The OKLAHOMA BAPTIST

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Church Attendance According To the Book of Convenience

By Chris Gonthier BMAO Moral Action

Where art thou? Where art thou? Where art thou? Three questions most pastors face every Sunday. Why isn't church important to people any longer?

As pastors face declining church attendance and membership, it becomes increasingly difficult to stay encouraged. There are many "reasons" for the decline, some imagined, some real.

Truth is most people do not come to church because it is no longer a priority or important anymore.

Reality 101 should cause everyone to realize that God and church are still every bit as important as they ever were. So we must ask ourselves why is there such a decline? Why are the church pews so empty? Why doesn't anyone seem to care about church and the things of God?

There seems to have been some very fundamental shifts in society today. I am going to give us some things to consider; you decide if they apply to you.

Consider cell phones and social media and the impact they have on our lives. First of all we have access to the internet almost 24/7. When someone needs information, it is literally at our fingertips.

Yes, there are temptations and inappropriate material on the internet. I

am not going to cover that right now, because it should be obvious the harm these things can cause.

Let's look at other things like people skills. In this world of texting, we don't learn to recognize tone and voice inflection. Our personal communication skills are seriously lacking. This causes us to offend others and become easily offended ourselves.

We ignore people that are with us in person, all the while using our phones...like we are addicted to a drug.

Every chirp and peep our phones make distract us from things that we need to do to have productive lives. Even while writing this article, I've stopped to check my phone several times.

How much time is wasted, and how often do we ignore important things? Our children see the backsides of our phones to the point that they crave attention from us.

How often do we ignore a movie, just to spend time with our phones? Do we spend quality time with our spouses? Or do we wait until we are not together so we can text or talk to them?

Confiscating phones and having family meals together would do wonders for our families.

"We ignore people that are with us in person, all the while using our phone, like we are addicted to a drug."

Now the ability to instantly access information is so very convenient that we have become addicted to perpetual search engine mania. I love to be able to find scriptures with instant searches. If I need to research information before I write an article, or even while writing, I just pick up my phone and search engines away.

We can even have multiple boxes open on our computers.

Romans 12:12, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."

We are so conditioned to instant solutions and answers that we never learn patience. It is no wonder we can't "get along", everything comes to us instantly...just the way we want it.

Maybe Romans 8:25 will shed some light. "But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Without patience our expectation of hope begins to falter.

Most of us have noticed the impact Covid had on our people skills. We became distrustful of others and became accustomed to not interacting with people.

Some have not returned to the work force out of fear for their safety. Children were hindered in their education and businesses closed.

People became divided on vaccines and masks and were unable or unwilling to tolerate others who differed from them. Some still view church online because of health reasons, but some stay home for convenience.

Then we have the matter of airing our dirty laundry all over social media. We make private matters public, and it hurts our ability to forgive one another and move on with healing.

We lash out at others instead of using people skills to forgive and show love. We give others and ourselves bad reputations.

Our testimonies become weak because the world sees us and not Christ. We

("Church Attendance," cont on pg 6)

Re:Charge Leader's Conference Set

Re:Charge, a pastor and church leaders conference, is coming up September 27-29 in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

The Healthy Church Solutions.org team is excited about this opportunity for ministry leaders to break away and get reenergized. Sometimes, to get refocused we need to draw apart alone.

Other times we need to be with colaborers and be reminded of the strengthening power of God's Word, the effectiveness of prayer, the encouraging element of iron sharpening iron, and the joy of fellowship and laughter.

We aren't designed to do ministry alone, and Re:Charge aims to be a retreat where leaders can plug in anew, fix our gaze afresh on Jesus, and be reminded there are others who have been where we are and can cheer us on in the race.

It's no surprise that pastors and ministry leaders need encouragement, especially over the last two years as we have continued to navigate COVID, decision fatigue, polarized viewpoints of all sorts, grief over many not returning to in-person church, and even the loss of loved ones.

David Kinnaman of Barna Group says, "We started seeing early warning signs of burnout among pastors before COVID. Now, pastors are experiencing significant burnout, driving them to seriously consider leaving ministry."

Recent Barna polls state that nearly two in five pastors have considered quitting full-time ministry in the past year, and nearly half of that number are leaders under age 45. Equally alarming is to note that stat is up nine full points from the beginning of 2021.

Another issue facing the church is the loneliness epidemic, which has only exacerbated over the last two years. Barna states that one in five practicing Christians admits to feeling lonely each day. Comparing Christians to non-Christians doesn't show much of a difference in this saddening trend. In fact, there is also research to show that few men actually have a close best friend.

An awareness of these stats and having conversations with leaders in our work that backs these reports is part of the vision behind hosting the Re:Charge Conference.

We want to pour into leaders who are wearing many hats and are weary or getting weary. We want to come alongside these leaders and their spouses and help them have a reset.

David Kinnaman also says, "More than ever, the church needs resilient leaders who are humble, agile, rooted in prayer and who are committed to being healthy as an essential aspect of effective leadership."

We couldn't agree more. Healthy churches require healthy leaders!

This year at Re:Charge we'll worship together with Travis Sellers, hear from seasoned pastor and author Bill Elliff on recharging through prayer, learn through breakouts for guys and ladies.

We will also enjoy a buffet meal and entertainment by comedian Brad Stine, have opportunities to explore Hot Springs, attend game nights onsite (sponsored by Baptist Trumpet), and soak up some precious fellowship.

For more info and to register today go to https://bmaamerica.org/recharge/.

We can't wait to see you there!

CBC Awards Scholarships at SOAR

Our Admissions Team gave away nearly 1000 CBC t-shirts along with three grand prizes, JBL Bluetooth speaker, a mobile device charger, and Apple Air Pods! We also gave away three Youth Ministry Worker prize packs full of \$25 gift cards and CBC gear to show our appreciation to what they do for the youth of the BMAA.

The three student winners of the \$10,000 Central Baptist College scholarship were Sady Long (Arkansas), Joshua Ford (Arkansas), and Cayce Harper (Oklahoma).

We are excited about the possibility of these students attending Central Baptist College soon.

We are also excited about SOAR 2023, see you there!



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"I Was Just Thinkin"

By Narita Roady

"There's a Rat Trap in the House"

A country rat heard the rustling of paper and looked through his crack in the wall, hoping it might be some kind of food. He saw the farmer and his wife opening a package.

His curiosity turned to horror when he saw it was a rattrap. In a panic, he darted to the farmyard to warn the other animals.

First he ran to the chicken, "They have a rat trap in the house, a rat trap!"

Scratching for bugs and worms, the chicken barely lifted her head to cluck and reply, "I'm sorry, Mr. Rat, I know this is a serious problem for you. It doesn't affect me, therefore, I wont' be bothered by it."

His heart racing, the rat went to the pig and shared his frightening discovery. "They have a rat trap in the house, a rat trap!"

Raising his head ever so slightly from the cool mud, he sympathetically said, "I am so sorry Mr. Rat, but there is not a thing I can do about it. All we can do is pray. Please know you are in my prayers."

The rat scurried up to the cow and squealed, "They have a rat trap in the house, a rat trap!"

Lazily she turned her head and

answered, "Big deal, Mr. Rat, a rat trap. I am in serious danger, huh?" With a swing of her head she continued to chew her cud.

The poor rat hung his head and trudged miserably back to the farmer's house to face the rattrap alone.

That exact night the sound of the trap snapping was heard all over the house. Something had been caught.

The farmer's wife awoke at the sound. She jumped out of bed, rushing to the trap, fully expecting to find a rat.

In the blackness of the night, she could not see that her trap had ensnared the tail of a poisonous snake. As she reached for the trap, the snake bit her.

The farmer rushed her to the hospital. After a brief stay she returned home, but continued to run a fever. Of course the very best thing for a fever is chicken soup.

So the farmer took his trusty axe, went to the farmyard, and killed the chicken.

Sadly the farmer's wife's condition continued to worsen. Friends and neighbors pitched in to help. She had someone by her side 24 hours a day.

With all these extra people to feed, the farmer once again took his axe to the farmyard and butchered the pig.

The farmer's wife never recovered from the snakebite and died. Being much loved in community, friends and family from far and wide came to the

funeral.

In fact there was such a large turn out, the farmer had to slaughter the cow to supply meat for everyone to eat.

Life has become a literal rat race for so many today. The world screams so much louder than the still quite voice of the Holy Spirit. Its clamor has captured our attention and we have become immersed in all that is temporal and material.

We are so choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, that we have shut our hearts to the Lord's agenda for us. (Luke 8:14)

Such temporal focus has turned a large majority of the King's children into calloused, self-centered, spiritual brats. Only what touches them or those close to them personally will bring tears of heartfelt compassion, while the sorrows of others are met with coldness and apathy.

The buck has been passed to the pastor to weep with those that weep. Romans 12:15

If comfort or time is to be given then it falls upon his shoulders. After all isn't it his job to share their burdens and visit the sick?

Such apathy is evident in the condition of our nation. Christians have been comfortable and secure in their own little worlds as our country and freedoms are swept away by Satan's diligent efforts. After all isn't it someone else's job to vote and be a part of political issues?

("Rat Trap," cont on pg 7)

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The key here is, is the Lord in control of your life? All love comes from God. How much we love and care for others is a direct result of how much we allow Him to live thru us.

And since love is an action not a gushy feeling, our caring for others will show in what we say and do.

"Spotlight on Missions"

Larry Barker and other Missions representatives recently attended the celebration of the first Garifuna-language church plant in America: Misión Bautista GM Redención (Redemption Garifuna Missionary Baptist Mission).

David Dickson, whose relationship with the Garifuna began in 1980, was an important part of the celebration.

Barker says, "I wish everybody could have been there when David Dickson read from the Garifuna Bible. I looked around and saw faces light up. People are always drawn to their mother tongue when they hear it spoken, so it was an amazing moment, particularly because of Bro. David's love for the Garifuna."

While Bro. David and his family were on vacation in 1980, he heard two boys speaking an unknown language and asked them about their people group.

He immediately felt a burden for them, and two years later their relationship had strengthened, resulting in a Garifunalanguage Bible translation.

Garifuna churches were first planted in Latin American countries like Honduras and Belize, and now there are twelve churches in the region.

In addition to the Bronx church, there are Garifuna congregations in Louisiana, Houston, and Atlanta, and each of their pastors and church planters attended the Bronx, New York event.

Two years ago, Larry Barker went to Redemption Garifuna church's first service. It was held in the basement of an apartment complex, which they quickly outgrew.

The objective for American church planters is to have a self-sustaining church within five years. The rapid growth of the Garifuna church is remarkable but not unusual, because ethnic church plants grow much more rapidly.

According to Bro. Larry, "Ethnic congregations understand the concept of church better than we do. Brick and mortar buildings are not important to them, so they focus on relationships. They lean on one another, encourage one another, and pray for one another. They do life together."

"We (Americans) are guilty of 'consumerism' and focus on consuming the service then getting on with our lives."

"If we believe the church is not a structure but a congregation of baptized believers doing mission together, then we understand that it can be birthed in many different contexts including a living room, an elementary school, or a shade tree."

"All the functions of a church can be done without a building. American culture puts the emphasis on all the bells and whistles, but the Bible puts emphasizes building relationships so there can be gospel conversations with people. And that's what a community of believers is anyway."

Almost every week Misión Bautista GM Redención baptizes people who immediately begin the discipleship process.

During the recent celebration service, five new believers came forward with their decisions to follow Christ. They were then told that salvation is only the beginning and the discipleship process begins immediately.

Bro. Cherry and his ministry leaders are intentional about teaching and training new believers.

The United States is the most onelanguage nation on earth, so Garifuna speakers are drawn to churches like Redemption Missionary Baptist Mission. Because they share a common language they quickly become a faith community as they adjust to a difficult-to-understand culture and learn English.

In addition to Garifuna, the other BMA America language churches include those that speak Russian, Arabic, Urdu and Spanish.

Sharing a common language, building relationships, then sharing the gospel is critical and necessary for generational multiplication, and Redemption has clearly accepted the challenge to evangelize and disciple.

Bro. Larry says, "The gospel is for everybody, and I do want our churches to think about being multi-ethnic, but it takes time to reach them, win them, teach them, and train them."



Bro. Cherry and Bro. David Dickson

Latest News From Oklahoma Church Plants



Grace Harbor Oklahoma City

This month, we held our first Summer Club. Summer Club is our version of a

VBS where we invite kids to join us for a few days of intentional teaching and connection with God and one another.

We had 49 children attend and over 20 adults serve that week, and that

was with no promotion and only word of mouth/personal invitations.

Twelve of those 49 were our neighbors from Afghanistan who are living in OKC as refugees from the turmoil in their home country.

The Bible's teaching and our position at Grace Harbor is clear: God, in His sovereignty has brought these neighbors to live where they live, when they live so that they may come to know God, and it is our hope to serve and love them well!

That week, 12 grade school aged kids and about 15 of their family members heard the Gospel presented, though a very strong language barrier exists.

At one point, we even had the kids repeating over and over "Jesus is Lord, God loves me."

As I write this at 1:37am, I am in the waiting room with two of my Afghan

neighbors as one of their family members is being operated on. They have thanked me over and over again for being her with them, and at one point became very apologetic.

As challenging as it is to communicate with them on a basic level(much less finding ways to share the Gospel with them), there are certain times where it seems God is creating a

unique moment for intentional conversation.

Upon their apologies, I was able to locate a translation of the scriptures in their exact language. I found 1 John 3:11-18 and texted it to one of the men. I told him not to be sorry, that this was what Christ followers do.

It was a surreal moment seeing a man who just 10 months ago had likely never met a Christian or heard the Gospel now sitting reading a large chunk of God's Word in a text about Christ's love right in front of me.

Pray for them with me!

New Generations, Norman

Thank you again for the privilege of serving folks in Norman in the name of Jesus on your behalf. I have said for

quite awhile that our focus needs to be on evangelism and discipleship. This has not changed as we continue to share the gospel both in our Sunday services and also, out in the community.

We have had several professions of faith out in the community. Please continue to pray for us in this regard that we will remain faithful.

Luis made several contacts with Hispanic folks out in the city this week and Chris has made many contacts also.

Below is an excerpt from Chris's monthly report:

It was very encouraging to see Nancy back at church the past few Sundays! Nancy attended our church for several years before the pandemic and was a volunteer in the apartment outreach at Chapel Ridge.

She moved out of town to live with her daughter, but now she's eager to rejoin our fellowship thankfully!

Lynn has been kept pretty busy with children ministry at our church. Sue has been bringing two girls to church, Serenity and Arianna, and of course there is little Lainey that belongs to Melissa and Luis.

With those three, Lynn has her hands full, but it's of course a good problem to have as it's always an encouragement to see little ones running around and knowing that they are being brought up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD!

Thank you all again for the spiritual and monetary support. You are making a difference through your ministry at New Generation Baptist Church.

Steve & Lynn Puckett 405 570-8325

Chris Lorenz 405 226-4111

Luis & Melissa Santos 832 513-3505

Oklahoma Students "Making the Grade"

The following three Oklahoma students were recognized for their academic achievement during the Spring of 2022 semester at Central Baptist College, in Conway, AR.

Josie Gelsthorpe, of Sand Springs, J'von Hutchinson, of Edmond, and Landon Hitchcock, of Broken Arrow. All three were mentioned on the Dean's List.

To qualify for the Dean's List, a student must be enrolled for a minimum of 12 semester hours and have earned a grade point average of 3.500 or higher out of a possible 4.000.



"That Reminds Me"

By Jesse Spurlock

"Identifiers"

In most larger cities, businesses come and go. In the 1970's there was a bowling alley in Midwest City named Bowling Green.

About 1979 it went out of business. A medical group purchased the facilities. After some major remodeling it didn't look like a bowling alley, nor was there anything to hint it was ever anything else. It became Midwest Medical Group.

Once, I was in the doctor's waiting room there. The receptionist received a call. She scheduled an appointment and then gave directions to the caller to find the address.

She then said, "We're in the building where the old Bowling Green bowling alley was."

It struck me as strange because that day was in 2005, at least 25 years since the bowling alley had closed. Yet, that name was the identifier for finding this address.

Since I couldn't hear the other end of the conversation, I don't know the response, but the caller didn't ask for further directions. So, apparently they understood how to find it by the "Bowling Green," reference.

I was reminded of the old farm place we bought when we returned from California in 1945. It was called "The Old Glover Place."

I don't know how long Mr. Glover had owned the place, but Mother and Dad sold the place eleven years later in 1956, after my dad became disabled. People were still calling it "The Old Glover Place." To my knowledge it's still known as that.

If you asked about "The Old Spurlock Place" and gave someone directions, they would probably respond, "Oh, you mean "The Old Glover Place."

I've often wondered what Mr. Glover did

that permanently named the place. It was only 80 acres so it couldn't have been the size.

That way of identifying our farm reminds me of what one of my college professors did. He was a Church of Christ preacher. He wasn't supposed to get into their doctrine, but continually did.

I wanted to pass his course, so I didn't respond to any of his comments, until one day when he drew a line on the chalk board which he said represented salvation.

He said when someone was saved, they went above the line, stating the person believed and was baptized. He said, "When he sins, he goes back down here." He then drew a line back down.

He kept illustrating being saved and lost with that chalk line, going up and down across the "saved line," until it looked like

a cork on a fishing line with a feisty perch on it.

I finally had enough and raised my hand and told him, "It seems to me if Christ saved the person in the first place, they would stay above the line, and not bob up and down the way you've got him doing."

He slammed his chalk down and said, "I knew it! I

knew it! You're a Baptist aren't you?" I smiled and said, "Of course! Why would I be anything else?"

I thought it was amazing my simple statement about a saved person staying above the line was all it took for him to recognize me as a Baptist.

That comment identified me as a Baptist in the same way "The Old Glover Place," identified our old farm. It's amazing only Baptist believe "once saved, always saved."

But that's probably the most well established truth in the Bible. (See Ephesians 2:8-9, among others.)

"Church Attendance," cont from pg 1

spend so much time on frivolous things that we ignore what is important. Social media can be used for the cause of Christ, but instead we use it for the cause of gripe.

Sports have also become a major distraction. How many services have been canceled due to the Superbowl? How many services have been missed so our children can play sports or maybe we want to attend a game? We dare not miss band camp, but church camp is not important. We won't spend \$150 for church camp, but \$400 for a school sport or camp is just fine.

We have to be entertained at church, rather than finding how we can serve. There is a reason we call it service times at church and not the next show.

Timing is also important, that is, when we arrive at church. We would never dream of being late to work, school, or the doctor visit. Since we won't get fired, we feel tardiness is ok.

I guess we can sum it all up with the word apathy. We have a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern.

We have become Laodiceans, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot." Revelation 3:15. Read verse 16 and we see God wants to spue us out of his mouth.

It is time to get real with God and remove the distractions.

"Rat Trap," continued from pg 3

"Life has become a literal rat race for so many today. The world screams so much louder than the still quite voice of the Holy Spirit. Its clamor has captured our attention and we have become immersed in all that is temporal and material."

Pastor Martin Niemoller who survived a Nazi concentration camp shared the tragic lesson he learned when he said, "When they arrested the Communists, I kept silent. I was not a Communist.

When they took away the trade unionists, I did not protest. I was not a trade unionist. When it was my turn, there was no one left to protest."

While insensitivity to the trials of others has reached a national level, the seeds of it are much closer to home, in our local churches.

People just don't' care about much anymore unless it affects their comfort zone. Just give me my recliner, remote, a bag of popcorn and leave me alone!

Too many have become 'at ease in Zion" like those in Amos 6:1. They are prideful and secure, vainly confident in themselves.

By being careless of the troubles of others not only are they abusing their privileges as a Christian, but they are greatly offending the Lord who gave them those very costly privileges.

Satan has lulled us into a false confidence mentioned in Psalm 10:6, "I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity."

The second greatest commandment is grossly ignored and broken today. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these". Mark 12:31

Love of others is not just a

commandment, it is a sign that we are truly saved!

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. 1 John 3:14

The key here is the Lord in control of your life? All love comes from God. How much we love and care for others is a direct result of how much we allow Him to live thru us.

And since love is an action not a gushy feeling, our caring for others will show in what we say and do.

As the Lord lives in us, we will see things through His eyes. He will make us sensitive to the heartaches and needs of others. These are individuals He died for and cares for very deeply. So much so that He tells us that when we care for them we are caring for Him.

Matthew 25:34-45

The heart of Christ's ministry is love and concern for others. He comforts us that we might comfort others.

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

2 Corinthians 1:4

He gives to us that we might give to others. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.

For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

Luke 6:38

He saved us that we might lead others to that same eternal gift. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

Matthew 28:19-20a

People have been trying to escape their responsibility to others, ever since Cain asked the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God answers, "YES!"

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Philippians 2:4

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous 1 Peter 3:8

This doesn't mean empty cliché's, tired expressions, hollow promises of prayer or phony words of sympathy.

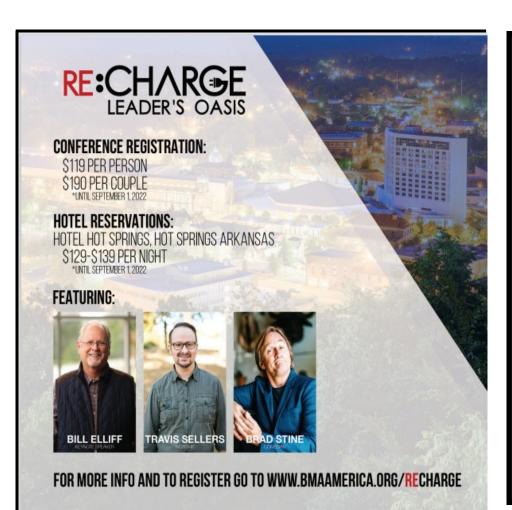
You see, long ago there was a rat trap in your house. It was your problem alone, created by another's disobedience and you were helpless to resolve it.

Amazingly, mercifully, someone cared for you, left a royal position with all its comfort, and glory, to suffer and pay the price to solve your problem. If our trials are His trials, shouldn't the trials of others be ours also?

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. Romans 15:1-3



UPCOMING EVENTS

Central District Meeting

September 13 Grace Harbor

Re:Charge Leader's Conference

September 27-29 Hot Springs, AR See pg 2

BMA of OK Annual Meeting

October 7-8 Unity, Wayne

