

*The Journal of  
Florida Baptist  
Heritage*  
Volume 22, 2020



# ***THE JOURNAL OF FLORIDA BAPTIST HERITAGE***

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## PREFACE

### Florida Baptists' Evangelism Legacy

The heartbeat of Florida Southern Baptists is their commitment and active involvement in fulfilling the Biblical mandate to share the claims of Jesus Christ to a spiritually lost world. This commitment towards evangelism is primarily expressed through the preaching ministry and personal soul winning. Evangelism is a word derived from the Greek words “eu,” meaning “well” or “good” and the word “aggelos,” meaning “messenger,” according to the *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Vol I*. Applying this definition of evangelism into an English language understanding means a Christian allows the Holy Spirit to speak through him or her to an unbeliever about the gospel message. The responsibility of a messenger of God – anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as the Saviour – is to take the good news of the truth in Christ to unbelievers, announcing the gospel, publishing good tidings, going "everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

Florida Baptists' fundamental commitment to be about the task of evangelism has been primarily expressed through the preaching ministry, personal soul winning, church starting and ministry actions that provide the opportunity to share Jesus Christ with others. This evangelism commitment motivated itinerant missionary preachers to enter the Florida Territory in the early 1800s to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to establish His church in settlements and villages across the state. Over two hundred years later, Florida Baptists continue in this

legacy commitment to the task of evangelism – preaching and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Florida Baptists’ Legacy of Evangelism is the subject of this year’s 2020 issue of the *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*. In the pages that follow the nature, purpose, and Biblical foundation for evangelism are presented. Additionally, selected historic events and a few of the many people that have contributed to and shaped the legacy of evangelism in Florida are featured.

## The 2020 Baptist Heritage Award



**The Florida Baptist Historical Society is pleased to announce that the 2020 recipient of the Baptist Heritage Award is L. David Cunningham of Jacksonville, Florida.**

The Society's Board of Directors determined earlier this year, as they considered potential candidates to be the 2020 Baptist Heritage Award recipient, there was one noteworthy individual who has contributed to the preservation of a unique aspect of Florida Baptist history – the Sunday school. L. David Cunningham of Jacksonville, Florida, researched, wrote and published a definitive history of the development of the Sunday school movement in Florida in a book titled, *A History of Florida Baptist's Sunday Schools*. Published in 2004, this book detailed the beginning of Sunday schools in Florida churches as early as 1843, and recounts the numeric growth of the movement, the churches that were the pacesetters in evangelism through the Sunday school, and the significant laity and pastoral leaders who contributed to the expansion and enhancement of Sunday school work up through the twentieth century.

Continuing his historical research on the Sunday school movement, Mr. Cunningham is nearing completion of his second book that highlights a group of significant Baptist Sunday school teachers across the United States. Tentatively titled, *Uncommon*

*Sunday School Teachers*, the book profiles thirteen well-known business and political leaders – men and women – who have faithfully taught Sunday school for decades in their respective church.

Prior to his retirement in 2001, Mr. Cunningham served as the director of the Sunday school department of the Florida Baptist Convention since 1984. Known to many church leaders as “Mr. Sunday School,” during his 17 years of program promotion leadership, David Cunningham led Florida Baptist church leaders to increase their overall Sunday school enrollment by over 100,000 persons. Under Mr. Cunningham’s leadership, Florida Baptist churches led the Southern Baptist Convention earning Sunday School Leadership Training awards and diplomas for 13 of his 17 years of leadership.

A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, David Cunningham accepted Christ and was baptized at age seven. He subsequently responded to the call of God by being ordained in 1973 by the Plymouth Park Baptist Church, Irving, Texas. Mr. Cunningham attended and graduated from the Ouachita Baptist University with a B.A. degree (1959); and later attended and earned the Master of Religious Education degree in 1965 from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Prior to joining the state convention staff in 1984, Mr. Cunningham served in the Christian education ministry at various places between 1962 and 1973 before being called as the assistant pastor/minister of education at the First Baptist Church, Orlando,

Florida, (1973 – 1984), to serve alongside Pastor Jim Henry. From Orlando, Mr. Cunningham was invited to lead the Sunday school program staff of the Florida Baptist Convention.

The following individuals are Heritage Award recipients:

- 1997 – Earl Joiner
- 1998 – Adolph Bedsole
- 1999 – Joe Bamberg
- 2000 – Ruth Bagwell
- 2001 – John Hillhouse
- 2002 – Martha Trotter
- 2003 – Wiley Richards
- 2004 – E. B. Browning, Sr.
- 2005 – E. H. Rennolds, Sr.
- 2006 – Harry C. Garwood
- 2007 – Pope Duncan
- 2008 – John L. Rosser
- 2009 – Doak Campbell
- 2010 – Judith Jolly
- 2011 – Jack Dalton
- 2012 – James C. Bryant
- 2013 – David Elder
- 2014 – Mark Rathel
- 2015 – No recipient
- 2016 – David Lema and Roger Richards
- 2017 – Jerry M. Windsor
- 2018 – Sid Smith
- 2019 – Thomas A. Kinchen

## **Our Mission:**

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## **Serving Churches**

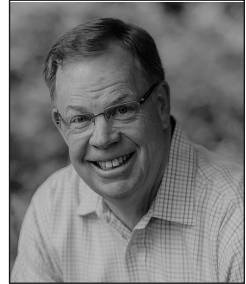
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In fulfilment of our Mission to research, preserve and promote the Legacy of Florida Baptists, the Society assists leadership of Florida Baptist churches and associations in a variety of ways:

- ◆ the research of local church and association histories;
- ◆ the research of pastoral leader biography;
- ◆ provide resources for publishing a history; and
- ◆ encourage and assist churches and associations to celebrate their respective heritage and anniversaries.

# The Message of Evangelism

*by Ted H. Traylor, DMin  
Pastor, Olive Baptist Church,  
Pensacola, Florida*



As a young man who had answered God's call to ministry in 1971, I was excited to share the Gospel. Deacon Claude Wheeler stepped into my life. Each Monday evening we met at the church to make visits in the community. Deacon Wheeler did most of the talking in the early weeks. I just listened. Then he told me it was my turn. We had no manual, Gospel tract or outline. We used a New Testament with four verses in Romans underlined. I was mostly passionate for people, was confident in the Bible and a fearful young desire in my soul. I was being discipled and I didn't even know it. I am grateful to this day for a deacon in a country church who sought to place a fire in my bones to win people to Jesus.

Since that early training, I have been involved in various courses of evangelism training. We had a WIN school. Then there was the Four Spiritual Laws training. Evangelism Explosion was a method I also was taught. Southern Baptists used FAITH training and I was a part of that emphasis. A current popular tool is Three Circles. The issue in sharing Jesus is not the tool we use, but the obedience to God's command to go into all the world.





## Defining Evangelism

When we define evangelism, the first place we look is the New Testament. The verb “evangelize” comes from the Greek *evangelizo*. The prefix “ev” means *good*. You can think of English words using the same prefix. Eulogy, a good word spoken of someone at their funeral, is an example. Euphoria is a good feeling. In evangelism, the “ev” is good, and combined with “angela” which means *messenger*. So evangelism is good message or good news. This is often translated *preaching the good news*. This is unfortunate, as the tendency has been to make evangelism a preaching pulpit function, while evangelistic preaching is vital, it is not the primary means of communicating the function of every saved individual.

Our friends at Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) have long used this definition of evangelism: “Presenting Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the rest to God. Other popular definitions: “One beggar showing another beggar where to find the bread.”<sup>1</sup>

Lewis Drummond taught evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He gave a powerful definition of evangelism:

“A concerted effort in the power of the Holy Spirit to confront unbelievers with the truth about Jesus Christ and the claims of our Lord with a view to leading unbelievers to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and, thus, into fellowship of His church so they may grow in the Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

Christianity is founded on the conviction the God of creation has revealed Himself to mankind. God is our creator. He made man in His own image. However, man sinned and rebelled against His creator. The Lord of mercy became flesh and while we were sinners God came to redeem us. God became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus on the cross died an atoning death as man’s substitute. He died in our place and paid the sin debt.

God will be entirely just in His judgment and no one will be able to complain. God shows no partiality (Romans 2:11). Every person will stand to give an account. And the unredeemed will be cast away into darkness.

The redeemed have been commissioned to carry the good news of salvation to every person. It is only good news if it reaches mankind.

Since the days that Jesus walked the earth, died on the cross, and was raised from the garden tomb, the culture of every generation has sought to thwart the advancement of the gospel. The culture you live in today stands against the gospel. The culture our parents lived in sought to thwart the advancement of the gospel. And when all of us are dead and gone, the generation coming after us will live in a culture that will try to stop the advancement of the gospel. The Apostle Paul knew that.

### **Paul Lived and Preached the Gospel**

Nero sat on the throne and judged Paul, but he couldn't stop the gospel. Paul was in jail, but jail couldn't stop the gospel. Paul wrote to young Timothy in his second letter to Timothy, in the second chapter and the ninth verse, that the word of God is imprisoned. You can put the preacher in jail, but you can't put the gospel in jail. The gospel will go and when the gospel is proclaimed, it will do what God intends for it to do in any culture on any continent in any climate. You can't stop the gospel.

When you're on the gospel's side you're on the winning side of the culture. Paul, facing Nero, bound by a chain to a Roman Praetorian Guard had walked through the book of Acts. He came finally to Rome after three missionary trips and Luke ends Acts with these two verses. The Bible says: "And he [that is

Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness.” (Acts 28:30-31)

He was preaching and teaching with all openness. See the last word of the book of Acts – Unhindered. It is the word hinder with an “a” in the Greek in front of it. It’s like the word moral. Then we say amoral. It means no morals. This is that same word, hindered. “A,” it is unhindered. You can not hinder. You can not prevent the gospel.

Now get the picture. The preacher is in jail unhindered. Nero sat not very far from this rented place, getting ready to bring judgment against Paul and yet the gospel is unhindered. I don’t care what your government or your culture says to you. The gospel is only hindered when we cease to believe God enough to share it. It’s like a lion. Just take the rope off his neck and let him go. Leo the lion will take care of himself. He will go unhindered in the culture. That is what we find in Paul’s jail.

**[Paul] was preaching  
and teaching with all  
openness**

Think with me about advancing the gospel. Now this is an unusual outline. I’m going to give you three main points and underneath those points I’m going to give you six principles of gospel advancement that you, every one of you that are saved can be a part of in advancing the gospel. We’re going to look at Paul in

these two verses and we're going to see his money, his methods, and his message. Those are found right there in this text. Underneath those we're going to find six clear principles of gospel advancement.

### **Principle One: Faithful stewardship advances the gospel**

First of all, we start with Paul and his money. Look at it right there in verse 30. And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters. Now when you go back over to verse 23, they had put him into lodging. He has evidently moved from lodging to his own rented quarters. Paul is in jail but he had been given favor by the Roman government because he is a Roman citizen and they've allowed him to rent a place for them to incarcerate him. Have you ever heard of such? When you are under house arrest, they will sometimes let you live in your own house today and they'll put a bracelet on your ankle and they know if you go outside or come in. They know everywhere you go but you're living in your own house under house arrest. That's much like Paul was here though he didn't have a bracelet on his ankle. He had a bracelet on his arm and every eight hours it was taken off by one of the Praetorian Guards and hooked to another and in that place where Paul lived and paid his own way, the gospel was advanced.

Baptists have always – more than any other evangelical crew – stood in the United States of America for the separation of church and state. What we stand for is that we do not want the government in our business. It does not mean that we do not get in

the government's business. There is a wall there to keep Uncle Sam out of the Lord's church, but God never intended for the Lord's church not to have a prophetic word to Uncle Sam. You mark this down. If the government pays for the quarters, it will control the message. But when you pay your own way and rent your own quarters, the preacher is not for sale. The Apostle Paul, how in the world did a man in jail rent his own quarters? That's Paul and his money.

Some people believe that the Apostle Paul came to jail having been a pretty wealthy man, but even a wealthy man's money runs out after a while. Paul was the greatest fundraiser the Christian church has ever known. He not only sent help to other churches; you'll find especially the church at Philippi sending offerings to the Apostle Paul. He was a great promoter of the faith, a sharer of the needs of the kingdom, and people brought those offerings to him.

Any vision must be paid for. Faithful stewardship advances the gospel. You must be a giver if you're going to be like Jesus. If you're a member, you should be a tither. You ought to give a tenth to begin. If you make \$100 you ought to give God a \$10 bill. If you make a thousand, you ought to give Him \$100. If you make \$10,000, you can do the math. As God blesses you, you ought to give. That's where you begin. That's not where you stop. Over and above that you give an offering. In Southern Baptist life we cooperate together in a Gospel endeavor. Churches give through the Cooperative Program – a powerful Gospel tool as we fund a Gospel mission.

## **Principle Two: Kingdom preaching advances the gospel**

In verse 31, Paul was preaching the kingdom of God. Have you ever run a reference chart all the way through scripture on the kingdom of God? You'll find Jesus using that phrase again and again and again and again. Luke loved it. Luke probably used it as much as anybody: The kingdom of God.

There are two or three things about the kingdom of God you'll find all through scripture. There are many other things as well, but the principle is that you must enter the kingdom. Jesus always said a man's going to enter the kingdom or he can't enter the kingdom. You've got to go in. When you preach the kingdom you are preaching to everybody that's outside of Jesus who needs to come in. Anybody who's reading this today that's never come inside of the kingdom – come into Jesus Christ – the Bible says that you are spiritually lost. You're on the outside. You're on the road to hell. You're already being condemned. People come in church from time to time and say, "Man, I walked out of there and I felt condemned." Friend, you don't have to feel condemned. You're condemned already. The Bible teaches that. Come in to the kingdom. You've got to come in.

**Paul was  
preaching the  
kingdom of God**

The kingdom of God is not a monarchy. It's not a democracy. It's a theocracy. Jesus is the head. He's at the top. You're not. I'm not. We're not. He is and

we bow before. Just one king and His name is Jesus. Paul was in that rented quarters paying his own way taking up offerings and sending them out, preaching the kingdom of God.

I want to ask you today. Have you ever entered the kingdom? Are you a preacher of the kingdom? Do you share the kingdom? Oh Lord, it's going to be a sad day for some of you. You're going to get to heaven and you're not taking anybody with you. Spurgeon says you're going to get a crown but it won't have any jewels in it and he said, "You will be an embarrassed saint when you get there wearing a crown with no jewels." Friend, you ought to be talking to somebody. If you're in the kingdom you ought to be inviting those on the outside of the kingdom inside the kingdom.

Your job, if you're in the kingdom, you are assigned a preaching post. Mine's at Olive. Some of yours are in a school, in a business, in a truck. You will advance the gospel as you peach the kingdom. Kingdom preaching advances the gospel.

### **Principle Three: Inspired writing advances the gospel**

Now you don't find that laid out in this text but when you begin to read the epistles, we know that while Paul was in his own rented quarters, he wrote four letters. He wrote the books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. From his desk in his rented quarters he sent out those letters. We read them even today. But when Paul sent the one to Ephesus it was as encouragement. He sent to



Colossae encouragement. He sent to Philippi encouragement. I'll come back to this one. He sent to Philemon a very personal letter that we'll talk about in the conclusion of this narrative.

Are you an inspired writer? You know how God will use you in the kingdom? With a pen. You ought to handwrite notes to lost people and saved people and you ought to put specific stuff in there of how you're praying, blessing, and encouraging them. I got one of the most blessed notes from a young man in this church this week. He put specific things in that handwritten note. I've got it on my desk. I keep a lot of handwritten notes and put them in a file I've got, but this one I've kept on my desk. Why? Because every day I read it, it encourages me. Paul was a writer. You ought to be a writer as an encourager.

I recently sent several text messages. In my quiet time – my prayer time – I send texts. Craig White is the new pastor at Pisgah Baptist Church. He recently preached his first sermon at my home church. He'll preach to about a hundred people. I sent him a text. I said, "Son, I'm praying for you. My momma and daddy will be there. He's a former police officer." I told him, "Carry your gun." I went on to say, "You're legal. You may need it when you crawl up in that bunch, I'm just telling you." Man, I prayed for him.

Some of you ought to write a book. Outside of the Bible, do you know the most read Christian book in the history of the church? *The Pilgrim's Progress*. If you've never read it, you ought to read it because this

generation alive today has not read it like the generations gone before. Paul Bunyan takes us so many places. Oh great books encourage us.

### **Principle Four: Teaching to develop disciples**

How do you advance the kingdom? You advance the kingdom through faithful stewardship. You advance the kingdom through kingdom preaching. You advance the gospel through inspired writing. And the developing of disciples advances the gospel. Look at it right there in the text. Paul was preaching the kingdom of God and then he was teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the development of discipleship. Paul's in jail. People are coming by. He's preaching the gospel, but he's also teaching the Christ life. It is our job to preach and teach the Christ life.

Teach it until you understand the Christ life, until you understand Galatians 2:20, until you understand Romans chapter 12:2. I want you to look at that Romans 12 verse where Paul said: *"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."* Now look at verse number 2. *"And do not be conformed to this world [When you first get saved you're conformed to this world], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* I want you to look at the word "conformed." You are either conformed to Jesus or conformed to this world. Many people get saved and they've never

moved to transformation by the power of the Holy Ghost within them because they've never been discipled and taught – death to self and alive to Christ.

When you get saved, you've got to die to yourself and live to Him. Some of us are just putting on a show. That's what the devil does in II Corinthians chapter 11. The false apostle is like the devil who was an angel of light. He's lost in his heart but he's acting like he's a Christian. We've got folks that are "saved" but are acting like the world because they've never been transformed. Jesus went through transformation on the Mount of Transfiguration and that which was within him got on the outside. What you've got to do is be discipled and help others understand how the Jesus that's in you has got to get on the outside of you and live through you. It's called Bible transformation through developing disciples. Don't be conformed to this world. Be transformed. Paul is teaching this to these folks.

### **Principle Five: Nurturing spiritual friendships**

Spiritual friendships advance the gospel. Friend, you ought to have deep spiritual friends because with those friends you will advance the gospel. Who came to see Paul? We can find all of these in scripture somewhere that had come by while Paul was there. Luke and Aristarchus came. Also Tychicus, he's the one who carried the letter to the church at Ephesus. Then there was Timothy. He stayed in Rome part of the time. Paul later wrote I Timothy once he got out of jail after two years because Nero found him not

guilty and set him free. Once Paul got out, he did some more Gospel work. Then he was charged with insurrection and was brought back to jail where he wrote to Timothy the second time. Timothy was there with him. Others were there. Epaphroditus, he's the one who brought the offerings from Philippi. Mark, you remember Mark? Paul got hacked off at Mark and ran him off. But Mark came back and they were reconciled. Do you have any friendships you need to renew? Some folks that let you down? Christian brothers? Don't go to glory with that dangling. Mark hung out in rented quarters. Justus was there and also Demas.

The greatest Christian I think Paul ever knew was Epaphras. He had more glowing things to say about Epaphras. He was one of the greatest gospel men found anywhere in scripture. He didn't write any letters but you find Paul naming him E P A P H R A S. You don't even know who he is. Nobody knows him but he's one of the greats. He's one of Paul's closest confidants. You know how you advance the gospel? You have spiritual friendships and you never give up on them.

Let me tell you, you've got the culture that's going to come against you but the culture cannot stop the gospel. That's why you ought to be in a group. You ought to join a church. You ought to have spiritual friendships. Amen. Paul had them. They just came by. Can't you just see them dropping by the jailhouse all the time? In and out. In and out. In and out. He's chained up to that old guard and he's sharing the

gospel. The Praetorian Guard's getting saved.  
Hallelujah. Spiritual friendships advance the gospel.

### **Principle Six: Being Involved in personal evangelism**

Finally, principle number six is that personal evangelism advances the gospel. Paul is sitting there minding his own business. He's in a jail. I don't know, he probably had a chair or a table. He had to have a table to write on. Somebody brought him writing instruments. There's a knock at the door. A little slave boy walks in. The likely conversation between Paul [P] and Onesimus [O] that ensued:

P: "Yes, sir?"

O: "I hear that there's a man here that can help me."

P: "Maybe. My name's Paul. How can I help you?"

What's your name, son?"

O: "My name's Onesimus."

P: "Come here. Tell me about you."

O: "Well, I'm a slave but I ran off."

P: "You ran off?"

O: "Yeah, they sent me on an errand I just didn't go back. I was tired of slave life."

P: "How's it going for you now?"

O: "I'm about to starve to death."

P: "Well how can I help you, son?"

O: "Well I hear that you're encouraging people and giving – it's on the street out here, Mr. Paul. People say if you want help you come here."

P: "Yeah. Onesimus, have you ever heard of Jesus?"

O: "I did. I heard that they killed Him. Paul, I've been told that some people believe that he didn't stay dead."

P: "Yeah, that's right. He's alive."

O: "How do you know?"

P: "Well, I met Him. I was walking down the road and He appeared. He changed my life."

O: "Yeah, he really changed your life. You're in jail!"

Paul led young Onesimus to salvation, one on one. The greatest days of my life are days when I get to lead somebody to Christ one on one. One Friday we had a golf tournament. We were at Stonebrook and a cart came up with an older man in it. "Brother Ted." I looked over. I said, "John. How are you doing, John?" John said, "Oh I just heard ya'll were playing. I just rode over here to see you." I said, "Yes, sir. Tell me about that." He said, "It was 25 years ago this week, preacher. Twenty-five years ago this week you came to my house." I said, "I won't ever forget it." He said, "I just came over here to thank you for coming to my house 25 years ago." He said, "You remember, preacher, what happened?" I said, "Oh yeah. I shared the gospel." He said, "I believed on Jesus. I got saved and it's still working." John Johnson got saved that day. His sweet wife got sick and died. So John doesn't get out much.

I'll never forget that day. We prayed and he got up and went straight to the kitchen. I said, "John, what are you doing?" He said, "We're going in here and pouring this liquor out." He got under the cabinet, removed all his liquor, and poured it down the drain. I don't know how many dollars' worth. He said, "We're pouring it all out right now." He said, "Jesus changed my life. It's over." He told me the other day,

“I’m telling you, pastor. I’m as saved today as I was 25 years ago.” He said, “Nothing has changed.” When I get to heaven and I put my crown on – Amen. I didn’t have nothing to do with that. That’s just God you know but you’ve got to go. You’ve got to put the key in the car. You’ve got to go.

So Paul led Onesimus to Christ. He said, “Now Onesimus, you’ve got something you’ve got to do.” “What?” “You’ve got to go back to your master.” “Wow, what?”

Yeah, that’s what the little one-page book of Philemon is all about. Philemon was his master and Paul wrote Philemon. How do you know he led? Because in Philemon chapter 1 and verse number 10 where Paul said to Philemon, “I appeal to you for my child Onesimus whom I have begotten in my imprisonment.” Paul didn’t have an affair and have a child. Begotten means born again, in jail. “This is my child. He’s been saved. Hallelujah!” Onesimus goes back to walk in obedience. Now that slave card doesn’t play in our culture. People get up and say, “Well Paul ought to . . .” That was the culture he lived in. He sent Onesimus back. Some of you need to stop being so rebellious in your spirit and get submissive to the situation you’re in and God may just bring deliverance in your soul.

We’re here not for our own good and our own glory, we’re here for His good and His glory and sometimes in our own submission God gets glory and raises up a miracle unto His name. You never know who’s sitting

in the room. Weeks ago I stood in the church foyer and a tall, big, handsome man walked right up to me and shook my hand. He said, "Pastor, I really enjoyed church today." He said, "Today is the first Sunday I've been out of prison in 25 years." He explained, "I'm living in a halfway house just down the road down here. They told me if I came here it might be a good place." And then he said, "I found the Lord in prison and I sure am glad to come by and hear the gospel today."

### **Concluding Observations**

The only thing that hinders the gospel in our churches is our unbelief. When you will not believe God and when you will not act on what God's told you to do, you're walking in unbelief and therefore you hinder the gospel. We dare not be a church that hinders the gospel. Paul preached with all openness unhindered. I don't know what's coming but I'm telling you, we must be advancing.

At the time of this writing news came of the death of Ravi Zacharias. He was one of the leading Christian apologists of our time. Watching his funeral moved my soul. Ravi often reminded us behind every question is a questioner. His point, always remember, the Gospel is about people. And we must love people to do the work of evangelism. In the closing hours on his death bed, Ravi's family reported his last admonition to them. He said, "Never quit." Those are great last words for all of us when we come to do evangelism. **Never quit!**



## ENDNOTES

1 Scott Dawson, ed. *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others for Christ*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 119.

2 Lewis Drummond, *The Word of the Cross*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), np.

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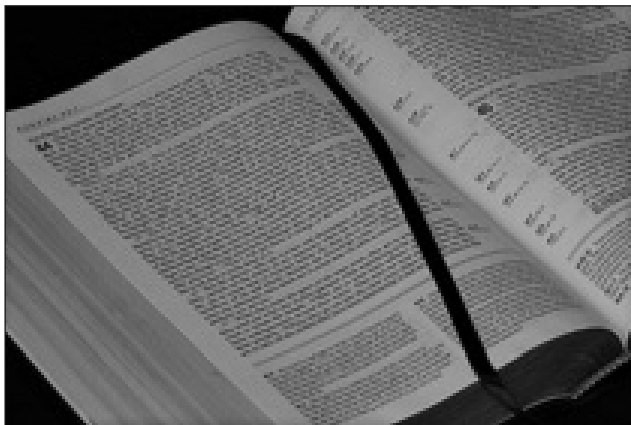
# The Messengers of Evangelism: The Biblical Legacy

*by Joel Breidenbaugh, PhD  
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I like to entertain guests and have them over to our home. Part of that interest comes from being a pastor and wanting to be hospitable. The other part comes from my mother who is the definition of hospitality.

Several years ago we hosted several young families from our church and let the kids swim in our large pool. There were some fifty or sixty people who attended. We were eating and talking and having good, Christian fellowship. I had asked the parents earlier if their young children were good swimmers. If they were not, they had floaties or life jackets. All the other kids, the parents assured me, were good swimmers and would be fine. Then it happened. A 3-year-old boy stepped off the bottom step and got in over his head. He could not swim and began to drift a few feet away from the steps. All the adults were laughing and enjoying themselves. The kids were playing and screaming and lost in their world of laughter and childhood. Tragedy was about to strike. [Continue reading this article to the end for the rest of the story.]



Every time I hear a drowning story, I cannot help but think about a person lost at sea about to go under for the third and final time. Unless someone is present to throw a lifeline—a lifesaver—to the person, that person will never be rescued.

Such a rescue is a common analogy for evangelism. All people are lost in their sins and doomed for eternal destruction unless they hear the message of the good news of Jesus and receive that lifeline through faith.

While much could be said about our need to be involved in evangelism, this article deals with the messengers of evangelism: the biblical legacy. To present a faithful picture of this legacy, it is necessary to define evangelism biblically and see how God's people throughout Scripture presented the good news of Jesus. That is to say, before looking at the biblical *messengers* of evangelism, it is imperative to understand the biblical *message* of evangelism.

## **Biblical Message of Evangelism**

When considering the topic of evangelism, it is surprising how many authors assume their readers know what it is. While books on evangelism abound, fewer seem to provide a basic definition of evangelism. They want to teach readers about ways to share their faith but they either say little about what the Christian faith is<sup>1</sup> or they spend 300+ pages covering it in great detail without a simple overview.<sup>2</sup>

When we discuss evangelism, we should realize the root “evangel” means “gospel.” So “evangelism” is “gospel-ism” or “sharing the gospel.” Thus, a basic definition of evangelism is when a Christian allows the Holy Spirit to speak through him to an unbeliever about the gospel message. The gospel message includes the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the sinner’s only hope found in the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the call for the unbeliever to repent of his sins and trust in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

One could make a biblical case for including other matters like forgiveness, grace, mercy, love, peace, eternal life, reconciliation, and more and I do not intend to downplay any of those precious elements of the gospel. I believe those matters are tucked inside that basic definition, as I will show in this narrative. But those elements I include are the minimum aspects of the gospel message and when we fail to include those things, we need to ask ourselves if we have truly covered the gospel.

## **Basic Elements of the Gospel**

With this basic definition of evangelism in place, permit me to support this definition biblically to help you see the biblical message promoted by the biblical messengers of evangelism.

### God is the Creator and He is supreme in holiness

The Scripture begins with God (Genesis 1:1) and the opening pages identify Him as the Creator (Genesis 1-2). Moreover, God's chief, personal attribute is His holiness (Exodus 3:5). God displays love, grace, mercy, justice, goodness and more but never do we find Scripture to teach God is "love, love, love" or "grace, grace, grace," or "mercy, mercy, mercy." But the Lord God is "holy, holy, holy" (cf. Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). The Hebrew language communicated the superlative by repeating a word. We say "greatest" as a superlative, but Hebrew might say, "holy, holy" as a superlative. The fact that God's holiness is stated three times is a super-superlative! He is the Most Holiest God, a redundancy in English but a glorious truth in the Bible!

When we start with the holiness of God, the way Scripture does, we catch a glimpse of Him in His glory and also recognize just how dreadful our sin is (see Isaiah 6:3-5 for this same order of God's holiness first and then man's sinfulness).

### Man is sinful and separated from God

In contrast to the holiness of God throughout the Bible, sin abounds. From its deceptive entrance into the world in Paradise in Genesis 3 until its destructive

exit from heaven in punishment in Revelation 20, sin litters the pages of Scripture and the lives of God's creation. Man's sin affects him exponentially more with each passing generation. Every aspect of man's life has been negatively ruined by sin (see Genesis 6:5). No matter how many self-help experts enter the world, society has not improved but continues to implode! How great is our sin! No wonder the only thing sin earns us is death (cf. Romans 6:23). The chasm between a holy God and sinful man is so great no amount of good works could ever come close to spanning it.

Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the only hope for salvation  
In response to our sin problem, God interwove His grace, mercy, and love toward us "in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8; cf. also Ephesians 2:4-7).<sup>4</sup>

Only Christ, the sinless Son of God who took on flesh, could be our substitute and die in our place. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For our sake [God]

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made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). As noted below, Christ's death was for our sins "in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). He took the punishment of God's wrath that we deserved. Furthermore, Christ rose from the dead to prove He is Lord of all (see Acts 2:31-32, 36) and "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by

which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). As the God-Man who is the once-crucified-yet-risen Lord, Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man (see 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:27). As such, Jesus is the only way to the Father in heaven (John 14:6).

### Two-fold response: repentance and faith

Although the work of salvation was completed 2,000 years ago when Jesus gave His life and rose from the dead (cf. John 19:30), the gift of salvation – including the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:16-17; Acts 2:38), forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7), peace and reconciliation with God (cf. Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20) and eternal life (cf. John 3:16; 1 John 5:13) – is not automatic. Until the gospel message is received, the unbeliever will not benefit from it.

So how does an unbeliever receive the gospel? It’s a two-fold response of repentance and faith.

Unbelievers must repent from their sins, turning from their way of life and turning to God (see Acts 2:38; 3:19; Romans 2:4). On the one hand, repentance is necessary for salvation. On the other hand, so is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. One cannot work for his salvation (see Ephesians 2:8-9) but faith in Christ, and faith alone, is what pleases God (cf. Hebrews 11:6).

Thus, there is no such thing as an easy-believism for someone to go to heaven. Too many preachers emphasize Jesus as “Savior” without stressing He is also “Lord.” It’s eye-opening to note the New

Testament references Jesus as “Savior” less than 10 times but labels Him as “Lord” more than 200 times! To be saved requires a repentant faith or a believing repentance. In other words, salvation is a life of surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Glimpses of the Gospel from the Old Testament Prophets**

Now that I have provided a biblical understanding of the message of evangelism, let us see the numerous examples of the messengers of evangelism throughout the Bible. Let us begin with the Old Testament prophets.<sup>5</sup>

### Moses

Moments after sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden, God promised through the writings of Moses<sup>6</sup> to send the Seed of woman to bruise the head of the serpent even though the serpent would bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15). Scholars are correct in labeling this the protoevangelium – the first announcement of the good news. The pierced foot of Jesus Christ would ultimately deliver the deathblow to the serpent, Satan.

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Because of Israel’s rebellion against the Lord, Moses regularly highlighted God’s holiness (cf. Genesis 3:22-



24; Exodus 3:5; Leviticus 11:44-45). Moses also called the people to repent (cf. Deuteronomy 9:12) and remain loyal to the Lord (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Not only did Moses underscore these gospel elements, but he also pointed Israel to hope in the future Messiah. Moses wrote, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between His feet” (Genesis 49:10). Most scholars see this prophecy as the future reign of Jesus, the Lion from the tribe of Judah (cf. Revelation 5:5).

In his preaching ministry, Moses predicted, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to Him you shall listen.... And I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And whoever will not listen to My words that He shall speak in My name, I Myself will require of him” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19). The Apostle Peter declared this prophecy’s fulfillment in Jesus the Christ (see Acts 3:13-23). Moses preached the gospel elements of divine holiness, man’s sinfulness, God’s provision of the future Prophet-King, and the necessity of repentance and trust in the Lord. These foundational teachings in the Torah reoccur throughout the prophets.

### Pre-Monarchy Prophets

After Moses’ death, Joshua followed in his footsteps, declaring his allegiance to Yahweh and calling Israel to decide for themselves (cf. Joshua 24:14-15). Samuel regularly told Israel to turn from their sins and depend on Yahweh to deliver and help them (cf. 1

Samuel 7:3-4, 12). While these men did not proclaim a complete gospel, they delivered glimpses of the gospel.

### Monarchy Prophets

After God established David as king to rule over Israel, He spoke through the prophet Nathan words of hope found in David's Descendant as part of the Davidic covenant. The future King would come from David's offspring and His throne would be established forever (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-16).

David understood the severity of sin, for he wrote of mankind, "They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3). David sinned by

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committing adultery with Bathsheba, he cried out to God in repentance, pleading for His mercy (cf. Psalm 51).

The Lord occasionally gave King David prophetic words, too. David and the other psalmists spoke of the Messiah's sovereign rule (Psalms 2; 8; 110), His extreme suffering (Psalm 22), the Messiah's resurrection (Psalm 16:8-11; cf. Acts 2:25-28), His eternal priesthood (Psalm 110:4) and more. David knew the ultimate hope for sinners would only come from a future Son of David.

### Pre-Exilic Prophets

When thinking about the Writing Prophets and their messages, it is important to note every single one of them mixes words of warning and judgment with a message of hope and mercy. Found within those writings are either implicit or explicit calls to repentance and faith in the Lord. The prophets before Judah's exile who urged people to repent include Obadiah (12-14), Joel (2:12-13), Amos (4:6, 8-9, 11), and Jonah (3:4-10). These prophetic messages also communicated God's mercy and love, as seen in Hosea's redemption of his adulteress wife (3:1-2). Furthermore, Micah's call to display the fruits of repentance, such as justice, lovingkindness, and humility (6:8), and Isaiah's call to reason with God (1:18) are common responses to God's work of grace and love. Zephaniah urged Israel to "seek refuge in the name of the LORD" (3:12).

Quite possibly the most important teaching found from the pre-exilic prophets comes from the pen of Habakkuk when he wrote, "The righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4). The significance of this verse appears at the crux of the Apostle Paul's explanation of the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; cf. Hebrews 10:38).

### Isaiah

Because of the breadth and depth of the ministries of Isaiah (ca. 739-700 BC) and Jeremiah (ca. 627-580 BC), they deserve a bit more attention. Isaiah's call to salvation and mission service (6:1-8) is common in much missiological preaching today. He also offers

several specific prophecies about the coming of Christ into the world, including being born of a virgin (7:14), ruling an eternal kingdom (9:6-7), and descending from David/Jesse as the Spirit-empowered sovereign (11:1-5). Isaiah offers the Suffering Servant song as the most Christ-centered text in the entire Old Testament (see Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Isaiah also speaks of the Anointed One's gospel preaching, general ministry, and miracles (61:1-2). Any honest reading of Isaiah uncovers strong hints of gospel truth.

### Jeremiah

Few prophets poured their heart and soul into ministry as much as Jeremiah. Known as "the Weeping Prophet" because of God's coming judgment on Jerusalem, he, too, wanted to see the people repent. God gave Jeremiah insight into the future so that he could speak confidently of the righteous, Davidic Branch reigning wisely and justly (23:5-6). Jeremiah also foresaw the new covenant where God would inscribe His law on His people's hearts and forgive them of their sins (31:31-34).

### Exilic Prophets

Although Jeremiah overlapped a few years into Judah's exile in Babylon, the majority of the ministries of Daniel and Ezekiel took place during the exile. Daniel's message regularly promoted the supremacy and holiness of Yahweh and the need to trust in Him (see Daniel 2:47; 3:17, 28-29; 4:2-3, 17, 25, 32, 35, 37; 5:21, 23; etc.). He also called kings/readers to repent from sin (4:27, 34; 5:22).

Some of Daniel's best material is found in his prophecies about the sovereign kingdom of the Son of Man (7:13-14), the dominant Prince of princes (8:25), and the atoning work of the Anointed One (9:24-26).

Ezekiel's ministry was that of a watchman who warned people of coming judgment and called them to repent (see 3:16-21; 33:7-9). Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was given a glimpse into the new covenant God would make with His people through a personal relationship with them (11:19-20). In one of the most memorable passages in the Old Testament on the valley of dry bones, Yahweh revealed to Ezekiel that a day would come when God would completely resurrect His people (see 37:1-14) – what a great hope!

#### Post-Exilic Prophets/Messengers

Once the exiles were able to return to Jerusalem, God raised up a few prophets and messengers to speak a message of warning and hope. Haggai called Judah to repent and turn to the Lord (2:14-17), as did Malachi (3:7). Zechariah urged Judah to repent and return to Yahweh (1:3-4) and spoke of a future date when God's

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people would cry out in repentance as they “look on Me, on Him whom they have pierced” (12:10), a clear reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

In addition to prophets during this period, the Lord raised up Ezra. Ezra preached God's law and exhorted the people to repent and they did, resulting in a great revival (Ezra 9-10; see also Nehemiah 8:1-8).

All of these prophets and messengers throughout the Old Testament shared bits and pieces of the gospel. They offer glimpses into a more complete picture in the future. That complete picture came in the writing of the New Testament.

## **Clarity of the Gospel from the New Testament**

### John the Baptist

To prepare people for the coming of the Messiah, God raised up John the Baptist. He preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). He also pointed people to Jesus, of whom he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; cf. 1:36). Luke labels the Baptist's exhortations as gospel preaching (Luke 3:18). Surely this message of repentance from sin and trusting in Jesus and His sacrificial work gives Bible readers a clearer picture of the gospel message.

### Jesus

Of course, no one was a better preacher of the gospel than Jesus, who "came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The fact that four Gospel writers record the life and ministry of Jesus – identifying Him as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Son of Man, and the Savior of the world – underscores how central Jesus is to the gospel message. As previously stated, the

gospel is “good news about Jesus Christ.”

No one appealed to a variety of spiritually lost people from all different walks of life more than Jesus. He regularly overcame religious walls, political preferences, ethnic obstacles, and gender differences in His witnessing. Leavell notes, “His efforts at soul-winning touched Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Zealots, rulers, Samaritans, Galileans, Greeks, and Romans. He dealt with common people, publicans, lechers, harlots, little children, wise men, soldiers, beggars, fishermen, lovely women, and taxgatherers.”<sup>7</sup>

Like John the Baptist, Jesus preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). He called people to believe in Him to have eternal life (cf. John 3:16; 14:2-3, 6). He regularly highlighted His mission to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45) and to rise again from the dead (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; cf. John 2:19-22).

Everything about Jesus’ identity and ministry was connected to the gospel message He came to embody and fulfill (cf. John 1:1, 14-18). His final message before ascending into heaven commissioned His disciples to spread the gospel about Him beyond Jerusalem and Judea to all nations (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8).<sup>8</sup>

### The Apostles

After Jesus charged His disciples to preach the gospel, He sent them out as apostles (those “sent out” as

eyewitnesses of the risen Lord). While we do not have biblical records of all of the apostolic missions, what has been recorded in Acts and the Epistles serve as ample material on how they communicated the gospel to others. Space does not permit a detailed look at such writings as Hebrews, James, and Jude, but they certainly contribute to the supremacy of Christ in all things (Hebrews) and “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). A closer look at the gospel emphasis of Peter, John, and Paul is valuable.

### Peter

Tradition ascribes Peter as the main source of Mark’s Gospel.<sup>9</sup> If this is true, then the emphasis in Mark on who Jesus is and what He did comes from Peter’s preaching. Indeed, Mark’s Gospel begins, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). Jesus’ life, ministry, substitutionary death, and resurrection are central to Mark’s Gospel and Peter’s preaching.

Throughout the first half of Acts, any reader quickly notes the leading role played by Peter. He preached at Pentecost the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, proving He is both Lord and Christ (2:22-36). Peter declared the amazing power of Jesus (3:6, 16) and the exclusivity of salvation found only in Him (4:12). He preached the necessity of repentance (2:38; 3:19; cf. 2 Peter 3:9) and was among the first to call Samaritans to turn to the Lord (9:34-35) and then became the first to venture out into Gentile territory with the gospel of Christ (10:34-43).



Toward the end of his life, Peter wrote 1-2 Peter to Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire due to persecution. He encouraged them in their faith and pointed them to the hope found in Christ, reminding his readers even Jesus suffered before entering glory (1 Peter 1:3-12; 2 Peter 1:3-11).

### John

Although Peter's voice is usually the most prominent in Acts 1-12, the Apostle John is often right beside him. John declared with Peter the powerful name of Jesus (3:6). They both replied to the charge to stop preaching Jesus, claiming they must obey God and speak the things they had witnessed (4:19-20).

John's greatest contribution to spreading the gospel is found in his Gospel account of Jesus. John's Gospel offers a deeper, more complete picture of Jesus' identity and mission than any of the other Gospels. That John intended his Gospel account for evangelistic reasons is clearly stated toward the end—"these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (20:31). John's Gospel is regularly used to lead people to faith in Jesus today.

John also wrote letters to defend the genuine gospel against false gospels and rival claims about Jesus (see 1-3 John). Jesus Christ revealed to John a special message for the seven churches of Revelation in Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3) and highlighted the victorious future for Jesus, the Lamb who was slain yet lived as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5-6). A major aspect

of the good news is Jesus vanquishes every foe and redeems His people who have repented and trusted in Him (see 5:9-10; 19:11-21).

Paul

Apart from Jesus Christ, no one has impacted the Christian faith more than the Apostle Paul. Just after his conversion, “he proclaimed Jesus in the

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synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God’” (Acts 9:20). As the leading missionary to the Gentiles, Paul took at least three missionary

journeys throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia to preach Jesus to those who did not know Him (cf. Acts 13:28; Romans 10:14-17). Paul wrote to churches and individuals to explain the gospel. He mentioned the holiness of God and His word (cf. Romans 1:18-23; 7:12) and man’s sinfulness (cf. Romans 1:18-3:20; Ephesians 2:1-3), but he mostly centered on the work of Jesus Christ (see Romans 3:25; 1 Corinthians 1:17-18; 15:3-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 2:4-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-22; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; etc.). Paul continually called his listeners to repentance from sin (cf. Acts 17:30; Romans 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25) and faith in the Lord Jesus (cf. Romans 3:21-4:25; 10:9-10; Galatians 2:15-21; Ephesians 2:8; 2 Timothy 1:12).

No one took the gospel to more places or more people in the biblical era than Paul. He preached the gospel

unashamedly to both Jews and Greeks (cf. Romans 1:16). He sought to reach the (known) ends of the earth by going to Spain (cf. Romans 15:24) in fulfillment of Jesus' command (cf. Acts 1:8).

### Other messengers

Space does not permit a full treatment of other messengers of evangelism in the New Testament. Let it suffice to note faithful evangelists included personal soul-winners like the apostles (cf. Luke 5:10)<sup>10</sup> and early ministry leaders, Stephen (cf. Acts 6:5, 8-7:60) and Philip (Acts 6:5; 8:5-40). Evangelists were sometimes missionaries like Barnabas (cf. Acts 13:1-14:28) and John Mark (cf. Acts 15:39; see also the Gospel of Mark). Sometimes women, like "Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women," spoke of the once-crucified-yet-risen Lord Jesus (Luke 24:9-10). Finally, various individuals throughout the Roman Empire gathered at Pentecost when the Spirit came on the believers (cf. Acts 2). Many of them became believers and undoubtedly carried the gospel message back to their homeland, for Rome had several house-churches even before Paul visited that city (cf. Romans 1:7; 16:3-5).

## Conclusion

I left off part of the story from the beginning about the 3-year-old boy who was drowning. In the words of Paul Harvey, “and now, the rest of the story.” As the boy’s mouth and nose slipped below the surface of the water, his eyes became big as saucers. He was not yet tall enough to touch the bottom of the shallow end of

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the pool. His parents were deep in conversation with friends. How do I know? Because I witnessed the whole thing. It was my

house and they were my guests and I was not about to let a guest drown on my watch. God has appointed that boy’s death, but it was not that day!

As I noticed the parents oblivious to it all and no one else was intervening, I immediately jumped up from my chair, ran across the lanai, took a couple of steps into the water fully clothed, and yanked that toddler up from what was about to become his watery grave. Everyone stopped what they were doing to witness the moment. The parents thanked me for stepping in and seemed shocked their son could not swim.

That story is a picture of what Jesus has done for each one of His children. When we were drowning at sea, He stepped in and snatched us from a watery grave. He rescued us by His grace, love, and mercy. We responded by turning from our trust in self to place our faith in Him. That is a picture of the gospel and that is the kind of work the biblical messengers did.

Let us get busy in sharing that biblical legacy of the hope found only in Jesus Christ and snatch others from death for the glory of God and the good of His people.

## ENDNOTES

1 See Scott Dawson, ed. *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others for Christ*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

2 See Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort, *The School of Biblical Evangelism: 101 Lessons How to Share Your Faith Simply, Effectively, Biblically... the Way Jesus Did* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2004); Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People*, Revised and Expanded (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

3 The best description of the gospel, in my opinion, occurs in the opening chapters of Romans, where the Apostle Paul lays out his view of the gospel, since he had yet to visit the saints at Rome. He began with the righteousness and holiness of God (cf. 1:18-23), detailed the sinfulness of man (cf. 1:18-3:20), promoted the substitutionary work of Christ (cf. 3:25), and discussed the need for both repentance (cf. 2:4) and faith in Jesus Christ (cf. 3:22-4:25).

4 All Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

5 The outline on the rest of this article is an adaption of the Evangelism in the Bible section from Roland A. Leavell, "Evangelism" in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 407-419.

6 While I understand the debate over the authorship of Genesis and the Pentateuch, I favor Mosaic authorship.

7 Leavell, "Evangelism," 408.

8 I don't believe Mark 16:9-20 is authentic and many scholars note it as a late addition. Mark 16:15, however, is consistent with the commissioning verses found toward the end of each Gospel account. Thus, while Mark 16:15 was not part of Mark's Gospel originally, its substance is true.

9 Early church apologists throughout the second and third

*Joel Breidenbaugh*

centuries defended this belief, including Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, to name a few.

10 Early church tradition had the apostles scatter throughout the known world spreading the gospel. For a summary of these journeys, see Leavell, “Evangelism,” 408.

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# **The Great Awakenings: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards and Isaac Backus for Baptist Revivalism**

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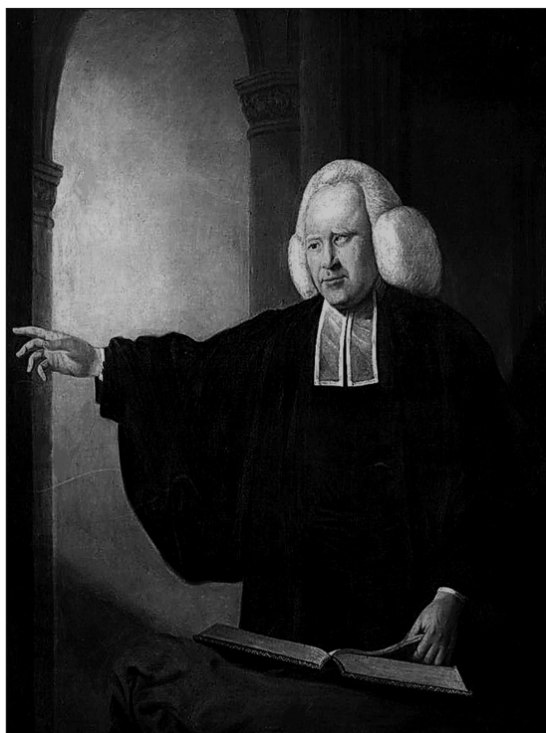


## **Introduction**

The colonial period and early days of the Republic bequeathed to the evangelical church, and Baptists, in particular, a legacy of revival. “In 1700 Baptists in America numbered no more than twenty-four scattered churches, with only 839 members. By 1800, according to some calculations, they had become the largest denomination in America.”<sup>1</sup> While the fantastic growth of Baptists has multiple causal factors, the legacy of the First Great Awakening, “a series of revivals between 1725 and 1760 is a primary factor.”<sup>2</sup> A Second Great Awakening began in the 1790s after a period described by Yale scholar Sydney Ahlstrom as a period of “distraction, disruption, and decline” due to a “Religious Depression” during the Revolutionary War and a period of “Religious Rationalism” (Deism, Universalism) that grew in popularity after the War.<sup>3</sup> The legacy of these earlier Awakenings paved the way for a “Third Great Awakening” between 1875-1914.<sup>4</sup>

Isaac Backus became a Christian and Baptist preacher during the First Great Awakening in the colonial





**Isaac Backus**  
**(b.1724; d.1809)**

period. He lived to experience the beginning of the Second Great Awakening during the early stages of the United States. He left a legacy in the following areas: new birth theology; revivalism; prayer; and religious freedom.

**Jonathan Edwards: The Preacher-Theologian of the First Great Awakening**

Isaac Backus cannot be understood apart from the influence of Jonathan Edwards (b.1703; d.1758), the preacher-theologian of the First Great Awakening.

Jonathan Edwards was a third-generation preacher following in the steps of his maternal grandfather Samuel Stoddard (b.1643; d.1729) and his father, Timothy Edwards. Stoddard and the elder Edwards were well-known ministers. They both witnessed revivals in the churches they served before the launch of the Great Awakening movement.



**Jonathan Edwards**

From the 1680s to the midpoint of the eighteenth century, God brought periodic seasons of revival to churches in New England.

Solomon Stoddard,

Edwards's grandfather, described five seasons of revival between 1679 and 1718.<sup>5</sup> After completing his education at Yale University, Jonathan Edwards became a pastoral assistant to his legendary grandfather at the Congregational church at Northampton, Massachusetts in 1726. In 1734, Edwards preached five sermons on justification by faith alone, which sparked a revival among the young people and became a catalyst for a revival movement known as the Great Awakening. Beyond his fame as a pastor and revivalist leader, Edwards was the premier theologian in colonial America, a missionary to Native Americans. Three months before his unexpected death from small-pox, Edwards served as the president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University).

Edwards described the work of God as the spiritual awakening that transformed the village of Northampton.

“This work of God... made a glorious alteration in the town so that in the spring and summer following (anno 1735) the town seemed to be full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love, nor so full of joy. . . There were remarkable tokens of God’s presence in almost every house. It was a time of joy in families on the account of salvation being brought unto them: parents rejoicing over their children as new born; and husbands over wives; and wives over husbands.”<sup>6</sup>

Under Jonathan Edward’s influence, local revival movements united into a mighty movement of the Spirit known as the First Great Awakening.

Several factors influenced the religious period known as the Great Awakening. First, the Congregational churches in New England were plagued by members that could not testify to a salvific work of God’s grace. Ministers expressed alarm at the decline of morals evidenced by "Sabbath-breaking, drinking, immodesty, pride, and decay in godliness."<sup>7</sup> The Bay Colony required church attendance, but church membership declined significantly because children and grandchildren of church members lacked a salvation experience. As a solution, in 1662, a Congregational Church synod approved the Half-Way Covenant, which permitted ministers to baptize infants whose parents had never joined the church.

By the 1740s, several influential ministers called for reformation within the church as well as the abandonment of "half-way comprises."<sup>8</sup>

Second, the 1734-35 phase of the Great Awakening under Edwards began as a youth revival movement. Edwards preached a sermon challenging young people to gather on Sunday nights in small groups in various parts of the town for spiritual pursuits rather than participating in activities of "mirth and company-keeping." One young teenage girl came to Christ. Edwards described the impact of the conversion of this one young lady:

"God made it, I suppose, *the greatest occasion of awakening* to others, of anything that ever came to pass in the town. I have had abundant opportunities to know the effect it had by my private conversation with many. The news of it seemed to be almost like a *flash of lightning*, upon the hearts of young people, all over the town, and upon many others. Those persons amongst us, who used to be *furthest* from seriousness, and that I most feared would make an ill improvement of it, seemed greatly to be *awakened* with it. Many went to talk with her, concerning what she had met with, and what appeared in her seemed to be to the satisfaction of all that did so."<sup>9</sup>

This revival that began among the youth produced dramatic moral change. Edwards wrote a letter describing the impact of the revival among the youth: "There has been a great alteration among the youth of

the town, with respect to revelry, frolicking, profane and licentious conversation, and lewd songs.”<sup>10</sup> Third, the First Great Awakening was the Great Leveler; the revival movement demonstrated the truth of Peter's words in Acts 10: 34, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." W. Cooper from Boston wrote a preface to Edward's *The Marks of a Work of the True Spirit* and commented on the egalitarian nature of the revival. "The work has been remarkable also for the various sorts of persons that have been under its influence.”<sup>11</sup> Cooper described the Spirit working among all ages, all ranks of society, all nationalities and ethnic groups (including Negroes and Native Americans), and all education levels.

A principal legacy of the First Great Awakening for Baptists was the salvation of Isaac Backus in August 1741 under the preaching of Calvinist Methodist itinerant preacher George Whitefield. Backus experienced the new birth of salvation during the First Great Awakening, but he lived long enough to experience and impact the Second Great Awakening.

### **Isaac Backus: Evangelist, Revivalist, and Proponent of Religious Liberty**

Sydney Alhstrom summarized the impact of Isaac Backus. "Perhaps no single separatistic convert augured larger consequences for New England church history than Isaac Backus (b.1724; d.1809).”<sup>12</sup>

Southern Baptist historian Leon McBeth commented on the impact of Backus on eighteenth-century Baptists. "Perhaps more than any other person, Backus set the tone for New England Baptists during

his lifetime in theology, evangelism, and churchmanship.”<sup>13</sup>

Backus was a pastor, an evangelist, a revivalist, a church historian, and the leading voice of Baptists on religious liberty during the colonial period. In this article, the author contends that contemporary Baptists can learn from Backus and his revival legacy

**“My soul yielded  
all into his hands**

**. . .” - Backus**

as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission in the twenty-first century. As we examine Backus's

legacy, we will discuss his legacy in terms of salvation, revivalistic tours, passion for the salvation of souls, a legacy of prayer, legacy as a church historian, and legacy as a proponent of religious liberty.

### Legacy of the New Birth

The socially privileged Backus did not experience a conversion until 1741. Backus grew up in “the ruling elite of Puritan Connecticut.”<sup>14</sup> His paternal grandfather was a justice of the peace and a representative in the Connecticut legislature. Isaac’s father was a prosperous farmer that professed Christ in the context of the revival period in 1736. Backus’ mother descended from the Winslow family that came to America on the Mayflower in 1620. She became “a living member of the household of faith” in 1721, a period in which Timothy Edward’s grandfather Samuel Stoddard described as a period of revival. Despite growing up in a devout household, Isaac experienced conversion in the context of the revival of 1741. Rev. John Davenport, a preacher in the mold of

George Whitfield, preached for three days in Backus's hometown of Norwich, Connecticut. Backus' described his conversion to Christ:

“As I was mowing alone in the field, August 24th, 1741, all my past life was opened plainly before me, and I saw clearly that it had been filled up with sin. I went and sat down in the shade of a tree, where my prayers and tears, my hearing the Word of God and striving for a better heart, with all my other doings, were set before me in such a light that I perceived I could never make myself better, should I live ever so long. Divine justice appeared clear in my condemnation, and I saw that God had a right to do with me as he would. My soul yielded all into His hands, fell at His feet, and was silent and calm before Him. And while I sat there, I was enabled by divine light to see the perfect righteousness of Christ and the freeness and riches of His grace, with such clearness, that my soul was drawn forth to trust in Him for salvation.”<sup>15</sup>

### Legacy of Revivalistic Tours

Five years after his conversion, Backus affirmed that God called him to preach the gospel despite the absence of education, a requirement for ordination in the Congregational church. Backus described his call to serve in ministry:

“The next day, September 27, 1746, new views were given me beyond those which I had before received. My business led me out to work alone in the woods, where, with none to interrupt me,

I had such converse with my God as I never had before. His former teachings now came to this point, *that He called me to preach his Gospel*. And I was then led to count the cost of obedience to the will of God in this work, as distinctly as ever to cast up any particular sum.”<sup>16</sup>

Backus immediately began preaching as an itinerant preacher for fourteen months in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts.<sup>17</sup> He eventually became a Separatist pastor near Middleborough, Connecticut. Separatists withdrew from Congregational churches (in essence Congregational churches were the state church) to form separate independent churches.

“Reviving the call for visible sainthood, they [Separatists] demanded that candidates for church

**Backus  
possessed a  
passion for souls**

membership show the marks of true conversion before being admitted. Consequently, they adopted the practice of

closed Communion. The Separates supported itinerant preaching and encouraged emotional displays of piety amongst both laity and clergy.”<sup>18</sup> In 1751, Backus received believer’s baptism. In 1756, Backus and a small group of the membership withdrew from the Congregational church at Middleborough to establish the First Baptist Church of Middleborough, a church Backus served until he died.



Although Backus served as pastor of First Baptist, he had an active itinerant ministry to Baptists throughout the colonies and young nation. He traveled by horseback an estimated “. . . 67,000 miles to assist churches in baptisms, ordinations, revivals, constituting new churches, and settling disputes ....”<sup>19</sup> In his diary, he summarized his ministry labors on the last day of each year. For example, December 31, 1780, Backus wrote:

“In the year which is now closed, I have traveled nineteen hundred and eighteen miles, and preached two hundred and forty-eight times, with as little weariness of body and with as much liberty of soul as I ever was favored within my life. The work of conviction and conversion has prevailed more extensively in New England than it has done since the year 1742.”<sup>20</sup>

### Legacy of Passion for Souls

From the beginning of his ministry, Backus possessed a passion for souls. Backus frequently commented regarding his joy at the salvation of souls. The following diary statements exemplify his passion for spiritually lost people:

“How blessed a thing it is to see a new-born soul!;”

“Oh, that the Lord would appear for the deliverance of these precious souls!;”

“The divine favors have been distinguishing here; and while I have been gone, the assistance which I have enjoyed in preaching and the conversions which I have seen among sinners, together with the language of new-born souls,

have made it the most comfortable journey to me that I have taken this winter;" and "I was favored with uncommon strength and solemnity in treating with immortal souls, as one who must give account of himself before God."<sup>21</sup>

### Legacy of Prayer

Days of prayer and fasting marked major moments in Backus' life. For example, he fasted and prayed before deciding to marry his wife, before he accepted the doctrine of believer's baptism, and before his submission to God's call to preach.

Backus connected awakening movements from God to the prayers of God's people. Backus described New England churches as similar to the church of Sardis in Revelation 3.1, "I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead."<sup>22</sup> According to Backus, God began to renew His church through home prayer groups. "The work was also greatly promoted by private meetings for prayer, exhortation, etc."<sup>23</sup>

In 1795, Backus joined with ministers of other denominations in disseminating a "Circular Letter" calling for a nation-wide weekly "Concert of Prayer" for revival.<sup>24</sup> The "Concert of Prayer" movement renewed a focus on revival prayer birthed by Jonathan Edwards and his prayer treatise *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People, in Extraordinary Prayer, for the*

*Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth.*<sup>25</sup> The "Concert of Prayer" called for united prayer across denominational groups at specific times. The emphasis on prayer "developed into a widespread revival of evangelical Christianity."<sup>26</sup> Backus' promotion of the "Concert of Prayer" "served to bridge the gap between the First and Second Great Awakenings."<sup>27</sup>

### Ministry in the South

In 1789, the Warren Baptist Association in Connecticut received correspondence from Virginia that detailed the revival among the Regular Baptists, Separate Baptists, and Independent Baptists. In response to a request for ministers "to help garner the harvest of waiting souls," the association sent Isaac Backus. He labored in Virginia and North Carolina for five months. "Backus was about to participate in the beginning of the Second Great Awakening in America."<sup>28</sup> The journey had a two-fold purpose: to strengthen the churches and to develop stronger relationships between Baptists in the north and south.<sup>29</sup> During the five months, Backus traveled over 1,200 miles and preached 117 sermons.<sup>30</sup> The Baptist preachers in the south must not have made a positive impression on Backus. "Backus described the ministers as principally drunkards, card-players, and swearers."<sup>31</sup>

### Legacy of Religious Freedom

Isaac Backus was the foremost advocate of religious freedom among Baptists in the north; John Leland of Virginia served a similar role in the south. Backus'

position differed significantly from the views of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison who desired a “wall of separation” to protect the rights of man; Backus and his fellow Baptists wanted to protect the rights of Christians.<sup>32</sup>

**Backus . . . a  
chief advocate  
of civil  
disobedience**

Backus fought against governmental taxes to support churches. In Connecticut, dissenters from the established Congregational Church

paid taxes to support the church. On October 15, 1752, Isaac’s sickly mother Elizabeth was thrown into jail for thirteen days because she refused to pay colony mandated funds to the Congregational pastor. In a letter to Isaac dated November 4, 1752, Elizabeth described her experience. While she was bound, she was the free one. “O then I could give up my name, estate, family, life and breath, freely to God. Now the prison looked like a palace to me.”<sup>33</sup> Isaac served on the Warren Association Grievance Committee that cataloged grievances and prepared petitions to the General Courts of Massachusetts and Connecticut for redress.

Backus began to use the revolutionary motto “taxation without representation” in response to the persecuting authorities:

“...as the present contest between Great Britain and America, is not so much about the greatness of the taxes already laid, as about a submission to their taxing power; so (though what we have already suffered is far from being

a trifle, yet) our greatest difficulty at present concerns the submitting to a taxing power in ecclesiastical affairs.”<sup>34</sup>

Backus became a chief advocate of civil disobedience regarding the payment of religious taxes to support the Congregational Church in New England.<sup>35</sup> To Backus, religious taxes violate the right of conscience. In 1779, Backus presented a “Bill of Rights” for the Massachusetts Constitution. In the second article, Backus wrote:

“...every person has an unalienable right to act in all religious affairs according to the full persuasion of his own mind . . . their power [civil rulers] ought to be exerted to protect all persons and societies, within their jurisdiction from being injured or interrupted in the free enjoyment of this right, under any pretense whatsoever.”<sup>36</sup>

The Warren Baptist Association in Connecticut sent Backus as its agent to the First Congressional Congress meeting in Philadelphia in September 1774. Backus, along with other Baptist leaders from New England, presented a memorial [a resolution] to the delegation from Massachusetts – a delegation that included John and Samuel Adams. Because of the influence of John Adams, the colonial constitution of Massachusetts contained no provision for religious liberty. Backus wrote that “the war [Revolutionary] was fought on two fronts by him and his brethren – against the British troops for civil liberty and against the patriot legislators for religious liberty.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1778, the town of Middleborough elected the Baptist pastor Backus to serve as a delegate in Boston to ratify the U. S. Constitution. He was the first Baptist to speak to the convention. Numerous Baptists opposed the new federal constitution.<sup>38</sup> Backus spoke in favor of the constitution because of the provisions prohibiting religious tests for officeholders and prohibition against hereditary nobility.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps his fight for religious liberty is the greatest legacy that Backus provided for contemporary Baptists. The author believes that Backus would affirm that religious freedom offers the best soil for the growth of revivalism.

## **Conclusion**

Contemporary Baptists owe a high debt to the revival legacies of Jonathan Edwards and Isaac Backus. A comparison and contrast between the two men is insightful. Both men belonged to the aristocracy of New England. Edwards had a premier education for the day, having graduated from Yale, and served as president of the future Ivy League school Princeton. Backus lacked formal education, but he served as a founding trustee of the Baptist Rhode Island College, which transformed into the Ivy League Brown University. Edwards was born into a revivalistic family that provided vital leaders of the movement. Backus lacked a ministerial heritage and was a convert in the First Great Awakening that Edwards helped birth. Edwards wrote a pamphlet encouraging support for the “Concert of Prayer;” Backus reissued

the call for a “Concert of Prayer” for a new generation in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Both men were Calvinistic in theology, yet both were committed to God's mighty acts of revival. Edwards belonged to the Congregational Church that oppressed dissenters; Backus became the foremost advocate of religious liberty in New England. Edwards served as a missionary to Native Americans; Backus served as a missionary to the south. Both men were revivalists.

Edwards and Backus both exemplify the truth that revivals cannot be worked up by humans; rather, God grants seasons of revival. In his history of Baptists in New England, Backus applied three terms to his discussions of revivals. Twenty-two times, he noted that "God granted revival." Twelve-times, he described revivals as "fresh" works of God. Thirteen times Backus refers to "happy revivals." Both men affirmed the priority of prayer in revival.<sup>40</sup>

Contemporary Baptists need to pray in the mode of Backus' descriptions of revivals. God "grant revival," defined as your "fresh" work that results in a “happy revival” of the people of God. Lord, do it again!

## **ENDNOTES**

1 H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook of Baptist Heritage*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1990), 142.

2 Bruce L. Shelley, "Great Awakening, The," in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, rev. ed, editor Bruce L. Shelly (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1978), 428. Shelley based his dates upon earlier revival movements sparked by Dutch Reformed

pastors Theodore Frelinghuysen and Gilbert Tennent. Baptist historian and theologian Stanley Grenz narrows the years of the Great Awakening to 1740-1742 and cites the earlier movements of awakening in Edwards church in 1734-35 and the ministry of Frelinghuysen and Tennant in New Jersey as "Preparation for the Awakening." Stanley Grenz, *Isaac Backus – Puritan and Baptist: His Place in History, His Thought, and Their Implications for Modern Baptist Theology*. Dissertation Series Number 4 National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, ed. Charles Talbert (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 55.

3 Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 364-369. Ahlstrom's book received recognition as Winner of the National Book Award in 1973.

4 E. A. Livingstone, ed. "Great Awakening, The." In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Ed. Oxford: University Press, 2005.

5 Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), Kindle Edition.

6 Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, reprinted in *The Works of President Edwards* (Worcester, MA, 1808) III, 11-12; cited in Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An historical account of the development of American religious life*, second ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 65-66.

7 David W. Cooley, "Halfway Covenant," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States: Volume 3: H-M*. eds. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 1032.

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9 Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of Surprising Conversions," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol 1. (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 348.

10 Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*,



- vol. 1 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 94.
- 11 Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 258.
- 12 Ahlstrom, 202.
- 13 H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*: (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 260.
- 14 B. L. Shelly, "Backus, Isaac" in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), n.p.
- 15 Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of Rev. Isaac Backus, A.M* (Boston; New York; Cincinnati: Gould and Lincoln; Sheldon, Blakeman & Co.; George S. Blanchard, 1858), 39. For fifty-four years, Hovey served as professor and president of Newton Theological Institution, a Baptist institution founded in 1825. Backus wrote an extensive diary; a rich person may purchase a copy in 2020 for over \$800. Hovey provides a good synopsis of salient points from Backus' diary.
- 16 Ibid., 61.
- 17 Ibid., 75.
- 18 B. L. Shelley, "Separates," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990, n. p
- 19 James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study*. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009). 155. Garrett's mileage estimate does not include Backus's travel by ship to the South later.
- 20 Hovey. 267.
- 21 Ibid. 130.
- 22 Rev. 3.1 CSB.
- 23 Hovey, 140. The concept of a "Concert of Prayer"
- 24 Robert G. Torbert, *A History of the Baptists, Third Edition*. (Valley Forge, PN: Judson Press, 1963), 299.
- 25 Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revival*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 216. Revival authority J. Edwin Orr joked that long titles in colonial times were

more like a synopsis of the contents than contemporary short titles.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid, 223.

28 William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition*. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1967), 204.

29 Ibid. This researcher thinks the mileage number reflects the journey by horseback after Backs traveled by ship from the north to the south.

30 Hovey, 272.

31 McLoughlin, 204.

32 Ibid, xii.

33 Isaac Backus and David Weston, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, Second Edition., vol. 2 (Newton, MA: The Backus Historical Society, 1871), 99.

34 Isaac Backus, "An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty: Against the Oppressions of the Present Day." William G. McLoughlin, ed. "An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty: Against the Oppressions of the Present Day," *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754-1789*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 340. Backus published the work in 1772. According to Brown University Professor William McLoughlin, "It is the best exposition of the eighteenth-century pietistic concept of separation." (p. 123). Backus served on the first Board that established Rhode Island College (now Brown University) as a Baptist school, the school that leading Backus scholar McLoughlin taught.

35 McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus*, 120.

36 McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism*, 487-88.

37 McLoughlin, "Introduction," in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism*, 13.

38 Twenty Baptists attended the discussion of the federal constitution in Boston; only "six or seven" Baptist delegates voted for the constitution. McLoughlin, 15.

39 Ibid.

40 Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called BAPTISTS, Second Edition*, (Worcester, MA:

Backus Historical Society, 1871).

## Resources



**The Florida Baptist Historical Society maintains a variety of Florida Baptist-oriented resources for use in history research on churches, associations and individuals. The holdings include printed and microfilm copies of the Florida Baptist State Convention *Annals*, association annuals, and the *Florida Baptist Witness* newspaper. The Society has created and maintains history-related files on over 3,000 churches and more than 2,500 individuals. These resources may be accessed by contacting us by Email:**

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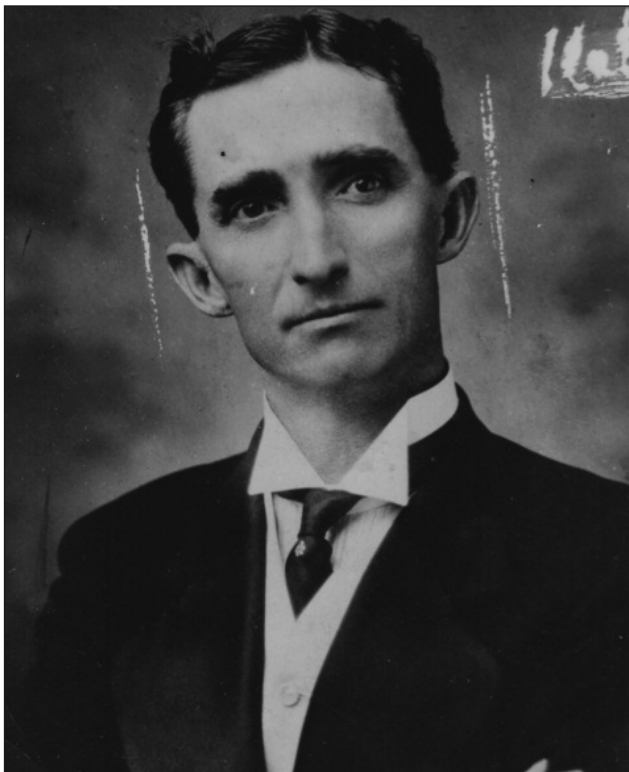
## Chipley's 1916 'Great Awakening' Revival Yielded 700 Professions of Faith in Christ

by Donald S. Hepburn  
Secretary-Treasurer  
Florida Baptist Historical Society



Much has been written about the “Great Revival of 1906” which grew out of the Welch revival begun in 1904 and led to millions of people declaring faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> That movement of God swept across the United States during the next several years and continued in various manifestations until 1915. One outcome of that spiritual awakening was the 1906 Azusa Street (Los Angeles) Revival that served as the formative event for early Pentecostalism.<sup>2</sup> The multi-year revivals were the earliest and most significant religious movements to occur across the world, and more specifically in the United States, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

However, it was just ten years later that an unusual revival came to the rural Panhandle community of Chipley, Florida, that continued for nearly seven weeks and resulted in the spiritual conversion of a reported 700 persons – nearly one-half the population of the town. That moving of God’s spirit seemed to come out of nowhere, except for perhaps the preceding several weeks of prayer meetings and the evangelist’s zeal – Rev. George C. Cates – who burdened people’s hearts with “just the naked word of



**George C. Cates**  
**(b. 1868; d.1954)**

God.” A local historian summarized the Chipley event by using an excerpt from the local newspaper, *The Chipley Banner*, that reported with some hyperbole in 1916 that the revival was, “The greatest sight ever witnessed in Chipley, probably in West Florida, and possibly in the whole state of Florida . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, it was evident that the Spirit of God was at work in this out of the way place. Perhaps the best explanation can be drawn from an observation made by revival historian J. Edwin Orr, who said, “In

times of evangelism, the evangelist seeks the sinner, in times of revival the sinner comes chasing after the Lord.”<sup>4</sup> Such may have been the case in Chipley and the hundreds of people who came from “surrounding farms and communities.” In some ways, for eyewitnesses, this event was a “local version of ‘the great awakening’ revivalist influence which had swept the nation” ten years earlier.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Movement of God Realized**

Historians of religious studies have not singled out any specific events – such as the beginning of World War I in Europe or American military troops invading Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti – to have caused people to become unusually concerned about their spiritual well-being and relationship with God. However, American cultural and religious values were being challenged at the beginning of the twentieth century. Zach Kincaid, a historian of religious movements, explained that the Industrial Age was in full force and Darwinism was “reshaping our sense of the value of history and future accomplishment.” In that context, Kincaid described in his on-line blog, the example of Billy Sunday, “a professional baseball player turned preacher” who began holding month-long revival meetings that were, “direct and powerful with the Gospel message.” Kincaid observed that, “God’s work is not isolated but sometimes we see it concentrated around specific places and people” as was exemplified by the Azusa Street Revival and Billy Sunday’s evangelistic preaching.<sup>6</sup>

## **Rural Chipley, Florida and its Churches**

For some inexplicable reason God chose the “specific place and people” of Chipley, Florida. Located in the Florida Panhandle, the Washington County community of Chipley is approximately mid-way between Tallahassee and Pensacola. The founding of what became known as the community of Chipley began in 1882 when the Pensacola and Atlantic Railroad (later designated as the L&N lines) was completed and the trainline ran east to west through the then designated community of New Orange. Train agent J.M. Callaway is credited for having “the station and post office named Chipley, in honor of Colonel W.D. Chipley,” who had constructed the railroad.<sup>7</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century there were only three churches within the small town of Chipley. These included the Baptist church (organized 1897) led by Rev. Avery T. Camp (b. 1869; d.1942)<sup>8</sup>; the Methodist church (organized in 1885) led by Rev. Havilen T. Strout (b. 1868; d. 1927)<sup>9</sup>; and the Presbyterian church (organized in 1896) led by Reverend Frederick F. Schell (b. 1878; d. 1972).<sup>10</sup> And when the extended Cates' revival was underway, other Baptist pastors from outlying areas lent their support to the evangelistic crusade by encouraging their members and friends to travel – by horseback, wagon or walking – to Chipley to be a part of the great event. Among them were Charles H. Temples (b. 1875; d.



**Avery T. Camp**

1951) who served four part-time churches in Alford, Orange Hill, Wausau and White Pond; William F. Moore (b. 1883; d. 1959) who served churches in Bonifay and Panama City; and J. W. Senterfitt (b. 1872; d. 1945) who served the Marianna church.<sup>11</sup>

The Baptist and Methodist churches were located along 5th Street diagonally across the street from each other, both abutting what is today designated as U.S. Highway 90 that runs east to west through the town. The Presbyterian church – located a few blocks north from the two other churches – apparently had the largest facility and hosted most of the revival services.<sup>12</sup> According to the available records the combined memberships of those three churches numbered approximately 1,100 to 1,200 persons, in a community whose entire population was approximately 1,500 residents around 1915.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Revival and the Evangelist**

The “greatest sight,” described by the *Chipley Banner* in its December 21, 1916 issue, “was the one Sunday afternoon [December 17] when 600 converts received by Rev. George Cates, during the past five weeks’ revival services met at the Methodist church and marched to the north side of the railroad where a double line was formed between 5th and 6th Streets and was extended the hand of Christian fellowship by the large crowd assembled for that purpose, the converts in turn shaking hands with each other.” The newspaper account was recited by local historian E. W. Carswell: “Since that time there has been something like 100 more who have yielded to the



power of the Holy Spirit, confessed their sins and accepted Jesus as their savior. Rev. Cates is a wonderful preacher, and it is probable that his meeting here is the greatest ever held in Florida. . .”<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the limited reports in the *Banner* newspaper, there apparently was only one other primary source which provided an extended printed eyewitness summary account of the events that occurred during the Chipley revival. It is a rare 30-page booklet called the *Cates Union Revival, Chipley, Florida, 1916*.<sup>15</sup> An additional brief summary report was published in the *Florida Baptist Witness*.<sup>16</sup>

Evangelist George C. Cates (b. 1868; d.1954) of Louisville, Kentucky,<sup>17</sup> was age 48 when he went to Chipley to lead the initially planned week-long revival services. Cates was fairly well-known throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, having preached in churches large and small throughout the south, as recorded in numerous local newspaper accounts published between 1905 and 1930.<sup>18</sup> When invited to a specific community, Cates typically sought an assessment of the spiritual condition of the churches and the community.<sup>19</sup> As was typical of interdenominational relations among various religious groups at the beginning of the twentieth century, events involving several different denominations were referred to as “union” meetings. And based upon news accounts, Rev. Cates typically agreed to lead a revival if the sponsoring church would join together with other churches acting in unity, thus the designation of a “union revival.”

Cates also required that during the weeks leading up to the start of a revival, prayer meetings had to be scheduled. In Chipley the revival was set to begin Sunday, October 22. Earlier in September, revival preparation began by the three churches with a series of “union cottage prayer meetings, also union Wednesday night prayer meetings” which grew in attendance as the revival start date drew near.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, after two services on Sunday and a Monday night – October 22 and 23 – Evangelist Cates was afflicted by an unspecified ailment.<sup>21</sup> However, based upon news reports of similar revival meetings held before and after Chipley, Cates suffered from neuralgia (a nerve disorder typically caused by stress) and occasional throat problems.<sup>22</sup> Yet in those three sermons, Cates made a major spiritual impact upon those in attendance. “He laid on their hearts, not only the duty but the privilege of soul winning, and did it so earnestly that the Christian people brought their [spiritually] lost ones to the meeting, and the preaching of God’s naked word was so effective that there were nearly a hundred conversions the first week.”<sup>23</sup> In his absence, the prayer meetings continued until Cates returned.

On the second Sunday in November,<sup>24</sup> Cates’ preaching resumption resulted in “great crowds in all the churches, the largest seen at the regular services in any of the churches for a long time. Thirty-four joined the Methodist church, twenty-six joined the Baptist church and nine joined the Presbyterian church.” An

unnamed visiting pastor reportedly observed, "Brother Cates requires too much of the converts." That requirement was to stand before the congregation and first confess their sins to God and then make a public profession of their faith in Christ.<sup>25</sup>

As was characteristic of some preachers of the era, Cates' preaching style had a "hellfire and damnation" emphasis. Baptist Pastor Camp later wrote that Cates "preaches a bottomless hell to be saved from, a topless heaven to be saved to, and the all sufficiency of the blood of Christ to save." Camp stressed that Cates "lays much emphasis on prayer . . . [praying himself] many times during the service."<sup>26</sup> Another account noted Cates' preaching has "great power without any undue excitement whatever." And during the invitation, "Brother Cates has no singing at all, or if any, he insists that it be very soft and low."<sup>27</sup>

That approach seemed only to encourage hundreds of people to come forward to accept Christ. During that November Sunday evening service Evangelist Cates preached a sermon titled, "Prepare to Meet thy God," to a standing room only crowd that yielded 32 professions of faith in Jesus Christ. During the altar call invitation, a "prominent business man" reportedly "almost ran to the front" and told Evangelist Cates, "I've renounced the devil, I've come to declare allegiance to God Almighty, and I'm ready to do anything in the world that God wants me to do."<sup>28</sup>

## **The One-Week Revival that Continued for Seven**

As that first full week drew to an end (now the second week in November), the sponsoring pastors and Evangelist Cates decided that on the following Sunday night the revival services would be concluded. But overflow crowds came to both morning and evening services. And as the published record noted, “at the close of the service the Holy Ghost came with such power upon the great throng that more than a score [20 people] were saved, and by a rising vote the great multitude asked that the meeting be continued.” As a result the daily meetings were continued into the next week with a reported 36 spiritual conversions. Attempts were made to no avail to find a larger meeting facility.<sup>29</sup>

The following Monday a pouring rain began an hour before the start of the 7:00 p.m. service and yet the church building was packed again to standing room only capacity. “Notwithstanding the unfavorable conditions,” the revival booklet reports, there were 28 professions of faith made. In one instance, “A bright little eight-year-old girl came across the pulpit crying, and Brother Cates thinking she had gotten hurt in some way, asked her trouble, and she said: ‘I’m sorry, I’ve done wrong, and I want to ask Jesus to forgive me, and give Him my heart.’ Brother Cates’ heart was so touched by the scene, that though he was very busy giving the invitation he bowed and listened to the remarkable prayer of the little girl as she confessed and surrendered her life to Jesus.”<sup>30</sup> The response by the little girl was just one of several dozen recorded

vignettes of people, young and old, who were so moved by God's messenger that they declared their intent to follow Christ.

As the revival continued into December, Evangelist Cates led morning chapel services nearly every day at the local school. Prior to these special services it was reported that 70 children had come forward announcing spiritual decisions during the regular revival services. As a result of the efforts of Rev. Cates and the school teachers serving as spiritual counselors, it was reported that "every last one" [approximately 400] of the school children "made a glorious surrender" to the savior Jesus Christ. "I love Jesus a hundred bushels full," one young boy reportedly said.<sup>31</sup>

By Sunday, December 17 – the revival now starting its seventh week – a reported 600 professions of faith (plus another 100 decisions that day) had been made and 300 existing church members had registered re-dedications to the Lord. Although the three local churches benefitted from additions to their membership rolls, other Washington County churches reported people returning from the revival to make public professions of faith in their local church. At 3:00 that Sunday afternoon, all 600 converts met in the Methodist church and from there these new believers plus curious townspeople walked in a double column the several blocks to the Chipley town square. It was described as "a scene the like of which has never been witnessed in this part of the world."<sup>32</sup> Under threatening rain clouds, Evangelist Cates stood

on the back of a wagon and preached on the topic, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved.” Following the invitation, at which another 100 people responded, and during the next several hours, the now 700 converts proceeded down an orderly line of hand shaking – and for some a time of brief prayer – with the evangelist, the local pastors and select laymen.

The unknown writer of the *Cates Union Revival* booklet assessed the preaching of Rev. George Cates: “The evangelist did not tell us what he thought about God’s word nor what somebody else said about it. But day after day and night after night, he burned into our hearts just the naked word of God, and also got the people to go to their friends with God’s word . . .” which effectively affected the saving of spiritually lost souls.<sup>33</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 E. Michael and Sharon Rusten, “Five Key Revivals,” posted May 5, 2005 on the website, <https://decisionmagazine.com/five-key-revivals/>, accessed April 15, 2020, which reported: “The Welsh Revival began in 1904 under the preaching of Evan Roberts. Within two years, 100,000 converts were added to the Welsh Church. More than 5 million came to Christ as the revival spread throughout the world. As part of this same outpouring of the Spirit, revival came in 1906 to a mission led by William Seymour in a dilapidated building on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. The Azusa Street Revival was the formative event of early Pentecostalism.”
- 2 Mark Nysewander, “Awakening Movements in Modern History,” website, <https://www.seedbed.com/awakening-movements-in->

modern-history/; posted January 14, 2019; accessed April 5, 2020. Nysewander explained: "Inspired by the Welsh Revival, hundreds of people pray for revival in Los Angeles, California, when William Seymour, a black Holiness preacher, arrives in town from Texas. On April 9, 1906, he and seven others in a home meeting suddenly fall to the ground, speaking with other tongues.

Attendance increases so quickly, the gathering is moved to an old warehouse on Azusa Street, where the meetings last through the days and into the nights. News of the tongues and other signs of power bring trainloads of people from across the United States. Within six months, missionaries go out from Azusa Street, while visitors scatter over the country spreading the same experiences. The revival peaks countless salvations, baptisms of the Spirit with tongues, healings, holy living, and manifestations of the Spirit characterize the revival."

3 E. W. Carswell, *Washington: Florida's Twelfth County*, (Tallahassee: Rose Print Co., 1991), 349, who cites the December 21, 1916, issue of the *Chipley Banner*.

4 Matthew Backholer, *Revival Fires and Awakenings*, (London: United Kingdom: ByFaith Media, 2009), 11.

5 E.W. Carswell, "Soul-Winning Event Retold," *The Pensacola New Journal*, December 1, 1969, 1-D.

6 Zach Kincaid, "What Sparked these Five Great American Revivals," *ShareFaith Magazine*, blog posted on website, <https://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2016/06/5-great-american-revivals/>, posted May 6, 2006; accessed April 5, 2020.

7 No author, edited by Book Committee, *The Heritage of Washington County, Florida*, Clanton, AL: Heritage Publishing Consultants, Inc, 2006, 1. As a point of information, W.D. Chipley (1840 – 1897) and his spouse, Anne Elizabeth, were Baptists by conviction and were active in the First Baptist Church of Pensacola. While Chipley gained prominence in the Panhandle through his development of rail lines and political leadership, Anne

Elizabeth gained prominence in her work in the woman's missions' organizations at the church, state convention, and Southern Baptist Convention levels. See Martha Pope Trotter, *Faithful Servants*, (Pensacola: FL: PEC Printing and Publishing, 1994), 27.

8 Joan P. Chance, *History, First Baptist Church, Chipley, Florida, 1897 – 1987*, (Chipley, FL.: Panhandle Area Educational Cooperative, 1987), 8. This source briefly describes pastor A.T. Camp as being a Mississippi native, who was self-educated and taught school in Mississippi. He also preached in Mississippi and Abbeville, Alabama before coming to Florida. Camp first came to the Chipley Baptist church, "as a revival singer. However, he finished the revival as the evangelist when the original evangelist became ill. He was first called as a supply preacher for two Sundays per month, and continued to serve the church" from 1915 to 1924. Also see: *The Heritage of Washington County, Florida*, 30.

9 Havilen T. Strout was assigned to Chipley in 1913 after service at the Methodist church in Pensacola. He continued to serve in Chipley until the end of 1916 when the District Bishop assigned him to Camden, Ala. Also see various sources: "News Notes," *Pensacola (FL) News Journal*, December 21, 1913, 6; 1916 *Minutes of the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*; *The Heritage of Washington County, Florida*, 30. Birth and death dates were sourced from

<https://search.ancestry.com> and

[https://Newspapers.com/Obituary Index](https://Newspapers.com/ObituaryIndex); accessed May 2, 2020

10 Rev. Fred F. Schell, who grew up in Chipley and whose father was a founding member of the church, had been serving the Presbyterian church several years prior to the revival. Also see

<https://chipleypresbyterian.org/site/cs/about-us.asp>;

*The Heritage of Washington County, Florida*, 29. birth and death dates were sourced from

<https://search.ancestry.com>;



<https://Newspapers.com/Obituary Index>; accessed May 2, 2020.

11 No author, *Cates Union Revival, Chipley, Florida, 1916*, (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Co., no date), 25. Hereinafter this resource shall be referred to as *Cates Union Revival*. A photocopy of the booklet is held in the files of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, Graceville, Fl. The Baptist pastors church service information was verified in the 1916 *West Florida Baptist Association Annual* and the birth and death dates were secured through <http://search.ancestry.com>., accessed May 2, 2020.

12 *The Heritage of Washington County, Florida*, 29-30. Also see, A.T. Camp, "The Great Union Meeting in Chipley Closed," *Florida Baptist Witness*, January 11, 1917, 5.

13 The recorded membership of the Baptist church was 325, according the *1915 Annual of the West Florida Baptist Association*; the Methodist church's reported membership was 502, according to the *1915 Minutes of the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*; and there is no available resource on the Presbyterian church's membership, but the writer's best low estimate is 300 members. These membership records were part of a larger statistical report typically filed in September/October and represented statistics for the prior church year of October to September.

14 Carswell, "Soul-Winning Event Retold," 1-D.

15 *Cates Union Revival*, a rare and hard to find booklet, provides a summary account of the Chipley revival.

16 A.T. Camp, "The Great Union Meeting in Chipley Closed," *Florida Baptist Witness*, January 11, 1917, 5.

17 "Certificate of Death," Commonwealth of Kentucky, provided the birth and death dates of Cates, which was retrieved from the website:

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/89358211/george-c-cates>; accessed November 8, 2019., and a copy of the certificate in the files of the Florida Baptist Historical

Society, Graceville, FL.

18 Dozens of these newspapers were reviewed by the author at the online newspaper archive,

<https://newspaper.com>; accessed November 10 – 11, 2019.

19 “What’s the Matter Spiritually with Temple,” *Hopkinsville (KY) Kentuckian*, April 2, 1908, 2, serves as an example the Cates’ request for a community’s spiritual assessment.

20 *Cates Union Revival*, 7.

21 Editor, “The Cates Meeting at Chipley Postponed,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, November 2, 1916, 5.

22 “Evangelist Returns,” Austin (TX) *American-Statesman*, April 3, 1908, 2; “Burton Hall Report,” *Baptist and Reflector* (Tennessee), June 30, 1910, 5; “Evangelist Cates Was Back on His Job Today,” *The Daily Decatur* (Alabama), September 20, 1916, 1, were typical news reports of Cates’ medical condition which affected his preaching.

23 *Cates Union Revival*, 7.

24 Ibid. The *Cates Union Revival* booklet cites specific dates which do not match the actual year 1916 calendar dates which were compared using the website: “Calendar for Year 1916,” [www.timeanddate.com/calendar](http://www.timeanddate.com/calendar); accessed May 5, 2020.

25 Ibid. 7-8.

26 Camp, 5.

27 *Cates Union Revival*, 11.

28 Ibid, 9.

29 Ibid. 12.

30 Ibid. 13.

31 Ibid. 17.

32 Ibid. 21.

33 Ibid. 29.

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## **Jorge Comesañas: The Hispanic Evangelism Pacesetter**

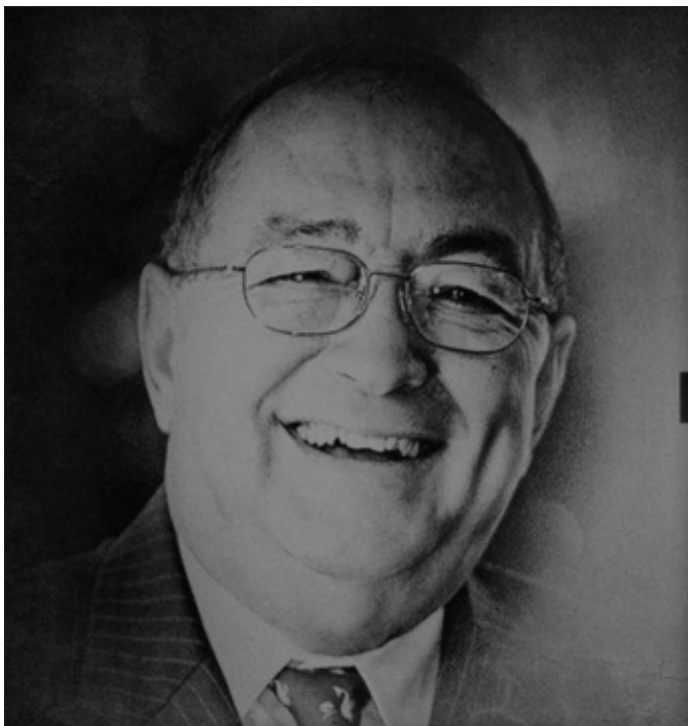
*by Barbara Little Denman  
Freelance Writer  
Jacksonville, Florida*



As a visionary Hispanic pastor who planted churches across the United States, Cuban-born Jorge Comesañas led Miami's Primera Iglesia Bautista de Coral Park from 1982 to 2009 to become the largest Hispanic congregation in the Florida Baptist State Convention and among the largest in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Jorge Comesañas grew the Coral Park church from 150 members to more than 3,400 resident members while baptizing 2,208 new believers through a vigorous evangelistic outreach, a charismatic personality, and an innate ability to see God at work.<sup>1</sup> But no one other than God knows the countless souls he reached with the gospel during his daily walks of life, his international mission trips and in his troubled homeland.

Speaking at a conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center in July 1998, Jorge Comesañas attributed the Coral Park church's growth to "an optimistic spirit and thinking big. You have to have goals and the Lord will provide. If you are happy with the number you have, you won't do much."<sup>2</sup> He



**Jorge Comesañas**  
**(b. 1940; d. 2011)**

added, “You have to have a vision for each aspect of church life. If you think small, you’re going to stay small.”<sup>3</sup> With 21 Spanish-speaking nationalities represented among the church members in 1998, the Miami pastor said the church effectively provided a family atmosphere for new immigrants. “We can meet their needs through love, care and lifestyle. The key is love.”<sup>4</sup>

Although Pastor Comesañas retired from Primera Iglesia Bautista de Coral Park in 2009, he was still serving his Lord as pastor of First Baptist Church in

Hialeah Gardens, at the time of his death from a brain tumor on October 27, 2011, at age 71.

“Jorge was a man ahead of his time, a faithful servant of God, a pastor with a tender heart, with vision and great passion for the [spiritually] lost,” said Frank Moreno, retired language division director of the Florida Baptist Convention. “He was intentional to reach the unchurched, had a welcoming spirit and an attitude that enhanced assimilation into the fellowship of the church.”<sup>5</sup>

“He was a humble man from humble beginnings,” said David Lema, pastor of Peters Road Baptist Church in Plantation, Florida, and Associate Professor of Theology and Missions at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisiana. Lema called Jorge Comesañas his mentor and friend. “I think God exalted him. He grew a megachurch but didn’t really want to pastor a ‘megachurch;’ he just wanted to see Kingdom growth.”<sup>6</sup>

“Jorge Comesañas was an inspirational, highly effective and truly committed Southern Baptist Convention pastor and leader that demonstrated by example that ethnic/language churches and leaders could be an integral, important and necessary part of who we have become as a denomination,” said Emanuel Roque, catalyst for Hispanic ministries for the Florida Baptist Convention.<sup>7</sup>

“The first and largest SBC Hispanic megachurch in the United States, Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana de

Coral Park flourished under his pastorate. This church was an example of his leading in a way that was clearly a Southern Baptist Convention-oriented culture and commitment to Cooperative Program and values.”<sup>8</sup>

## **Humble Beginnings**

Jorge Comesañas was born April 18, 1940, to Manuel Comesaña and Amanda Diaz in San Miguel del Padron, Havana, Cuba. Due to a clerical error, a “s” was added to his name at birth, a spelling he continued to use throughout his life. He had three older siblings: Manolo Comesaña, Guadalupe “Lupe” Comesaña, and Lorenzo Comesaña.<sup>9</sup> As the fourth child born to an extremely poor family, Jorge Comesañas was often told he was unwanted, and later learned his mother had considered an abortion. According to his son, Alex Comesañas, his father endured beatings and was treated as a “nuisance,” by his family, sent outdoors to entertain himself. An elderly woman in the community gathered him and other neighborhood children to take them to church.

“It was there that my father heard the Gospel and the message of being part of a loving family of God. That is what he longed for,” said Alex Comesañas. His father accepted the Lord as his Savior in 1949 at age nine at Iglesia Bautista de Jacomino, located in the Havana Province in Cuba. “The church became his haven.”<sup>10</sup>

At one point, Jorge Comesañas was told by his father to choose between his family and the church.

Although torn, the young man heard a sermon based on Mark 8:36, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, but lose his soul?" After reflecting on that passage, the answer came easy for the young Jorge, the work of the Lord must come first. When he told his father, a devout Atheist, that he loved his family, but would choose the church, life became even more difficult as his father told him he'd have to beg for food and wash his own clothes. Always industrious, the youngster began working in a hardware store to provide his own nourishment.<sup>11</sup>

The teenager sensed a call to the ministry and began attending Iglesia Bautista Luyanó in 1953 at age 13. The pastor of the church was David Torres, who, according to Jorge

Comesañas' widow  
Carmen Comesañas,  
became Jorge's spiritual  
father and one of the  
greatest influences in his

**... he was  
ordained and  
planted a Spanish  
mission ...**

life, even after both immigrated to the United States. "Pastor Torres and his wife opened the doors of their house to Jorge, and he was discipled and encouraged by the pastor to become a faithful follower and servant of Jesus," said Moreno. Their ministry paths would cross often in the future. Torres came to Florida with his family and served as pastor of a Hispanic mission of Murray Hill Baptist Church in Jacksonville<sup>12</sup> (later constituted as Primera Iglesia Baustista Hispana de Jacksonville where Jorge Comesañas would lead as pastor)<sup>13</sup>; and years later became the pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista in West Palm Beach.<sup>14</sup>



To prepare to follow God's leadership in the Christian ministry, Jorge Comesañas entered seminary at Seminario Bautista de Cuba Occidental in 1959 at age 19, becoming the youngest student there. That year he was ordained and planted a Spanish mission for a Jamaican church in Buena Vista, Havana, Cuba. That church plant continues today.

Coincidentally, one of the first members of the Spanish congregation is now a member of Providence Road Church in Miami, where Jorge Comesañas' son, Alex Comesañas, serves as pastor of member care and administration. Her grandson leads worship at the church.<sup>15</sup>

While in seminary, Jorge Comesañas came under the tutelage of Professor Herbert Caudill, a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board missionary for 40 years, who along with his son-in-law and fellow missionary David Fite, were the only Americans imprisoned by Cuban dictator Fidel Castro after the Cuban Revolution. The two, along with 53 Western Cuba Baptist Convention leaders, were arrested in Havana in 1965 on what Fite later called fabricated charges of "trafficking in foreign currency" and "ideological diversionism." They were released in November 1968 and returned to the United States in February 1969.<sup>16</sup> The relationship between the professor and student continued until Caudill died in 1987 at age 84. According to Emanuel Roque, Comesañas and others of his ministry era in Western Cuba, "had been effectively educated" by SBC home missionaries including Herbert Caudill, David Fite, Hubert Hurt,

Christine Garnet and local pastors who “equipped them for gospel and local church ministry with a great working knowledge and commitment to Southern Baptist work and missions.” The Hispanic ministry that Comesañas started in Buena Vista, was planted in cooperation with the English-speaking church where David Fite served as pastor.<sup>17</sup>

“Equally important, Christine Garnet had a great discipling influence teaching stewardship to Jorge’s wife, Carmen while in Cuba,” Roque said. “Carmen was baptized and served in Havana at William Carey Baptist Church where a leading pastor, Domingo Fernandez, served. Pastor Fernandez was taught by the legendary Home Mission Board missionary Moses McCall who served as superintendent and director of the seminary for 40 years shaping much of Western Cuban Baptist Convention.”<sup>18</sup>

After years of oppression under Fidel Castro’s regime, Jorge Comesañas left Cuba in 1968. But he returned to the country at least 25 times to visit with his family and share the gospel with them and his fellow Cubans. Several family members, including his sister and mother, would eventually come to know Christ as Savior. His brother was the only family member to immigrate to the States along with his three adult children and their families. Comesañas’ sister remains in Cuba where her son, following the footsteps of his uncle, too, became a pastor.<sup>19</sup> When Jorge Comesañas graduated from seminary, his father and mother attended the commencement service and proudly watched their son receive his degree.

Surprisingly after his father's cruel treatment of him, the young pastor bore no bitterness, according to Carmen Comesañas. "Once he came to know Christ at age nine, God took away everything but good will," she said.<sup>20</sup>

## **Finding new life in America**

The 1960s were a tumultuous decade in Cuba as the government drifted toward a Communistic ideology. Wealthy and middle-class Cubans fled the island nation as tensions between Fidel Castro's government and the United States intensified and the relationship deteriorated.

While in seminary, Jorge Comesañas met Carmen Figueroa in 1961 at a funeral and married her on December 16, 1963. A year later in December 1964, their first child, a son, David was born. He sent Carmen and the baby to the United States to live with her family in Sarasota on December 13, 1965.



**Comesañas newly married**

Two of her brothers had escaped Cuba through the Operation Peter Pan, a clandestine mass exodus of more than 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors from 1960 to 1962. The family immigrated and lived in Sarasota through the sponsorship of Bay Haven Baptist Church.<sup>21</sup> Jorge Comesañas could not immigrate to the United States with his family

because males between the ages of 15 and 26 years were prohibited from leaving the country should they be called to serve in the military. He had urged his wife to leave Cuba and join her family, telling her that it would be easier for him to escape unaccompanied than with a family.<sup>22</sup>

While remaining in Cuba, the young seminarian was determined that God could use him in midst of the political upheaval in his homeland. Ordained in 1963, he became interim pastor of four churches from 1965 to 1968 leading congregations whose pastors were imprisoned by the Cuban government for preaching the gospel. Although there is much speculation as to why Jorge Comesañas was never detained, meeting the same fate as his fellow pastors, some family members allude to the belief that “he was always in the right place at the right time – God’s time.”<sup>23</sup>

His son, Alex Comesañas, who affectionately characterizes his father as an “energizer bunny,” said, “he never hid, he never stopped moving,” noting that the chief of police lived across the street the entire time officials were looking for him.<sup>24</sup>

Having applied to the Cuban government to leave his place of birth, in January 1968 at age 26, Jorge Comesañas arrived in the United States to join his family, his wife Carmen and their son, and her family that included her parents and five siblings living in Sarasota. He planted a Spanish mission for a small group of Hispanics that had been gathering at the Bay Haven Baptist Church, the congregation that had

served as sponsors for their family.

The newly arrived immigrant was appointed as a Home Mission Board, SBC, missionary, serving from February 1968 to June 1970, to reach Hispanics living in Southwest Florida communities from North Sarasota to Naples. In that role, Jorge Comesañas traveled the rich, fertile farmlands stretching from Gillette to Bonita Springs in search of migrant farmworkers who worked the fields, ministering to their needs and leading many to Christ.<sup>25</sup>

In June 1970, the Comesañas family moved to Decatur, Georgia, where the young pastor planted a Spanish mission affiliated with Atlanta's First Baptist Church. Under his leadership, the congregation acquired a building and established Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana, a congregation that still exists in 2020. While there, First Baptist Atlanta was in a time of transition when Charles Stanley became pastor in 1971. The legendary Atlanta pastor became a life-long friend of the Hispanic pastor.<sup>26</sup>

During the next 12 years, Jorge Comesañas served as pastor of two congregations: Iglesia Bautista Resurrección in Bergenfield, New Jersey, 1976-1979; and a Spanish mission for Murray Hill Baptist Church located in the westside of Jacksonville, Florida, that purchased property and established a church, Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana, 1979 to 1982. In every new church he planted, the astute pastor secured a new building, giving the embryonic congregation a foothold in its community and a vision for future

growth. During the years in the U.S., Jorge and Carmen Comesañas added three children to their expanding family: Amy Comesañas (now Pasteris), born January 1969 in Sarasota; Daniel Comesañas, born March 1973 in Atlanta; and Alex Comesañas, born August 1974 in Atlanta.<sup>27</sup>

### **A Haven for Immigrants**

Jorge Comesañas was called as the pastor of Miami's Primera Iglesia Bautista de Coral Park on July 11, 1982, the church that would become the hallmark of his 50-plus years in ministry. According to the family, when Jorge Comesañas arrived, the church had 400 members with about 120 active members. The 1982 Florida Baptist Convention *Annual*, however, reported 244 resident members, 249 total members and 30 baptisms that year.<sup>28</sup> For the first time in his U.S. ministry, Jorge Comesañas did not have to seek out the Hispanic community to win to Christ. They were a booming demographic in this rapidly changing community. In 1980, 56 percent of the city of Miami's population was classified as of Spanish descent, while 35.7 percent of Dade County's population was Hispanic.<sup>29</sup>

"My father never saw a stranger, only people in need of a Savior and sometimes in need of help," said Alex Comesañas. In 1989, Primera Iglesia purchased its current building, a former synagogue less than a mile away from the previous church site. To save money, church members undertook major renovations required to prepare the cavernous, aging synagogue to host the thriving Baptist congregation. The

congregation continues to worship in the building today.

“My father was driving home on a rainy night, and he saw the silhouette of two guys hiding from the rain under a picnic table on the property of a Catholic church,” Alex Comesañas recalled. “He approached them to see why they are out in the elements. After hearing they were homeless brothers, he offered for them to sleep in a room in the church at night and help with the construction by day for a wage. These two brothers stayed until the building project was complete and went on to trust in Christ as their Savior and eventually get full time” employment.<sup>30</sup>

The family shares story after story of the pastor’s winsome ways and kind spirit. He often brought home guests – people in need – “We never knew who would be at our home,” or how long they would stay, said Alex Comesañas.<sup>31</sup>

**“My father never  
saw a stranger, only  
people in need of a  
Savior . . .”  
- Alex Comesañas**

“Dad was an uber-extrovert who did not like being by himself. As serious as he could be about the gospel, he could also tell jokes and stories. He was the life of the party with his presence and always up for a good laugh. More specifically, when you were with him, he wanted to know about you. He did not have a computer, nor did he ever turn one on, but he knew every person in the church, who was their family, and what was the most urgent need. If you were in need of anything, he would find it.”<sup>32</sup>

Jorge Comesañas was a soulwinner in every walk of life. Carmen Comesañas tells of the time she took her husband shopping at a local grocery store. After he excused himself to go to the restroom, she completed her shopping, paid for the groceries, and began searching for her wayward spouse. About that time, she caught sight of him, walking towards her, his arm stretched across the shoulder of his “new brother in Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

The pastor became known not only for his great evangelistic fervor, but also for his enthusiastic support of the Southern Baptist Convention’s unified giving plan, the Cooperative Program, perennially leading all the state’s language churches in cooperative giving.<sup>34</sup> Cooperative Program support was a “non-negotiable” to Jorge Comesañas, said David Lema. “He was Baptist to the bone.” His commitment to the Southern Baptists’ cooperative financial giving plan was not unlike that generation of Hispanic Southern Baptists, Lema said. But he admits that type of denominational loyalty was not necessarily held by the next generation.<sup>35</sup>

Emanuel Roque attributed Jorge Comesañas’ denomination loyalty to his seminary education in Cuba. “When he came to the U.S., he and his generation of first generation Cuban pastors, stepped right into a continuation and alignment with Southern Baptist’s Cooperative Program, a Great Commission commitment to evangelism and missions, program and ministry emphases including



special missions offering such as Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon, and a clearly visible Southern Baptist DNA and commitment to cooperation and stewardship for missions to the whole the world,” he said.<sup>36</sup> “All this clearly visible SBC commitment and expression was a result of their relationships, formation and ministry development at the local church and denominational levels that was Biblically centered and modeled by those that impacted them.”<sup>37</sup>

For two terms – 2004 to 2007 and 2007 to 2010 – Jorge Comesañas was elected to serve on the Florida Convention’s State Board of Missions. Yet according to Lema, the pastor was not asked to serve in other elected offices within the denomination – nor did he seek such positions. “I think he was the most underestimated servant of God I’ve ever met,” Lema said.<sup>38</sup>

**Jorge Comesañas**  
**... “was Baptist**  
**to the bone”**  
**- David Lema**

During Jorge Comesañas’ 27-year tenure at Primera Iglesia Bautista de Coral Park, 2,028 total baptisms were recorded, averaging 75 baptisms per year. For five years, the church reported at least 100 baptisms per year: 1996 – 136 baptisms; 1997 – 115 baptisms; 1999 – 115 baptisms; 2004 – 105 baptisms; 2007 – 116 baptisms.<sup>39</sup>

While the church grew to as many as 3,000 in total membership (not resident members) and became the largest Hispanic churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, Jorge Comesañas qualified the spiritual

significance of the growth, saying the church was small in contrast “to the thousands and thousands of [spiritually] lost people” in Miami-Dade.<sup>40</sup>

The unprecedented growth of the church under Jorge Comesañas’ leadership can be attributed to a number of factors, according to retired missions’ leader Frank Moreno. “Jorge was a very strong people person and good at building relationships,” he said. “His charisma and great pastoral heart made his church members feel welcomed and cared for. His passion for evangelism and missions was evident, and he instilled that enthusiasm in the life of the church.” His

**“Jorge was a very  
strong  
people person . . .” -  
Frank Moreno**

missionary zeal was not limited to the Coral Park church. Jorge Comesañas frequently took his members on mission trips, planting churches in Florida, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Cuba and Mexico.<sup>41</sup>

The younger Comesañas shared a story about a time his father went on a mission trip to Nicaragua and visited the home of a family running a soup kitchen. “My father went outside to where drunkards were sitting and sat next to one of them and gave him a hug.” After learning of Jorge Comesañas’ death, the Nicaraguan man sent a letter to the family, saying it was the first hug he ever remembered receiving. The man eventually became a Christian and is now “preaching the Word,” Alex Comesañas said.

“That was life at our house,” Alex Comesañas remembered, saying his father was the same at home and at church. “And it was contagious to the people at church.”<sup>42</sup> Another example of the pastor demonstrating his genuine love for people was following the Mariel Boatlift, when 125,000 Cubans escaped oppression in their nation by thousands of boats, traveling across the Florida straits from Mariel, Cuba, to Key West from April 15 through Oct. 31, 1980. The Home Mission Board set up a processing center in Key West to help the overwhelming overflow of refugees. One day, Pastor Comesañas showed up with a bus and took back a busload of new refugees to Miami where they could start a new life in America.<sup>43</sup>

A year after Jorge Comesañas arrived in Miami, he was invited to participate in Evangelism Explosion (EE) training, a witnessing tool developed by James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in nearby Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Eventually Jorge Comesañas and his wife Carmen were trained to lead workshops and hosted trainings at the church, bringing in hundreds of international pastors to Coral Park. “Evangelism Explosion was a catalyst for the phenomenal growth at Coral Park,” said Alex Comesañas. “Once we tied EE with a robust discipleship process, the church exploded in growth. The two were interdependent.”<sup>44</sup> He went on to explain, “My father was always grateful for EE, but he was often saying, ‘the best evangelism model is the one you use.’ Too many people are trained in an evangelism model but never use it. I would never say he was ahead of his time in evangelism. He was just obedient,” said Alex Comesañas.<sup>45</sup>

Jorge Comesañas believed that critical to the success of any church's growth is visitation – whether it was using Evangelism Explosion practices or any other soul-winning method. Every Monday night the pastor and the five ministers on staff led several hundred trained church members out into the Miami streets to share the gospel with homes in the community. “We go out for visitation even if there is a hurricane or tornado. The pastor and staff must be a testimony to the members. We can't tell the people to go if we don't go,” Jorge Comesañas told workshop attendees at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center.<sup>46</sup> Alex Comesañas, who served on the staff with his dad for nearly 12 years, said it was easier for staff members to get time off on a Sunday than during a Monday. “Monday nights were sacred.”

When Category 5 Hurricane Andrew was approaching Miami in August 1992, the pastor made it clear that Monday night visitation would go on. However, when the storm hit the southern end of the Florida Peninsula early in the morning of August 24, visitation was cancelled. Instead the day afterwards, the church began cooking and serving those in the community without power and in need, continuing as long as the need existed. And true to form, on the next Monday after the storm struck, visitation continued as scheduled.<sup>47</sup>

Other highlights of Jorge Comesañas' ministry at Coral Park include beginning an English-speaking congregation in 2001 and planting two new congregations in other Miami communities

experiencing explosive growth: Coral Park Kendall in 2003; and Coral Park Cutler Bay in 2006. In each location, Jorge Comesañas ensured that property was acquired for the new congregation.<sup>48</sup>

At the time of his retirement from the church in 2009, Primera Iglesia de Coral Park had eight pastors, three locations, a nearly two-million-dollar budget, and mission involvement in many countries including Nicaragua, Paraguay, Cuba, Mexico, Guatemala and the Middle East. The church's Christian Learning Center included a daycare and elementary school from kindergarten through fifth grade with 30 teachers and approximately 210 students in the entire school.<sup>49</sup>

Yet, the younger Comesañas said, "My father's great joy was never in the ministry that God allowed him to have. He was always proud of Coral Park and loved every single person that came through the doors. His greatest accomplishment was having a family that was united and trusted in Christ. Family was never sacrificed at the altar of ministry."<sup>50</sup>

Contemporaries of the Miami pastor note that his wife, Carmen Comesañas, was one of his biggest assets. They balanced each other perfectly, said Lema. "He was the accelerant, and she was the brakes."<sup>51</sup> Moreno agreed, "The two of them worked very closely as a team and complemented each other in a unique way. She was very effective as a leader working in various areas of the church and supporting her husband in the ministry. She is well known in

Florida for her great personality, faithfulness to God and wisdom.”<sup>52</sup>

After a diagnosis of a brain tumor two years earlier, Jorge Comesañas came face-to-face with the Savior he had loved since age nine on Oct. 27, 2011.



**The Comesañas' 47  
years of marriage**

More than 2,000 people came to say goodbye to the beloved pastor during his memorial service held Sunday, October 30. He is survived by his wife of 47 years, Carmen; adult children, David, Amy, Daniel, and Alex; ten grandchildren; and other family members.

A year after his death, the Florida Legislature approved a request by the Miami-Dade City of Miami to dedicate the stretch of SW 87th Ave. from 8th St. to 24th St., where Iglesia Bautista de Coral Park is located, as Rev. Jorge Comesañas Way. The city also named that day, October 27, 2012, as Rev. Jorge Comesañas Way DAY.<sup>53</sup>

As Alex Comesañas looked back on his father's life, he acknowledged Jorge Comesañas would have never wanted “recognition for what God did through him. He was always quick to deflect the credit from himself and direct it to God.” Recalling his father's favorite verse, 1 Corinthians 1:27—“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose

what is weak in the world to shame the strong,” Alex Comesañas added, “He felt that the verse was describing what God could do with him a foolish and weak person.”<sup>54</sup>

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# **The Legacy of Florida's “Million Souls” Evangelist: E.J. Daniels**

*by Jerry Windsor, ThD  
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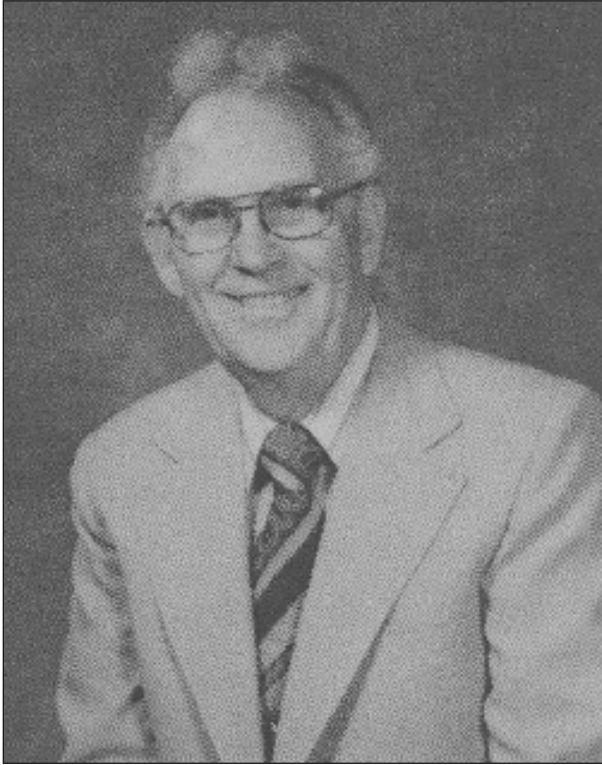


E. J. Daniels (b. 1908; d.1987) was a passionate preacher with a personal agenda. His flowing curly hair and wide rimmed glasses gave him a mad scientist look, but his nice suits, raspy voice and clear-cut language made him a favorite among preachers of the Southern Baptist Convention. E. J. used humor, logic and emotion to make his points stick. He told jokes but everyone had meaning. He liked to use outrageous statements but E. J. was all business. He was a business man at work with a preacher's call and passion.

Glenda M. Jeters of Fort Myers, Florida, called *Christ for the World* ministries one day to order some E. J. Daniels tapes for her mother. In making the order, Dr. Jeters said that her mother loved “his old-time gospel message. I loved it too. It was like fire.”

## **Background**

Elamb Jackson Daniels was born November 1, 1908, in O'Brien, Florida. He was number five of eight children. There was Byron, Ruby, Lois, George, E. J., Aaron, Jacob and Richard. His parents were Jim and Meriba Daniels and E. J. soon became “Elam” as the



**E. J. Daniels**  
**(b. 1908; d.1987)**

“b” was dropped from his first name.<sup>2</sup> E. J. was named Elamb after a great uncle who was a Florida sheriff and another uncle who was a timberman. Both men died tragically in the line of duty. The middle name “Jackson” was given by his father who was an admirer of Stonewall Jackson of Civil War fame.

E. J. was born into a Scotch-Irish family that believed in free enterprise, honest dealings and hard work. Jim Daniels was a big-time turpentine distiller. He

learned the art of making money by leasing state prisoners for refining resin from yellow pine trees. At one-point Jim leased tens of thousands of acres in South Florida to harvest the turpentine for medicinal, paint, and commercial purposes. Acres were leased for 25 cents an acre and the pine trees represented yellow gold. However there was a fatal flaw in all the transactions. Pines in south Florida were “short pines” and did not offer the same easy surrender of resin as did the pines in north Florida. This business set back could have been overcome, but at this same time daughter Ruby contracted diphtheria and died at age four at their home in O’Brien. The family loss scarred Jim so badly he abandoned the south Florida project and lost thousands of dollars. He then turned his attention to farming. The concepts of risk, hard work, early rising and responsibility made a meaningful impression upon E. J. Daniels as a child.

### **Spiritual Decisions**

E. J. was nicknamed “Lam” and by age 13 saw a need for church membership. W. T. Newsome was his pastor and baptized Lam into the church at Little River Springs, that flows into the Suwannee River. Lam was a member of O’Brien Baptist Church but was still [spiritually] lost. It was not until age 18 that E. J. personally trusted Christ as his Saviour and was baptized again into the O’Brien church. Some people did not understand it, but E. J. was convinced that his new birth required a valid baptism.

E. J. graduated from Branford High School in 1929. He planned to study law at Stetson University and

entered school right before the October, 1929 depression. It was during a J. Earle Lewis tent revival in Deland that fall when E. J. told Lewis he was called to preach. Lewis immediately announced that E. J. would be preaching his first sermon the following Wednesday night in a rented store building. E. J. preached his first sermon there in Deland and five people were saved. He preached his second sermon at Pierson, Florida. According to Max Morris in *The Million Soul Man*, (p. 73) the store front preaching begun by J. Earl Lewis became the Stetson Baptist Church. E. J. was a charter member and was licensed to preach by the Stetson church.

E. J. had a heart to prepare and preach but he had no money. He sold Bibles for the Southwestern Publishing Company of Nashville (\$6.95) and set a company record by making 20 presentations and 20 sales in one day. All his life he maintained the Bible selling record because who could beat 100 percent.

A choice of schooling was never easy for E. J. He graduated from Branford in 1927 with seven people in his graduating class. He entered Stetson School of Law (1929-1930) but after being called to preach attended South Florida Bible School (1930-1933) at Plant City. He went to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1936 but had to drop out after he contracted tuberculous. E. J. received a certificate from the Plant City school and attended Florida Southern in Lakeland from 1933-1935. In 1948 Bob Jones University awarded E. J. the D. D. degree.

E. J. married Elizabeth Weaver in 1931. They had no children but adopted a foster child Kaye Hannah. Kaye stayed in the Daniels home while she was in school in the United States. E. J. and Elizabeth married on the day Elizabeth graduated from Live Oak High School. Therefore Elizabeth became a wife, high school graduate and pastor's wife on the same day.

### **Five Pastorates and Full Time Evangelism**

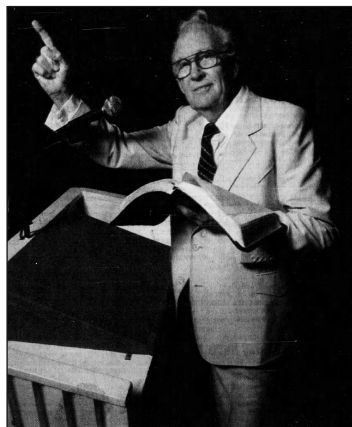
E. J. served as pastor of five different Southern Baptist churches before he went into full time evangelism. His first pastorate was Broadway Baptist Church in Tampa (1930-1933). His salary was \$15.00 a week and it was there that E. J. and Elizabeth married. The second pastorate was Eagle Lake Baptist Church (1933-1936). He was then pastor of First Baptist Church, Winter Garden (1936-1942), First Baptist Church, Fort Pierce (1942-1943) and First Baptist Church, Fairfield, Alabama (1943-1947). Daniels was very effective as a pastor but God called him into full time evangelism and E. J. surrendered to that call.

While at Eagle Lake E. J. went into the printing business. He purchased a printing press and his first publication was "The Biblical Echo." This was the beginning of an eventual printing empire. By 1980 E. J. and Elizabeth had one of the largest printing firms in the south with plants in Florida and Alabama. An older brother died and left E. J. some start up money for the business and "The Golden Rule Press" was born. The firm had hundreds of employees in Ft.

Lauderdale and Birmingham and they printed books, magazines, Baptist state papers, inserts for department store ads and other business accounts. This printing business made the money to fund the evangelistic ministry of E. J. Daniels around the world.<sup>3</sup>

“Dr. D. was definitely different. He did not want to ask the public for donations . . . His business interests were equal to the task and gave a wonderful financial foundation to Christ for the World ministries.

Associate John Bos wrote an article entitled “God Keeps Evangelist Daniels Young.” Bos pointed out that E. J. Daniels had the energy, strength, enthusiasm and vigor of men far younger. Bos listed numerous reasons he felt E. J. had done so well, but his bottom-line argument was that it was a “miracle” of God.<sup>4</sup>



**E. J. Daniels pictured  
in a *Florida Today*  
news story**

### **The Preaching of Dr. Daniels**

It is my intent to make some general observations about the preaching of E. J. He was a called communicator of the good news and his preaching style and methods were part of that communication giftedness.

### Sermon Text

E. J. Daniels was a Biblical preacher. He loved the Bible, believed the Bible and preached it as the inspired word of God. However as we think of a basic text of a sermon there were numerous times when E. J. would let his subject and not the text rule the sermon. I remember hearing him preach two different times (Dothan, Alabama in 1960; Mobile, Alabama in 1966) and it seems he read a text each time but departed immediately. He always had many, many supporting texts but not always a basic sermon text that he used as home plate.

### **He always rang the bell in his preaching**

Elizabeth Daniels was asked to choose seven of Dr. Daniels best sermons for publication in 1988.

This was after 50 years of marriage and more than

50 years of hearing her husband preach. Of the seven sermons chosen by Mrs. Daniels only two of them (Psalm 23, Job 14:1-14) had a direct text. All of them had supporting scripture, truths and lessons. But only two had a foundational text that produced the meat of the sermon. Sometimes E. J. would list or read a text and then go immediately into the sermon idea without any textual background or explanation.<sup>5</sup>

### Sermon Title

I have always felt a sermon title was important. I was trained that way (J. F. Kelley, Hudson Baggett, V. L. Stanfield, James Taylor, John Killenger) and the Broadus, Brown and Craddock approaches affirmed



all of that. E. J. Daniels always had titles and in about 25 percent of the time had titles that were very interesting and made you want to hear more. Sometimes titles and topics were assigned to E. J. and he made no particular effort to dress them up. In the 1965 Florida Baptist Evangelistic Conference Dr. Paul Meigs, Secretary (Director) of the Evangelism Department, Florida Baptist Convention, asked Daniels to preach a sermon on “Compassion for the Lost.” E. J. did and entitled the sermon exactly that: “Compassion for the Lost.”

However in his preaching and writing E. J. Daniels had a vivid imagination and let it shine in some of his best written and oral presentations. “Seven Don’ts for Those Planning Marriage” sounds negative but was an interesting helpful topic and discourse. Who could resist “Whom Should You Marry” and “The Tragic Results of Not Tithing.” “Why God Does Not Always Answer Your Prayers” and “Perplexing Questions Regarding Life after Death” showed promise in their titles and delivered the results.

I suspect titles were not all that important to Daniels. He always rang the bell in his preaching and used titles sparingly and briefly. His publication ministry intensified the importance of titles, but he was always able to find some good titles and use great introductions to overcome weak titles.

### Sermon Introduction

E. J. seldom used scriptural introductions. His favorite use was humor. He had a great memory and

a splendid use of “timely” humor. He could read an audience well and use his directed humor to introduce most any topic. Some very serious topics like “Alcohol: The Mad Dog in Our Communities” did not lend itself to humor but most of his sermons were filled with funny stories that hit home.

Sometimes E. J. used a question for his introduction; (Whom Should I Marry?) sometimes a contextual setting (When Dr. Meigs asked me to speak...); sometimes a transitional statement (There are many factors that should determine whom you should marry); sometimes a startling statement (There is a mad dog loose in your community); but most of the time it was good, clean, pointed country humor.

Fearing that many in the audience had already heard the sermon he was about to preach E. J. told an introductory story about a hunter who was skeptical about purchasing gun powder in a certain gun shop because the powder did not smell right. The owner asked the potential customer what was wrong and the hunter replied, “This powder smells like it has already been shot.”

### Sermon Transition and Outline

A great strength of Dr. Daniels was that his sermons were clear and to the point. His transitions were normally plural nouns that precisely introduced the body of the sermon. In 1971 he preached at the Florida Baptist Convention Evangelistic Conference in Jacksonville and his transitional sentence and outline were simple and precise within the first three minutes

of the message. Dr. Daniels stated, “There are great truths in my subject if I can unfold them. I beg you to pray that God will enable me to help us see that souls are lost, when they are lost, how they are lost, and what the effect these truths should have on us all.”

E. J. was not beyond using alliteration. He never seemed to insist upon it or force it but he was not afraid to use it. In his sermon on Matthew 9:36-38, he states, “Christ saw in the multitude four things that should give all of us cause for alarm over the lost: their departure from God; their depravity in sin; their destiny in hell; and their despair without a shepherd.”

Remember E. J. Daniels preached long before the call for expository preaching that came in the 1970’s and 1980’s. When Daniels began preaching in the 1930’s topical preaching was the primary method of sermon delivery. As late as the 1950’s, I remember friends scrambling for an “outline” for next Sunday. There was far more emphasis on the sale of “sermon outline books” than on commentaries or study helps. Richard DeHahn and Hershel Ford had followed the Spurgeon tradition by publishing “manuscripts” but they were not near as popular as simple outline books. The *Broadman Commentary* of 1967 brought some context and word study help to Southern Baptist preachers, but by then a whole generation had drunk at the well of topical preaching and retraining them was beyond the pale. Bellevue Baptist Church (Memphis, Tennessee) pastors R. G. Lee was a topical preacher and Adrian Rogers was an expository preacher. That is one church and generational

example of when, where and how expository preaching began to come into its own.

Billy Graham heard E. J. preach and was profoundly impressed early in his ministry. Paul Meigs used E. J. Daniels every time he could at the Florida Baptist Evangelistic Conference. R. G. Lee recommended Daniels and W. A. Criswell was his friend. E. J. Daniels was a Biblical preacher with a passion for souls and a desire to help people.

### Conclusion and Invitation

John Bos wrote, “Having pastored several churches in Alabama and Florida, Dr. D. could not get away from the calling to full-time evangelism. It was his passion. And, his style of preaching was exactly what people wanted to hear. Deep spiritual truths, along with a mixture of interesting illustrations and humorous stories. At invitation time, the people streamed down the aisles to accept Christ or to make other meaningful commitments.”<sup>6</sup>

E. J. Daniels knew how to draw the net. Max Morris in his book *The Million Soul Man* states that there were 1,049,275 professions of faith in face to face preaching from March 1980 to March 1985. E. J. expressed the truth that, “only God knows the actual souls saved in any Christian service we can only report the number ‘professing’ to be saved.”<sup>7</sup>

When E. J. Daniels spoke in his raspy voice it was said to be like a “grinding dilapidated windmill.” Yet his passion, concern and earnest call to repentance and faith could never be forgotten. He used a personal, emotional conclusion with a strong invitation to come

now. E. J. had a boldness and empathy at invitation time that could be felt all through a congregation.

An event in 1970 verifies this fact. At the 1970 Florida Baptist Evangelistic Conference held in the Tangerine Bowl, Orlando, Anita Bryant, a nationally known Christian entertainer, gave her testimony. After her testimony Dr. W. A. Criswell was to preach. The testimony of Anita Bryant was so moving and so touching that Dr. Criswell did not feel led to preach. The decision of Dr. Criswell not to preach startled the thousands of persons in attendance. His next move even confused them more. Without preaching Dr. Criswell gave an invitation. This unexpected invitation without a sermon brought a slow and bewildered response. Dr. Criswell did what he felt the Lord wanted him to do and turned the service over to Dr. Paul Meigs, the director of evangelism, Florida Baptist Convention, who had organized the conference. It was at this point that the Holy Spirit prompted E. J. Daniels to give an invitation. After Dr. Criswell had finished his work, E. J. still felt the people were stunned or shocked at how the service ended and had not been prepared for a proper invitation. Daniels later said he pleaded with the Lord not to have to do it. He said he felt it might offend Dr. Criswell. He felt people would call him a fool for such an act. Yet in obedience to what he thought was needed E. J. Daniels extended another invitation. Hundreds came forward that night in the Tangerine Bowl to trust Christ and make other meaningful decisions.<sup>8</sup>

*Jerry M. Windsor*

Elamb Jackson Daniels was a man of integrity, conviction, hard work and charisma. Elizabeth Weaver Daniels was his partner. Florida is a better place to live because those two came by this way. They didn't stay long. But Glenda Jeters was right, "it was like fire."

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Florida Baptist Historical Society vertical files, E. J. Daniels folder.
- 2 M. F. Morris, *The Million Soul Man*, (Orlando: Christ for the World Publishers, 1982), 17.
- 3 Morris, pp. 91-92; John Bos letter dated February 25, 2010. Bos letter to Windsor is in FBHS E. J. Daniels vertical file.
- 4 I really wanted John Bos to write this article. No one worked any closer or knew E. J. any better than John. I personally watched them work together and I was always pleased and amazed to see how well their ministries were meshed. John was living in Michigan with his family when E. J. called him by phone and “hired him on the spot.” I saw John as pianist, organist, chauffeur, travel arranger, associate, friend and confidant to E. J. They trusted one another and for years were team members in Christ.
- 5 I realize I only heard E. J. preach twice but for years I read his books and sermons in other sources. You never felt that there were any untruths or dangerous doctrines but sometimes you yearned for a basic text to shine on the subject.
- 6 Bos letter, February 25, 2010. FBHS files.
- 7 M. F. Morris, *Mission Impossible Accomplished! Sequel to The Million Soul Man*, p. 6.
- 8 1970 Florida Baptist Evangelistic Conference, *Messages on Evangelism*, pp. 121-122.

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## Waylon Moore: Florida's Soul-Winner Strategist

*by Calvin J. Carr, PhD  
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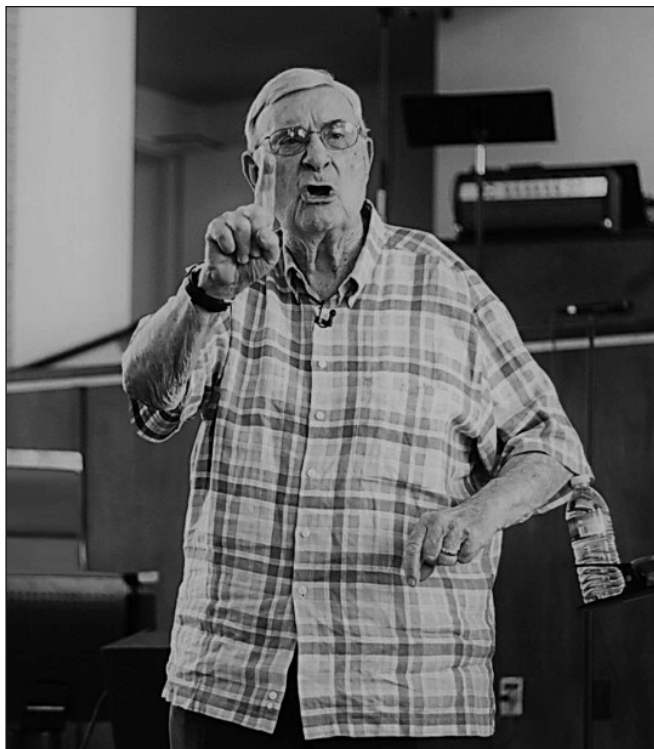


Florida Baptists have been blessed to have a unique evangelistic strategist in Waylon B. Moore. A Texas native, Moore came to Florida as a young pastor in the early 1960's and has spent nearly six decades in the state, impacting local churches and beyond, as well as training missionaries and believers in over 100 nations around the world. He has this unique background of having developed a Great Commission strategy for the local New Testament church after being influenced by: the Billy Graham Crusades of the 1950's; the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago; and by two of the most respected disciple-makers of history – Dawson Trotman of the Navigators and Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ.

Moore then developed a strategy for his local church in Tampa which became a leading evangelistic church in Florida. Dr. Roy Fish, evangelism professor, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote about Moore's congregation:

“A few years ago I was in a large church in Florida for a series of meetings. It was no ordinary church. The immediate counseling done with new converts was the most thorough I had ever seen. A class for new members was





**Waylon Moore**  
**At age 93 still preaching/teaching**

the most effective I had ever observed. Above all, there was a group of laymen who were equipped as competent spiritual leaders. These men assume the major task of equipping others.”<sup>1</sup>

Moore has recorded his strategy for evangelistic work in six books.<sup>2</sup> After serving as a pastor in Tampa for thirteen years, Moore launched an itinerant speaking ministry through an organization he founded called

Missions Unlimited, that impacted gospel work in over 100 nations.

How did this happen? What was his background that led him to have such impact? This is the purpose of this overview narrative of his life. Moore's biography will be presented in four sections: Moore's early life; ministry beginnings; pastoral years; and his years with Missions Unlimited.

### **The Early Years**

Waylon Boyce Moore was born on October 5, 1927 to Waylon Boyce and Fannie Mae Witten Moore in Venus, Texas. Venus is twenty-five miles south of the city of Fort Worth.<sup>3</sup> Moore was named after his father, and was the firstborn son of three children.<sup>4</sup> The "Boyce" in both his own and his father's are namesakes for James Petigru Boyce (b.1827; d.1888), the first president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, whom Moore's grandfather greatly respected.<sup>5</sup>

#### Moore's Parents

Moore's father learned to play the piano as a boy, taking lessons from his oldest brother's wife.<sup>6</sup> After serving in World War 1 and upon returning to Texas, Moore's father played background music for silent movies to pay his way through Baylor University, where he earned a music degree. That qualified the elder Moore to be able to teach and he was hired to teach piano at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1923. He also was the music director for College Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth.<sup>7</sup>

Moore's father died in 1948 when the younger Moore was a student at Baylor University.<sup>8</sup>

Moore's mother, Fannie Mae Witten, was one of two daughters of Pat Witten who owned four or five sections of land in Waxahachie, Texas.<sup>9</sup> She was a school teacher and graduate of Baylor Female College in Belton, Texas.<sup>10</sup> Although Moore was not aware of how his father met his mother, he knew that they did some of their dating in Dallas.<sup>11</sup> They were married in 1924 and Waylon Moore was born three years later.

### Moore's Conversion and Teenage Years

Waylon Moore was converted to Christ at the age of ten. Mrs. H. C. Wallen was the Sunday school teacher for the ten-year-old boys at College Avenue Baptist Church. As a result of her faithful witness, Moore was converted.<sup>12</sup>

Moore characterized himself as a good student while his brother Witten was the athlete of the family.<sup>13</sup> This created some conflict because Moore's parents would encourage Witten to be like Waylon and aspire to making good grades.<sup>14</sup> Moore was interested in drama while in school, acting in a number of plays. He played the lead role in "Robin Hood" and competed in dramatic reading competitions while at Paschal High School,<sup>15</sup> winning the city championship in dramatic reading.<sup>16</sup> He played the lead role in "Job" while a student at Baylor University, which eventually became a Broadway play.<sup>17</sup>

### Called to Preach

Moore graduated from high school at age 16 and many young men his age signed up for military service to

fight in World War II. Moore's parents wanted him to go straight to college and so, while teaching Sunday school on the weekends, he went to two years of college at the Arlington, Texas, branch of Texas A & M., and then to Baylor University in Waco, Texas, for one semester in the summer of 1945. Moore then joined the Navy in August of 1945. Moore did his basic training in San Diego, California, and became a storekeeper, which was a type of accountant.<sup>18</sup> His assignment was at Oceanside, California, but the war was over by then and his commitment was only for the duration of the war plus six months, so Moore only spent one year in the Navy.<sup>19</sup>

Moore went back to Baylor, finished his coursework in 1948, and entered law school. Moore was involved in the collegiate ministry at First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas, where Forrest Feezor was the pastor. Feezor asked Moore to preach on a Wednesday night and after his message, four young men made professions of faith in Jesus as Savior.<sup>20</sup> It was during his time at Baylor that Moore felt God's call to preach. He said,

"Bruce Miller was a fellow student at Baylor. He said God told him to give me time and helped me to grow. He was my first adult mentor/disciple. He took me to visit people in nursing homes, got me into quiet time, and reading biographies of great men of God. We met many times during the week and were in a class or two together."<sup>21</sup>

While in prayer in Miller's room one night, Moore wrestled with God's leading to preach. Moore wondered if Satan was putting it in his head to leave his law studies to preach. Bruce asked Waylon, "Why should you preach?" Then it came to Moore, "Because the world is dying without Jesus!" They both agreed that Satan would not have given that answer, which confirmed his calling was from God. Moore finished the winter semester of 1949 at Baylor and prepared to enter Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall of 1949.<sup>22</sup>

### **Early Ministry Beginnings**

During his seminary days, Moore was hungry to learn from visionary leaders who were being used of God. He later said, "I ran after big men of God."<sup>23</sup> Some of the most notable men of God would impact his life over the next decade.

#### Pacific Garden Mission

In 1950, the annual Southern Baptist Convention meeting was held in Chicago<sup>24</sup> and Moore sold his record player so that he could make the trip.<sup>25</sup> While in Chicago, a college friend invited Moore to go see the Pacific Garden Mission where Billy Sunday was converted. Moore and his friend drove to the mission and took a tour of the ministry. Moore became interested in spending the summer there learning and asked the superintendent, Harry Saulnier, if he could have a job at the mission. Saulnier asked him to come back the next day, and when he did, he offered Moore a summer job for free room and board but no other salary. Moore took it and was challenged to walk with

God by Dennis Snell who was a counselor trainer at the mission. Moore wrote:

“One day I asked Dennis, how do you know so much Bible and have a great attitude about work? He said, ‘Well, I guess it’s from spending two hours a day in the Bible for four years and hiding God’s word in my heart.’ What? I was shocked. You spend two hours a day in the Bible and you’re not a preacher? Dennis laughed. Hiding God’s word in your heart? I asked, you mean . . . memorizing Scripture? ‘Yes,’ he said. I hate to memorize Scripture, I confessed. It’s a waste of time. He replied: ‘I’m not going to argue with you. I’m just telling you that it changed my life.’”

“I watched Dennis for two or three more days. Then I went to him and said, you have something I need. Teach me how to memorize Scripture.” ‘You don’t really want to memorize!’ he said. I convinced him that I was serious. ‘All right,’ Dennis responded, ‘Go talk to God. If you believe that God wants you to memorize, then make a commitment to him and tell me. If the Lord is leading you, He will keep you at it when I’m not around.’ Feeling convicted, I surrendered in prayer to make this a growth habit in my life.”<sup>26</sup>

### Serving with the Navigators

After returning to Southwestern in the fall of 1950, Dennis Snell encouraged Moore to hear Dawson Trotman who was scheduled to speak in Fort Worth in conjunction with a planned 1951 Billy Graham crusade.<sup>27</sup> At a pre-crusade training session Moore heard Trotman speak on Acts 17:11: “These are more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether those things are so.”<sup>28</sup> Moore wanted to spend some extra time with Trotman and asked if he could drive him around the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Using a borrowed car, Moore took Trotman to various appointments. Impressed with Moore’s initiative and interest in spiritual matters Trotman promised Moore that if he would come to California to the Navigator summer conference, he would provide him free room and board at Westmont College.<sup>29</sup> Moore took Trotman up on his offer and went to the Navigator training conference in the summer of 1951.

In the fall of 1951, Charlie Riggs, who was a staffer with the Navigators, came to Fort Worth to begin Navigator work. His businessman benefactor backed out at the last minute and Riggs ended up staying with Moore. Riggs began to pour into Moore’s life, challenging him to be in the Word. A Billy Graham staffer, Jerry Beavan,<sup>30</sup> preparing for the Houston Crusade in 1952,<sup>31</sup> needed an assistant and he went after Riggs, who was very reliable in accomplishing tasks assigned.<sup>32</sup> Riggs involved Moore in the Houston Crusade.<sup>33</sup>

### Return to Pacific Garden Mission

In May of 1952, Moore graduated from Southwestern Seminary. After the May 1952 Billy Graham Crusade in Houston, Moore went back to the Chicago area and took courses at Moody Bible Institute and lived at Pacific Garden Mission where he completed his first book. Moore wrote six Bible studies for Pacific Garden Mission intended to encourage new Christians. These Bible studies eventually became the basis of his *First Steps* book. While in Chicago he joined the Southside Alliance Church in Chicago where A. W. Tozer was the pastor. Later Moore opened a Navigator Home<sup>34</sup> in Dallas for the 1953 – 1954 school year and worked with university students at Southern Methodist University.<sup>35</sup>

### Billy Graham Ministry

Because of Moore's friendship with Riggs, Moore was invited to participate in the Graham Crusades from 1952 to 1954. Moore worked with Billy Graham crusades in Houston (1952), Dallas (1953), London (1954), Amsterdam (1954), and Berlin (1954).<sup>36</sup> Moore said, "And of course Graham was the hottest thing in the religious crusades. I was doing this and that, working, and Charlie [Riggs] was a guy who would give me \$100 a month to stay in Europe, while I missed some meals. But I was with the Graham team."<sup>37</sup> Being with the Graham team made an impact upon Moore's life as he saw great things accomplished for the Lord. He recalled, "I was there for the big Wembley Stadium meeting where they had three thousand people profess faith in Christ. The first time since Pentecost as far as we ever know."<sup>38</sup>



### Campus Crusade for Christ

Bill Bright was opening up student work at the University of Texas in Austin in the summer of 1954, and he needed people to head up the work. Bright asked Dawson Trotman if he could provide him some men. Trotman talked with Moore who quickly agreed

**Moore learned about the importance of evangelism and how to present the gospel.**

to accept the ministry task at the University of Texas. Moore went to Los Angeles, California, in the summer of 1954 to be trained for the U. T. campus ministry which was to begin that fall.<sup>39</sup>

Moore spent all day in training with Bright and slept on the study floor of the evangelist J. Edwin Orr.<sup>40</sup> Moore learned about the importance of evangelism and how to present the gospel. In that year at U.T. Moore led thirty-eight people to Christ.<sup>41</sup>

Following Moore's work at the University of Texas, Trotman asked Moore to begin work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. There Moore lived at a Navigator home where others were ministering to men in the Boston area. Because it was difficult for Moore to find a paying job to support his Navigator ministry, he only served at M.I.T. with the Navigators for one year and was released from this assignment.<sup>42</sup>

### Future Spouse Clemmie Everly, M.D.

In 1958, Clemmie Everly met Waylon Moore at an evangelism training retreat in Houston. She was

originally from Hartford, Kentucky, and had a grandfather who was a medical doctor. She loved him and admired his medical practice, going with him to make house calls when she was younger.<sup>43</sup> Her father was a druggist. Clemmie went to Western Kentucky

**Clemmie was a great encouragement to Moore for his entire ministry.**

University where she received her bachelor's degree and to the University of Louisville Medical School where she

received her medical school training. Clemmie also had a year of training at Belmont College in Nashville, Tennessee. She finished her residency training to become a pediatrician at the University of Houston. The evangelism meeting was a retreat in 1958 sponsored by the South Main Baptist Church of Houston, Texas. Moore was the speaker and he and Clemmie were the only two singles in attendance at the retreat. They began to date more seriously and Clemmie asked Moore if he wanted to spend Christmas of 1958 with her family in Kentucky. He accepted her invitation. While there for Christmas, he asked her to marry him and they were married on August 1, 1959.

Clemmie was a great encouragement to Moore for his entire ministry. She was a committed pastor's wife and a mother. Her steadfast commitment to Christ would be a stabilizing force that Moore would need in the pastoral years of his life.<sup>44</sup>

## **Moore's Pastoral Service Years**

After they were married, the Moores moved back to Fort Worth where Waylon began graduate work. He submitted a topic for a doctoral proposal at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and it was rejected. He intended to write a dissertation on the role of follow-up in the New Testament. Moore said, "That was what I was going to write my doctorate on, and they turned it down."<sup>45</sup> Moore further explained:

"I went to Southwestern to work on a doctorate right after I'd married, and we lived in that two-room apartment with termite holes in the floor out there. When I gave them my thesis title, they rejected it. They said we have no one that could grade that. That's something we have no knowledge of. I said well that's what a doctorate is!"<sup>46</sup>

When his dissertation proposal was rejected, Clemmie told Waylon to spend the time necessary to write the narrative. She provided the financial support for the two of them to make it possible for him to devote fulltime to writing. Moore never received the degree he sought from Southwestern Seminary, but did stay in Fort Worth to do his research and write. His finished product was eventually published as his first book, *New Testament Follow-Up for Pastors and Laymen*.

### First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida

Homer Lindsay, Jr., attended Southwestern along with Moore and rented a room from the Moore family

during his seminary days in the early 1950s.<sup>47</sup> Nearly a decade later Lindsay was the pastor of the Northwest Baptist Church<sup>48</sup> in Miami, Florida, and a trustee at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>49</sup> Lindsay was in Fort Worth for a trustee meeting and called Moore.

“He called me up and said, ‘Waylon, I’m going to be up with the trustees, do you want to get together?’ I said yeah—I’m married and we’ll have you over for a meal. So he came around

**This program of  
decision counseling  
became a model for  
Southern Baptist  
Convention  
churches.**

for a meal, but it was deliberate you see . . . his father said, ‘Do you know anyone that is bold in his witness and is pure?’ Homer said, ‘I had a

roommate that was, he’s married; I don’t know a thing about him now’ . . . so he checked me out.”<sup>50</sup>

Lindsay told Moore, “My father needs a minister of evangelism, and I have lived with you and you are a soul-winner. My father will send you out soul-winning.”<sup>51</sup> As a result, Moore joined the staff of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida, where he served two years through the summer of 1964.

One unique contribution that Moore made in Jacksonville was his influence on the spiritual decision counseling process that was developed in the church. Fred McCormick, E. H. Whitaker, and Moore

worked together to improve how people were counseled after making decisions during the invitation at each service. Regardless of the commitment of each person coming forward, everyone was required to explain their salvation experience and commitment to Christ. This program of decision counseling became a model for Southern Baptist Convention churches.<sup>52</sup>

Spencer Memorial Baptist Church, Tampa, Florida  
Through the influence of Colonel John Fain, Waylon Moore was recommended to the pastor search committee of Spencer Memorial Baptist Church in Tampa, Florida. Moore wrote:

“After running from God during World War II, tough Colonel John Fain got converted. Amazing. Soon after, his wife Barbara was also saved. As a businessman with a great heart for evangelism, Jack founded the serviceman’s division of Campus Crusade for Christ. I met them while visiting Florida doing ministry. In those days I was single and lonely. The Fains gathered me into their hearts, giving me a sense of belonging and value, though we never lived in the same city . . . Later, the colonel recommended me to a pulpit committee in Tampa. The church called me and I pastored there for 13 years.”<sup>53</sup>

Moore took up the pastorate at the Tampa church in October of 1964:

“I started meeting with guys at six o’clock in the morning for one hour. I said, I’ll teach you how to study the Bible. Well the ole deacons came

the first time. Then they didn't come anymore . . . but the hungry guys did come and eventually I had five groups of different guys a week. For a period of time I had six groups of guys.”<sup>54</sup>

Moore's spiritual training evolved into taking selected men visiting for three nights per week. He also implemented his “Adoption plan” for new believers and paired up young believers with those equipped to disciple them.<sup>55</sup> Moore also made it a priority to take people overseas with him for short-term mission trips, which he recalled:

“I began to take people overseas with me before there was any volunteer department. There was no volunteer division of the Foreign Mission Board, when I took guys overseas with me. Because I had to enlarge their vision for a lost world. I took them because I had to enlarge their vision.”<sup>56</sup>

The Tampa church baptized on average over one-hundred new converts per year for the thirteen years that Moore served as their pastor.<sup>57</sup>

### **Enlisted for Missionary Orientation**

Moore was invited to train new missionary recruits for the Foreign Mission Board (now called the International Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1969 to 1982.<sup>58</sup> David Lockard, director of missionary orientation for the SBC Foreign Mission Board, knew Moore at Southwestern Seminary and was aware of Moore's book, *New Testament Follow-Up*. Moore recalled, “He read my

book. He wanted that material taught at the orientation. He was given some flexibility and was allowed to choose some speakers to come in so he picked me to come.”<sup>59</sup>

During the missionary candidate’s orientation, Moore attended one of the weeks of training and taught on new convert assimilation



and follow-up. He taught on the spiritual disciplines of Bible study and Scripture memory with an emphasis on spiritual reproduction. Lockard told Moore, “What you are sharing, the people can use immediately. They need it.”<sup>60</sup> A missionary benefitting immediately from Moore’s teaching at the Missionary Orientation Center was Reggie Quimby who was headed to Spain and who later wrote to Moore:

“All that you have shared with the M.O.C. in the past 3 days has been vital to me. I’m ashamed to say I was one of those that had experienced no victory in my devotional life – but thank God – the last two mornings I have kept my appointment with God. It has been a blessing and the Lord has begun to show me beautiful things.”<sup>61</sup>

Affirming the training Moore provided to missionaries Lockard once wrote:

“Waylon, I spent the month of May in West Africa doing Bible studies for the annual mission meetings. On several occasions,

*Calvin J. Carr*

missionaries indicated that your lectures and your book (which we have continued to make available here) have proven to be among the most helpful part of their orientation experience. Invariably, I find myself doing one or two Bible studies along this line – i.e. nurturing new converts, one on one, or in other small group settings.”<sup>62</sup>

In thirteen years<sup>63</sup> of training missionaries, Waylon Moore instructed nearly twenty-five-hundred missionaries.<sup>64</sup>

### **Missionary to Missionaries through Missions Unlimited**

Relationships Moore built with hundreds of missionaries, and because of his great desire to encourage them in disciple-making, Moore said, “I was going overseas . . . I took my month off and I was going overseas.”<sup>65</sup> Missionaries invited Moore to come to their field to equip them and the nationals that they worked with and Moore took his vacation time to go overseas. Moore said, “Clemmie and I prayed. She said, ‘You’re happy when you are working with missionaries. You love to work with missionaries. I think God has called you to be a missionary to the missionaries.’”<sup>66</sup> He started Missions Unlimited and incorporated it as a non-profit ministry after receiving the advice of men who were praying with him. He resigned from Spencer Memorial Baptist Church in 1977.



Consultant to Missionaries

In the period before and after the establishment of Missions Unlimited, **He often spent Moore travelled to over his travel time one hundred nations of encouraging the the world to encourage missionaries and consult with missionaries of the SBC Foreign Mission Board. He often spent his travel time encouraging the missionaries when they gathered for their annual strategy sessions. Moore was invited to speak, teaching the missionaries God’s Word.**

Retired IMB missionary to East Africa Ed Moses, wrote of Moore’s impact:

“We first met Waylon Moore at our Missionary Orientation, 14 weeks, Calloway Gardens, Ga. in 1968. He taught his fantastic book, *New Testament Follow Up* to about fifty recently appointed missionaries soon to cover the globe. I soaked it up like, a sponge. Keep it a secret, but I copied several of his illustrations and wrote some of his explanations in our Shona language: ‘The Wheel Illustration,’ ‘The Christian living the Life,’ the ‘Word in Heart and Hand,’ ‘5 fingers’ and the ‘Bible in the Palm.’ My students learned them and passed them on. We knew Waylon’s wife, Clemmie, and both of his children Martha and Bruce at Southwestern Seminary. I give STRONG CREDIT to both the FMB and the IMB for engaging Waylon for many discipleship

seminars for countless missionaries in numerous countries for making Waylon's Biblical principles known and practiced all over the world. Only Heaven will reveal the extent of Dr. Moore's wisdom and ministry. His other book, *Multiplying Disciples* is super great also."<sup>67</sup>

### Encouragement to Seminarians

Both of Moore's major texts have been used in seminary evangelism classes with the most interest in Moore's book *New Testament Follow-Up*. Roy Fish used it for 15 to 20 years. Then Fish used *Multiplying Disciples* as a companion resource. The books became standard texts in all SBC seminaries and then they were used overseas, which resulted in Moore receiving invitations to go overseas. Moore recalled Roy Fish said, "We don't have anything on how to help the new Christian grow that's based on the New Testament. This is pristine, this is basic stuff."<sup>68</sup>

**Moore continues to mentor men, write, preach, and encourage others to make disciples.**

In addition to the use of his books in the seminaries, Moore lectured at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on the subject of mentoring from 2001 to 2004 and was a guest lecturer in practical theology in eleven classes at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

## **Waylon Moore Today**

Moore continues to mentor men, write, preach, and encourage others to make disciples. He currently meets with men weekly, and is mentoring new believers at Christ Fellowship, Tampa, Florida, where his son Bruce is the current pastor. His daughter Martha is a twenty-year veteran missionary to Europe. Moore maintains a newsletter, published quarterly, that is sent to 3,500 pastors, laymen, and missionaries all over the world, as well as a website called [www.mentoring-disciples.org](http://www.mentoring-disciples.org).

Waylon Moore has had a very eventful life, with great challenges and victories.

He has met and been influenced by some of the great leaders of the Christian world. Each of these has influenced him in a particular way and has resulted in a unique ministry of disciple-making. He took what he learned from Billy Graham, Dawson Trotman, and Bill



**Waylon Moore and son  
Bruce, pastor of the Christ  
Fellowship Church,  
Tampa**

Bright and put it to work in leading Florida congregations. As a Great Commission strategist, with a home-base in Florida, Waylon Moore has influenced thousands of people worldwide for Christ by his own preaching and by equipping hundreds of Southern Baptist missionaries. Florida is blessed to have Waylon Moore as a key figure in it's great evangelistic and soul winning heritage.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Roy J. Fish in the forward to Waylon B. Moore, *Multiplying Disciples* (Tampa: Missions Unlimited, 1981), 5.
- 2 The six books included: *Building Disciples Notebook*, *First Steps: Simple Basics for Growing Strong*, *Living God's Word: Practical Lessons for Applying Scripture to Life*, *Multiplying Disciples: The New Testament Method for Church Growth*, *New Testament Follow-Up for Pastors and Laymen*, and *The Power of a Mentor*.
- 3 Waylon B. Moore, interview with the author, Tampa, January 14, 2014.
- 4 Waylon B. Moore, interview with the author, Tampa, June 6, 2013.
- 5 For a brief summary of the life of James P. Boyce, see Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1859-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3-5. Wills writes of Boyce's impact on the seminary, "From the beginning its success depended uniquely on one man, James P. Boyce. His remarkable determination to establish and preserve the seminary rescued it from failure time and again. Without his leadership it would have passed into extinction." *Ibid.*, 3.
- 6 Moore said, "His oldest brother was an attorney. Those Moore boys were everything. Three were M. D's, one was a minister, one was an attorney, three or four were salesman, one was a barber." *Ibid.*
- 7 Moore said, "College Avenue was the second largest church in town. We had a mission church we started called Travis Avenue Baptist." *Ibid.* See also "Travis Avenue Baptist Church—Texas Historical Marker," accessed January 16, 2014, [http://www.9key.com/markers/marker\\_detail.asp?atlas\\_number=5439005552](http://www.9key.com/markers/marker_detail.asp?atlas_number=5439005552).
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Waxahachie, Texas, is located 41 miles southeast of Fort Worth, and 30 miles south of Dallas.
- 10 For a history of Baylor-Belton, which eventually

became a co-educational university, see University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, "Our History," accessed January 16, 2014, <http://about.umhb.edu/our-history>.

11 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

12 Moore, *The Power of a Mentor*, 10

13 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

14 Ibid.

15 For a succinct history of Paschal High School see "History of R. L. Paschal High School," accessed January 5, 2014,

[http://paschal.fwisd.org/pages/Paschal/About\\_Us](http://paschal.fwisd.org/pages/Paschal/About_Us).

16 Moore remembered that he gave two speeches, "Little Boy Blue" by Eugene Field and "Carry On" by Robert Service in the city competition. Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

17 Moore, interview, June 6, 2013; and Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

18 Moore, interview, June 6, 2013; and Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

19 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

20 Ibid., and Waylon B. Moore, phone interview by author, December 10, 2013.

21 Moore, interview, November 25, 2013.

22 Ibid.

23 Moore, interview, December 10, 2013.

24 See Johnston's Archives, "List of SBC Convention Meetings," accessed January 16, 2014, <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/baptist/sbconvlist.html>.

25 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

26 Waylon B. Moore, *Living God's Word* (Nashville: Lifeway, 1997), 36-37.

27 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., and Moore interview, 6 June 2013. Information on Westmont College can be found at Westmont College, "History of Westmont College," accessed January 16, 2014, <http://www.westmont.edu/about/history.html>.

30 Documentation from the Riggs memorial archives shows the letterhead of the Houston crusade with Beavan's name and title: Executive Secretary, Public Relations Supervisor, and Charles Riggs, Assistant Director. Follow-up can be accessed at Wheaton College: Billy Graham Center, "Charles Arthur Riggs 1916-2008," accessed January 16, 2014, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/memorial/Riggs/Document1.htm..>

31 See Wheaton College: Billy Graham Center, "Select Chronology Listing of Events in the Life of Billy Graham and the History of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association," accessed January 16, 2014, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/bgeachro/bgeachrono2.htm..>

32 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

33 Moore, interview, June 6, 2013.

34 For a succinct background of the Navigator Home ministry see Robert Walter Felts, "A Critical Analysis of Dawson Trotman's Methodology of Discipleship for Contemporary Mission Strategy among North American Evangelical Mission Agencies," (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 23-29.

35 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

36 Moore, interview, December 10, 2013.

37 Moore, interview, June 6, 2013.

38 Ibid. For a fine description of this event see Joanna S. Wong, "Celebrate 50th Anniversary of 'Billy Graham Crusade' in London: A Crusade that Reshaped International Evangelism," *Christianity Today*, May 26, 2004, accessed January 16, 2014, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/celebrate.50th.anniversary.of.billy.graham.crusade.in.london/895.htm..>

39 Waylon B. Moore, interview by author, Tampa, April 30, 2009; Moore, interview, January 14, 2014; and Moore, interview, June 6, 2013.

40 Moore, interview, June 6, 2013; and Waylon B. Moore,

phone interview by author, November 18, 2013.

41 Moore said that Paul Pressler, the Texas lawyer who was instrumental in the Conservative Resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention, was a student at the University of Texas at that time and remembered his work of winning students to Christ. Moore, interview, January 14, 2014. For Pressler's perspective on the Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention see Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die* (Nashville: B & H, 2002)

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

45 Waylon B. Moore, interview by author, Tampa, February 4, 2010.

46 Moore, interview, June 6, 2013.

47 Ibid.

48 See Northwest Baptist Church, "History of Northwest Baptist Church," accessed January 17, 2014, <http://nbc.nwbm.org/about-us/history-of-northwest-baptist-church>. Lindsay was called to the church as its first pastor and served the church for seventeen years.

49 Homer G. Lindsay, Jr., represented Florida with a term expiring in 1963 at Southwestern. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, "Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1961," accessed January 17, 2014, [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SB\\_C\\_Annual\\_1961.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SB_C_Annual_1961.pdf).

50 Moore, interview, June 6, 2013.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid. Decision Counseling was taught for over twenty years at the FBC Annual Pastor's School and Bible Conference to hundreds of pastors and laymen. E. H. Whitaker, one of the original developers of the program was involved in this training until his death on August 29, 2011. His obituary even mentions his counseling training: "As active as he was at work he was the same at First Baptist Church. He and his wife, Mary Frances who

predeceased him in 2000, started the Young Married Couples Sunday School Department. He was instrumental in leading the Men's Department as the church membership grew. He served on the building and finance committees during the numerous building and expansion projects, and established a counseling program patterned after the one used at the conclusion of all of the Billy Graham Association services." "Edmund Whittaker," *Florida Times-Union*, September 1, 2011, accessed January 17, 2014,

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/timesunion/obituary.aspx?page=lifestory&pid=153392406>.

53 Moore, *The Power of a Mentor*, 11. Moore said, "It was a 97% vote to call me as pastor." Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

54 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

55 Charles Hartwig, phone interview by author, January 20, 2014; and Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

56 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

57 Moore, *Living God's Word*, 4.

58 Files compiled from Moore's home office reveal missionary orientation brochures from the orientation center in Callaway Gardens, GA, beginning with the fall of 1969 and ending in the fall of 1982. See also Moore, *Living God's Word*, 4; Moore, interview, February 4, 2010; and Waylon B. Moore, interview by author, Tampa, December 2, 2013.

59 Waylon B. Moore, phone interview with author, January 17, 2014.

60 Ibid.

61 Reggie Quimby, letter written to Waylon B. Moore, n.d.

62 W. David Lockard, letter to Waylon B. Moore, June 23, 1976.

63 Exactly how many sessions of the training that Moore taught is hard to nail down. His own files contain documents revealing that he was included in twenty-seven sessions of the training, provided he never missed a



session. This author has found no material evidence or testimony from Moore that he ever missed. In spite of this record of his files, there are places which mention him doing the training for eleven years, listing the years as 1970 to 1982.

64 Moore's files contain pictures of the missionaries he trained from nine of the twenty-seven sessions in which he taught. The materials that were obtained reveal that each orientation session was attended by, on average, 92 new missionaries. These included both the husbands and wives. Moore taught at twenty-seven sessions, which would give him the potential of teaching 2460 individuals over a thirteen-year period, based upon this average per session. The above estimation is realistic because it does not include the journeymen missionaries trained later not included in the above numbers. The Southern Baptist Convention Annuals were consulted but were not helpful in reporting the actual numbers at the Missionary Orientation Center. New appointments reported to the Convention in the Annual included reappointments and other personnel hindering an accurate count of those who went through new training.

65 Moore, interview, January 14, 2014.

66 Ibid.

67 Ed Moses, email correspondence with author, December 9, 2013.

68 Moore, interview, February 4, 2010.

## Florida Baptists' Anita Bryant's Anti-gay Stand Sparked Religious Right Movement

by Penny Baumgardner  
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“What has come to be known as the religious right was not started by James Dobson, Jerry Falwell or Ralph Reed,” the Southern Baptist Convention’s *Baptist Press* reported in 2001. Rather, the conservative movement had its genesis in the courageous stand by then Florida Baptist, nationally known singer, TV personality and mother of four, Anita Bryant, who took a high profile stand against and led in the repeal of a 1977 Metropolitan Dade County homosexual rights ordinance. “Her high-profile opposition attracted the attention of the national and international news media, and served as a rallying point for homosexuals across the country,” *Baptist Press* reported.<sup>1</sup>

But more importantly, Bryant’s “organized opposition to gay rights that spread across the nation, [was] the beginning of what came to be known as the religious right. The Rev. Jerry Falwell came to Miami to help her, but it was Anita Bryant who first led fundamentalist Christians into politics under the banner of a domestic social issue.”<sup>2</sup>



**Anita Bryant**  
**At age 80 still singing God's praises.**

Ms. Bryant – in the period of the 1960s and 1970s – was a highly popular singer of gospel and pop music and a familiar TV commercials' spokesperson, who had unexpectedly become the proverbial “poster child” for moral decency and family values. She was the public face of the effort to pass a ballot referendum to reverse a Miami-Dade (Florida) county ordinance that would have mandated public and parochial schools to hire avowed homosexuals as teachers. And because of her high-profile

involvement in the fight against the ordinance, Bryant and her family were subjected to threats of bodily harm, blackmail and even blamed for the suicides of individuals who had claimed to be homosexual. But more significantly, her stand for Christian morality resulted in her life being completely torn apart by a divorce and a significant loss in income and career opportunities.

### **Growing Up in Oklahoma**

Anita Jane Bryant was born March 25, 1940, in Barnsdall, Oklahoma, to Warren and Lenora Berry Bryant. She had a younger sister, Sandra. As early as age two, Anita demonstrated a talent for singing. Her grandfather Bryant taught her to sing the simple song, “Jesus Loves Me,” which Anita Jane later sang before a Sunday morning church congregation. By age six she was singing on stage in a local high school play and in Oklahoma fairgrounds. Over the next several years Anita was performing weekly on a local radio program. Anita Bryant knew the audience loved her and she loved the applause.

Despite her young success, Anita suffered through what she considered to be a “rough” childhood with her parents divorcing when she was two, only to later remarry after her father returned from military service. Unfortunately, by the time Anita reached age 13, her parents divorced again. “I do remember parts of my childhood as being happy and other parts I’ve blocked out because it hurts too much. I guess I was happiest when I was eight years old and my parents remarried, and I was baptized and came to Christ as

my personal savior,” she once told a national magazine.<sup>3</sup>

That spiritual conversion in 1948 occurred while the family lived in Velma-Alma, a rural community in southwest Oklahoma, where they attended the Church of Christ. “As I walked down the aisle conscious that I was making my commitment public – a matter of record – I felt the Spirit of God Himself leading me there,” she recalled. When her mother later questioned Anita about her decision and desire to be baptized, her mother tried to convince Anita that she was not old enough. Anita later wrote in her autobiography that she asked her mother, “Can you show me in the Bible where it says how old I must be before I can be saved?” Soon thereafter, Anita was baptized recalling that day vividly. “I well remember my baptism. I felt so clean inside as though my sins were washed away,” she recalled.<sup>4</sup>

Within the year, the family moved to Midwest City, just outside Oklahoma City, which would provide for Anita greater opportunities to develop her vocal talent through training and performances. It also was a time for growth in her spiritual commitment. Early on, Anita was performing on two local country and western television programs and even given her own show for 15 minutes every Friday night. By age thirteen, Anita and her sister Sandra, joined the First Baptist Church in Midwest City and Anita “committed her life to Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately her developing family life was shattered by her parents’ decision to divorce a second time. The event

presented a new spiritual challenge for Anita. “For the first time in my young life I came to God in real anguish. I loved my family and felt he [my father Warren] had rejected me, had rejected all of us.” But through that experience, Anita grew spiritually with, “the peace of God that passes all understanding.”<sup>6</sup>

### **A Performance Career Develops**

After some adjustment to the divorce, Anita continued to accept invitations to perform at weddings, civic luncheons, and appeared more frequently on local television programs as she became the focus of newspaper articles. And her first sacred song, called “Somebody Cares,” was produced on a 45-rpm record. During these teen years Anita’s attempt to maintain a sense of Christian humility was overshadowed by her growing ego encouraged by others. She recalled that, “several individuals, who really believed in my talent, urged me to build and polish a repertoire for television and personal appearances.”<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Anita’s mother remarried a man named George Cate and the re-constituted “nuclear” family soon welcomed a new father whom she lovingly called “Daddy George.” But the family had to move to Tulsa where George Cate had a job opportunity.

“The Anita Bryant most people saw was the brash, hammy, eager girl who so loved to sing, perform and reach out to audiences and make people enjoy themselves,” Anita



recalled years later. “I tried to keep everybody, but Mother and me, from knowing about the gloomy, pessimistic Anita who occasionally bugged the real me.” This personality trait of depression only encouraged her to attempt to strengthen her spiritual side. “Prayer became my chief weapon against fear. I began to pray more often, and certainly never went on stage or before the camera without first asking God for his blessing.”<sup>8</sup>

A significant opportunity came at age 16, when Anita was invited to travel to New York City to appear on the television network program, “Arthur Godfrey’s Talent Scouts.” Despite misgivings expressed by family, friends, and her own pastor, Anita ignored their counsel and was determined to go to New York, but yet she could not understand why she felt so “miserably unhappy.” Before leaving, Anita knelt in prayer by her bed, “feeling more rebellious and troubled than I’d ever felt before in my life,” Anita later recalled. After a time of extended confessional prayer and tears, an “indescribable peace descended upon me,” she said.<sup>9</sup> This event marked a turning point in Anita’s spiritual journey. “What God really wanted of me, I realized, was my submission . . . He wanted me to go, perform, and act in full obedience to my inner guiding from Him,” she wrote.<sup>10</sup>

Following high school graduation, Anita Bryant was enlisted and won that summer the Miss Tulsa beauty pageant followed by the Miss Oklahoma pageant. This led Anita to participate in the 1959 Miss America pageant. That Atlantic City event showcased her

singing talents to a national television audience, but as she later recalled, she found she was “relatively unschooled and unprepared for high-level competition.”<sup>11</sup> Despite being named one of the ten finalists, the Miss America crown went to Mary Anne Mobley.

As a result of the Miss America pageant Anita received a scholarship that permitted her to enroll in Northwestern University, located in Evanston, Illinois. The location was ideal as it permitted Anita to continue to participate daily on the Don McNeil “Breakfast Club,” a national radio program that was broadcast from Chicago, in addition to other performance bookings. She soon gave up the academic pursuit to grow her evolving professional musical career.

### **Meeting Bob Green**

It was during a 1959 tour promoting her new record, “Till There Was You,” that Anita Bryant met a Miami disc jockey named Bob [Robert Einar] Green [b. 1931; d. 2012]. “I knew Bob Green by reputation – knew he ranked as one of country’s top ten deejays, and that he had a terrific radio following,” she recalled in her



autobiography.<sup>12</sup> Anita had gone to a national deejays convention held in Miami as a part of Carlton Records’ promotion of its performers and their records. “Because Bob Green was just about the best-looking man I’d ever met, I was leery of him from



the beginning. Blond, tanned and slim, with a personality just as great as his looks, he seemed almost too attractive,” Anita once wrote.<sup>13</sup> Although this 19-year-old became infatuated with Green, who was nine years older, she was not ready for courtship.

As Anita soon discovered, God had other plans for the soon-to-be couple. They maintained a long-distance relationship fostered by nighttime telephone calls and letters. The infatuation evolved into love. The main stumbling blocks to a marriage, as Anita viewed it, were her age – she thought she needed to be at least 25 – while Green may have been too worldly – sophisticated, brash, successful, a real ladies man – for someone like herself – a conservative small town young woman, naïve in some ways, but possessing strong Christian beliefs and high moral values.

During a first-time dinner meeting with Bob Green’s Swedish parents, Green slipped a diamond ring on Anita’s left hand. Although ecstatic about a wedding planned later for June, Anita was concerned about Green’s Lutheran faith which Anita felt reflected a nominal Christian practice. She recalled Bob “looked somewhat puzzled when I tried to explain what I meant by being saved through Christ.” Fortunately, “Had God not stepped in and taken over, this could have been a terribly dangerous place in our relationship. Finally the night before their wedding, Anita and Bob talked with Anita’s childhood friend and strong Christian Gloria Roe, a California-based music composer and television personality. As Gloria talked with Green about his Christian beliefs,

providentially “the Spirit of God descended upon us” which resulted in Green making a confession of faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

### **Marriage, Business and Family**

Local Tulsa radio station KAKC designated Saturday, June 26, 1960, as Anita Bryant Day and hosted the high noon wedding for the couple.<sup>15</sup> Although the couple had their respective successful careers, Anita always experienced struggles with the business side of her professional career. A mutual friend suggested that Anita would benefit greatly if Bob would assume the role of business manager handling bookings, travel arrangements and accommodations, as well as contracts and the financial affairs of Anita Bryant the performer. While Anita was initially agreeable to the arrangement, her self-described bossy, control freak personality caused arguments with Green. Then another spiritual epiphany occurred as Anita realized that if she really would turn over the business affairs to Bob, she also would have to “turn my bossy nature over to God. . . When I resorted to Christ, He helped me relinquish authority so my husband could assume proper control.”<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately that Christian wife’s submission didn’t always provide peace and harmony. Disagreements over Anita’s business affairs would become a bone of contention between Anita and Bob that lasted throughout the next 20 years of their marriage. “I’m not the type to sit back meekly and let him do it all, and he’s not the type to let me horn in when I really don’t understand the particulars.”<sup>17</sup>

To his credit Bob Green, early on in their partnership, chastised Anita for separating her Christian performance from her secular performer life, which was most evident in the two totally different audiences for whom Anita performed and produced specialty albums – pop music versus sacred hymns. “I literally had given a testimony through music all my life. Now here was Bob Green, a relatively new Christian, challenging me to begin using my entire professional life for this purpose: asking me to speak up for Christ.”<sup>18</sup> Soon in her secular performances Anita began to “to tell people that I love Christ . . . what my faith means to me.”<sup>19</sup>

By January, 1961, Anita and Bob re-located to Miami Beach to make their home – close to Bob’s business ventures and a good environment to raise a family. After visiting many area churches, in November, 1963, they found a congregation where the members were “friendly, unpretentious, and wonderfully enthusiastic . . . those people really feel a burden for lost souls” she recalled.<sup>20</sup> Upon joining the Northwest Baptist Church they asked the then pastor Rev. Homer Lindsey, Jr., to baptize Bob Green on his profession of faith. The couple was active in Bible studies, worship services and fellowship events, despite the constraints of Anita’s travel and performance schedule. The hopes of having children were dashed when a doctor told Bryant she could not conceive. So they adopted their first child, Bobby, Jr., in 1963, whom they received soon after his birth. It turned out later that Bryant could bear children and she had Gloria Lynn, seven months after adopting Bobby. Five years later –

January, 1969 – she had twins William [“Billy”] and Barbara Elisabet, both of whom were born premature and suffered from respiratory problems. Bob Green reported to the local newspaper that, “Anita almost died while giving birth” and he expressed concern “over the survival of the twins.” An outpouring of prayer support, as reflected in the “literally hundreds of other friends sent word they were praying,” assured the well-being of Anita and the twins.<sup>21</sup> Although Anita was released from the hospital the twins had to remain for another two months. For the next eight years Anita, while being an attentive mother, still managed to perform concerts, produce record albums, pursue a television career, and during the 1970s participated with Bob Hope in USO shows for military personnel in Vietnam.

### **The Miami “Gay-Rights” Ordinance**

In January, 1977, the Metropolitan Dade County Commission approved a Human Rights Ordinance that established legal protection from discrimination against homosexuals in housing, public accommodation and employment. Soon civic and religious leaders who disagreed with the ordinance began to organize an effort to repeal by referendum the so-called “gay-rights” ordinance.<sup>22</sup> Bryant characterized the reaction as, “Christians were coming out of the closet against this unconstitutional law as fast as the gays were coming out for it.”<sup>23</sup> Bryant was enlisted by her then pastor Rev. E. William Chapman, who served the Northwest Baptist Church from 1969-78, to lead an organization called Save Our Children.<sup>24</sup> The non-profit organization,

which had enlisted the support of civic leaders and hundreds of pastors – from evangelicals to Catholics to Orthodox Jews – managed to secure 53,000 signatures to qualify a ballot referendum to repeal the Dade County gay-rights ordinance. Only the first 11,072 certified voter signatures were needed to qualify the issue for a countywide vote, which was set for June 7, 1977.<sup>25</sup>

In public rallies and media interviews, Bryant stressed, “The Bible clearly says homosexuality is an abomination.” Noting that the ordinance required private and parochial schools to hire homosexuals as teachers, the mother of four was infuriated. “When the law requires you to let an admitted homosexual teach your children and serve as a [role] model for them, it’s time to stop being tolerant.”<sup>26</sup>

The referendum to repeal Dade County’s human rights ordinance was soundly approved by a 2 to 1 margin, with 202,319 votes for repeal and 89,562 against. “Not quite 45 percent of the Dade County registered voters turned out . . . with no other major issues” on the ballot, *Baptist Press* reported.<sup>27</sup> The short political campaign had represented an epic battle between the morality forces of good and evil. One father told the *Miami Herald* the overwhelming vote was a reaction to the “worsening moral decay.” The ballot referendum had drawn into the battle, “Both religious conservatives and gay rights advocates from across the U.S., [who] after all, had wooed the Dade voters with high powered media blitzes, advertising and speechmaking campaigns.” The same

newspaper article went on to characterize the unique political campaign this way: “With the nation on the sidelines, watching, the big show also marshalled sex, God, human rights, the Constitution and heavy helpings of show biz.”<sup>28</sup>

In a post victory rally held at Miami’s Northwest Baptist Church, Bryant told the audience of 1200 supporters, that the repeal effort, “was not an Anita Bryant crusade.” She said, “we’re not trying to stampede the nation. It’s not our way.” Bryant also confirmed her efforts to repeal gay-right ordinances elsewhere would occur, “Only if there is an invitation and God says, ‘Go,’ will I go to another part of the country.”<sup>29</sup>

Five months later in a speech to the Florida Farm Bureau convention held in Kissimmee, Bryant stressed, “I am not anti-anything.” Although, she did affirm, “I am pro-God, pro-family, pro-motherhood, pro-life, pro-Bible, pro-morality, and especially putting prayer back in school.”<sup>30</sup>

Bryant subsequently led several more campaigns around the country to repeal local anti-discrimination ordinances, including campaigns in St. Paul, Minnesota; Wichita, Kansas; and Eugene, Oregon. Unfortunately in 1998, the now-named Miami-Dade County Commission,<sup>31</sup> by a seven-to-six vote, repudiated Bryant’s earlier successful campaign and reauthorized a sexual orientation anti-discrimination ordinance. In 2002, the national Christian Coalition organization secured a ballot initiative to repeal the

1998 ordinance, called Amendment 14, that was voted down by 56 percent of the voters.

Fifteen years later, in her latest book, *A New Day*, Bryant reflected upon the fallout from her high-profile leadership in the Save Our Children campaign.

“However, God Almighty allowed my circumstances to hem me in on every side, so that I had no choice other than to take a stand for the Lord and to protect our children. As it turned out, I then became identified with a national issue that not only was controversial, but ugly. The press called me bigoted, some Christians called me brave, and my husband in his heart called me someone foolish enough to destroy a career he had worked years to help me build.”<sup>32</sup>

An immediate effect upon her career – which provided a \$500,000 annual income – was the cancellation by various groups of eighty performance bookings and the loss of a lucrative network TV show contract with the Singer Sewing Machine Company, among others.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Bryant’s 11-year, \$100,000 annual contract with the Florida Citrus Commission continued briefly, before it was finally cancelled by the Commission, which contended that Bryant had “worn out” as a spokesperson. Many of these cancellations were the result of organized gay-rights advocacy groups which staged demonstrations against Bryant and threatened boycotts on products promoted by her. “We should not rest until Anita Bryant is utterly destroyed,” was the sentiment

expressed in gay-oriented publications.<sup>34</sup> Reportedly, during the 12 months following the referendum Bryant, “weathered bomb threats, snuff [death threats] letters and numerous close calls with mayhem.”<sup>35</sup>

The intense, and at times, negative public scrutiny, combined with the loss of income, placed a nearly unbearable strain upon the marriage of Anita Bryant and Bob Green. The stress resulted in regular heated arguments between the two. Quickly Anita saw the affect upon their children, recalling years later, that as, “tempers flared, and bitter words and harsh accusations flew, I would see such hurt and dismay on their faces.”<sup>36</sup> Yet in this time of growing despair and depression Anita was again reminded of her spiritual security. “I overlooked two central and permanent facts: Each of my children had his or her individual faith in Jesus Christ, and God had no intention of leaving or deserting any of us, not even me,” she wrote.<sup>37</sup>

In May, 1980, Anita Bryant filed for divorce from Bob Green citing emotional abuse which caused her to have latent suicidal thoughts. Green, in his response to the divorce filing said he loved his wife and children and “were it within his power alone to do so, he would preserve the marriage and save the family.”<sup>38</sup> The divorce decree was finalized that August. Later she would write, “I believed that the factors leading to my divorce belonged to God and me alone. I owed no one else an explanation. Even if my humiliation must be public . . .”<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the divorce “caused the



collapse of the remainder of her career when churches and Christian ministries stopped calling.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Life After Everything Crashed Around Her**

Whatever happen to Anita Bryant? By the mid-summer 2020, at age 80, Anita Bryant is alive and well living in Oklahoma City, Okla., where she leads Anita Bryant International Ministries.<sup>41</sup> Following her divorce, she and three of her children (the oldest, Bobby, 17, chose to live with his dad) made a series of successive moves : Oklahoma (1980); Selma, Ala. (1981-1984); Atlanta (1984 – 1988); Nashville (1989); and then following marriage to her childhood sweetheart Charlie Dry, the couple moved to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, until October, 2003, when they returned to Oklahoma City.<sup>42</sup>

Time and spiritual growth gave Anita Bryant continuing motivation and a new perspective on her life experiences. “Despite the most horrifying or hopeless circumstances, you need not be washed up, finished or beyond hope. God is there, even when you cannot pray and desire not to pray . . . He holds your life in His eternal hands, and He will not let you fall. I know.”<sup>43</sup>

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- 36 Bryant, *A New Day*, 67.
- 37 Ibid. 68.
- 38 Barry Bearak, "Anita, Bob Decides What's His, Hers," *Miami Herald*, July 25, 1980, C-1.
- 39 Bryant, *A New Day*, 20.
- 40 King, n.p.
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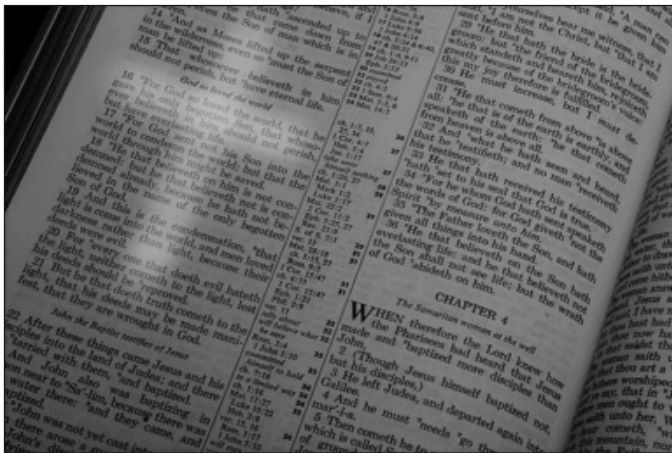
## **Making Personal Soul-Winning More Effective: Through the Evolving Methods of Evangelism, 1950 – 2000**

*by David Burton  
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“Soul-winning is the chief business of the Christian; indeed, it should be the main pursuit of every true believer,” Charles Surgeon wrote and promoted.<sup>1</sup> The renown theologian went on to explain that love for God should be one of the two motivating rationales for a Christian to be a witness. The second reason lies in “the command to love my neighbor as myself still retains its claim upon me.” Continuing, Spurgeon wrote, “We are to speak to them in terms of God’s loving Gospel because our hearts desire their eternal good.”<sup>2</sup>

Several years ago, the *Washington Post* carried an article on why Southern Baptists’ church memberships are on the decline. According to Thomas Kidd, a professor at Baylor University, cited research by the Pew Research Center, which reported American evangelicals “engage in virtually no personal evangelism. Few tell others about their faith, or invite co-workers and neighbors to church.”<sup>3</sup>



When Christians are asked the question, “Why do you not share your faith in Jesus with others?” the number one answer will be, “I am afraid.” The failure to be a witness is not uncommon. Based upon my experience as a pastor and evangelist, I would say every believer at some point in his life experiences the agony of speaking aloud for Christ. It is called the “fear factor.” Throughout the New Testament we have examples. Consider Peter in Acts 4:29 where he says, “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word.” The second reason people give for not sharing their faith in Jesus is, “I don’t know what to say.” Remember, Peter and John even asked the Lord to give them the words to speak (Acts 4:29).

A great comfort for these two challenging issues a believer faces is found in Luke 12:12. “For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what you ought to say.” (KJV)

Even in the Old Testament, Moses feared what to say before the king of Egypt in Exodus 4:12, “Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.” (KJV)

Now, two important questions: Why do people fear? And secondly, why do people not know what to say? I believe the number one reason is leadership in the local church. It is the obligation, joy and personal responsibility of every pastor to equip every believer in helping fulfill the Great Commission. No one is saved by osmosis. There must be someone proclaiming the Good News and someone hearing it to be BORN AGAIN. Scripture states pastors and teachers are “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Eph. 4:12 [ESV]). The Bible also states in Romans 10:14: “How then shall they call on him (Jesus) in whom they (spiritually lost people) have not believed? and how shall they (lost people) believe in him (Jesus) of whom they (lost people) have not heard? and how shall they (lost people) hear without a preacher (proclaimer)?” (KJV). The pastor’s responsibility is to teach the believers under his watch care how to proclaim this Good News known as the GOSPEL.

The pastor is not only to teach people how to share this good news, but also how to “go into the highways and hedges” (Luke 14:23 [KJV]). Of course, we all know the Great Commission (which is a commandment), “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, and the son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to

observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and low, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.“ (Matt. 28:19-20 [KJV]).

As a result, the pastor is to teach, equip and send every believer in his congregation into the fields which are white for harvest. “Do you not say, ‘there are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (John 4:35 [NKJV]).

### **The Joy of Sharing Jesus Christ**

One of the greatest joys a believer has is *verbally* telling another person how Jesus changed his life. This is the Good News! To not do so is SIN. We have already read where we are *commanded* to go into all

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congregation  
into the fields**

the world. Jesus was not asking us to go. This was not a request. It was a command. Our first verbal responsibility is to our own family, then our neighborhood, then our

friends, work associates, school mates, and acquaintances, among others.

Why do I say a great joy? The answer is found in Philemon 1:6 where Paul speaks to his friend Philemon: “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ,” [NIV 1984].

In other words, the more we share Jesus verbally with others, the more joy and fulfillment we will have in our Lord.

Down through the ages people have shared the Good News of Jesus in many different ways. There are many different approaches and different theological thoughts on just how to and if we are to verbally share the Gospel of Jesus. It is my interpretation of Scripture, that we are to go about verbally telling others how to be Born Again. From my perspective, I will use several words or phrases interchangeably: witness, soul-win, Good News, share Jesus, sharing your story, brag on Jesus, and evangelize. Each of these descriptors basically represent the same thing.

Because there are so many different approaches, styles and tools in presenting the Good News message of Jesus, one cannot say that there is a “silver bullet” which is the only way – the best way – to help an individual fulfill the great commission.

Therefore, there must be **multiple approaches** or **multiple entry points** in sharing Jesus with others. Why multiple entry points? There is no single context – we must see the difference with the eyes and heart of God; There is no single **geographic location** – it may be at work, home, school, ballfield, picnic, etc ; There is no single **method** – verbal testimony, gospel tract, visual tools, such as E-Cube, Hand-to-Hand Evangelism, Phone App, among others. There is no specific, normal **time limit** – a person may have three minutes or 30 minutes.



An individual desiring to be a strong witness of Jesus must always be flexible and remain sensitive to the process of relational/bridge building and intentional witnessing. No matter how long one relates or builds bridges into the life of a spiritually lost person they must always encounter/confront the lost with the Good News verbally in order for that person's life to be changed forever (BORN AGAIN). We're reminded of the Scripture challenge: "how will they hear without a preacher/sharer, of the Good News." (Romans 10:14).

### **The Starting Point for Southern Baptists**

The parameters of this article are to focus on the legacy years of 1950 to the year 2000, during which many evangelism methods and tools were developed to help laity and others in being effective soul-winners. The starting point for this consideration is the post-World War II years when the Southern Baptist Convention was inspired by the challenge to conduct one million baptisms nationwide during the Convention's centennial year of 1945. The following year during the 1946 annual Convention held in Miami, Florida, the messengers approved an 11-point strategy to make evangelism a priority at the national, state, associational, and local church level.<sup>4</sup> By 1950, Southern Baptists had a program of evangelism that was providing promotion, coordination and resources to help churches carry out the Great Commission through mass evangelism activities – revival, rallies and crusades – to the personal evangelism training provided prior or during those events.<sup>5</sup>

Despite those early efforts, one scholar has noted that, “Southern Baptists have not always employed the use of witness training models. The convention did not utilize them until the 1960s and did not popularized them until the 1970s.” Citing the perspective of Charles Kelley who chronicled the history of Southern Baptist evangelism efforts, Matthew Queen observed, “Study course books taught in conjunction with the educational program of churches, were the primary means of propagating the plans and training people to use them. In the 1960’s a movement toward a more organized and sophisticated training process began. This movement culminated with the Lay Evangelism School in the 1970’s and the Continuing Witness Training program in the 1980’s. The former trained participants to witness by using a tract which summarized the gospel. Participants in the latter were trained to witness by memorizing a presentation of the gospel. The growing sophistication of the training methodology produced a more sharply defined explanation of the gospel.”<sup>6</sup>

As a result of his review of the various witnessing methodologies used by Southern Baptists, Queen concluded there were eight common elements which he defined as:

“1) The gospel content of Southern Baptists’ proclamation stems from doctrinal and theological truths;”<sup>7</sup>

“2) Southern Baptist evangelistic presentations of gospel content have proven consistent with one another because of Southern Baptists’ commitment to interpret the gospel biblically;”<sup>8</sup>

“3) Southern Baptist evangelistic presentations of gospel content incorporate the use and support of scripture references to explain the gospel;”<sup>9</sup>

“4) The gospel content proclaimed by Southern Baptists incorporate a Christocentric telling of the gospel;”<sup>10</sup>

“5) The gospel content of Southern Baptist proclamation emphasizes the Lordship of Jesus Christ;”<sup>11</sup>

“6) The gospel content of Southern Baptists aims primarily for the conversion of unbelievers’ souls;”<sup>12</sup>

“7) Southern Baptists have implemented a number of methods in order to proclaim gospel content throughout their history;”<sup>13</sup> and

“8) Southern Baptists evangelistic programming intends for each member of a Southern Baptist Convention congregation to enter into a cooperative effort of sharing the gospel with unbelievers.”<sup>14</sup>

## **Developing a Strategy for Personal Evangelism**

Gradually Southern Baptists continued to develop and strengthen the promotion of personal evangelism training as Christopher Bonts explained. “The first widespread evangelism strategy that was produced by the North American Mission Board, then Home Mission Board, and widely adopted by the SBC was the *Lay Evangelism School* (LES, also called WIN, *Witness Involvement Now*), which was introduced in the early 1970s and “quickly became the most popular

evangelism training program in Southern Baptist history.”<sup>15</sup>

Based upon his research, Bonts concluded, “Southern Baptists trained over 103,000 laypeople to use this methodology in 1972. Southern Baptists just reported 445,725 baptisms that year. Both Charles Kelley and Kenneth Chafin credited this training with tremendous influence upon the number of baptisms that year, which Kelley noted was a new record for baptisms for the first time in a decade.”<sup>16</sup> Southern Baptists continued to use *Lay Evangelism Schools* for over 20 years. Its popularity resulted in the North American Mission Board re-issuing in 1992 a revised training manual of the *Lay Evangelism School*.

Another strong evangelism training strategy was called Continuing Witness Training (CWT). The Home Mission Board developed CWT in response to the widespread use of Dr. James Kennedy’s

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*Evangelism Explosion* by Southern Baptists during the 1980’s. When the publishers of *Evangelism Explosion*,<sup>17</sup> refused to produce a Baptist version that addressed issues such as believer’s baptism, the

Home Mission Board responded by producing a very similar *Continuing Witness Training*.<sup>18</sup> Charles Kelley noted that the key differences between *Evangelism Explosion* and *Continuing Witness Training* was that CWT scheduled a shorter training

period (13 instead of 17 weeks), placed an emphasis on believer's baptism, and made a stronger presentation of the Lordship of Christ in conversion.<sup>19</sup> I did have the privilege, while serving on the staff, as minister of evangelism, at the Germantown (TN.) Baptist Church, to write and edit portions of the CWT training guide.

"The advent of the 1990's saw yet another program introduced by the North American Mission Board that was widely adopted by Southern Baptists, the *One-Day Soul Winning Workshop*." Christopher Bonts further explained, "This program was produced in part because churches began to notice a reluctance of many in their churches to commit to a long-term training strategy like CWT. Churches can employ the *Workshop*, as its title suggests, in one extended training session. It borrows heavily from CWT."<sup>20</sup>

### **Other Personal Evangelism/Soul-Winning Methods**

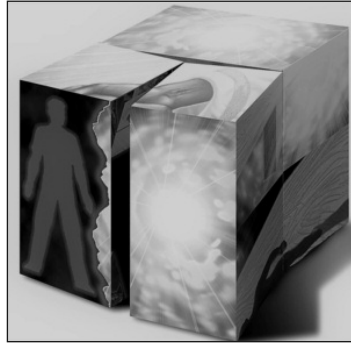
Space limitations within this article will not permit a review of ALL the tools and methods developed and distributed by the North American Mission Board. As an example, between the late 1970's and early 2000's, among the personal evangelism resources were: How To Have a Full and Meaningful Life; Win Our World; Training for Evangelistic Lifestyle and Leadership; WIN (Witness Involvement Now); Building Witnessing Relationships; People Sharing Jesus; Heart Call; Friendship Evangelism; Meeting Needs Sharing Christ; His Heart Our Hands; THE NET; Life On Mission; Three Circles; the Roman Road marked

New Testament and an emphasis upon personal testimonies. There were two other highly popular, but non-Baptist-developed methods, that included Dr. Bill Bright's "4 Spiritual Laws" and Bill Faye's "How to Share Jesus Without Fear." All of these resources were designed to assist Baptist people to enter into a conversation about Jesus with a spiritually lost person. Other organized programs designed to present the gospel through personal evangelism have included Sunday schools, Vacation Bible Schools, Door-to-Door visitation, Planting and Starting New Churches and in general lifestyle evangelism.

In 1998 another very popular soul-winning church program strategy was *F.A.I.T.H.: Evangelism Through the Sunday School*, developed by pastor Bobby Welch, which he began in 1985 at First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach, Florida. Embraced by Southern Baptists, the program was launched nationally in 1998, during which Pastor Welch travelled the country in a bus promoting the evangelism strategy. Meanwhile in Florida, Dr. Jerry Passmore, evangelism director (1989 – 2001), for the Florida Baptist Convention, developed *Through Every Door*, an evangelism strategy involving local churches in a concerted door-to-door evangelism emphasis. Over a three-year period, this strategy, based upon statewide baptism statistics, reached thousands with the Gospel message.

Since the start of this decade, Florida-based David Burton Ministries has developed and currently makes available many highly sought-after tools for personal

evangelism that are used for effective soul-winning. These specialty tools, which are explained in this article's endnotes, include: Do the Dot; Life-Death gospel tract; Jesus Face illusion card; Why Did Jesus Die booklet; the EvangeCube; the Illusion Bible; and the Burning Bible.<sup>21</sup>



**The EvangeCube**

### **The Use of Mass Media in Personal Evangelism**

World renown evangelist, Dr. Billy Graham (b.1918; d.2018), probably one of the most well-known Christian figures in history, has likely set the “gold standard” for the most effective use of mass media. He preached the gospel for nearly six decades (1947 – 2005) through over 400 live crusades. He pioneered in the use of new technologies radio (1950), television (1951), publishing (1960), and website (1996), all as a means of fulfilling the Great Commission.<sup>22</sup> As of 2008, an estimated lifetime audience, including radio and television broadcast, topped 2.2 billion. These technologies served as both inspiration and model for churches and Christian organizations to reach people with the gospel electronically.

The decade of the 2000s produced a growing awareness and use of various electronic mediums that were effectively used by individuals, ministries, and evangelistic organizations to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Among these so-called “social” media platforms were (and the year started): Facebook (2004); YouTube (2005); Twitter (2006); and Instagram (2010). In the year 2010 with the emergence of the smart phone, many ministries/organizations began producing their own APP presentations which served as a visual aid in sharing the Good News.

Just remember, “Keep bragging on Jesus” through whatever means you are able.

## ENDNOTES

1 Charles Spurgeon, *The Soulwinner*, (New Kensington, PA.: Whitaker House, 1995), 7.

2 Ibid., 17.

3 Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, “Here are Three Reasons Why Southern Baptists are on the Decline,” *Washington Post.com*, posted June 16, 2015; accessed March 27, 2020.

4 *Southern Baptist Convention Annual*, 1948, 41.

5 C.E. Matthews, *The Southern Baptist Program of Evangelism*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1958), 9.

6 Matthew Burton Queen, “A Theological Assessment of the Gospel Content in Selected Southern Baptist Sources,” a PhD dissertation for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, May, 2009, 23.

7 Ibid. 183.

8 Ibid. 186

9 Ibid. 190.

10 Ibid. 191.



11 Ibid. 192.

12 Ibid. 194.

13 Ibid. 199.

14 Ibid. 201.

15 Christopher Michael Bonts, “A Soteriological Analysis of Evangelism Training Programs of the Home Mission Board and the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention,” a PhD dissertation for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2009, 12-13.

16 Ibid. 12.

17 *Evangelism Explosion* was developed in 1962 by Dr. D. James Kennedy, pastor, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale.

18 Bonts, 12. Also see an overview of the development process of CWT, see. “Preface” in *Continuing Witness Training: Pastor/Leader Manual*, (Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1982), 1-3.

19 Charles S. Kelley, Jr., “How Did They Do It: The Story of Southern Baptist Evangelism?”, *Insight*, A publication of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993, 77 – 80.

20 Bonts, 13.

21 The David Burton Ministries personal evangelism resources available on-line at <http://www.davidburtonministries.com>, and referenced in this article include: (1) “Do The Dot” is a small red adhesive DOT placed on a person’s watch, credit card, driver’s license, cell phone to represent the BLOOD of JESUS. It is a constant reminder for the Believer to be a verbal soul winner and it also opens doors of conversation from people asking “What is the Dot for?” It is presented with a business card having an outline of how to use a Red Dot to share Jesus; (2) “Life /Death” gospel tract. These unique business card size tracts with their bright florescent orange optical illusion design, catch the attention of a person and easily creates a natural conversation about Jesus. The reverse side has

the basic Roman Road gospel outline to assist the soul winner in conversation with a lost person. These tracts are available in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese; (3) Jesus Face illusion card is a black/white optical illusion picture that is creatively used to capture the attention of a person.....opening the conversation to Jesus; (4) Hand-to-Hand Evangelism uses a person's hand to guide the presenter of the Good News into a unique visual aid of sharing the Gospel. Each finger and the palm represents a 6-point outline from God's purpose, sin, the cross/blood, commitment, faith and security; (5) "Why Did Jesus Die?" is a small folded booklet with a mirror inside. As the witness asked the question, "Why Did Jesus Die?" he hands it to the lost person who opens the booklet up and sees himself in the mirror. The Roman Road is printed on the inside to guide the personal soul-winner through the Gospel conversation with the hearer; (6) The EvangeCube celebrates its 20th year (2020) as one of the most creative witnessing tools ever. It is a multi-paneled "cube" that flips and turns to different pictures which Tell the Jesus Story. No words appear on the cube – it is all pictures of the Gospel; (7) The Illusion Bible (coloring book design) is used to create conversations about the Life of Jesus: birth, ministry, death and resurrection. As the presenter/witness uses the Bible, three different applications appear on the pages: blank pages, black and white pages and color pages. It amazes people trying to figure out how it works; (8) The Burning Bible is a Bible-size box that looks just like a Bible on the outside but inside is a flint, wick and mantle that catches fire and burns – looking like the Bible is on fire. A highly effective way to get the attention of an audience or individual for sure.

22 Information from the Billy Graham Evangelism Association website:

<https://memorial.billygraham.org/biography/>; Accessed 5/25/2020.

## **Our Mission:**

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## **Serving Churches**

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In fulfilment of our Mission to research, preserve and promote the Legacy of Florida Baptists, the Society assists leadership of Florida Baptist churches and associations in a variety of ways:

- ◆ the research of local church and association histories;
- ◆ the research of pastoral leader biography;
- ◆ provide resources for publishing a history; and
- ◆ encourage and assist churches and associations to celebrate their respective heritage and anniversaries.

# **The Baptist Influence on Revival Music/ The Revival Influence on Baptist Music**



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The reason for the dual title of this article is fairly obvious. Baptists had a significant influence on the development of the music used in the great interdenominational revival movements of the late nineteenth century. At the same time, the revival movements have left an indelible imprint upon the music and worship of Baptist churches to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Baptist Influence on Revival Music**

Baptists had relatively little influence on the music of the revivals that were part of the Second Great Awakening in the early part of the nineteenth century. Many Baptists of the time were strict Calvinists who did not have much use for revivalism; they were not inclined to make musical contributions to something in which they did not participate. Further, Baptists typically did not have very sophisticated musical programs in their churches at this time, and there were few congregations that could boast of – or even desired – choirs and musical instruments, much less trained leadership. Thus, there were really very few (or no) leaders to whom Baptists could look as revival music directors or authors and composers of revival



songs, even had they wished to participate in such efforts. Most of the church music leaders were volunteers who were chosen more for their faithfulness and willingness than their ability or effectiveness, and Baptists made do principally with hymns written by Congregationalists, Methodists, Anglicans/Episcopalians, and British Baptists.

By the middle of the nineteenth century that situation had begun to change. The earlier strict Calvinism was being replaced by a more moderate Calvinism, and the music programs in Baptist churches were becoming more sophisticated, with choirs, musical instruments, and trained leadership becoming more common, especially in the urban centers, though these were still not universally approved or available.

The increasing involvement of Baptists in revivals and their music is evident from the titles of several hymn

collections by Baptists that were published around the mid-point of the century: John Butler's *Revival Hymns of 1839*; R. H. Neale and H. W. Day's *Revival Hymns of 1842*, an anonymously compiled collection of *Revival Melodies* "as they were originally sung at the [revival] meetings of the Rev. Mr. [Jacob] Knapp" (also published in 1842); and Joseph Banvard's *Revival Gems of 1858*. All of these books were compiled by northern pastors or evangelists who worked in urban areas. The repertory of the books consisted chiefly of a few traditional hymns, collection of folk-type hymns, and examples of the "better music" that was being espoused by reformers such as Lowell Mason and Thomas Hastings. Though folk hymns were generally unacceptable to the reformers, those in the revival songbooks had at least a veneer of sophistication about them: they were "correctly" harmonized according to "scientific" principles (two buzzwords among the reformers) and they represented a more middle-of-the-road type of folk hymn that generally avoided excess of enthusiasm; however, very few, if any of the pieces in these books were original with Baptists.

### William B. Bradbury

Significant Baptist contributions to revival music began with the layman William B. Bradbury (b. 1816; d. 1868), though there was little direct connection between his work and revival meetings.<sup>2</sup> The area in which he became best known was in the writing of Sunday school songs, which during his time were aimed primarily at children. He generally wrote only the music, relying upon others for the words. It was

Bradbury who composed the music for the beloved children's song "Jesus loves me."<sup>3</sup> Bradbury did not invent the Sunday school song style, but he can be said to have brought it to maturity. In his hands, the Sunday school song usually featured an appealing melody with easily remembered rhythmic patterns, and a chorus that summed up the message of the stanzas.<sup>4</sup>

But Bradbury did not write only for children, and many of the tunes he composed for use by adults or mixed age groups became classic expressions that were used often in revival services, such as his music for "He leadeth me, O blessed thought," "Savior, like a shepherd lead us," "My hope is built on nothing less," "Sweet hour of prayer," and, above all, that favorite invitation hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea."

Bradbury died just about the time classic mass evangelism was getting started, at least if one thinks of this as beginning with Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey's English revival meetings of 1873. By this point, the Sunday school had expanded to include both adults and children, and the Sunday school song style was in the process of merging with secular song styles to form a new idiom, the "gospel song." This was the period of Johann Strauss, Jr., John Philip Sousa, Stephen Foster, and Gilbert and Sullivan, and the gospel song reflected the influence of the waltz, march, minstrel show tune, sentimental ballad, and operetta. The gospel song became the "typical" revival music of the late nineteenth century because it contained a simple text that avoided theological

sophistication in favor of direct appeal for salvation or renewed commitment, linked with a popular musical style that appealed to the masses. The gospel song was intended for immediate appeal and quick consumption, and was aimed principally at the unconverted or backslidden.

Robert Lowry

William B. Bradbury's place as the pre-eminent provider of Sunday school songs for both children and adults was taken after his death by the Baptist pastor Robert Lowry (b. 1826; d. 1899), who wrote both texts and tunes.<sup>5</sup> Lowry's songs slipped easily into the

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... became  
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gospel song vein and became standard revival fare. Among these were the words and music for "Nothing But the Blood," the tune for "I

Need Thee Every Hour," and the refrain and music for "We're Marching to Zion." Lowry provided both the words and music for "Shall We Gather at the River," which has become the stock gospel song, used whenever Hollywood wants to paint a picture of rural southern religion. The fact that the song was written by a northern city-dweller who was a highly educated pastor and became a university professor seems to count for little. Of course, part of this unfortunate identification came from misuse of the song at outdoor baptisms: the "river" at which we are to gather is not the baptismal water, but the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" of Revelation 22.



### William Howard Doane

Lowry's contemporary and collaborator in the writing and publishing of revival music was William Howard Doane (b. 1832; d. 1915), the president of a woodworking machinery manufacturing company whose avocation was writing hymns and compiling songbooks. Doane showed a special affinity for writing tunes to match texts by the Methodist author Fanny Crosby, including those for "To God Be the Glory," "I Am Thine, O Lord, I Have Heard Thy Voice," "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior," and "Rescue the Perishing."

### George C. Stebbins

Mention should also be made of the contributions of George C. Stebbins (b. 1846; d. 1945), an associate of Moody and Sankey.<sup>6</sup> Stebbins was one of the collaborators in several volumes of the Gospel Hymns series of songbooks published between 1875 and 1891 that were to become the "bible" of gospel hymnody. The music he wrote for such texts as "I've Found a Friend, O Such a Friend," "Ye Must Be Born Again," "Take Time to Be Holy," and especially the invitation hymns "Jesus Is Tenderly Calling," "Out of My Bondage, Sorrow, and Night," and "Have Thine Own Way, Lord" became classics of revival music.

### Other Baptist Contributions

Bradbury, Lowry, Doane, and Stebbins were the major Baptist figures in revival music of the late nineteenth century, but others made individual contributions as

well, including the writers of the texts "Peace, Be Still" ("Master, the Tempest Is Raging"), "Take the Name of Jesus With You," "I Will Sing the Wondrous Story," "Must I Go, and Empty-Handed," "Throw Out the Life-Line," and the tune for "Bringing in the Sheaves," as well as others.<sup>7</sup> All these gospel songs have seen wide use in American revivalism since the late nineteenth century, and many of them continue to be sung today on a regular basis.

Baptists were certainly not the only ones to make major contributions to revival music of the late nineteenth century, but the songs they created became an integral part of the repertory and legacy of revivalism that still impacts the church today.

### **The Revival Influence on Baptist Music**

It will be noticed, however, that nothing has been said about the twentieth century nor about Baptists in the South.<sup>8</sup> There is a good reason for this, because this subject appropriately belongs to the second part of the article, "the revival influence on Baptist music." Baptists of the North profoundly affected the content and direction of revival music, and in turn were influenced by revival music; Baptists of the South made few direct contributions to the standard repertory of revival music, but were overwhelmed – of their own free will, of course – by revival music.

### **The Influence of Revivalism on Baptist Worship**

In earlier times, the principal meeting of Baptist churches was for the purpose of worship – the Christian meeting his or her God in a corporate

setting. Evangelism almost surely happened as part of these occasions, but it was usually a byproduct rather than the expected result. When the church experienced corporate evangelism, it was more often in the context of a "social meeting" – that is, a meeting that was held apart from the stated worship times of the church.

The revival movement of the late nineteenth century, however, produced a radical change in the underlying philosophy of the Baptist service. While no one would have claimed or admitted that they were abandoning worship, the thrust of the principal services began to

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direction of revival  
music**

move more and more in the direction of evangelism. Essentially, the Sunday morning service became like a single

service during a revival meeting. The question was not "Did the Christian meet God today?" but "Did the unbeliever meet God today?" Elements that had not previously been common in Baptist worship, such as the public invitation, were borrowed from the revival service and became a standard fixture.<sup>9</sup> The service now had a distinctly different but easily measurable objective: to have people "walk the aisle."

This was a significant change of emphasis and philosophy that had a major impact on the music of Baptist churches. If the goal of the service is for the

initiated to have communion with God, the music can be that of an "insider" – one who knows the ropes, so to speak, and has some experience with Christian song. On the other hand, if the goal is to attract and convert the unbeliever, then the music must be of a more popular and secular twist – such, at least, is the rationale.

### The Influence of Gospel Hymnody

As Baptists saw the impact gospel songs had in the revival meeting, and, desiring to duplicate such results in their services, they often began to abandon whatever they had sung previously in favor of this new popular style. In the nineteenth-century South, Baptists had principally been folk hymn singers. Folk hymns were essentially the popular music of rural religion, and, of course, most nineteenth-century Baptists lived in rural areas. It is perhaps a mark of the increasing urbanization of Baptists in the South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that they so readily accepted the gospel song, a form that had originated in the major cities of the northeast. But these Baptists not only accepted the new style, they adopted it wholesale, and gospel song became the *lingua franca* of Baptist church music in the South.

This stark picture is, of course, not quite the whole truth. Baptists continued to sing "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." But it is certainly true that the revival meeting-inspired style of the gospel song became the predominant idiom in Baptist church music during the first half of the twentieth century.

A case study of the change that occurred can be found in the tune for the hymn "On Jordan's Stormy Banks." This music was written or copied from oral tradition by Matilda T. Durham, a Baptist laywoman from South Carolina, and was first published in fellow South Carolina Baptist William Walker's *Southern Harmony of 1835*. Based in the idiom of folk music, the tune as originally notated and sung was a vigorous minor-mode melody. However, as the end of the nineteenth century neared, the minor key was rapidly disappearing from American popular music, and gospel hymnody was no exception. Thus, in 1874, Rigdon M. McIntosh, a Methodist, published a version of the tune arranged in a major key. Baptists adopted this form of the tune as early as 1920,<sup>10</sup> and the old minor-key setting was largely forgotten, except in the insular world of the Sacred Harp sing. What was once an earnest longing for the Promised Land had become a cheerful celebration of heaven without a whiff of "chilling winds" or "poisonous breath."

The wholesale adoption of revivalism and the gospel song style had important ramifications for Baptists. One is that, over time, it separated them from the mainstream of Christian church music. In 1906, a new hymnal was published for the use of Anglican churches in Britain. Titled simply *English Hymnal*, this was the most innovative and eclectic hymnal that had been published to that time. Hymns of social concern by contemporary authors such as G. K. Chesterton found place alongside sixteenth-century metrical psalms, Watts and Wesley, and Lutheran chorales. Plainsong tunes, English folk songs,

Victorian part-songs, vigorous new compositions from the fledgling twentieth century, and even gospel songs co-existed, more or less peaceably.

The innovative and eclectic approach of the *English Hymnal* had an important influence on the hymnals and congregational singing of many denominations, both British and American. Baptists of the South, however, were almost completely insulated from the effects of the *English Hymnal* by their steady diet of gospel songs. In fact, it was to be nearly seventy years before the impact of the *English Hymnal* was to be felt by Baptists of the South in any significant way, and until 1975 it would have mattered little to Baptists if the *English Hymnal* had never been published.<sup>11</sup> Far greater influence was exerted on Baptists during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s by the gospel songs of John W. Peterson and Bill and Gloria Gaither than by the *English Hymnal*.

This also was, of course, a two-way street. Since Baptists continued to cling to the revival music idiom long after other denominations had moved on to other things, the influence that Baptists had once exerted in contributing new texts and tunes for congregational singing waned as well. Within the Southern Baptist orbit, the name of "B. B. McKinney" achieved almost mythic status during the first half of the twentieth century. However, his name is little known and his songs seldom sung outside Baptist churches in the South. One of the key reasons for this is that by the time McKinney did his work other mainline denominations had abandoned the revival meeting

and broadened the scope of their hymnody beyond the gospel song. Since revivalism and gospel hymnody no longer formed a major part of the life of these denominations (if it ever had), they had little interest in new songs of the type McKinney was writing, and they were content to make do with an ever-diminishing number of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century examples in this genre. For Baptists, on the other hand, the gospel song was still central, so the hymns of McKinney were welcomed eagerly and sung vigorously.<sup>12</sup>

### Other Influences of Revivalism on Baptist Church Music

Another lingering effect of revivalism on Baptist church music is the position of "minister of music," the person who is ultimately responsible for the totality of the music program in a local church under the leadership of the pastor – the "chief musician," if you will. This position evolved from that of the revival music director. Beginning with Ira D. Sankey in the nineteenth century, who unobtrusively led the singing by playing a portable organ, the role of the revival music director was expanded by the musical evangelist Charles M. Alexander in the early twentieth century to include being master of ceremonies for the meeting. This pattern of the revival musician as master of ceremonies was continued by Homer Rodeheaver and other evangelistic musicians. As Baptist churches sought to emulate the revival service in their worship, the need for an "up front" person to fulfill the roles taken by musical evangelists such as Alexander and Rodeheaver became apparent, and the

"song leader" became an accepted figure in Baptist churches. As concepts of ministry broadened and deepened, and as music programs grew significantly in the years after World War II, the song leader evolved into the minister of music. This product of revivalism became a more-or-less unique contribution of Baptists to the larger world of church music and worship life.<sup>13</sup>

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Brief mention should also be made of the prominence of the piano in Baptist church music. Prior to the early twentieth century, the organ or one of its derivatives was the predominant instrument for church music. However, when Charles M. Alexander began using the piano to accompany the singing at his revival meetings – because its percussive effect helped keep the congregation together – the way was opened for its use in churches that followed the revivalist pattern. This instrument (which was also cheaper than an organ) became a standard fixture in Baptist churches of all sizes.

### Recent Developments

It is no secret that profound changes have occurred in the music of Baptists and other churches in the United States in the last thirty years. In some places, hymns, choirs, and organs have been discarded in favor of contemporary Christian songs, choruses, and praise bands.



In an ironic twist, gospel songs have been lumped with hymns of other types as part of the "tradition" that has been rejected in these circles. This musical form that was based on the popular music of the day, that once dominated the music of Baptist churches, in a style that Baptists retained long after it had ceased to be the common expression of the surrounding culture, has to some extent been replaced by another.

Revivalism in the nineteenth-century sense of the protracted meeting, and the music that once sustained it – the gospel song – may have been superseded in the minds of and hearts of some Baptists by more contemporary idioms, but the general rationale for this approach has not. The worship service is still seen in many circles primarily as an evangelistic opportunity. Both the gospel song and contemporary Christian music represent popular expressions that are drawn from the secular music of the surrounding culture; the only essential difference is whether that popular style reflects the late nineteenth century or the late twentieth/early twenty-first century. The two styles are intended to fulfill much the same function: to provide a musical connection with the person on the street and to serve as an attraction to the service where the person can hear the gospel message. In many respects, contemporary Christian music is the successor of the revivalist tradition represented by the gospel song. This, perhaps, at least partly explains the speed with which contemporary Christian music was accepted in Baptist churches. Christian popular music has found a place in churches of all denominations and traditions, but it has generally had

less success in churches that have a strong liturgical heritage than in those that typically follow the revivalist pattern. Because of their adherence to the principles of revivalism, Baptists were already in the habit of using popular musical idioms; they have merely traded an older popular style for a more recent one.

## Conclusion

There will likely always be a debate as to whether the music of the church should have a special character that sets it apart from other music, or if it should be as much like that of "the world" as possible. How this question is answered generally depends upon one's view of the primary purpose of the service: is it to be worship or is it to be evangelism? One thing, however, is certain: though the methods and repertory have changed, the impact of revivalism on Baptist church music and worship is as strong today as it was a century and more ago.

## ENDNOTES

This article was originally published by the *Baptist History and Heritage* journal, in the Summer-Fall, 2010, issue (Vol. 45, #3) and is reprinted here with permission of the publisher and writer.

1 Particularly important writings on the music of American revivalism during the nineteenth century include the following doctoral dissertations: Paul Garnett Hammond, "Music in Urban Revivalism in the Northern United States, 1800-1835" (D.M.A., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974); Paul Gaarder Kaatrud, "Revivalism and the Popular Spiritual Song in Mid-nineteenth Century America: 1830-1870" (Ph.D., University of Minnesota, 1977); and Esther Heidi Rothenbusch, "The Role of Gospel Hymns Nos. 1 to 6

(1875-1894) in American Revivalism" (Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1991). Marvin McKissick's article "The Function of Music in American Revivals Since 1875," *The Hymn* 9, no. 4 (October 1958): 107-117, usefully summarizes musical features of the revivals of Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday, and the early crusades of Billy Graham.

2 For a significant study of Bradbury, see Alan Burl Wingard, "The Life and Works of William Batchelder Bradbury 1816-1868" (D.M.A. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973).

3 The tune is called either CHINA or JESUS LOVES ME.

4 Comprehensive information about the early Sunday school song can be found in Virginia Ann Cross, "The Development of Sunday School Hymnody in the United States of America, 1816-1869" (D.M.A. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985).

5 Lowry's life and musical works are detailed in Roger William Walworth, "The Life and Hymnological Contributions of Robert Lowry (1826-1899)" (D.M.A. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994).

6 The most thorough study of Stebbins and his work is Robert Rankin Brooks, "George Coles Stebbins: His Life, Work, and Influence upon the Development of Gospel Hymnody" (D.M.A. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993).

7 For the names of the authors and composers of these and other gospel songs by nineteenth-century Baptists see David W. Music and Paul A. Richardson, "I Will Sing the Wondrous Story": A History of Baptist Hymnody in North America (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 337-338.

8 The music for "Bringing in the Sheaves" was written by the Southern Baptist George A. Minor, but this stands almost alone among contributions of the southern branch of the denomination to the standard repertory of gospel hymnody. Furthermore, the popularity of the song owed

more to its inclusion in the northern-produced Gospel Hymns No. 4 (1881) than to its original 1879 publication.<sup>9</sup> In research for his 1979 Ph.D. dissertation, "The Public Invitation as a Method of Evangelism; Its Origin and Development" (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979), W. Oscar Thompson found that "more than ninety-five percent of [Southern Baptist] churches adhere to the practice of issuing a public invitation at the close of virtually every major worship service."

Thompson's dissertation usefully summarizes the history of the public invitation during the twentieth century and before, especially among Baptists.

<sup>10</sup> H[arry] E[skew], "On Jordan's stormy banks," in Jere K Adams, ed., *Handbook to The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 214.

<sup>11</sup> The first Southern Baptist hymnal to reflect significant influence of the *English Hymnal* was *Baptist Hymnal* (1975 Edition) (Nashville: Convention Press, 1975). The 1956 *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1956) did contain a few items that were original to the *English Hymnal*--such as the arrangement of the tune LASST UNS ERFREUEN, though the book included neither an acknowledgement of the arranger, Ralph Vaughan Williams, nor a copyright notice for the music--but none of the twentieth century tunes or folk song arrangements by Vaughan Williams or other composers found in the 1906 book.

<sup>12</sup> "Songs by McKinney that continue to be popular among Baptists in the South include "Breathe on Me," "Glorious Is Thy Name," and "Wherever He Leads I'll Go." McKinney has been used here mainly as the best known representative of many other Baptists in the South who wrote or composed gospel songs that became widely used locally, regionally, or within the denomination, but that had little impact on the wider world of Christian song. Among these might be mentioned the nineteenth-century gospel songs of William E. Penn and those of the musical evangelists who worked for the Southern Baptist

Home Mission Board between 1910 and 1928. See Michael Linder, "William Evander Penn: His Contribution to Church Music" (D.M.A. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985), and William L. Haas, Jr., "Musical Evangelism of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (1910-1928)" (M.C.M. thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1970).

13 See Hugh T. McElrath, "The Minister of Music in Southern Baptist Life," *Baptist History and Heritage* 21, no. 3 (July 1986): 9-20, for a description of the origins of this position among Southern Baptists.

# Florida Baptists’ Evangelism Legacy Affirmed by Baptism Growth

by Donald S. Hepburn  
Secretary-Treasurer  
Florida Baptist Historical Society



“For several years now, I have been greatly burdened by the declining number of baptisms across the Southern Baptist Convention,” wrote SBC president J. D. Greear in an on-line article for *Baptist Press* in 2019. “I believe the baptism numbers serve as one of the best indicators of evangelism in our churches. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and that means that proclaiming the Gospel is the core of who we are – not only as Southern Baptists, but most importantly, as disciples of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Greear serves as pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C

While the process of leading people to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ is a priority mandate for Christ’s disciples, tracking the numbers of baptisms serves a secondary, yet valuable purpose. According to *Christianity Today* on-line blogger Karl Voters, statistics “are critical to understanding trends, needs, and our effectiveness.”<sup>2</sup>

And while some critics may contend that keeping records on membership and baptisms is akin to a sterile counting of sheep, Pentecostal Pastor Jack



Hayford of Van Nuys, California, has noted there are biblical rationales. “There are examples in the Bible of good record keeping and numerical reports.”<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the biblically-mandated discipleship responsibility for Florida Baptists to lead people to the baptismal waters, there are other values achieved by recording baptisms performed by churches. On a micro level, is the ratio comparison of church membership against baptisms performed. This statistic reveals how many church members, on average, were required to lead one person to faith in Jesus Christ. Additionally, from a macro perspective, combining the baptism totals for a region (i.e. Baptist association) or for the state and comparing that number against the general population census can be an indicator of the Gospel’s penetration into the secular society.

These two comparative measures will be summarized within this article following an overview of the evangelistic efforts by Florida Baptists since being established in the Florida Territory and continuing up to the early 1940s.

### **Associational Affiliation**

The heartbeat for spiritually lost souls has existed among Florida Baptists for nearly 200 years since itinerant missionary preachers entered the Florida Territory to proclaim salvation through Jesus Christ. Those efforts resulted in men and women coming to faith in Jesus Christ and the starting of churches in small settlements across the Territory's Panhandle. These itinerant missionary-preachers typically would perform baptismal services of the new believers in nearby lakes and rivers. Those new converts either served as the nucleus for a newly established church organized by the missionary or the converts would join in fellowship with the area's only Baptist church. With the growing development of churches along the Florida Panhandle, the need existed for those geographically separated churches to be affiliated with other Baptists of like faith and practice. This desire for affiliation grew out of several needs – not the least of which was fellowship and inspiration – the most important being a commitment to fulfill the Great Commission within Florida. However, between 1820 and 1843, the Territory's few Baptist churches could only affiliate with Georgia-based Baptist associations, specifically the Piedmont Association [org. 1815], the Ochlocknee Association [org. 1827], or the first Florida/Georgia-based association called the



Suwannee River Association [org. 1835].

Unfortunately a spirit of anti-missions – based on a hyper-Calvinism theological interpretation of predestination – spread across South Georgia. This resulted in all the aforementioned associations adopting rules of order that disassociated themselves from and prohibited participation with any Baptist church or individual who advocated or supported missionary and evangelistic endeavors.

As a result of that anti-missions' sentiment, the pastors of the Florida Territory's few Baptist churches agreed to join together to organize a truly Missionary Baptist association. Apart from the mutual fellowship role, the proposed association would focus on evangelism and church starting. That commitment was realized when the Florida Baptist Association was organized in 1843. During its first annual meeting the church delegates voted to employ the association's first missionary to travel the region preaching evangelistic meetings and starting new churches.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently Ryan Frier was commissioned to follow an itinerant circuit throughout East Florida. Several years later, in 1845, the association employed James McDonald, who had been serving as an itinerant missionary for the American Baptist Home Mission Society.<sup>5</sup> And by 1860, the association had four men serving as missionaries across the Florida Panhandle. They were: Ryan Frier, W. F. Duval, Z. G. Wheeler, and G. W. Bostick.<sup>6</sup> The itinerant missionary assignment was not a full-time endeavor, inasmuch as each of these men served as a part-time pastor of one or more churches.

Subsequently, as Florida's population grew, more Baptist churches were established to reach the spiritually lost. It became evident there was a need for a unified effort for statewide evangelism. To that end, representatives from the then current Baptist associations within the state – Florida, West Florida, and Alachua – met in Madison to organize on November 20, 1854, the Florida Baptist State Convention. As was typical of most state conventions of the era, the Florida convention was organized to unify and cooperate in a larger effort of evangelism and church starting.<sup>7</sup> Initially a State Convention Committee on Evangelism was assigned to promote the role and purpose of evangelism which was expressed through reports read at the annual meeting. While there was not yet a centralized collection of statistical data on church membership and baptisms, a review of the separate annual reports of the three existent associations do provide a statistical baseline of Florida Baptists. In 1854 there were a total of 91 churches that participated with one of the three associations, whose combined membership totaled approximately 3,957. Their churches reported combined baptisms of 367.<sup>8</sup> The 1854 statistics reflect that, on average, it took nine Baptists to lead one person to faith in Christ. It should be noted that due to geographical constraints, there were other Baptist churches in Florida that either were not affiliated with

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any of the three associations or held affiliation with an out of state Baptist association.

### **First State Convention-Appointed Evangelist**

In an effort to undertake a proactive commitment to evangelism, delegates attending the 1873 annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention, approved a recommendation made by the Committee on Evangelism to employ Kinsey Chambers (b. 1814; d. 1889) as the Convention's first missionary-evangelist beginning on July 1, 1873.<sup>9</sup> Chambers was well known as an evangelistic pastor, having come into the Florida Territory in 1845 (the year Florida achieved statehood) to organize and serve as the first pastor of the Ephesus Baptist Church at King's Ferry (in present day Nassau County).<sup>10</sup>

As the State Convention's sole missionary-evangelist, Chambers "traveled widely, preaching, exhorting, making Sunday school addresses." He served in that capacity through 1876.<sup>11</sup> In that dual assignment Chambers was the State Convention's first employee to contribute to the development of Sunday school work. Prior to the statewide assignment and by 1872, Chambers had served concurrently as pastor of six part-time churches – Bethlehem Church at Lake City; Deep Creek and Sharon churches in Callahan; Ephesus and Hebron Churches at King's Ferry; and Mount Pleasant Church at Wellborn. During his ministry, Chambers was credited with having baptized over 500 persons.

Also prior to his Convention service, Chambers was

instrumental in the formation of the Santa Fee Missionary Baptist Association in 1857 (later renamed the Santa Fe River Baptist Association). He then served for two years as the association's domestic missionary and was responsible for the starting of eight churches in a single year.

### **State Board of Missions Established to Spearhead Missions and Evangelism**

During Kinsey Chambers tenure as the State Convention-commissioned missionary-evangelist, prominent pastors noted that the State Convention's Executive Committee needed to be better organized to employ more field evangelist-missionaries. At the urging of Napoleon A. Bailey (b.1833; d. 1897) the State Convention during its December, 1880, meeting in Madison, approved the formation of a Board of Missions. The newly created board took over the functions of the former Executive Committee, which had acted as the State Convention between annual sessions from 1854 until 1880, when the Board of Missions was formed.<sup>12</sup>

The newly organized State Board did not fully know the extensive and staggering challenges of evangelism and church starting that they confronted. Though they were aware of their limitations, the pastor-members organized with faith and hope for the future. The first minutes of the board reported receipts of \$104.11, and cash paid out \$103.60, leaving a balance of 51 cents. However, with such small amounts they still employed two missionaries: A. H. Robinson of Lake Como and Napoleon A. Bailey of Micanopy,

paying each of them a salary of \$25 per quarter.<sup>13</sup> In the first statewide statistical summary made in 1882 by the State Convention, a reported 593 baptisms were performed by 222 churches. With a combined church membership of 8,059 a statistical analysis showed it took approximately 14 Baptists to win one person to faith in Christ.<sup>14</sup> However, the state's population was in excess of 270,000 residents and Baptists comprised less than three-percent of the population.<sup>15</sup>

Even though the State Convention grew remarkably as a result of newly started churches and the financial help provided by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (now called the North American Mission Board), the State Board was plagued with financial problems throughout the remainder of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The statewide task of evangelism and church starting was underwritten by the State Board, which not only supported its team of missionary-pastors, but they also established in 1883, a church loan fund for financing much needed church buildings. Unfortunately, by 1886 that appeared to be a useless venture because no money was available and no loans from banks were possible.<sup>16</sup> In 1887, optimism prevailed, for then the statewide missionaries' salaries also were declared absolute.<sup>17</sup> However, in 1895, with widespread economic problems in Florida, the State Board determined that the missionaries' salaries would be paid only if there was sufficient income. It is remarkable that the State Board accomplished so much in view of its economic limitations. As financial resources increased, the

State Board appointed additional missionaries. Like the pioneer missionaries before them, they often traveled long distances, preaching, organizing Sunday schools, constituting churches, and helping erect church buildings.<sup>18</sup> Those combined evangelistic efforts in supporting local churches, by the end of 1899, resulted in the State Convention reporting 1,302 baptisms being made by the 459 cooperating churches. Based upon the combined church membership of 22,620, it now took 17 members to win one person to faith in Christ.<sup>19</sup> By now the state's population had grown to over 500,000 residents and Baptist only represented approximately four and one-half percent of the population.<sup>20</sup>

### **Evangelism Becomes Intentional**

During the early years of the new century, Florida's agricultural-based economy was still reeling from the effects of the great freeze of 1895 and the ravages of the boll weevil. Despite the economic conditions, the State Board continued to employ general missionaries, evangelists and church builders (mission pastors) to assist the existing churches as well as start new churches in the growing cities.<sup>21</sup>

As Florida's population growth increased by the 1920s, Southern Baptists and Florida Baptists began to recognize the need for more intentional evangelization efforts toward spiritually lost persons. Up until this time, since the late nineteenth century, the promotion of evangelism – a staple of Baptist doctrine and practice – had been a primary responsibility of the local Baptist church and its

pastor. The State Convention's State Board of Missions and the Southern Baptist Convention served as catalysts for the promotion of evangelism through their respective appointed committees and the deployment of missionary-pastors and evangelists. However, in 1921 the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board adopted an evangelism strategy that was characterized by the slogan "Every One Win One." W. W. Hamilton, superintendent of the Evangelism Department for the Home Mission Board challenged churches and pastors to take up the banner of soul-winning. "If our churches will adopt this evangelistic method and put it into practice, next year will be the greatest ingathering of souls in all our history," Hamilton said.<sup>22</sup> In response, Florida Baptist

**It now took 17  
[Baptists] to win  
one person to faith  
in Christ.**

churches were encouraged to ready themselves for evangelistic opportunities that existed in their communities. Florida

Baptist Convention Secretary-Treasurer S. B. Rogers challenged Florida Baptists to "organize themselves in a body, select a permanent leader, secure literature upon the One Win One campaign, (and) organize themselves into groups for separate study and sacred prayer."<sup>23</sup> The results were the formation of local Soul-Winners' Leagues in cities and towns across Florida.<sup>24</sup> The groups, comprised mainly of laypersons, demonstrated a strong commitment by individual Baptists to become serious about sharing their Christian faith with non-believers.

Additionally, during the decade of the 1920s, the State Board employed men who were designated as “Enlistment-Evangelists.” Their task was to organize churches, conduct evangelistic crusades and revivals, as well as “assist pastors and their churches over the many obstacles that retard their growth.”<sup>26</sup> Initially five persons – C. B. Gaize, W. C. Taylor, John F. Gable, A. A. Holmes, and J. L. Hampton – were employed and assigned to strategic regional locations – Marianna, Madison, Gainesville, Orlando and Tampa. Due to a variety of reasons these men typically served for a year or two. In the ensuing years, replacements included W. R. Lambert, L. E. Goodgame, Joseph Connell, J. W. Senterfitt, W. L. Head, Sr., and W. L. Evans.<sup>27</sup>

Florida Baptists’ energetic commitment to evangelism caused the Home Mission Board’s Evangelism Department to select Florida to be the first state to “test pilot” a proposed statewide evangelistic campaign beginning in February, 1927. The Home Mission Board provided evangelist-preachers and evangelist-singers to lead crusades in those churches that committed to participate in the statewide effort.<sup>28</sup> The success of the springtime crusade resulted in many Florida Baptist churches scheduling annual revivals in the ensuing years. Again the positive results were measured by reported annual baptism totals of between 6,600 and 7,200 for each year between 1927 and 1932.<sup>29</sup>

Earlier, in December, 1929, C.M Brittain, the then secretary-treasurer, Florida Baptist Convention,



reported that the State Convention-sponsored evangelism efforts had been discontinued, "because of the financial situation that has so materially affected receipts."<sup>30</sup> Despite the personnel elimination by the end of the decade, statistical reports from earlier in this period indicated that the evangelistic emphasis and outreach efforts by local churches had paid dividends. As an example, at the end of 1930, churches reported a record 6,617 baptisms compared to the 3,813 baptisms performed a decade earlier (see attached chart).<sup>31</sup>

### **Statewide Evangelists Appointed**

The visibility and emphasis upon a renewed commitment to evangelism may not have caused another Great Awakening. However, it did prompt some Baptist leaders to call for a return to an earlier practice of a Convention-employed evangelist. To underscore their rationale those leaders only had to cite the example of the Home Mission Board, which by the late 1920s, had nearly 50 employed evangelists leading church-based and citywide revivals across the country. Between 1929 and 1933 the Home Mission Board's Evangelism Department was deactivated and all the evangelists were laid off due to the Depression. It was not until 1937 that the national program was re-started. While many Florida Baptists agreed to the need and value of a Florida staff evangelist to assist local churches, the financial crisis experienced by the Convention in the late 1920s and early 1930s kept the dream from being realized. Finally the State Board recommended and the State Convention approved in 1933 a proposal to employ a person to give leadership

to “evangelism and enlistment.” In April, 1934, C. M. Brittain reported in the *Florida Baptist Witness* that the “Lord has come to our assistance to make this work possible.” A Jacksonville layman, formerly of Madison, named W. C. Wells apparently was led by God to contribute the needed financial resources to underwrite for one year at least one-half of the salary of a state evangelist. The Wells’ gift – as a memorial to his recently deceased spouse – subsequently was provided annually for many more years. The State Board jumped at the proposal, agreed to find the additional funding for the salary and began the search for the right man to serve as state evangelist.<sup>32</sup>

Surprisingly the State Board did not have to look any further than to Southwest Florida to find its state evangelist prospect. Serving as pastor of the First Baptist Church, Sarasota, was one of the nation’s leading evangelists – T. O. Reece.<sup>33</sup> Prior to the Sarasota pastorate, which began November 15, 1931, Reece had successfully served four years (1927 – 1931) as pastor of First Baptist Church, Perry. Yet, his reputation as an evangelist was more notable and widely known. The North Carolina native had been trained and educated at Mars Hill College, Washington College, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Tullius O. Reece (b. 1878; d. 1947) formerly served as state evangelist for the Tennessee Baptist Convention and later served 13 years as a staff evangelist with the Home Mission Board. Through his mass evangelism crusades Reece claimed to have led between 16,000 and 18,000 people to make a profession of faith in Christ. “He is a

seasoned evangelist, but has had sufficient experience as a pastor to know how to sympathize with the pastor and help him solve his problems,” Brittain wrote in the *Witness*.<sup>34</sup>

In his new role as state evangelist, Reece primarily led church-based and citywide revivals. With the success of the Soul Winners' League there was not a perceived need at the time for providing personal evangelism training to pastors and lay persons. This emphasis would come later when a regular Evangelism Department was established. By the end of the 1930s two other evangelists – R. D. Carrin, employed July 1, 1936, and C. L. Wattenbarger, employed March, 1938 – were added. Both evangelist-pastors continued their part-time pastorates, while devoting time to the state's largely rural areas. Those appointments symbolized the Convention's renewed commitment to assist struggling rural congregations, many of which were without pastoral leadership during the late 1930s.<sup>35</sup>

As part of the renewed emphasis upon evangelism, a State Convention Committee on Evangelism was newly appointed in 1937. The group subsequently annually planned and conducted three statewide evangelistic conferences. Those typically were held in Orlando and Miami, as well as a West Florida location. In addition the group defined the state by geographical districts for the purpose of planning and conducting regional evangelistic rallies. To lead revivals in small, weaker churches the committee enlisted over 200 pastors of stronger congregations to

be assigned to preaching locations. “As a result, a spirit of evangelism has swept over our state,” the committee reported, “and more than 18,660 members have been added to our churches, more than 10,714 of these by baptism.” The committee recommended and encouraged Florida Baptists to accomplish the State Board’s five-year goal to achieve 100,000 baptisms in the state by the end of the decade.<sup>36</sup>

Although the challenge goal was not achieved, 40,776 baptisms were reported for the five-year period 1935 – 1939. More significantly, the evangelism efforts by Florida Baptist churches resulted in two consecutive years of record baptisms totaling 9,357 and 11,307 in 1938 and 1939 respectively. It was six years before those baptism records were surpassed.<sup>37</sup> Yet, by 1939 it still required one out of every 14 Baptists (among 155,965) to win a person to faith in Christ.

World War II brought a tremendous influx of military personnel and their families who were assigned to many of the newly established military installations located across the state. Many of these new residents became prospects for many Baptist churches, although many churches experienced reductions in active members as many Florida Baptists, including pastors, enlisted in the armed services to join the war effort. However, following the war in 1945, as church leadership got back to the enhanced ministry of evangelism, Florida Baptist churches collectively registered 13,173 baptisms, a record high in the State Convention’s ninety-one-year history. With a total membership of 199,483, required on average 15

Baptists to lead one person to faith in Christ. Yet Baptists' growth had reached approximately ten percent of the state's population. This narrative must conclude in the 1940s as the story of evangelism advance in Florida – more than one hundred years after Florida Baptists first organized – to cooperatively fulfill the Great Commission.

But as the record reflects, those record high number of baptisms in the 1940s, only set the pace for Florida Baptists during the next 60 years (1944 – 2004), as the annual record setting benchmarks in baptisms are detailed on the following chart. However, as the chart reflects, an increasing number of committed Baptists were required annually to win a single spiritually lost person to faith in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, their gospel penetration into Florida's secular society – the ratio of Baptists compared to the general population – was losing ground. However, Florida Baptists remained faithful and committed to the biblical mandate of carrying out the Great Commission by going and making “disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>38</sup>

Florida Baptists' legacy of evangelism is highlighted in this 150-year summary of baptisms that follows.

# Florida Baptists' 150-Years Baptism Record

## 1854 – 2004<sup>39</sup>

YEAR	CRHES	TOTAL MEMBERS	BAPTISMS	MBRS REQ TO WIN ONE	FLORIDA POPULATION
1854	91	3,957	367	9	*87,445
1882	222	8,059	593	14	
1899	459	22,620	1,302	17	*528,542
1906	519	27,969	2,064	14	
1910	598	39,017	3,130	12	762,619
1915	730	54,951	4,191	13	
1920	751	65,094	3,813	17	968,470
1925	838	99,075	6,449	15	
1930	751	115,705	6,617	17	1,468,211
1935	835	132,544	6,049	22	
1940	808	162,396	8,875	18	1,897,414
1945	833	199,483	13,173	15	
1946	813	201,480	11,297	18	
1947	877	224,857	13,547	17	
1948	897	242,804	15,286	16	
1949	914	261,527	17,467	15	
1950	911	278,668	18,460	15	2,771,305
1951	952	296,704	18,877	16	
1952	976	311,955	18,163	17	
1953	1,006	330,220	19,430	17	
1954	1,038	369,294	20,196	18	
1955	1066	371,807	22,463	17	
1956	1101	388,487	21,930	18	
1957	1148	411,145	22,431	18	
1958	1180	429,871	25,588	17	
1959	1228	455,175	28,626	16	
1960	1257	480,407	25,621	19	4,951,560
1961	1292	507,881	28,123	18	
1962	1327	528,885	25,962	20	
1963	1353	542,676	23,720	23	
1964	1382	557,031	25,028	22	
1965	1384	570,614	24,160	24	
1966	1404	581,956	24,402	24	
1967	1416	600,836	24,985	24	
1968	1433	614,900	24,732	25	
1969	1440	638,929	24,141	26	
1970	1,448	647,239	23,008	28	6,789,443
1971	1,468	666,149	28,918	23	

*Florida Baptists' Evangelism Legacy Affirmed by Baptism Growth*

1972	1,481	684,747	30,908	22	
1973	1,487	708,008	29,041	24	
1974	1,494	726,971	29,500	25	
1975	1,499	736,531	29,102	25	
1976	1,499	747,630	26,080	29	
1977	1,511	762,719	25,059	30	
1978	1,520	771,196	23,379	33	
1979	1,536	786,394	26,403	30	
1980	1,550	799,803	30,133	26	9,746,324
1981	1,729	807,492	29,087	28	
1982	1,875	819,684	29,821	27	
1983	1,817	841,657	29,218	29	
1984	1,851	850,965	28,764	29	
1985	1,916	874,540	27,419	32	
1986	1,985	892,221	27,464	32	
1987	1,996	909,855	25,885	35	
1988	2,057	927,340	28,130	33	
1989	2,157	935,338	27,850	33	
1990	2,094	952,273	31,183	30	12,937,926
1991	2,106	982,126	33,808	29	
1992	2,159	990,921	31,162	32	
1993	2,250	972,803	28,474	34	
1994	2,298	992,182	31,859	31	
1995	2,345	1,006,598	33,284	30	
1996	2,565	1,009,928	34,646	29	
1997	2,399	1,024,712	35,200	29	
1998	2,442	1,025,753	36,315	28	
1999	2,521	1,039,280	37,024	28	
2000	2,609	1,054,906	37,559	28	15,982,378
2001	2,699	1,037,581	36,478	28	
2002	2,707	1,048,687	37,234	28	
2003	2,756	1,072,616	34,274	31	
2004	2,796	1,055,976	34,534	30	

**NOTES:**

- 1 -- The year 1854 report represents the combined statistical totals for the three then existent Baptist associations: Florida, West Florida and Alachua.
- 2 -- The year 1882 report represents the first year the Florida Baptist Convention began collecting statistical information from the cooperating Baptist associations that were collecting statistical information from their respective member churches.
- 3 -- The combined statistics reflect actual reports filed by the reporting churches. No projections or estimates are used in these annual totals.
- 4 -- Since 1844, when the first Florida association began collecting

statistical information some churches did not file reports. The number of non-reporting churches grew steadily up to and beyond the current years, which skews the true statistical profile, but not the growth trends of Florida Baptists.

5 -- Population figures for 1854 and 1899 are based on the actual closest actual census year report

6- Beginning in year 1980 the church totals are the combined totals of actual churches and mission congregations.

By year 2004, mission congregations represented 31 percent of the total churches count.

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# **Billy Graham: Florida's Adopted Legacy Evangelist**

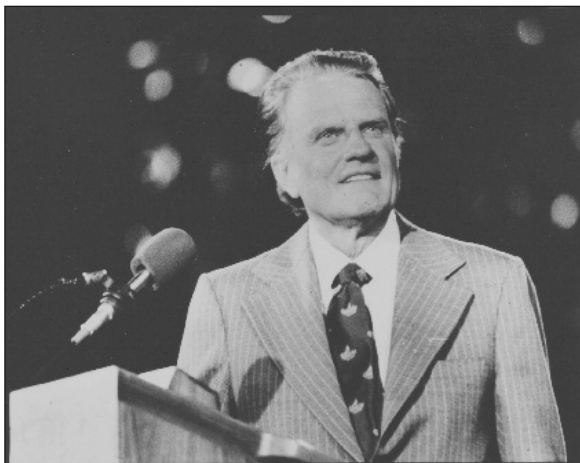
*by Joni Hannigan  
Freelance Writer  
Jacksonville, Florida*



Years before Billy Graham became a household name, Florida Baptists already were familiar with the young preacher who got his start by delivering simple, but forceful, biblical truths to cypress swamps and alligators.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt Florida was a “special place” for Graham, the world-famous evangelist who lived nearly a century and died at his North Carolina home February 21, 2018 at age 99.<sup>2</sup> It was in the Sunshine State that he trained for ministry, was baptized, ordained, and preached his first sermon. And during his lifetime, Graham returned nearly thirty times leading crusades and speaking at evangelism events across the state.

Graham preached the gospel in 417 crusades to more live audiences than anyone else in history – more than 210 million people in more than 185 countries and territories, including remote African villages and in the heart of New York City. He made unparalleled 47th and 40th consecutive appearances in the Gallup organization’s “Ten Most Admired Men in the World.”<sup>3</sup>



**Billy Graham**  
**(b. 1918-d. 2018)**

Graham took Christ at His Word when He said in Mark 16:15: “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”<sup>4</sup> He was not only a contemporary to Martin Luther King, Jr. but was known as the man who literally removed the barriers to integrate the audiences at his crusades.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps less known about the man whom many considered unflappable in his faith, was that shortly after preaching his first crusade – a series of nightly sermons – in Miami in January of 1949, Graham had a crisis of faith which had been building for some time.<sup>6</sup>

### **Graham’s Early Years**

William Franklin Graham, Jr. or “Billy Frank” as he was called, was born Nov. 7, 1918 just four days before the Armistice marking the end of World War I.

Raised on a relatively prosperous North Carolina dairy farm when many others lived in poverty, young Graham did not set out to be a preacher boy. His primary interest was baseball. He shook hands with the legendary Babe Ruth when he was ten or eleven, but his zest for the game never matched his skill. Instead, by the time Graham was 14, the lanky, quick-witted boy was fond of reading history books – some 100 – and he was often blamed for pranks involving a small brown goat, a large brown goat, a cat, and a collie.<sup>7</sup>

Though Graham was later compared to the evangelist Billy Sunday, it wasn't his preaching that caught the young man's attention. The 16-year-old's attention was caught after he jumped into the back of a truck with both "whites and Negroes"<sup>8</sup> to listen to the fiery evangelist Mordecai Ham. The result was that he felt "a kind of stirring in [his] breast that was both pleasant and scary," and as a result went forward and prayed to receive Christ.<sup>9</sup>

In Marshall Frady's biography on Graham, he described the evangelist's spiritual conversion experience as curiously devoid of emotion:

"But Billy's New Birth that evening was a curiously sedate event, in which there was a calm blankness of any mystic flares or fevers. 'I can't say that I felt anything spectacular,' he would later acknowledge. 'I felt very little emotion. I shed no tears. In fact, when I saw that others had tears in their eyes, I felt like a hypocrite, and this disturbed me a little.'

Indeed, he only vaguely recollects now the actual particulars of the moment. ‘I’m sure I had a tremendous sense of conviction, the Lord did speak to me about certain things in my life, I’m certain of that – but I can’t remember what they were.’ As he was riding back home that night, . . . he was strangely wordless and subdued. He only remarked once in an abrupt, quiet, level voice, ‘Now I’ve gotten saved. Now whatever I do can’t unsave me. Even if I ever killed somebody, I can’t ever be unsaved now.’”<sup>10</sup>

### **The Florida Experiences**

Following the lead of a good friend, Graham enrolled in Bob Jones University in Cleveland, Tenn. (now in Greenville, S.C.), but after learning there was little chance for growth at the highly structured school<sup>11</sup> and needing a warmer climate after two bouts of influenza – he transferred to Florida Bible Institute in Tampa (now Trinity Bible College in Dunedin, Florida). “Once in Florida, I immediately acquired a taste for the warmer climate and the palm trees,” recalled Graham later.<sup>12</sup>

In January 1937, Graham’s parents drove him from Charlotte to Tampa where Rev. John Minder, acting dean of the school, was on hand during the holiday break. The school was founded by its president, Dr. William Thomas Watson, Minder’s friend, who was a fellow graduate of Nyack Bible College (New York) in 1922. The two had worked in evangelistic efforts in Florida for two years.

More than 15 years earlier, on Easter Sunday, April 20, 1924, Watson established the St. Petersburg Gospel Tabernacle, which would result in a 4,000-seat auditorium at Fifth Avenue South and Seventh Street, before expanding to include a conference and college that would expose students to Bible preachers and teachers.<sup>13</sup> Rev. J. W. Van De Venter in Temple Terrace came up with a property that had been abandoned by wealthy Northerners. There amongst the orange groves and palm trees, a large pink stucco hotel, flanked by tennis courts and a golf course, became the school that opened in 1932.

While in school Graham worked odd jobs around campus, preferring the outdoor chores. Many legendary evangelists, among the *Who's Who* of evangelicals of their days, visited the school, speaking in chapel and classes. Graham, in one of his outdoor chores, served as their caddy on the golf course, thrilled to be in the company of such respected spiritual leaders. "Many of these visiting preachers made a lasting impression on me in their own individual ways," Graham recalled.<sup>14</sup>

Billy worked hard at the school to earn above-average grades, despite academic challenges. He studied Bible introduction, history, analysis, doctrine (homiletics), and geography. He also studied hermeneutics, prophecy, church history, comparative religions, ethics, and personal evangelism. The school, neither a college nor a seminary, offered few academic classes, and so Graham never took a course in public speaking at the Institute.<sup>15</sup>



As a part of their studies, students were sent out frequently to gather practical experience in ministry and evangelism. “In the course of student assignments that came my way, I spoke almost regularly at the well-populated trailer parks in the winter months and at The Stockade, Tampa’s jail,” recalled Graham.<sup>16</sup>

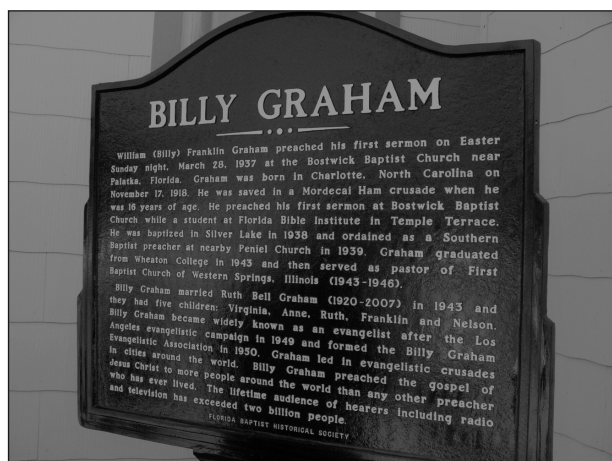
It was from the sunny institute in Temple Terrace that Graham wrote home: “Mother, . . . I never felt so close to God in my life. This is the first time I have enjoyed studying the Word of God. I love it here.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Preaching Ministry Begins**

Ironically, Easter Sunday, March 28, 1937 – thirteen years following a push by Waterson and Minder for evangelistic training in Florida – Graham began his preaching career at the tiny Bostwick Baptist Church in Palatka.

Graham traveled with acting dean John Minder, to visit Minder’s friend, Cecil Underwood, a lay preacher who was pastoring Peniel Baptist Church near Palatka. Underwood needed a preacher for the following evening at nearby Bostwick Baptist Church. Minder immediately gave Graham the assignment, his first experience to preach a formal sermon in front of a church audience. The young Graham had four sermons in his repertoire and thought that any of them would be satisfactory for the assignment. The next evening 40 congregants sat quietly as Graham approached the pulpit. “My knees shook and perspiration glistened on my hands,” he said. An

energetic Graham launched into sermon number one, then number two, then number three and finally number four. He drew a deep breath and sat down. Graham had preached four sermons in eight minutes! Somehow, though, he believed he “had grown spiritually through the experience.”<sup>18</sup>



**The Florida Baptist Historical Society placed in 2011, at Bostick Baptist Church, Palatka, this historical marker in honor of Billy Graham’s first sermon, Easter Sunday, 1937.**

Florrie Wilkinson Hoeltzel remembered the day well. In 2011, on hand for the dedication of an historical marker commemorating Graham’s first preaching assignment, she recalled as a child she was among those in cotton dresses and overalls for the evening Easter service when Rev. Cecil Underwood introduced the “skinny, tall” 18-year-old Graham to preach.<sup>19</sup>

“I never at that time, regardless of what age I would have been, ever thought that I heard the first sermon that a world-wide evangelist preached,” Hoeltzel said.

“Just the memories of seeing him and now knowing what he became in God’s Kingdom and God’s work – I’ve prayed for him all these years.”<sup>20</sup>

Graham told a reporter in 2000 he had “tremendous, wonderful memories of Northern Florida.” Before a Jacksonville Crusade, he said:

“My first talk was given at a place called Bostwick, and I remember we went there, it was a very cold night. . . They had a big old stove in the middle of the church, and the church wouldn’t have seated more than maybe 60 people,” he said. “I had prepared four different little outlines that I could talk from, I thought, and I’d practice them. . . When I stood up that night, I was so nervous that I was just trembling all over and I almost didn’t stand up . . . but I did.”<sup>21</sup>

Before the summer was over, Minder had asked him to preach at the Tabernacle and to take over the young people’s department. After that first experience, Graham decided he needed to practice for his next preaching opportunity. Reluctant for his classmates to hear him, Graham wrote, “I would paddle a canoe across the Hillsborough (River) to a little island where I could address all creatures great and small, from alligators to birds. If they would not stop to listen, there was always a congregation of cypress stumps that could neither slither nor fly away. The loudness of my preaching was in direct proportion to their unresponsiveness, so the trees got my voice at full blast.”<sup>22</sup> However, he described “the

greatest ministry that God opened up to me was the trailer parks.” He regularly preached at a large community known as Tin Can Trailer Park, where the crowds ranged from 200 to 1,000, and Graham would be paid \$5 for his preaching ministry. Through these early experiences in Florida, Graham sensed God moving in his life to call him to be an evangelist.<sup>23</sup> His “desire was not to be a preacher, but rather a ‘winner of souls.’”<sup>24</sup>

During his Tampa years Graham preached on the streets in front of saloons. Once, preaching in a doorway of a bar at the corner of Franklin and Fortune streets in Tampa, Graham was shoved into the street by the bartender. More than 40 years later, during one of Graham’s crusades in 1979 in Tampa, a marker was placed at Franklin and Fortune streets, commemorating Graham’s early preaching experiences.<sup>25</sup> Present alongside Graham, during the marker unveiling, were Gov. Bob Graham and Tampa Mayor William Poe. The marker reads: “Billy Graham Began Here.” It continues by noting, “the Rev. Dr. Billy Graham 40 years ago launched his worldwide Christian evangelistic crusade, exhorting derelicts, drunks and ‘Skid Row’ bums. Since then he has preached to more people than any other person, reaching million.”<sup>26</sup>

As he struggled to accept God’s call on his life, his “big break” came, he said. He was asked to preach for a week of evenings at East Palatka Baptist Church and be broadcast over the radio into nearby St. Augustine, live every morning. “By now I had

prepared and practiced about fifteen sermons – full-length ones – and I was ready to go!” he said. Eighty people that week professed faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup>

### **Baptism and Ordination in Palatka**

Two by-products of his Palatka experience were that Graham was baptized by immersion and he was ordained to the Christian ministry. As an infant, Graham had been sprinkled in his home Reformed Presbyterian church. Then years later he was confirmed in the faith by declaring his personal allegiance to the Lord. However, Graham decided that he needed to be baptized by immersion so that no barriers would come between him and those he was trying to reach. In late 1938, Underwood immersed Graham in Silver Lake. A few months later, in early 1939 Underwood, still pastoring Peniel Baptist Church, called together an ordination council of rural Southern Baptist pastors, who questioned the young Graham about his beliefs and approved him for ordination. Graham’s ordination was held in the Peniel church, and Graham recalls, as he stood up from kneeling during the solemn service, “I was an ordained Southern Baptist minister in the St. John’s River Association.”<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the earliest photograph of Graham to appear in any newspaper was in the *Tampa Daily Times*, published May 28, 1938. The caption read that Graham, a 19-year-old Florida Bible Institute student was preaching at Tampa Gospel Tabernacle during the absence of its pastor John Minder, who was attending a meeting.<sup>29</sup>

In the summer of 1939, Graham's preaching opportunities widened with a two-week evangelistic crusade in Welaka Baptist Church, located in a fishing village on the St. John's River. Following the crusade, Graham, for six weeks, served as the summer pastoral replacement at Tampa Gospel Tabernacle. During those weeks, he not only preached but also visited in homes and hospitals. For the balance of his summer break, Graham preached throughout Florida and southern Georgia.

Florida had been Graham's home for three-and-a-half years. During that time, Graham answered God's call to full-time evangelistic ministry. He was baptized. He was ordained. He preached in trailer parks and prisons, on street corners and riverbanks, in churches, large and small. He matured, and he began preparing himself for a lifetime of ministry that he could have never imagined.

### **The Greatest Challenges of Faith**

In 1938 Graham was met with three significant challenges. A pair of Christian leaders he greatly admired fell morally. He was devastated and determined to "put no confidence in the flesh."<sup>30</sup> His fiancé, Emily Cavanaugh, that next year, broke their engagement to marry another, and finally, he struggled with a call to preach.<sup>31</sup>

In March of that same year, Graham stopped on the eighteenth green in front of the school's front door and sat down looking up at the moon and stars. "The

trees were loaded with Spanish moss, and in the moon-light it was like a fairyland.” Graham recalled the tension snapped at that moment: “I remember getting on my knees and saying, ‘O God, if you want me to preach, I will do it.’ Tears streamed down my cheeks as I made this great surrender to become an ambassador for Jesus Christ.”<sup>32</sup>

In May 1940, Graham graduated from Florida Bible Institute.<sup>33</sup> Years later, in a commencement at the Florida school, Graham said he “had spent three glorious, happy, character building, life-changing years in the spiritual atmosphere of the institution.”<sup>34</sup>

Later that fall, Graham confidently entered Wheaton College in Chicago as a freshman. He said it was while in Florida that he “learned the importance of the Bible and came to believe with all my heart in its full in inspiration. It became a rapier and a sword in my hand that I have used as a hammer as well as a sword to break open the hearts of men and to direct them to the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup>

Nearly a decade later, following an international tour with Youth for Christ International, he had a crisis of belief; and yet again, it was his Florida foundations which undergirded his faith.<sup>36</sup> Fresh on the heels of reading Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth, he began to question the veracity of Scripture. When his friend, the one-time evangelist Charles Templeton, decided to enroll at Princeton, he invited Graham to join him. Graham declined. “Billy, you're 50 years

out of date," Templeton prodded. "People no longer accept the Bible as being inspired the way you do. Your faith is too simple. Your language is out of date. You're going to have to learn the new jargon if you're going to be successful in your ministry."<sup>37</sup> Despite Templeton's disparagement that Graham would "die intellectually" without a more liberal education, he discussed the matter with a friend – celebrity Christian educator Henrietta Mears – who understood liberal theology, but did not believe the arguments. "The ease and authority with which she wielded Scripture comforted Graham," Reardon noted. Roaming the San Diego mountains in California, Graham took his concerns to God.<sup>38</sup>



Evangelist Billy Graham is pictured in this *Florida-Times Union* photograph as he preached to the congregation of the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, in January, 1961.

"Father, I am going to accept this as thy Word – by faith!" Graham proclaimed. "I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be your inspired Word."



Although Graham “didn't have an explanation for every biblical oddity, for the first time in months he felt powerful intimacy with God and renewed confidence in the Scripture he proclaimed.”<sup>39</sup>

“As a result of these important milestones in his life, Florida was always a special place for Billy Graham, and he came back to the state many times over the years.”<sup>40</sup> As early as 1942 Graham even preached “two or three Sundays” at the historic Indian Springs Baptist Church (organized in 1829), according to Graham associate T. W. Wilson.<sup>41</sup>

He preached crusades throughout Florida in 1949, 1953, 1961, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1998 and 2000.<sup>42</sup> During the 1961 crusade, Graham spent four months in Florida, and he moved his wife, Ruth, whom he had married in 1943, and their five children to Vero Beach, where the children attended school. During that visit, Graham preached in 15 cities, including: Jacksonville, Orlando, Clearwater, St. Petersburg, Bradenton-Sarasota, Peace River, Tampa, Gainesville, Tallahassee, Cape Canaveral, Vero Beach, West Palm Beach, Boca Raton, Ft. Lauderdale and Miami.<sup>43</sup> Graham's 1979 crusade in Tampa, attracted the largest crowd ever (52,000), to that date, to participate in a religious event in the history of Florida.<sup>44</sup>

Additionally, Graham made other official visits to Florida through the years, speaking at major denominational meetings, including the Southern Baptist Convention in Miami (1960), the Baptist

World Alliance in Miami (1965) and National Council of Churches in Miami (1966).<sup>45</sup> His last Florida crusade was in Jacksonville in November 2000, more than 60 years after he had begun his evangelistic ministry in the Sunshine State. The nightly crowds at Alltel Stadium averaged approximately 55,000 people, with approximately 2,300 making decisions for Christ.<sup>46</sup> Even the Jacksonville Mayo Clinic was Graham's preferred choice medical facility for annual physicals and specialty treatments during the last decade of his life.

Up until his death in 2018, Billy Graham continued to visit and work in this state in which his career as a world-renowned evangelist began and was nurtured.<sup>47</sup>

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Editor's note: Joni Hannigan was the principal writer of this article that includes narratives contributed by Margaret Colson and Donald S. Hepburn.

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**Billy Graham (right) Ordination-1939-pictured with  
Ponzie Pennington (left) and Rev Cecil Underwood (ctr)-  
Paltaka-Peniel BC**



**Billy Graham-evangelist-1957**

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