

**Scott's Thoughts**  
**Annual Meeting, October 22, 2023**  
**Bono Baptist Church**

What is the state of the church in Johnson County? More specifically, what is the state of churches associated with our association? And just what in the world, you might ask, do I actually do? Let me give you a thumb nail sketch.

- It is safe to say that some are doing quite well in terms of attendance and budgets and even building; and there are others in decline by almost all metrics, hoping and praying something is going to happen to change their situation.
- Of the 61 churches in our association, about 1/3 of the churches are what I would call very involved in the association (give, attend), 1/3 is marginally involved (sporadic giving and attendance); and another 1/3 do not participate at all. Much to my own disappointment, I have been unable to really shift this trend in the last 13 years.
- Yet giving has been surprisingly strong. Compared to the first 9 months of last year, churches have given 11% more (about \$20,000) to the association this year! Thank you!! With such generosity, we are on track to not only meet our budget, but exceed it. And although there will be a few lines in our budget that exceed their allocation due to surprise expense and increased costs, at present we are spending about 95% of what we budgeted.
- As to what I do on weekends and often during the week, beyond visiting local churches, I have spoken (preached and taught) 74 times in church gatherings (filling the pulpit, sharing with a SS class the work of the association, the WMU, preparing BSM students for our Tanzania mission trip, and to an assortment of special gatherings such as the pastors and leaders in involved with Engage Arlington (a group, across denominational lines, committed to reaching Arlington with the gospel – I was so encouraged by this!), to Concho Valley Baptist Association's one day event on effectively taking the gospel to a rural context.
- Part of my role, of course, involves meeting with churches, pastors, elders, deacons, search teams...working with churches in crisis...gathering leaders for times of encouragement or training...and working to discover ways in which we might all more effectively lead and engage our communities.

Some of the things I have been especially encouraged by, besides the individual reports of baptisms, or a local church's new initiative, involve...

- Movement JC: This developed out of Movement DFW, a collaborative gathering of church and non-profit leaders across the DFW Metroplex to strategize how we might all focus on a few similar things that will foster a spiritual movement.
  - You might ask why focus on DFW, this is Johnson County! As you may or may not know, the new Loop 9 already under way, a highway system that will encircle the DFW Metroplex, reaching far beyond the I20, Loop 820 and 183, and 635 loop in Dallas...this new loop will circle from just south of Denton to the north, expand further to the east and west of the Metroplex, and whose southern border will be Hwy 67 in Cleburne...on to Venus...and beyond that cutting further east instead of north east to catch the new construction already planned and in some cases already under way...creating a giant oblong circle around the Metroplex which demographers say that in 25years, one in four Texas will live within this loop!
  - One of the most significant findings of Movement DFW was correlating data that indicates that the most likely spark to ignite a movement that effects the entire Metroplex

is among our students. In other words, if the students in our county experience an awakening, that will be a game-changer in every community. Consequently, we have started a local initiative called **Movement JC**, led and fostered by student leaders to help leaders and student groups focus on a few core aspects of ministry that show the greatest promise to ignite such a movement.

- I have been thrilled to hear about the progress of BSM work on the Hill College campus. For years we have invested in this, many of you and your churches have served meals there, and NOW we are beginning to see more of a stirring. We want to take this even further – and I would ask you to pray about this. I am working with some (TJ, the student leader at FBC Alvarado), to see if we can foster a weekly 18-twenty-something year old gathering for Bible Study, fellowship, and discipling; not to replace any church, but to encourage them to be in church...and to provide a weekly opportunity for them to be with their peers.
- And to hear how God is opening doors for the Christian Women's Job Corps to go into the prison? I think God is up to something grand!
- This year I was able to act on your behalf in presenting the deed for the church and land Cedar Cross is meeting on – what a blessing to give away an entire church facility to a church that has been through so much! This past year another matter related to property came up, a developer gifted the association with 2 acres, which I was privileged to donate to Lone Willow Baptist Church, who was especially appreciative and grateful because they are just now looking to add on to their building as they come up against space issues. God is so good!
- Speaking of gifts...Cedar Cross presented the association with a \$70,000 gift! And although no one in associational leadership thought it was a good idea I splurge on an around the world cruise, they did come up with an idea that I believe you are going to be pleased with and that will, God willing, bear lasting fruit for the Kingdom!
- You have briefly heard what God is doing in Tanzania through our association. (Incidentally, when I asked at our last annual meeting if there were churches willing to sponsor any of the new churches for \$1,000, 7 have now been adopted, 4 by churches and 3 by individuals!). I continue to pray God will stir the hearts of pastors and churches here to partner with us and sister churches, be they in Tanzania or Vancouver – these are exciting times!

BUT...what do we need to focus on in 2024? As I was given time to pull back and reflect on my recent sabbatical, to ask God to clarify the kinds of things we need to be doing to reach our county more, God began to put some things upon my heart, especially as I have studied the kinds of things that God's people are doing in those area where communities and cultures are being transformed by the gospel. For years this burden has been upon my heart.

- I have passed out books on various facts of creating momentum, books dealing with things like church unity (which we still need in our county!), partnership, and what godly and spiritual leadership actually look like; books that describe the kinds of things people are doing that have brought change to their communities.
- I have sought to mobilize people to pray for revival and awakening through weekly and monthly gatherings;
- Taking people on mission trips to see that that gospel is still powerful, in order to ignite more of a gospel-focus here in our own county;

So, with what God has been doing, and what we have been working toward, let me lay out a big-picture of what 2024 will look like. My job, as best I can tell, is quite simple: **to work with leaders and churches to help them be what God has called them to be, and to partner together to reach**

**our county and beyond.** I wish I could tell you I have it all figured out, but as I was reminded of yesterday in a conference I attended, following God is a little bit like flying an airplane as you are building it! In essence, what I am laying out before you is what is characteristic of every movement of God occurring around the world. Movements of God happen because certain things are taking place. What are they?

There are five elements I propose we put work together on:

**1) Making strategic, faithful, praying a priority.** This is activating prayer; it is activating because as we pray, God works! Prayer is absolutely vital to seeing God's transforming power upon our communities. I have visited some churches and seen their prayer list: it is such a dizzying array of names and needs I wonder if people pray at all. I'm not talking about that kind of prayer. I'm talking about darkness-shaking, life-giving prayer; the kind of prayer where the you and I stand in the gap – as a watchman on the wall, to use Ezekiel's imagery – between a holy and righteous God and people who are going to perish unless they turn to God! I'm talking about the kind of desperate praying that causes the enemy to shut up, sit down, and submit to the power of God that people might be free to hear and receive the life-changing message of Jesus! The kind of prayer I yelled out when, years ago while pastoring at Sand Flat, when I was assaulted by a demon possessed man who visited our church. I know he was demon possessed because I asked him In the name of Jesus I command you to tell me your name. To which he replied Belzebub. (Yes, there are demon possessed people in our county, and some show up at church!). And although the story is too long to go into here, suffice it to say that he jumped me, threw me to the ground, and I am convinced do what he had been threatening to do (to kill me) had I not, but by the grace of God and the Spirit of God within me, yell out "JESUS!" To which he released me, got up, and sat in a silent stupor on the chair! We see this on mission trips, for I have had people fall down the moment I speak the Name of Jesus or lay hands on them in prayer, writhing and yelling until the demon is cast out, just as Jesus and his followers did. Paul reminds us that we are in a battle – not against flesh and blood – but against spiritual forces. And God has so ordained it that we can fight and prevail in this battle, not by our strength or intellect, but in taking our stand in His Name and Authority. So, to keep pushing this initiative forward, we will carry on with our weekly prayer gathering, but come January it will be from 6:30-7:30AM on Tuesdays.

**2) Engaging culture.** Everywhere God is powerfully at work, ordinary Christians have been working to identify and meet people's needs in service and with the gospel. But if a church refuses to meet people's needs so that the gospel can be presented in a relevant way, that church will eventually shrivel up. If a church is not engaging the community with the gospel – by its members speaking up and taking responsibility to build loving and caring relationships with lost people so they may be used as God's witnesses – that church will die. We have seen it before, and we see it occurring today. It may take a few years, but that church will come to an end. Your association wants to help your church discover ways to effectively engage the people around you. And there are some creative things some of you are doing – but unless these are coupled with a strategy to follow up and focus on the WHY you are doing these things, they will be nothing more than an event that draws a crowd...but achieves little or nothing for the Kingdom.

**3) To make disciples.** Although I feel like I have been beating this drum for years, I still find so few churches have a clear, simple, reproducible strategy to make disciples. In fact, I would venture to say that most church attenders would be stupefied if you asked them to describe how they are making disciples. I want to help you and your church learn a simple method of making disciples who make disciples. Truth be told, the key to a significant movement is not more churches...but for those who

are already in churches to start making disciples on their own. There is no church program that is going to reach our county; but the people in the church can!

**4) Growing leaders.** Leaders must multiply themselves. The old guard must share and pass on responsibilities. Astute leaders identify and invest in those whom God is raising up. Instead of haphazardly spending time with whoever is calling for attention, set aside specific time to invest in the people around you. When an opportunity for growth comes along, instead of looking at it from your own standpoint, ask yourself, “Is there someone I am working with that I might encourage to attend?” Every church needs to be developing leaders, and I will continue to develop strategies to help leaders grow as well.

**5) Forming new communities of faith.** I have intentionally left out calling this “churches” because most of us immediately think of a building. A group starts to meet together, and over time buys land and builds a church. Now they are a church, right? No, they were a church when they started meeting together. Although we will still give significant attention to planting churches as we have been doing, I am looking for ways to identify those called to shepherd smaller groups, gatherings of people that meet in homes and apartments and community centers and places of work. If you are like me, I have seen and know of different people who have what we most often call a house church. These are springing up, it seems, with greater intensity as many in our culture are disillusioned with traditional church or, for some reason, will not attend a traditional church. This next year I hope to not only develop a simple system of identifying and training those whom God has called for this task, but to put in place way these gatherings can be connected to one another and the association. In invite you to pray with me about finding a person or two to help spear head this.

To keep these five components before us (activating prayer, engaging culture, making disciples, growing leaders, and forming churches) there will be some initial come and see opportunities in the Spring. And in the Fall, my hope is to launch at least two leaning cohorts, comprised of people who sense God is leading them put what I am talking about into practice so as to live this Life in Jesus in such a way to better impact their spheres of influence.

In short, I am excited about 2024! For if there was ever a time in which we needed a move of God...it would seem like now! For I am still convinced that the greatest need in our county is not better music from our churches, more Bible studies being offered, or even more seminary trained staff. And with all the problems in our communities related to drugs, abuse, neglect of parenting, and people living in blatant disregard to the law and common decency, the answer will not be found in more laws or better enforcement. All those aspects are important, but I still think our only hope is in Jesus Christ, the life changing nature of the gospel, the indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit, and obedient, ordinary Christians who live the kind of life that exemplifies Jesus. Here is my point: YOU...and Christ living and working through you...are the answer. Friends, I want to invite you to journey with me this next year in laboring for the Kingdom, and earnestly crying out that God will do what only He can do! And that is to bring life to the dead, awaken the complacent, and stir all our hearts to live completely for Him!