew 7:7

Remember, when they're gone you can't pray for them.

Be patient with the weaknesses and faults of your beloved family. We expect everyone to be patient with us when we feel bad or are unknowingly obnoxious, but do we extend the same privilege to others?

I don't know how many times I have heard someone say, "They are really getting on my nerves!" To which my reply is, "Then don't leave them lying around for them to get on!"

When we find ourselves being easily irritated by the actions or words of others, we need to do a thorough "heart examination". What we will find is selfishness and pride. Patience is evidence that God has control of our life.

Next time you find yourself being annoyed at the one you love, ask yourself, "How patient do I want God to be with me?"

"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Luke 8:15

Remember when they're gone you'll wish they were with you to do those annoying things.

("While You Have 'em" cont on pg 7)

"Families get so caught up in the pressures of day to day life and unresolved conflicts that they forget to show each other love."

“Am I Too Old?”

By Bro. Larry Barker

The scriptures are clear: You are never too young to serve the Lord. God uses us in the midst of our lack of experience, knowledge, and readiness for the assignment He has given us.

But do we ever get too old for the Lord to use us?

Never!

Yet we all wonder when is it time to step aside, retire, and not hold on so long that it begins to hurt the church or ministry?

You actually cannot find retirement in Scripture. Genesis 15:5 says, “He (God) took him (Abraham) outside and said, ‘Look at the sky and count the stars.’” Mark Batterson cautions that, “If we are not careful, we stop gazing at the stars, and start staring at the ceiling.”

God loves using you before you think you are ready and after you think you are done.

When you stand before the Lord one

day, you will not hear Him say, “well said,” “well thought out,” “well planned,” or “well studied.” What He will say is, “well done!”

Christianity is about action, and orthodoxy is having the right beliefs, but orthopraxy is doing the right things.

Dr. Dave DeVries reminds us in The Multiplication Workshop of the reality that you need all the right ingredients:

The Cross+the Culture–The Community
= No Church

The Community+The Cross–Culture
= No Mission

The Culture+The Community–The Cross
= No Hope

In Genesis 15, God promises a 99-year-old Abraham that He will keep His covenant and promise to him. Then God takes him outside so he will quit functioning only by what he could see in his tent and focus instead on the limitless vastness of the stars and His universe.

Let’s refuse to simply stare at our ceiling assuming that age, experience, qualifications, credentials, and education (all important and good things) can limit our limitless God.

Logic questions God, but faith refuses to put limitations on Him. Spiritual maturity is not determined by your five-year plan but rather your ability to remain sensitive to the moment-by-moment nudges of the Holy Spirit.

Think about Abraham again. Hebrews 11:8 says, “By faith Abraham, when was called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

At least I’m not the only one who doesn’t always know where they’re going. The will of God is not always easily discerned and takes much prayer, soul searching, and willingness to yield to whatever the Lord says.

It is wrong to think you will always know where God is leading you, what He is up to, and what He is doing. Scripture is clear that we are to walk by faith and not by sight.

In his book *Younique*, Will Mancini describes the three ages we are especially susceptible to crisis moments in discerning God’s will:

In our twenties, we are at our biological peak in almost every area.

In our forties (unless you’re a professional athlete) we still have zeal and energy but much more experience and knowledge, so we’re probably at peak performance.

In our sixties, energy begins to drain and our days begin to be numbered. You now have far more opportunities behind you than opportunities in front of you.

Will says, “Fortunately, the Bible doesn’t view the trajectory of a person’s life as a ballistic arc to a pathetic crash. Rather, Psalm 92 promises, ‘The righteous thrive like a palm tree and grow

(“Too Old,” cont on pg 5)



“My Call to Ministry”

By Chris Vines

There are two distinct times in my life that I knew without a doubt God was calling me.

The first was during an intentional conversation with my grandmother about Christ's sacrifice for me, a sinner.

It was then that God called me to Himself, and the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of my heart to believe the gospel and simply trust Christ's atoning work on



the cross for my salvation.

The second call to ministry was seven years later. I remember sitting in a service and being under strong conviction to give up my life's pursuits and dedicate my life to His ministry.

I will admit that at that moment, my role in ministry was unknown.

But I did know the Lord was calling me to say “yes” to serving His church in whatever role He would show me.

By that time in my life, I had heard many people give their testimonies of running from the Lord and experiencing intense, difficult years before they finally surrendered to God's call.

Part of my conversation with the Lord was, “Why in the world would I ever run from you when I know you will just bring me right back to this moment?” So I said yes right then.

Since then, I have discovered a reality that has become more clear the longer I live: God truly does have a hold on me. I have not attempted to kick loose from this call, and I have never regretted saying “yes”.

The reality is that God has a firm grip on me, and I am compelled to serve Him and make Him known. There is a burning desire within me to preach the gospel and to make King Jesus known to all people. Overwhelming thankfulness floods my heart for this grace.

Sixteen years later, the reality is that God keeps calling. He continually calls me to surrender my pride, personal desires, and earthly pursuits to Him. Truthfully, God's call has always been to put my “yes” on His table.

Have you put your “yes” on God's table?

There are many reasons a person hesitates to say “yes” to God's call. Some think He owes them a detailed plan of what they are saying yes to. Others simply don't want to say “no” to their own plans or the plans other people have for them.

SOAR 2022 will be all about God's call on our lives. God is calling, but are we saying yes?

SOAR Student Conference:
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“Am I Too Old?” *continued*

like a cedar tree in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the Lord, they thrive in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, healthy and green’.

Picture life not as an arc or a bell curve but as a series of rising stair steps.”

Around the age of twenty you begin to wonder what you will do with your life and must decide to follow Jesus and His plan or pursue your own. Unfortunately, some get off track here.

Then you reach your forties and again you must decide to follow Jesus or chart your own course? Will you passionately pursue God's calling on your life or will you play it safe and pursue the comforts of this world as you become more financially secure?

Mancini adds this: “Around age sixty, people face one more crisis, this one having to do with their remaining years. It's about whether their productivity is based on activity or on generativity—that is, how they're preparing the next generation to carry on their legacy.

The brilliant truth is that those who overcome this crisis impact more just as they begin to work less.

Are you willing to claim this promise? “They will still bear fruit in old age, healthy and green?” Your impact in “retirement” or even in death can be even greater than your entire life added together.

Mancini continues: “Peak performance may be long gone, but peak impact is one step away.”

You see, at each crisis moment in your life, whether at twenty, forty, sixty or eighty, you have a decision to make: Will you remain faithful to the Lord and the leadership of the Holy Spirit?

Every single day you have the opportunity to decide whether to choose the trajectory of the world's picture of aging or trust that God meant what He said.

There are no easy answers, and discovering God's will is not usually easy because we must pursue Him, seek Him, and keep knocking.

(The content of this article is greatly influenced by Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and two great resources, Wild Goose Chase by Mark Batterson, and Younique by Will Mancini.)

"That Reminds Me"

By Jesse Spurlock

"Closed Minds...Opened Mouths"

I saw another revealing bumper sticker the other day. Apparently, the person considered himself open minded and wasn't interested in hearing any opposing views.

His bumper sticker read, "If Only Closed Minds Also Had Closed Mouths."

I'm not sure what message he wanted to get across, but since I've never heard anyone other than a liberal use the term "closed mind" with reference to an opposing viewpoint, I assume he was a liberal.

It is speculation on my part, but since we had just gone through the elections, I suspect it had something to do with that. During the campaigning I know the liberal element was very unhappy that Christians were expressing our opinions, especially about "gay marriage."

(The quotation marks are intentional. Any marriage other than God's ordained union is not a marriage.)

Anything said about marriage as being only between a man and a woman brought an immediate charge that we were closed minded. They obviously wanted Christians to have closed mouths. I think it is safe to assume the bumper sticker had reference to that.

Many today state we are supposed to have open minds about everything. They even give the impression that being accused of having a closed mind about anything is a high insult.

However, there are some things that call for a closed mind. When God declares a truth, it isn't subject to debate and therefore the issue is closed, as our minds ought to be about it.

If someone tells me homosexuality is an alternate lifestyle, when God declares it to be an abomination, what is there to discuss about that? What is wrong with

having a closed mind about it?

When God's Word teaches that life begins at the point of conception, what is wrong with have a closed mind about whether or not it is a sin to perform an abortion?

In truth, everyone has a closed mind about certain things, so the issue isn't really so much about closed minds as it is about the issue involved.

If I jump out of an airplane at 30,000 feet with a parachute, I will surely be killed. That's something I have a closed mind about. Anyone with any sense will also have a closed mind about it.

How about death? Should we have an open mind about that? The Bible tells us "It is appointed unto man once to die, but after that the judgment." Hebrews 9:27

Having an open mind to other options

is very foolish.

When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." John 14:6

My mind is closed to any other consideration.

What most of the ones with "open minds" want is that

everyone will pay attention to what they've got to say and not give any opposing view.

Much like the boss I once had. His philosophy was "when I want you to have an opinion, I'll tell you what it is."

Now, I'm not closed minded about everything. If the subject is based on man's opinions and suppositions, I'll gladly consider another viewpoint.

I'm especially open minded when God says, "Come now, let us reason together..." Isaiah 1:18

Having a closed mind with God is very hazardous to our health.

Although the bumper sticker about "closed minds" sounds humorous, I suspect that humor wasn't the intended point.



“Love ‘em While You Have ‘em” continued

Harsh words are one of the most hurtful and damaging weapons families use on each other. They can cause more pain than a physical injury and the scars can go deeper. .

Those we love the most and are closest to us are the ones that fall victim to our unruly tongues. Doesn't seem right does it? We're tired, frustrated, aggravated, and unhappy.

Maybe it is something they did that didn't set well with us or perhaps we're just going through a tough time.

Whatever the problem more often than not, they're the ones that receive our acid words. We never stop to think about how it might affect them, we just know how we are feeling at the moment and want to "get it all out".

The sad thing is those words can never be taken back, and there will come a time when we regret them. We must purpose to think before we speak and let our words be kind and loving.

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Ephesians 4:29

Remember, when they're gone you won't be able to tell them how much you love them.

Unforgiveness seems to plague family relationships. Petty little grudges multiply like weeds on a lawn. Before long the incident is forgotten but the feelings of resentment remain.

No one wants to be the first to apologize because they think the other person is the one in the wrong. Time that can be spent loving and enjoying each other slips away with each passing day and everyone is miserable.

Don't fall into this trap. Be quick to forgive even if they don't ask for it. Never leave each other or hang up the phone without sincerely telling them you love them. It may be the last time you have a chance to.

When I was younger a friend's father died suddenly. I went with my mother to visit the widow and I have never forgotten her story. She sat sobbing and broken as she choked out the words.

She and her husband had had a fight the night before. In the heat of the argument she told him she hated him and wished he were dead. In her anger she slept on the couch that night. When she awoke in the morning he had died.

With swollen tear stained eyes she looked at us and said, "Those were the last words he heard me say and now I can never tell him I'm sorry."

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you". Ephesians 4:32

Remember, when they're gone, suddenly their offenses will seem so small and insignificant.

So think about it, pray about it and love 'em while you have 'em. Because you never know how long that will be.

It's Time to Make Your Reservations

The 2022 session of the Baptist Missionary Association of America will meet April 18-20 at the University Plaza Hotel and Convention Center in Springfield, Missouri. Please make your reservations early. Call the local hotel directly to make your reservations. The local telephone number is included below. You must identify that you are with the Baptist Missionary Association of America and that you are booking reservations in the BMA block of rooms. Also, when making your reservations, be sure to let them know you want rooms in the block for the BMAA that begins on April 17, 2022. Your stay does not have to include the night of the 17th, but that will make sure you get the BMA block rate.

The University Plaza Hotel will serve as our headquarters hotel for the annual meeting in Springfield.

University Plaza Hotel
333 John Q. Hammons Parkway, Springfield, MO
Single/Double, \$124 per night; King suite, \$159.00
Telephone reservations: 417-864-7333

Reservation cutoff date is March 19, 2022. The rates shown above will be available for three nights before and after the meeting if you would like to extend your stay in Springfield. All room rates quoted above are subject to all local taxes.

This information and additional news about the national association meeting can be found on the BMA website at www.bmaamerica.org. Check that website for news and updates about the meeting and reports from the national departments as they become available.

BMA Arrangements Committee:
Jerome Cooper, Daniel Williams, and Jerry Fulton

UPCOMING EVENTS

World Missions Sunday
February 27

Central District
Mid-year Meeting
Golden Corral, Norman
March 5

BMAO Midyear Meeting
Sunray Baptist, Purcell
April 2
(Please note the change in location)

BMAA National Meeting
Springfield, MO
April 18-20

“A ChangeMaker in Jordan”

The following is an interview with a Jordanian ministry leader and ChangeMaker, Fadi, who is on staff at Zarka Baptist Church:

It was at the end of my engineering studies at the age of twenty that a close friend came to Christ and I noticed a great change in his life that touched my life.

At that point I had never read the Bible and didn't know about the four Gospels or anything else. I had been raised in Christian schools, but the Islamic faith was taught to us there.

Because of my friend, I began to study the Bible, and six months later I was completely obsessed with the character of Christ and the Savior who came and gave his life for me.

I asked God to change my life to serving him, but my family did not accept it. They believed I had been brainwashed, especially my Father, who was an atheist.

After receiving my university degree and beginning my professional career as an engineer, I took seminary classes as my job allowed and, during that time, met my wife Mervat and we have four children.

I finished my seminary degree in 2003 then my PhD and dissertation, which was a comparison of Jihad and Islam and the conquest of Canaan.

It addresses the issue of whether war was ordered by God and the ethics behind this war issue, which is a very troubling thing in the Middle East with the Arab/Israeli conflict. Most believe the God of the Old Testament is aggressive and desires wars. If he's a loving God, people ask, why did he order the wars?

For almost twenty years I have taught an online course on how to share the love of Christ with Muslims in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and online.

I received training from godly men by going into the streets and putting their teaching it into practice until it became a completed course.

My involvement in attending the Zarka

church is an amazing story. I was without church for a long time and working as an engineer in Aqaba but decided to leave and take early retirement.

We moved back to Jordan and began attending there, but I had met Pastor Sam when he was one of my students.

Along with Pastor Samer, we have now created online bachelors and masters degree courses for Arabic-speaking believers who want to speak into the lives of non-believers from Muslim backgrounds.

Called Arabic Center for Biblical Studies, it will soon go through accreditation.

Because of security issues most students cannot go to the West and study at world-class seminaries, so the courses will quench their desire to both study the Bible and be trained to reach Muslims.

Today there are 60 students, not all of them Muslim, so please pray for these men and women with a strong calling to reach the lost.

The church has recently had a surge in attendees. Six months ago there were only 25 to 30 people. It has now just exploded and we have a larger group, so we need to move.

Nothing different was done, except with continued prayers people have been coming and the Holy Spirit has been leading them to Zarka Baptist Church.

We're enjoying the ride: There are many salvations, baptisms, and people coming back to church who haven't been there in several years. Without planning or any human effort we now have a congregation of around 130 including children. We found favor in God's eyes.

Please pray that those we're training will take the lead for the church in the Middle East.

Grace Harbor Following Jesus At All Costs

As most pastors and church members are keenly aware, the holidays and January brought so much illness to our people. This season in particular has stretched and challenged us in ways we haven't ever experienced, and I don't say that on my own testimony alone as a young pastor, but by testimony of pastors who have been at this much longer than I have! It seems easier and more likely to grow discouraged, but my prayer for others and for our church is that we would live lives in full submission to Jesus.

At the end of Jesus' sermon, Matthew records in chapter seven that the crowds were astonished by the teaching of Jesus, because he was teaching with authority and not in the way that their leaders had taught. I challenged our church on Sunday, that while it took the whole sermon of Jesus for the crowds to come to this realization, it is a realization and conviction we must come to today. It is right for us to say yes to Jesus (or surrender ourselves to him), even before we hear and understand all of the things he commands of us. I've heard one person say that we are to "put our yes on the table". If Jesus truly is the king and the authority, we don't get to judge whether or not his words are worth following, we simply submit to him, and understand that "wherever he leads, I'll go."

This is uniquely challenging for many right now. We are prone to allowing other things to lead us, and direct us. But we must follow Jesus at all costs.

We are holding a "Family Meeting"(aka Business Meeting) this coming Sunday with all of our members and regular attendees to share with them about what it looks like for us as a church plant to be moving towards coming off of outside support, and how this is an exciting thing for a church to be doing. If I am honest, it brings some uncertainty. But more so it brings an opportunity to trust God and not be anxious.

Our church is really seeing growth and it seems that each month, we are adding to our number of folks visiting and staying with us. Yesterday we had a neighbor who lives in our community visit our church who is not a believer. He is from India and really seems to be seeking and open to the Gospel. After church, he attended one of our home groups and spoke so highly of the way he felt welcomed. We are praying for him and are sharing the Gospel with him!