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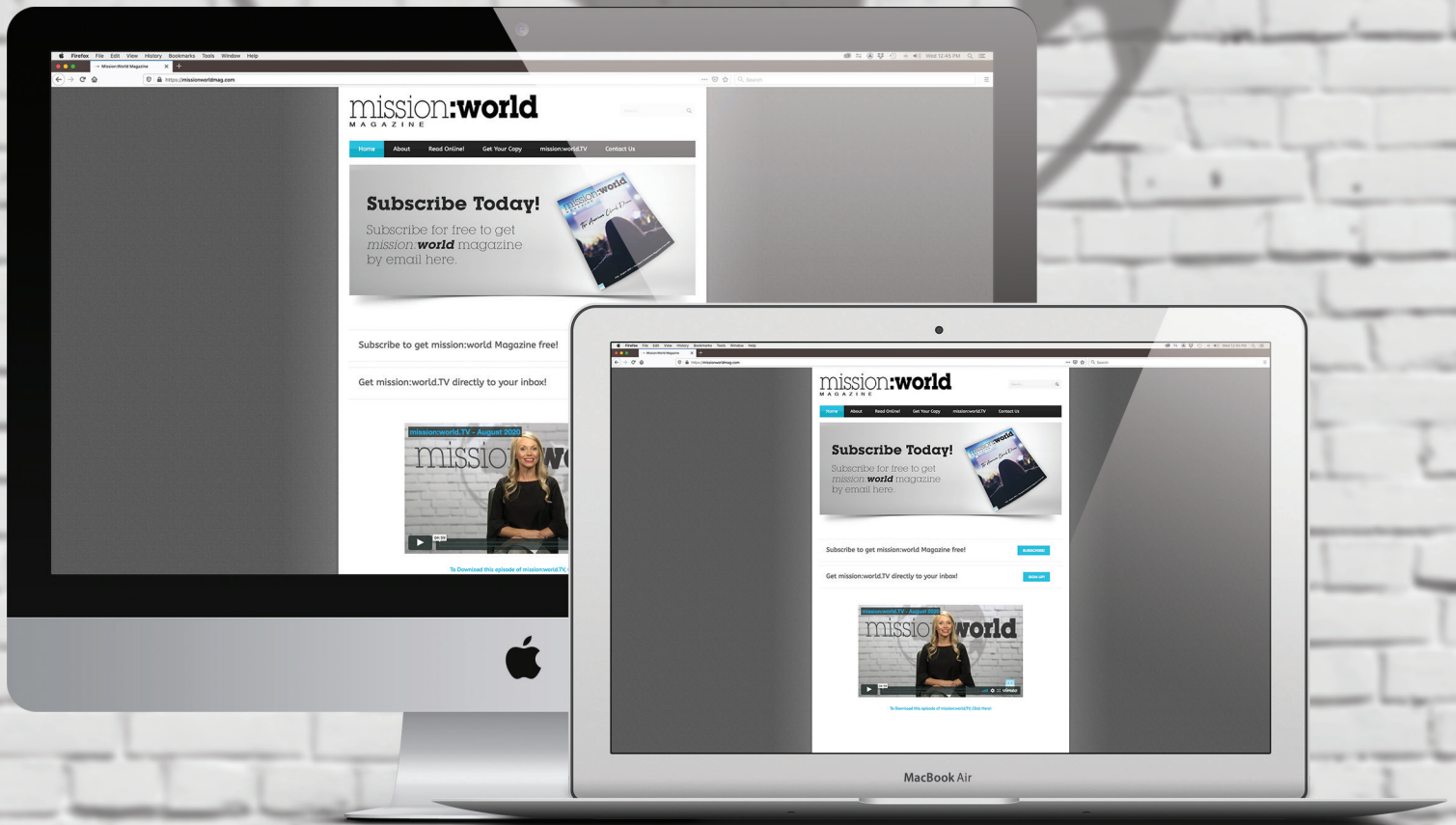
NEW CHALLENGES NEW OPPORTUNITIES



September - October 2020 ::: The Great Commission Magazine of the BMA



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Volume 8 - Issue 5
September - October 2020

mission:world

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BMA Missions seeks to facilitate churches in fulfilling the Great Commission through assessment, training, coaching, and missionary care.



Lifeworld assists in taking the gospel throughout the world through radio, television, the internet, and mobile devices.



Ministers Resource Services helps meet the financial planning needs of BMA pastors and staffs.

NEW CHALLENGES

NEW OPPORTUNITES



BY: Dr. John David Smith |
BMA Missions |
bmamissions.org |

Someone has said that change happens when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of the change itself. The possible pain of not changing can simply be in the form of lost income, the lack of progress in our lives, poor health et cetera, and that can be enough to motivate us to change. This is more of an inner desire to achieve a higher level or a greater return on our efforts or investment. Another catalyst for change in our lives is when someone tells us that we have to do something. This is more of an outside impetus to change that we may simply comply with even though it may or may not be our first choice. This certainly applies to our relationship with God. The optimal word here is *relationship*. Therefore, there should be that outward transcendent leading of God through His word and Spirit in our lives...He is simply greater than we are. It may not be our first inclination to follow and to trust God in change, but ultimately, we know that He will use change as an anvil in our lives as He pounds away to fashion us to be eternally more fruitful and effective. **Change can be defined as an inward desire brought about by our submission to the authority and trust of God that produces eternal fruit. This is ideal change.**

Ideal change...that seems like such a non-existent reality for most of us. Ideally, we would stay the same and bask in our comfort zone. Ideally, we would stay the same and never be challenged beyond those things that we can control. Ideally,

we would stay the same and only seek me and mine to the neglect of others. **Change, brought about by God, is the evidence that I live for Him and not myself.**

OK, I get it. Some change I desire; other changes He demands; and the ideal change is when I submit to His working in my life. Excuse me...what about those changes that do not fit neatly into one of these or any other category? What about a worldwide pandemic? What about all the ripple effects of that pandemic like a total disruption of my comfort zone? The turning upside down of church and Christianity as we know it? Economic uncertainty?

Actually, all of these come under the authority and trust of God that we alluded to earlier. Do you remember some of the great changes that occurred in the lives of the Israelites as they journeyed from captivity in Egypt to the Promised Land? Change really ate their lunch when they were forced to leave the comfort of captivity. That does not even sound possible to say...the comfort of captivity. They also struggled with the desire to have the promise without a price. When the difficulties started, they longed for the "way it used to be." Another major issue that controlled them during this time was their overall self-centered perspective and disobedience.

New challenges in new opportunities is a difficult truth to grasp because our default mode is to see and sense loss, my loss, in change...not opportunity. If God is affecting the change, what eternal opportunities are we missing here?

What lessons do we learn from the Israelites that we need to avoid when we find ourselves in the middle of change?

1. An unhealthy reverence to a “utopian” past. It is vital to learn the lessons of history and appreciate the sacrifices and accomplishments that have been made under the direction and blessing of God. **When the blessings of God become more revered than the God of the blessings, we have a problem.** We all fall prey to the “green grass syndrome” from time to time in our lives. The Israelites actually longed for a return to captivity rather than the opportunity that the change promised. Difficult change is often accompanied by a distorted view of reality much like the Israelites manifested. It is not uncommon for missionaries who are experiencing the intensity of adapting to a new culture to become disoriented in the process. There is a phenomenon that can be called “culture utopia” that happens many times. This is simply where the affected missionaries get the distorted view that if they could only go home, everything is perfect there! The problem is that once they get home and get a dose of the imperfect reality, they tend to think that the situation on their mission field is **really** where things are perfect! There really is no substitute for the arduous process of change when it comes to adapting to a new culture. If we are going to find new opportunities in new challenges, we are also going to have to allow change to happen. We start by putting the past in its place... God's place. He is in control of that too.

2. A preoccupation with an “effortless” future. The Israelites balked many times on their journey in the area of work, effort, obedience, and attitude. They simply wanted the reward without the requirements. I assure you this is no self-help, you-can-do-it, name it and claim it paragraph. This is about us as we resemble those wayward people in the wilderness. We are disobedient, devoid of a real purpose in our spiritual journey, and exhibit an overall attitude of entitlement that causes us to say, “Can we please just have the Promised Land without the price?” Do we really resemble the Israelites in this regard? You be the judge. Here are some sure signs we might be entitled:

- We tell God the water that He has miraculously and graciously given is too bitter (Ex. 15).
- We tell God that the food that He has dropped out of heaven to sustain us lacks variety (Ex.16).
- We totally miss that the lack of water is an opportunity to trust God on how He intends to grow and use us; instead we begin to think that our having water is more important than the purposes of God (Ex. 17).
- After giving God more than enough time to meet our entitled demands, we have substituted Him with a golden calf (Ex. 32).
- We complain about God-ordained leaders knowing full well we could do this much better (Num. 12).
- We consider the giants and challenges in our lives to be greater than those in all the history of the world, and we do nothing (Num. 14).

The covenant of God had guaranteed the Promised Land; and the expectations for the people are the same for us today: trust God that He is in control and obey Him when He directs us. They needed to understand that God had a plan and they were His people. As His people, they were expected to love and obey Him in the details that He demanded. They were also expected to march into battle to conquer the land as He instructed. There is no effortless prize for the child of God. Our eternities are as sure as the promises of God. Our immediate is as fragile as our entitled expectation of a promise with no price.

What positive lessons do we learn from the Israelites in recognizing new opportunities in new challenges?

1. New opportunities are usually the reward of a long, difficult journey, not the expectation of the entitled.

2. New opportunities that have eternal value are God-ordained not humanly manufactured.
3. New opportunities come in spite of our failures. God will sustain and carry us to the desired goal.
4. New opportunities are birthed in conflict, not comfort.
5. New opportunities demonstrate the eternal purposes of God, not our selfish ambitions.

In the face of new challenges, will we find new opportunities? In these challenges we must hear and obey the voice of God. We cannot worship the past, sit around and wait for the future while we waste the present... otherwise, we are only wandering in the wilderness.





BY: Donny Parrish
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On March 13, 2020, the Lifeword Board met at the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) Global Ministry Center for one of their four annual meetings. It was an exciting day. New broadcasts were introduced, and ministry plans were approved by the Board. A challenging fiscal year budget was presented and approved. Plans and dreams were prayed over, input from our Board was given, and all hearts were settled that God's will had been done. Everyone then shared a meal together and we all left thankful for what God was doing through the ministry of Lifeword. We were all anticipating fruit from the great things planned for the future.

Fast forward four days.

On March 17, 2020, in response to directives from the Governor of Arkansas, the Lifeword team along with everyone else serving in the Global Ministry Center were told to gather everything we needed from our offices and prepare to work from home until further notice. The Covid-19 pandemic had changed everything.

It was a kick in the stomach for me. All the things that we had planned and had approved by the

Lifeword Board on Friday seemed to be put on hold just four days later. How could we produce new programming when we had no recording studios? All of the computers, cameras, lights, teleprompters, sets—everything that we depended on every day to broadcast the gospel, they were now off limits! I began to pray and ask God, “Did I make a mistake here, Lord? Are you telling me to back up or back out? What in the world are you up to?”

Just a few days later, God's plan began to become clear. He wasn't putting Lifeword on hold. He wasn't putting plans that we had prayed about on a shelf. God was going to use the pandemic to open doors for Lifeword in ways I could never dream. He was using the pandemic to force our team to begin to do ministry in new ways, to think in new and exciting ways. God's plan was to use the pandemic to expand our borders and increase our effectiveness as a ministry like never before.

God had been moving behind the scenes for several years to prepare Lifeword for this day. Almost four years ago, Lifeword made the strategic move to dive headlong into internet broadcasting, expanding our ministry from being totally focused

on radio. That was a seismic shift for a ministry that had for 50 years used radio as her primary delivery platform. Some people didn't agree with the move at that time; but the Lifeword leadership team and the Lifeword Board forged ahead, believing that this was God's new direction for the ministry. Now God was going to bless that decision in unimaginable ways. He had raised up the ministry of Lifeword for such a time as this.

With each person forced to work from their home, the Lifeword team began to meet daily via Zoom to talk about how we could best serve our pastors and churches and how we could best equip our producers around the world to continue their broadcasts. We talked about the need for relevant broadcast content and how to tailor our messaging so as to present Christ best during this unusual time. As the impact of the pandemic deepened, the internet began to light up all around the world! People were stuck in their homes. They were frightened. They had questions about God and His plan for the world and for their lives. The Lifeword Cloud and all of the social media platforms that Lifeword had invested in began to pay off in huge ways. Traffic to Lifeword.org doubled overnight and thousands of people from around the world began to tune into Lifeword programming on social media platforms. The ministry of Lifeword was speaking to more people about Jesus than at any time in her history. The gospel of Jesus was being heard by people who were searching for hope.

Churches from across the BMA began to call to ask our team members how to go about live streaming their services each Sunday. The Lifeword team along with the BMA Production team consulted with multiple pastors and church staffs, helping them use technology to continue to minister each week. All of a sudden, God's church was being forced out of their buildings and into the streets. The technology that many churches had avoided was now becoming their lifeline for ministry. The Lifeword team and the BMA Production team were there to help BMA churches fulfill their mission.

I asked our Lifeword team to help me encourage our BMA pastors and BMA church members each day by filming a short devotional message each

morning. Overnight everyone on our team became experts in iPhone broadcast production. Each member of the team willingly stepped out of their comfort zones from behind the camera and became on-air personalities. The results were amazing. People from across the country, from inside the BMA and out, began to message us. They were thankful for the encouragement! And they began sharing those messages with their family and friends via social media. Those short devotionals opened up opportunities for gospel conversations all across America.

As I'm writing this today, things are not back to "normal" around Lifeword. Learning to produce broadcasts while observing social distancing guidelines has been a challenge. Some of our staff continue to work from home. We are still producing many of our over 100 gospel programs in circumstances that are less than ideal. While we are dealing with a Coronavirus inconvenience in the United States, many of our broadcasters, producers, and writers around the world are dealing with daily struggles of how to find food to put on the table. We are dealing with inconvenience. They are dealing with life and death. When you talk to our brothers and sisters in difficult places life quickly gets put into perspective.

No, things are not back to normal. The fact is, the old normal may be gone forever; meanwhile a new normal is emerging. Whatever the situation and whatever the circumstance, God will be more than faithful to meet our needs. He had already prepared Lifeword to meet the challenge of Covid-19 before the virus had appeared. I am grateful for the BMA churches, individuals, and friends who have been faithful to provide for the broadcast needs of Lifeword through these difficult times. God is using you to give billions of people the answers they are looking for during these challenging days.

Luis Ortega, Lifeword's Director of Operations and Jon Dodson, Director of Internet Broadcasting and Digital Strategies have done a great job in guiding Lifeword through this crisis. Read how God has and is using them to share the love of Christ around the world through media.



NEW CHALLENGES NEW MEDIA TOOLS

BY: Luis Ortega
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As long as Christianity has existed, there have been countries closed to the gospel, not to mention those that historically have been hostile towards Christianity. Either way, both have the intentions of suppressing the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not giving complete freedom to the proclamation of truth and hope. On top of that, add the new COVID-19 hurdles that the entire world is facing.

In times past, the primary options, and in some cases, the only options to introduce the hope of the gospel into a closed country was to beam a signal into it from an open country. Short Wave (SW), ideal for locations where religious broadcasting is prohibited, Frequency Modulation (FM), ideal for community-based radio stations, and Medium Wave or Amplitude Modulation (MW/AM), ideal for rural communities, have brought about great results and continue to do so. By way of example, Lifeword has learned of many new believers and in some cases, entire communities coming to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ where the radio signals have been penetrating, bringing them hope and salvation.

More recently, we have access to additional tools, especially the web-based platforms that are opening the doors even wider to the gospel, bringing about greater opportunities and yielding greater results. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented the challenge of church buildings and church doors mostly remaining closed in most parts of the world,

seemingly reducing the church's impact in her local communities. However, Lifeword has also recently learned of many examples where the challenging times have brought about varied ministry opportunities.

Churches that would have never considered utilizing YouTube, Facebook, Community Radio, the Lifeword Cloud, and other such technologies are reporting doing drive-in type setups for their services, literally as an outreach to their communities for the first time. Other churches are reporting that their impact in their community via tools like the Lifeword Cloud and social media tools have tripled or quadrupled their impact. Some churches with one hundred to a couple hundred members are reporting that their use of these tools has allowed them to minister to thousands upon thousands that did not know that their church was in their community.

Lifeword has received reports of professions of faith, and on a limited-basis even discipleship sessions from four different continents using WhatsApp, video conferencing tools like Zoom, the Lifeword Cloud, and various other tools that Lifeword has assisted in putting in their hands. Thank you for your continued partnership as we partner together with the local church for the sake of completing the task of making disciples of all nations.

Success In The Clouds

BY: Jon Dodson
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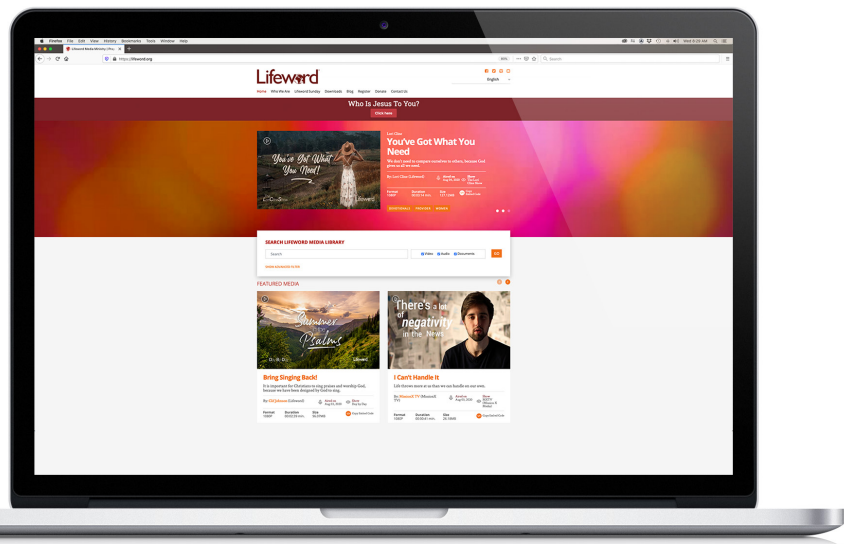
On September 1, 2018, Lifeword launched the Lifeword Cloud with a God-sized vision and prayerful expectations. Since its launch, the Lifeword Cloud has consistently grown in size and ministry impact with each passing day. God has used Lifeword, its team members, and media partners around the world to produce gospel centric content.

In 2018, Lifeword had approximately 2,000 visits per month to its web site at Lifeword.org. From January 1, 2020 to July 22, 2020 we praise God for 167,837 new visitors to Lifeword.org. These are people that have never been to Lifeword.org before. This is a 207 percent increase over the previous year for the same timeframe when we saw 54,598 new visitors. In the United States alone, Lifeword.org realized 59,890 new visitors this year to date. Social media platforms created 99,227 new visitors to the website since January 1, 2020 for a 159 percent increase over the previous year.

In 2018 Lifeword.org had 2,000 likes on its main Facebook page. As of July 24, 2020, Lifeword's main Facebook page now has 16,364 likes and growing. In 2018, Lifeword had 200 followers on Instagram. Fast forward to July 24, 2020 and Lifeword now has 12,526 followers. Even more important than the numbers is the ministry impact and influence; God has used Lifeword media to connect people to Jesus all over the world.

Across the seven Facebook pages that Lifeword now manages, since January 1, 2020, there have been 6.9 million minutes of gospel based videos watched, 321,600 engagements (likes, shares, comments), and an additional 25,500 followers of these Facebook pages. Lifeword has reached 15 million Facebook accounts since January 1, 2020.

The expansive digital efforts of Lifeword to leverage media online is the largest opportunity ever realized by this ministry. Praise God for His continued grace, direction, and blessings because Lifeword is only getting started with this Spirit-led opportunity.





Our New Way of Life

BY: Mike Poirier
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Life is certainly not the way it used to be. Covid-19 has presented several challenging situations; and though not easy, with God's grace we are working to adapt to our new normal. Our church in Levis, Quebec has been transformed to accommodate the pandemic. We pray for everything to return to normal again. Our church family has all remained safe from the virus—praise the Lord!—and we pray it stays that way. We praise God for His protection and encouragement.

We have continued to live-stream our church services via our church Facebook page because many of our extended churches in Haiti and Africa love to listen to our messages. I believe if we sow a seed, we will reap from that seed; we are sowing the Word of God through Facebook, and we are reaping from that seed (Galatians 6:9). Praise the Lord! We have had a new couple and a few other visitors attend services since we re-opened. What a blessing to see new faces!

One thing we have started is a weekly campfire each Saturday evening at our home. We roast marshmallows and make s'mores (yummy!). It is a blessing to eat and fellowship with friends while keeping two meters apart from each other. Our church family is so happy to see one another and have fun in an outdoor setting.

Haiti

The challenges our churches are facing are what many of you are facing. Many are insecure because of the prevalence of the virus in our day-to-day lives. Many of the protocols we have in Canada for keeping people safe are not as evident in Haiti. People choose to not wear masks; and grocery shopping is always in outdoor crowded markets. Many don't believe in the virus, instead believing that the government is trying to control people. The churches closed their doors on June 7 because of the virus. Some people have died, and many are sick.

The church re-opened its doors on the July 5, and we worry that the virus will continue to spread even more. Most people don't wash their hands regularly because they do not have easy access to disinfectant soaps. Cleaning supplies and soap cost money, which they do not have. Before the virus arrived, the church in Port au Prince (Ségur) was running an average of 300 people. Our pastor is trying to get the people back to church and back to serving the Lord. I believe this is going on in every church that preaches the Word of God. Our second church in Port au Prince (Onanville) is the poorest and most vulnerable of all. She is located at a dangerous place that is infected with gangs, robbers, and kidnappers; and the church has been robbed many times. Our

preacher has been stopped by gangs on many occasions. The biggest challenge for these people is to survive from day to day. At this time, we cannot fly into the country because our airlines are not flying to Haiti because of the virus. I don't know how long it will be before things get back to "normal" or if they ever will.

Cameroon Africa

Praise the Lord for the opportunity to preach the Word of God through Skype and Facebook. We have a group of 70 people gathering every week to listen to the Word of God and to fellowship with God's people. Our goal in Africa is to train leaders to do the work in their region and to give them the tools they need to be able to accomplish the task that God has given them. We have three men who are giving their time to be used by God to reach the people of Douala. Most of the churches in Douala preach a prosperity gospel and take advantage of the people around them. The Cameroonians have been misled by false teachers who have taken advantage of them and are leading them into destruction.

Though the situation is not much different from Haiti, in Cameroon, there is security, work, and electricity. But they also have their struggles. In

Cameroon, it is a privilege to find a day of work that nets you twenty dollars. Food is expensive. Access to drinking water is still a challenge for seventy-five percent of the Cameroonian population. Though considered a basic need, drinking water is very unreliable. Some areas of the political capital taps or wells have been dry for nearly thirty years. Water flows from a spring in a low end of the district and is the only source of water for thousands of people. Many of these people travel three to five miles in search of water, including children between the ages of seven and nine. They admit that they have never seen water flowing from a tap in the family home. Out of a population of 25 million inhabitants, only ten percent has access to drinking water. Drinking water remains a luxury. The high cost, poor quality, and difficult access make water a problem. In February 2020, four women and three children died on their way to search for water in northern Cameroon.

The people of Africa are depending on us to teach them the Word of God.

Whether in Quebec, Haiti, or Africa the need is great; people need the Lord! Without your prayers and support we cannot move ahead to reach the unreachable. Would you consider our mission work?



Michel Poirier ministering to children during a pre-Covid service in Haiti.



“What are we going to do?”

I want to thank the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) for the privilege I have been given to be able to share with each of you the challenges and victories that we have had during this pandemic that plagues the entire world.

In 2 Kings 6:14-17 we find these wonderful words from Elisha to his servant, a young man: “Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! **how shall we do?** And he answered, **Fear not:** for they that be with us are more than they that be with

them. **And Elisha prayed,** and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (emphasis added).

In our country of El Salvador, it has been over five months (at the time this was written), since we have gathered together in a church building. The day that I announced to all the servant-leaders of our church that we did not know when we would return to the building, a ten-year-old boy asked me a question I will not soon forget: “Pastor Rigoberto, what are we going to do now?” And as I was talking to this boy, God brought to my mind this wonderful story of Elisha and his young servant.



I explained to the child what we would do—that we would not fear and that we would pray—and that little boy returned home comforted and rejoicing. So, I meditated upon God’s word as I prayed. In the days that followed, other local pastors would ask me the same question, “What are we going to do?” That same question has been repeated to me by so many others so often that I have lost track of how many times I have been asked “What are we going to do?”

Many people in our area are hopeless; a tremendous panic has taken hold on many of them. Some, unfortunately because they do not have a clear vision, do not know what to do; still others feel that God has abandoned them, and they have become overwhelmed by the enormity of their enemy (the pandemic). As a result, they cannot see God in this pandemic.

Seeing all of this, I began to reflect on our mission and vision, and what we do as a local BMA church. I took time not to ask God what to do, but to instead thank Him for the vision that He has placed in my heart. Because we are a cell church, I was able to meet with our cell group leaders; after discussing some precautions suggested by the government, we continued with our meetings in the cell groups in houses throughout the city. We were able to do that for a month. Then the government said that there could no longer be meetings of groups larger than ten. What did we do? We went from cell group meetings in specific homes in key areas of the city with multiple families, to having Bible study groups in every home, being led by individual families. We called these “Family Cell” groups, and we are continuing to meet in this way to this day.



Other questions arose. “Pastor, how are you going to preach to us?” One of the leaders suggested that I should preach through Facebook Live. Of course, as pastors, we love to preach; but we want to see people’s faces and to hear an “amen.” I to consider our options, and God showed me that we had a vast number of media tools as options to carry out His work. I began polling pastors, leaders, and church members to see who had Facebook and who had WhatsApp. And finally, I began to preach every Sunday through Facebook Live. Our children’s instructors began to prepare their lessons every Sunday to share them on the different digital platforms, so that all our children could participate virtually. We record the message and children’s lesson for those without Facebook, and then send to them via WhatsApp.

I want to thank Lifeword for their support. Thanks to them, we have in El Salvador several community radio stations that are preaching the gospel; we also have a recording studio for recording, editing, and broadcasting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thanks to Lifeword media, today more than ever more people are hearing the gospel in our country and beyond. And thanks to the reach of mass media, we have received wonderful testimonies such as Cecilia Hernández, who after listening to a message on one of the radio stations called us to make a profession of faith, accepting Jesus as her Savior.

The situation we are experiencing in our country has been very difficult and continues to be very difficult and challenging. Like in other countries, our political parties are at odds rather than banding together to aid the population at large.





They have not joined efforts in any form or fashion to find legitimate ways to unify the country; and the consequences of their lack of collaboration is evident in the great problems facing the entire population. Thank God that as churches of the BMA, we have been able to offer both material and spiritual aid to hundreds of families, sharing with them the plan of salvation.

For me, the most difficult challenge has been not being able to gather together and instead having to do virtual services. Our virtual services include only one member of the praise band and me. It is not inspiring for me to be preaching into a camera phone, but in obedience to my Lord I do.

The victories are many. Despite all the restrictions we face, the Word of God continues to be preached, more people continue to be saved, many others are rededicating their lives to the Lord, and others are awaiting a window of opportunity to follow the Lord in baptism.

It may be that even today many are wondering, “What do we do?” I invite you to read 2 Kings 6:17 “*And Elisha prayed*, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened

the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”

Elisha’s servant was no longer afraid when he saw God’s mighty heavenly army. This has to lead us to understand and believe in faith that God is doing more for His people than we can imagine, more than we can realize through sight. Let us not forget this as we face these difficulties that seem impossible to overcome. The spiritual resources are there even when we cannot see them. Let us fight to see through eyes of faith and allow God to show us His mighty hand working on our behalf. Horsemen and chariots were the most sophisticated and powerful military instruments the Syrians had. But God’s invisible army literally had more destructive power than those horses and chariots. The spiritual army had chariots of fire around Elisha ready to defend him. If you don’t see God working in your life, the problem is not with the power of God, but instead with your vision.

Take courage church; Jehovah is with us as a mighty giant. May our wonderful God continue to bless your lives and use you for His honor and glory.

MINISTERING AND SERVING THROUGH THE CRISIS



BY: Denis López
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Food and medicine being delivered to the people of BMA churches in Honduras

The first confirmed case of Covid-19 appeared in Honduras on March 11, 2020. To date, we have seen 34,611 cases and 935 deaths. All the public hospitals are overrun, presenting a challenge to our nation. As a church, we are also facing challenges presenting the gospel of Christ in the middle of so many difficulties. Our country has gone through many stages. At first, we were at ease, thinking the virus would never reach Honduras or that it would be under control if it did. Then we moved to a strict quarantine, shutting down all businesses and public meetings. Our churches have been unable to meet for 140 days. Many of our brothers have lost their jobs; others have had their jobs put on hold, not knowing when they will be allowed to return.

At first, we looked on in astonishment at what was happening in other countries; then, little by little, we began to see an increase in the number of people affected by the virus. At first, the sick were those we

didn't know, but now we are in the stage where the cases are no longer statistics. Instead, they are people we know and have ministered to—even some of our pastors have caught the virus. All of us pastors have preached on the return of Christ; some of us never thought that we would live with some of the signs. Now we are in another reality—ministering and serving in the midst of a worldwide virus. This has brought us many challenges. Our pastors have had to become familiar with the internet. Now it is common to see our pastors through Facebook Live or using other platforms such as Zoom, Google Duo, or WhatsApp in order to stay in contact with their members. Our pastors have been concerned about food and medicine for their congregations, and they have invested all their funds in these areas. I see the concern they have for their people; I see pastors helping their communities.

Our pastors have needed help from the younger generation on learning how to use the internet

in order to be able to continue preaching to their members. Others with less experience have recorded their sermons to share through WhatsApp. In these cases, we have used the Lifeword Cloud in Spanish to record and share messages through the internet.

In remote or rural places, our pastors have more freedom to meet publicly in the churches. Since there have been no cases in those areas and they have no internet, they must use the churches. Even in these times we have had professions of faith; we have made new contacts through our broadcasts. We have seen how the broadcasts of our pastors have been able to reach people that we did not reach before; and we have also been able to connect with brothers who have left the country. For example, our church uses the Google Duo platform to connect with our members on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. We also add a Facebook Live transmission on Sunday through church Facebook page and it has reached around 1,200 people each week.

The quarantine forced us to cancel our National Mission Meeting—one day where all our churches

come together to raise funds to support new missions. This created a challenge in promoting missionary work, but we are trusting God that we will soon be able to move forward. This time has also been emotionally difficult for new missionaries, as many of them feel that they cannot continue. We have been providing spiritual and emotional support to missionaries. Some of them face anxiety and depression; nothing had prepared them for experiencing these days.

I ask that you continue praying for the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) work in Honduras. Pray that God would protect us and provide for our communities. Pray that God would continue to encourage us to proclaim the gospel in our country of Honduras.



Food being delivered to those in need.



Food and medicine being given.

MOVING THE CHURCH ON-LINE IN CHINA



BY: Creative Access Missionary
BMA Missions
bmamissions.org

Six months! That's how long we have been on lock-down in China. Six months of wearing masks. Six months of checking temperatures to enter our apartment complex. Six months of showing our health checks at every store, mall, or shop we enter. Six months of no movie theatres, no concerts, no sporting events. In other words, six months of inconvenience.

Inconvenience. If only the events of the past six months were merely inconveniences. These past six months have presented us with severe challenges as well—illness, death, separation from loved ones, sleepless nights of increased toil, new skills to learn, job loss, restructurings, layoffs, closures, painful goodbyes—the list is seemingly endless.

For the church in China it has been six months of no large gatherings. Six months of no public trainings. Six months of faithful members stuck out of country behind closed borders. Six months of solid disciples leaving the country. Six months of long-term fellow missionary friends being called home by their sending agency or sent home by the local government. Six months of funerals and loss.

Six months of churches closing due to financial difficulties, member shrinkage, and leadership gaps. Six months of weekly five- and six-hour long meetings in hopes of strengthening weak churches. Six months of tears, questions, frustrations, and doubts. Again, the list is seemingly endless.

But with every challenge comes opportunities. We serve a God who is in the business of taking difficult situations and working them for His glory and our good. And this is exactly what I have seen these past six months. As believers we can sit and bemoan the difficulties we face, or we can believe the truth of Scripture and work diligently to fulfill the purposes of God in our generation. In China, we have chosen to believe that He is able to do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. Will you join us?

With less than a 48-hour notice, we struggled to move everything online. In faith (I believe, help my unbelief!) we wondered how God would use it for good. Six months later that faith has been made sight. Each week we have been privileged to connect with old members who left years ago, now able to join the fellowship once again that we might mutually encourage one another. Those online

gatherings have served to help those who are leaving to transition well and stay connected to the life they didn't want to leave. As physical trainings moved online, we saw an increase in attendance and an ability to reach beyond only those in Beijing; instead we can now serve those living across China and Asia. It has enabled us to serve the "exiles" who have been living in AirBnBs and sleeping on couches for the past six months, waiting for the China borders to reopen. We can pray for them and with them; we can connect them with ministry opportunities where they are so that their time of "exile" is meaningful, not wasted or waiting. New challenges, new opportunities.

One unique thing about online services is that it gives high-risk seekers an opportunity to explore the faith. We have been able to connect with the least reached people groups and individuals from creative access and closed nations—people from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Somalia, and more. These individuals have heard the gospel for the first time...because of the challenges we are facing! God never wastes our suffering.

The Chinese church in Beijing has grown tenfold. Individuals who were not allowed to enter a service are now meeting weekly. Individuals who had never been to church before are now giving their lives to Jesus. New challenges, new opportunities.

Additionally, as strange as this sounds, it has allowed us to be more relational. As laws and disease keep us disconnected, we are forced to be intentional about community, to not take it for granted or assume that it will happen naturally. We have opened up homes and gathered in parks and coffee shops as "hubs" for Sunday services; and all

this has allowed us to better practice local church life. People are no longer one among hundreds, but one among ten or twenty...it's much more difficult to be unengaged or absent without someone noticing. It also gives occasion for seekers and newer believers to ask questions specifically related to the sermon and receive immediate answers. It has fostered greater one to one care. It affords for more people to get involved in serving and sharing, to not go to church but to be the church. It has fostered an environment where everyone is able to bring, "a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation" (1 Corinthians 14:26). New challenges, new opportunities.

The initial tragedy of Covid-19 gave us opportunity to meet real needs in our city. We distributed 4,600 care bags to individuals in Beijing. We donated supplies such as masks, gloves, goggles, and more to local hospitals and agencies, raising an awareness of the local church's love for the city and the care which Christ longs to lavish on those who have yet to know Him. Yes, our God is in the business of

turning tragedy into triumph! As a result, we have gained greater favor with local businesses and local governments...something quite useful in Asian cultures. New challenges, new opportunities.

When all of this began, we started writing in order to remind our members of God's faithfulness. This turned into a 61-day devotion specifically Covid-19 related which was then translated into Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Korean, Swahili, German, Indonesian, and Arabic. It has helped connect us with thousands of individuals, many of whom were not believers. Surely ministry



opportunities have not shrunk but increased. We need only to open our eyes to what God is doing and join Him as He carries us along from grace to grace. New challenges, new opportunities

As we saw the needs around us, we formed a 24/7 helpline that anyone in China could call to talk about their problems and fears. We trained 45 volunteers in basic counseling skills supervised by eight professional counsellors. The helpline offered support in English, Chinese, Tagalog, and Cantonese. People were lonely, suicidal, in need of medical care, embassy assistance, food, lodging, and more. These challenges forced us to be more proactive in intentionally caring for the needs ever present around us. As locals returned to China, they were required to do two-week quarantines. Two weeks alone. Two weeks without any assistance. Two weeks without friendly faces or familiar voices. Again, challenges provided opportunities.

We formed quarantine groups, delivered food and groceries to those in need, supplied updated information, chatted with them, laughed with them, cried with them, and most importantly pointed them to Christ (our greatest need). New challenges, new opportunities.

As you look around at your challenges, I am certain that God is opening up new opportunities for your church. International students worried about changing laws which directly impact their future. Lonely expats unable to return home. Racial divide. Political divide. Hurting churches with dwindling membership. Members who are struggling to meet budget. Members who have gone silent and stopped attending. The challenges are real, but so are the opportunities. Open your eyes; open your hearts. Your new challenges bring new opportunities which will bring God glory and will work for the good of His children.



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THE DECENTRALIZED CHURCH

BY: Larry Barker and Heidi Sorrells
Activate
bmamissions.org

The church left the building and that is not a bad thing. We have been reminded over the last several months that the church, as we have always said we believed, is not the building but the people living on mission together. Leaving the building and doing “church” differently is teaching us some very important lessons. It has revealed some strengths, but it has also revealed some weaknesses in our spiritual walks and our churches.

Decentralization reminded us that we desperately need the Lord. Relationships are more important than processes, programs, or planning. It has refocused us on loving God with all our heart and loving others the way Christ loves us. Maybe we had become too comfortable focusing on being event driven more than our daily walk with Christ and caring for one another. We are skilled at planning a service but relationships trump excellent events.

Decentralization has refocused us on the importance of discipleship. We mistakenly can assume that our programs are causing people to grow spiritually. Programs are great for connection but authentic discipleship through joyful obedience while learning how and why to forsake all else is lacking. Discipleship had hit a wall; and when we left the building it forced us to notice our discipleship path or whether we had one at all.

Decentralization has given us a laser vision on the geographical proximity of people closest to us in our neighborhoods and at work. We must recommit to caring for and loving those in our immediate circles of influence. The people next door desperately need to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Look with fresh eyes at the 3-5 blocks or the 3-5 miles around your house. How can you seize this opportunity to show your neighbors the love of Christ in a practical way?

Decentralization has reemphasized the need for soul care. The spiritual health of our families and our churches is dependent upon our own spiritual health. Were we ready and were we prepared to lead our homes spiritually and in family worship? Had we trained and equipped dads and fathers to disciple their wives and children? Had we adequately equipped our people to continue to lead their families spiritually even if we were never able to meet in buildings again?

Decentralization has caused us to communicate better through email, texts, social media, and even old-fashioned phone calls. Many churches are calling their people and asking simple questions such as: how are you doing? is there anything we can do to help you? and how can we pray for you? Many have mentioned that they never want to go back to pre-virus days where we had forgotten the importance of communicating better and more.

Decentralization caused us to reevaluate the importance of our social media and Internet presence. Online is not meant to replace in person worship but, it is a new platform to be leveraged. The potential for more people to hear the gospel is greater now than ever before. The metric is not how many are viewing, liking, or watching, but rather how well are you connecting with them on their next steps toward Christ and your church.

The necessary move from a centralized event to decentralized groups occurred but the mission never changed. The Great Commission is still our calling and we must prayerfully plan how we will fulfill it during these challenging times. Will we focus on the obstacles and challenges or will we see this as an opportunity for new and exciting open doors? We must re-examine our values and begin living them out with a fresh vision birthed out of a season of fervent prayer.

Hopefully, with more seed being sown than ever before we will see a great harvest and a great revival in our hearts, our families, our churches, and our country! What we do with these discoveries is critical! It's as if each church is receiving a letter from Jesus via the vehicle of cultural crisis and global pandemic. How we respond matters for all eternity!



ONLINE



ONLINE

BY: Nick Jacobsen
SOAR Conference
soarconference.com

For over 30 years, SOAR Student Conference has been on summer calendars for many student ministries in the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA). And then...comes COVID-19. In the early months of 2020, Chris Vines and I had to make some difficult decisions about SOAR, which resulted in taking SOAR exclusively online. We knew we didn't want to cancel SOAR altogether, even though we couldn't be at the Gaylord. While almost all other summer events were canceled, SOAR would still happen. Through the use of technology, we were able to produce a great conference and host it online. Taking SOAR online prohibited us from knowing who watched, how many watched, et cetera. However, what we do know is people did watch. There were over 230 downloads of the sessions, over 140 downloads of the break-out sessions, and over 640 plays. Since the sessions were posted on Facebook, and people shared the post, there were almost 9,000 "impressions," meaning nearly 9,000 people saw the posts on their Facebook news feed. We were thrilled to learn at least one person gave their life to Jesus, and several committed to being disciplined as a result of God using SOAR 2020.



Shane Harrington – Collective Church, Bryant AR.

SOAR 2020 online was a game-changer for our student ministry at Collective Church. The online experience grasped our students from start to finish. The hard work of the SOAR team allowed our students to grow relationally together but, most importantly, in our understanding of Jesus and His ultimate Mission for our lives. SOAR 2020 was the highlight of our summer!



Bubba Reese – Herman Baptist, Bono AR.

Our group, “The Gathering,” is in a transition at Herman this year. You know how it is, the older students are moving up, and younger students are moving in. This means all our students this year experienced SOAR for their very first time online. We were a bit apprehensive about this at first; however, let me say those feelings were quickly put to ease as we witnessed our students engaged in the content of the messages and in the discussion times. The sessions and breakouts matched in content exceptionally well, allowing our students to learn the theme “multiply” and to understand what discipleship is—that it is commanded and a must for all followers of Christ. One young lady approached one of our leaders about discipling her, stating she’d realized its importance in her own life! Awesome, right? In all, it was an excellent SOAR experience for our students. They’re looking forward to next year, hoping they’ll be able to be together with all the churches then, and not have to wear masks! Thanks to all who had a hand in making SOAR 2020 great for kids!



Kirby Pool – Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, Gilmer TX.

Our youth were a little disappointed when SOAR was moved from Dallas to online, but we are so thankful that things had settled a little, and we were able to participate in SOAR 2020 Online together at our church. It was an awesome weekend! In some ways, just like some aspects of this quarantine/social distancing time has been a blessing, we were so blessed to be able to have our SOAR at our home church. Because of the time and location, more of our students were able to join in. We spent a little more time close and together, fellowshiping; and our church family got to be more involved and to love on the students a little more by being present and providing food and entertainment. Many of them got to watch the sessions and experience what we experience each summer. We are so grateful to the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of America for caring for our churches and students and for putting together this excellent conference each year—and especially this year, when it would have been so easy to cancel altogether.



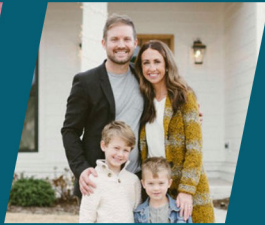
July 6-8 2021

PAUSE

Hilton Anatole - Dallas TX



Chris Vines
Host



Aaron Williams
Speaker



FLAME
Concert



Building 429
Concert



TJ Johnson
Speaker



SOAR Collective
Worship



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HILTON ANATOLE - DALLAS TEXAS

\$139 ++ PER ROOM BY JUNE 4, 2021

SOAR visionary leader Chris Vines announced SOAR 2021 will be at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, Texas on July 6-8, 2021. The theme is PAUSE. We will spend the week studying worship. We are thrilled to announce the speaker for SOAR 2021 is Aaron Williams. No stranger to the SOAR stage, Aaron has led worship at SOAR for well over ten years, and now he's coming to teach on worship. SOAR Collective will be back to lead worship for the sessions and to lead a special break-out session for students interested in leading worship, full of information and helpful advice. We are thrilled to announce Daniel Springs Camp is taking over the village; it will now be called Daniel Springs Village. We are so excited about SOAR 2021; we hope to see you there!



TACKLING THE HARD STUFF

BY: Holly Meriweather
BMA America
bmaamerica.org

“**T**he white church in America needs to feel the seriousness of people being killed because of their identity and that the deaths of African Americans won’t be dismissed because they committed a crime. That’s why the anger is so great: People are being killed because of who God made them to be.”

Ali Chambers is the pastor and church planter of Mosaic Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and conversations on race are not new for him. He responded with those words to a question by Larry Barker during an interview on Healthy Church Podcast (HCP), co-hosted by Drew Cline.

Born and raised in Memphis, Chambers grew up in a white community with an African American father and Middle Eastern mother. He attended college at Central Baptist (CBC) in Conway, Arkansas, where he met his wife Annetta, who is Polish. They have been married for seventeen years and have three sons who are eight, twelve, and fifteen.

During episode 14 of HCP the three pastors discussed what it means to be compassionate, gospel-centered, and humble in these days of racial unrest. Cline, who pastors South City Church in Little Rock, and Barker, Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) Director of North American Church Planting, have a long-standing friendship with Chambers.

Cline and Barker believe that the church has to be proactive in conversations like these as brothers and sisters in Christ with a desire for unity and reconciliation. As Barker told Chambers, “When all this began happening, I thought of you. If we’re brothers and sisters, what hurts you hurts me.”

Barker began the conversation by asking Chambers if he would share the vision for Mosaic church. Chambers explained that, “Through my own identity struggles and feeling like I didn’t belong I have been challenged to consider the deeper identity of Christianity and realize that Mosaic should be a church that is ‘different together.’”

“I have always had a passion for diversity,” Ali said, “and a burden to be part of a church with different backgrounds, experiences, cultures, multi-ethnic people, and families worshiping together, forming a cohesive whole. So, the vision for Mosaic is gospel-centered diversity. We take all our backgrounds and ethnicities and form a cohesive whole. Our identity is bigger than our skin colors. At Mosaic God is creating a people who are challenged to think of their identity and what it’s based on: Jesus and the gospel.”

Cline then asked about Mosaic church members: “How do you see this moment of crisis in your church?” Chambers said, “We’re struggling to stay in community. Compounding the virus with the killings, and our people are frustrated, angry—and it brings up wounds. Also, there’s a sense that this is nothing new. I’ve experienced this before. I have had to walk that. There’s also a numbness and that is shocking to whites, but it has been their lives, their reality, for years.”



Mosaic Church, Memphis

Drew asked Chambers if there are opportunities for hope, healing and change. Ali responded, “Yes, and in small ways there have been changes already, like now there are prosecutions and calling people to account for the killings. One good thing is that racism used to be intentional, and now it’s unintentional; but there still shouldn’t be a need for the video, and it shouldn’t be happening period, holding a guy’s neck down with your knee. It’s a frustration still.

“It’s revealing that something deeper is now coming to surface: a vivid picture of choking, crying out, a total disregard for the lives of black men, a disrespect of the culture and their personhood, and how they live out their identity. While I was in Ghana, there was a celebration of ‘blackness.’ I experienced a freedom that being black wasn’t strange, and I felt valued. Basically, we want to be celebrated, not tolerated.”

Larry asked, “What would you like us to do? What are some things you’d like to see from the white church?”

“When I’m in a neighborhood that is predominantly white, I have to be prepared if something happens and I’m looked at suspiciously. I have to decide what I need to say. So, people need to begin listening in non-threatening, non-fearful ways to the stories, the issues, recognizing the seriousness of what’s happening here.

“Yes, brokenness is everywhere in both cultures; there’s a history of bad things that have happened. African Americans are being killed because of their identity and whites should take the posture of the meek not the powerful, and mourn for it. We don’t want to be rescued. We’re actually just like you: People just doing life.

“So admit what is present in white America, the history, the power structure that is in the fabric of society. Killing someone because of their identity, because of who God made them to be is a reality.

“The only way to dispel fear is to have some significant experiences like moving to an ethnic community and getting to know them on an equal level and not be ‘the great white rescuer.’ We have to admit what is present in white America, that it’s in the fabric of our society.”

Cline then asked, “How do we engage African American culture and feel the same passion as churches?” Chambers said, “I participated in protests where there was a lot of anger, there was fire, breaking windows, which I absolutely do not support; but it is a reflection of pent-up rage against a system that doesn’t work for blacks.

“It’s an economic system that doesn’t work for them. Lashing out is wrong but try to understand where it comes from. The American story is about submission, taking what they (our forefathers) felt was theirs when America was discovered, because they were the dominant culture.”

Barker said, “I feel inadequate because we’re not sure we’re on target with what we’re saying, but I need to quit devaluing the situation by giving an example of a white person getting the same treatment. Churches need to quit reacting and act gospel and above all, to be humble.”

Chambers agreed, saying, “Yes, we get comfortable, and we don’t want to do anything hard. We need reform, but churches need to wrestle with fighting for justice for the oppressed, which God is concerned about. When one person can’t breathe, none of us can breathe.”





When Cline asked how both cultures and churches should move toward each other, Chambers' answer was, "To multi-cultural church unity. We need to agree that it may be uncomfortable, but we're all Christ-followers who love Jesus, and He didn't put us in segregated societies. God actually made us to depend on all cultures, white, African American, Hispanic, but we have different values.

"For example, African Americans value time, relationships, events, leading, etc., but white Americans get antsy when people aren't on time, so which value system wins? Often the dominant culture, so instead let's celebrate and value each other and learn from each culture.

"Culture could mean social class, education, church, you might have to give things up to come together. In black culture there's a sense of losing my identity if I become part of a multi-ethnic church, but a church should be based on biblical values and not on culture. Blacks need a voice in such a church. Mosaic often gives a platform to people that white churches would not because they're messed up and have a past they're ashamed of"

As the interview came to a close, Larry thanked his friend and told him, "I'm challenged, and I'm thankful that my heart is broken. Yes, as you said, our identities are not racially based. They're gospel-based. We're brothers in Christ. God says we're called to make sacrifices and fight for the oppressed and those who have no power. That has always been part of the gospel. If we're not concerned about those things, we're not living it out."

Chambers ended the conversation with the reminder that, "Belief should call for action and fighting for justice reform in our justice system. We're called to be concerned about these things. The gospel and social justice are the same. I've thought a lot about Titus 3:1-7 where Paul talks about being hated and hating one another, then the Savior appeared with kindness and love, offering salvation to everyone and encouraging us to be peaceable and considerate. It's what the church needs to be right now."

To listen to the entire podcast, Healthy Church Podcast Episode 14 [CLICK HERE](#).