



BASICS FOR BAPTISTS

- WHO WE ARE
- WHAT WE BELIEVE
- HOW WE SERVE

A series from the *Illinois Baptist* • Vol. 1

The whole world is our mission field

God’s call came in stages for Kelly Carruthers. First, he knew he was being led toward full-time ministry as a pastor. Later, as a seminary student, “God made that calling more specific,” said Carruthers, who has served as a missionary in Botswana since 2001.

Carruthers and his wife, Ann, are part of a Southern Baptist missionary force of nearly 7,500 serving overseas and in North America, not including 3,500 chaplains and more than 1,000 student missionaries.

During a chapel service at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1995, Carruthers heard a sermon from Genesis 12:1-2. “I felt strongly God telling me to follow in Abram’s footsteps,” he remembers.

But before he and Ann and their two young children were able to “go out from their land and relatives,” they had to clear several obstacles. Kelly and Ann each went on mission trips to Haiti to confirm whether God truly was calling them outside the U.S.

“Giving up ‘normal life’ is not easy, and it is not easy for others to understand. I remember the difficulty of telling others. Some did not understand and assumed we were doing to the deep ‘bush’ of Africa and would never return. Some assumed our children would suffer terrible things. Our immediate families had never had someone leave the continental U.S. for a lengthy period of time.”

But he was pastoring a church, Hoosier Prairie Baptist in Louisville, which had already sent one pastor to the mission field. “Many of them knew the deep calling God had placed on our lives,” Carruthers says, still thankful for the support of their church, family and friends.



We serve in ... Africa

The Carruthers family moved from Illinois to Botswana.

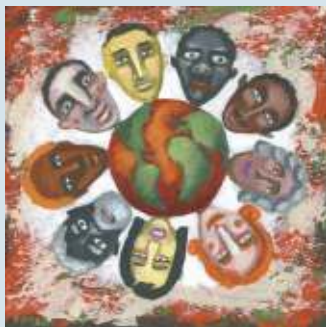
The family was commissioned by the SBC’s International Mission Board in May 2001, joining a long line of people who have served in Africa since Southern Baptist missions work began there around 1850.

As a church planter, Carruthers serves the Kalanga people in Botswana and Zimbabwe. He and Ann have initiated a discipleship strategy where they lead the people to write out books of the Bible. The writing method is designed to empower people in Botswana and Zimbabwe to take the Gospel to others who haven’t heard it.

“Please pray for them to see the importance of this simple tool. God is using His Word to speak to them, bring holiness into their lives, and deepen their commitments to His Kingdom.”

– Meredith Flynn

THE ‘GREAT COMMISSION’ COMPELS US



Disciple means “learner.” Jesus told his disciples to go to all the people in the nations around them and help them become disciples too, learners who choose to follow Jesus.

His words, recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, call us even today to share the Gospel with everyone on the planet. We are to teach them what Jesus taught. We are to encourage them to make the life-altering commitment of faith in Christ, then to make that commitment public by being baptized.

This Great Commission is at the heart of our work and our identity as Southern Baptists. We are people who teach others – wherever they may be – what we ourselves have learned as we follow Jesus.

Read: Article 1 of *The Baptist Faith & Message* (2000) at www.IBSA.org/B101.

How do we know what is right? And who says so?

Some people look to themselves, either their own reason (“I think this”) or their own experience (“I feel this”). Others look to a church and its traditions to find out what is true and what to do. We Baptists look to Scripture.

The first article of the *Baptist Faith & Message* clearly states Scripture’s authority and purpose. This “perfect treasure of divine instruction” is “the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.”

It is fitting that our faith statement begins with Scripture. Before we can discuss any other topic of theology and the Christian life, we must get the question of authority squared away. In 2 Peter 1:21, we find how Scripture can be written by men and yet have God for its author. “Men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” Since the words of the Bible are breathed out by God, and since God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), then we can trust that they are truth, without any mixture of error.

What’s more, the trustworthy Word of God is also our means of

knowing God. It is our authority because it is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It’s His personal communication.

In our current culture of spirituality, many people say they want a personal relationship with God. But what they fail to realize is that real relationship requires an objective revelation. Follow me here: How do I know I have a real relationship with another person?

The fact that the Bible has parts in it I may not like is evidence that I’m dealing with a real Person other than myself.

Whether it’s a church member, a fellow pastor, or my wife, my interactions with other people are only authentic if they can contradict me.

The same is true with God. The fact that the Bible has parts in it I may not like is evidence that I’m dealing with a real Person other than myself. Scripture gives us “divine instruction” and “it reveals the principles by which God judges us.”

Authority, yes. Principles to judge by, certainly. But thankfully, the Bible is much more than a book of rules revealing a God who opposes us. The Bible has “salvation for its end,” says the BFM. God’s main message to us is that we can have a right relationship with Him through faith in his Son who lived and died for us.

We can’t miss this point, like those to whom Jesus said, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40).

May we not just hold to a high view of Scripture on paper, but look elsewhere in practice. This quote from D.L. Moody illustrates how Scripture must be the centerpiece of our life and ministry:

“I prayed for faith, and thought that some day faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, ‘Now faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.’ I had closed my Bible, and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since.”

– Nathan Carter is pastor of Immanuel Baptist in Chicago.



CONSIDER THIS

For personal study or group discussion

- 1 How is the Bible’s authority different than, say, an owner’s manual or the Constitution?
- 2 Are you ever tempted to seek intimacy with God apart from Scripture?
- 3 How have you sensed God speaking personally to you through the Bible?
- 4 How does Christ being the main point of the Bible affect the way you approach it and use it in ministry?

Our denomination’s statement of faith is called “The Baptist Faith & Message.” It was updated in 2000 and adopted by elected messengers who attended the SBC’s annual meeting that year. Adopting the BF&M is the voluntary choice of each local church.

See the World from a *new angle*

Southern Baptists give

\$183 million

to missions through the
Cooperative Program
each year.

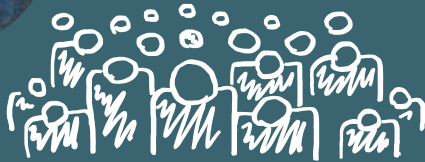
Why?

Because we believe **every person on earth** should have the opportunity to hear about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

There are

7 Billion people

on the planet.



5 Billion have never heard
the Good News
about Jesus.

In fact,

3,084 are considered UUPGs
(unreached, unengaged people groups).

Fewer than 2% of people
within those groups are Christian.

4,822 Southern Baptist
missionaries are engaging

874 people groups.

Every dollar you put in the
plate touches the world.

CP WORKS!

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

SOUL COMPETENCY

Roger Williams was the founder of Rhode Island. He founded its capital and named the town Providence, because he believed God had led him and a dozen followers there. Williams also started the first Baptist church in America in that town.

It's still there. It's called First Baptist Church in America.

Williams arrived in Rhode Island in 1636 after many years fighting for his freedom to worship. Two beliefs were very important to Williams that are important to us today: the separation of church and state, and soul competency.

Williams' conviction that the government should not interfere in the practice of religion made its way into Thomas Jefferson's writings at the founding of our nation. And his belief that each individual is responsible before God for his own personal belief in Jesus Christ as Savior is a key doctrine for Baptists.

Some theologians called this "soul liberty." Early Baptists called it "soul competency." Today we might think of it as "soul responsibility," we are responsible to God for our faith choices and practices.

It means that the government cannot make religious decisions for individuals. Churches cannot make personal faith decisions for their members. And one person cannot make a salvation commitment on behalf of another person.

You can see that this statement of the individual's responsibility before God is foundational to a personal faith commitment and to believer's baptism. "Out of this principle flow all other elements of Baptist belief," said Southern Baptist theologian Herschel Hobbs.



"Soul competency" answers some important questions:

- *Why must I make a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior?* Soul competency. No one can make that commitment for me.

- *Why don't Baptists baptize (or christen) infants?* Soul competency. No one can make that commitment for another person. The infant, when mature, can choose to make his faith commitment public by being baptized, as Jesus was and as He instructed.

- *Why don't Baptists have creeds (doctrines that everyone is required to believe)?* Soul competency. We have *The Baptist Faith and Message*, an orderly explanation of the important teachings our denomination holds true, but supporting the BF&M is voluntary.

With that foundation stone laid, we are ready to consider many ways Baptists are unique within Christianity.

—Eric Reed

Think about it:

What kind of responsibility do you feel toward others in their own faith-related commitments?

How is soul competency a motivator for our missionary work?

ILLINOIS IN SIGHT

A prayer strategy for sharing Christ

Scott Kallem, pastor of Marion Third Baptist, led his church to begin participating in Choose2, a strategy for identifying people who do not know Jesus as their Savior. Within a few months, one of the two people he had been praying for was walking down the aisle of Marion Third to declare he had accepted Christ as his Savior. He wasn't alone in his decision; his wife and 10-year-old son also accepted Christ.



"I thought, 'Wow, that was God working,'" shared Kallem. "You pray for them and all of a sudden there they are." Kallem had the privilege to baptize all three of the new believers.

"God has chosen to use redeemed humanity to reach those who haven't yet been saved by grace," said **Tim Sadler**, IBSA's director of evangelism. "He's cho-

sen to use you and me. There's no greater reason why we should do it than because He has entrusted this into jars of clay."

Choose2: It's as simple as 1-2-3
The Choose2 goal is for every Baptist in Illinois to...

1. Choose two friends, family members, neighbors, or co-workers who do not have saving faith in Christ.

2. Commit to pray for their salvation twice a day.

3. Invite your Choose2 family and friends to at least two events at your church this year.

Sadler encourages pray-ers to ask themselves how they can further engage the people they're praying for in a relationship that will lead to Gospel conversations.

And, "Don't stop praying, because God always hears, and you and I don't know God's timing."

More than 200 churches, starting in Illinois, have used the Choose2 prayer strategy for evangelism. And the emphasis has been used in churches in 12 states and adopted by four state conventions.

Our state convention, the Illinois Baptist State Association, is helping to advance the Gospel worldwide with innovative missions and creative evangelism plans. To learn more visit IBSA.org/Choose2.

Clip and Share B-101 with

- Pastors
- Church staff
- Discipleship leaders
- Missions leaders
- New members

ABOUT B-101

This is a 20-part study on the basic beliefs and missions of our denomination. It is designed for new believers, new Baptists, and those who want a refresher. Clip it out of the newspaper, fold into a four-page leaflet, and share with the people who would benefit from the information. You might even lead a study.

B-101 can be used for:

- **New members classes**
- **Study on missions in Illinois and around the world**
- **Exploration of doctrines in *The Baptist Faith & Message***

Make as many photocopies as you need for study groups, church members, and worship attenders.

Or download the PDFs at

www.IBSA.org/B101.

Produced by the editors of the *Illinois Baptist*: Eric Reed, Meredith Flynn, Lisa Sergent. Designed by Kris Kell.

Look for B-101 in every issue!



mission illinois

Pray for a new church

Location: Round Lake Beach

Target: Hispanic families and singles

Characteristics: This suburban area has a population of 28,000; 52% of the people have a Hispanic heritage.

Prayer Needs: For the planting of a Gospel-centered, Spanish-language church



— From the IBSA Church Planting Team

COMING SOON Resources for B-101

- Leader's guides for study groups
- Self-guided tutorials on SBC missions, Baptist beliefs, distinctives, and the Cooperative Program
- The whole 20-part series will be available for download in time for fall discipleship classes and small groups.

Available soon online at www.IBSA.org/B101.