

INTRODUCTION

If you attend Green Acres on a regular basis you know that my normal message pattern is to take a book of the Bible and teach through it verse by verse. Right now we're in the middle of a study of 2 Corinthians I've entitled, "Hope for Cracked Pots." But this morning, I'm going to take a break from 2 Corinthians to share "A State of the Church Message." Over the years, this was usually an annual message, but I didn't last year because we were in the middle of "For the Joy of All Generations."

In a little over two months, President Bush will stand before the combined houses of Congress and the federal judiciary to deliver his eighth and final "State of the Union Address." He'll be talking about important issues like the war on terrorism, taxes, the economy, and global policies. It's always interesting to see the response of those listening to the President. There will be those on the Republican side who will jumping to their feet and clapping and cheering wildly. While the Democrats will have pained looks on their faces, and clap politely (and will be thinking, "Just wait 'til next year!"). That's politics for you! As I'm sharing this State of the Church message, it's great to know that we're all on the same side! I hope you'll join me in enthusiastically cheering what God is doing in our church!

Our organizational handbook is the Bible and in the book of Acts we see the early Christians heard reports about what God was doing. After the Apostle Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey we read these words in Acts 14:26-28:

“From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.”

That's what I want to do, to report to you the great things God has been doing in our church. Then when you read in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas traveled from Antioch to Jerusalem reporting along the way about what God was doing.

Acts. 15:3-4: “The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.”

This is going to be like a family chat. Healthy families take time to sit down and talk together and plan the future. If you're not a member of our church, you're certainly invited to our family gathering today. I even hope that once you discover what God is up to through Green Acres you'll seriously consider becoming a part of the Green Acres family.

I heard a funny story about a lady who showed up for church one Sunday morning. The usher didn't recognize her, so he figured she must be a guest. He said, "Where would you like to sit?" The lady said, "I want to sit right down on the front pew." The usher said, "I wouldn't do that if I were you, ma'am. This preacher is REALLY boring." The lady said, "Oh really? Do you know

who I am?” The usher said, “No ma’am I don’t.” She said, “I’ll have you know that I’m the preacher’s mother!” The usher said, “Well, do you know who I am?” The preacher’s mother said, “No, I don’t.” The usher said, “Good!”

Now, I’m going to do my best to share the excitement I have in my heart about what God is doing in our church. The first thing we should do is to:

1. THANK GOD FOR THE BLESSINGS BEHIND US!

Our church really doesn’t have a slogan, but one of the things we often say is: God is good...all the time. And all the time...God is good! Amen! And God has been good to us.

As I examine our church, I feel somewhat like a doctor who’s examining a healthy patient. Our church is very healthy. We aren’t perfect, but we are healthy.

In fact, if you’re looking for a perfect church, you’ll never be satisfied. There’s a little poem by my favorite poet, Anonymous, about a Perfect Church. It says, “If you should find a perfect church; without one fault or smear; For goodness sake, don’t join that church; You’ll spoil the atmosphere; So since no perfect church exists; Where people never sin; Just stop looking for a perfect church; and love the church you’re in!”

There are almost 45,000 Southern Baptist Churches in America, and each year every church turns in a numerical report for the previous year. For reporting purposes, the church year goes from October through September.

Green Acres was founded on May 1, 1955 with almost 300 members. Our congregation is a little over 50 years old, and God has blessed us from the earliest days. I want to show you some graphs that reflect the growth we’ve experienced over the past 30 years and the numbers we reported for this past church year that ended in September.

The first graph (*figure 1*) shows the growth in Church Membership over the past 30 years. In 1977, the membership had grown to over 3,000, and our current membership is 13,967. We received approximately 900 new members last year and 226 of them came by baptism.

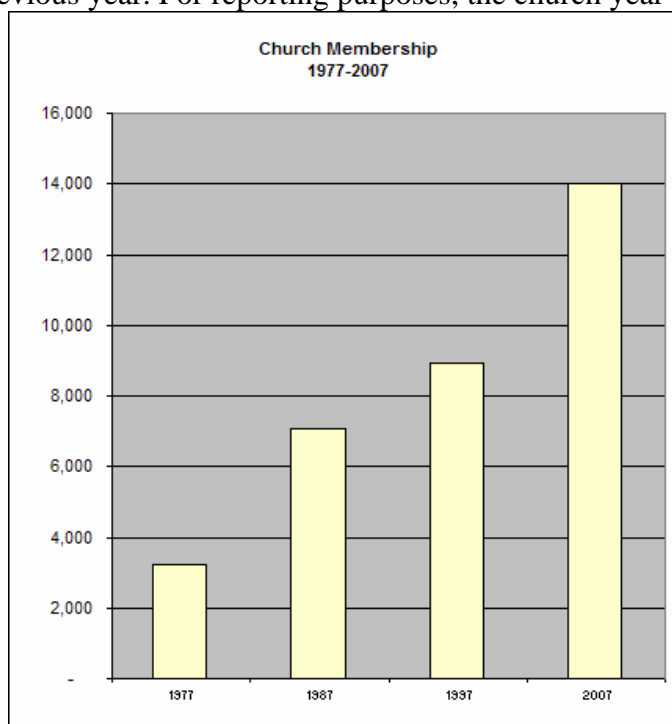


figure 1

As you’re going to see in the next graph (*figure 2*), we don’t have nearly that many people who attend. I have often been quoted as saying, “we have 14,000 members, but the FBI couldn’t find half of them.” I say that facetiously, because each one of these members represents someone whose name and address we have on file. I consider a church membership list more like a prayer list. Just because your name is on a church membership roll doesn’t mean your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. These are people who need us to reach out to them and pray for them and encourage them to be a part of what God is doing.

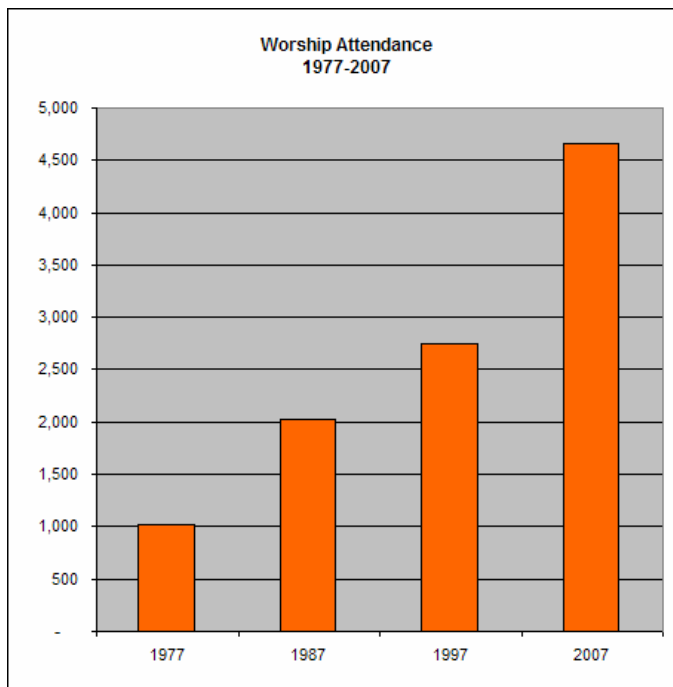


figure 2

This graph represents average worship attendance on Sunday. In 1977 there were about 1,000 people attending worship, and our average worship attendance for this past year was 4,655. There are probably only about 15 Southern Baptist Churches in America that have 4,000 or more in worship on Sundays. Of course, not everyone attends worship every Sunday. We have some people who attend twice a month, or once a month or so. We estimate that there are about 7,000 people who attend Green Acres on a fairly regular basis.

The problem is that we don’t have parking for that many people. People get frustrated when they can’t find a place park, and if someone’s not entirely committed to attending, they may drive through a full parking lot, and then just drive home. We’re addressing our parking needs in this construction process. Over the next few months, you’re going to see a large, two level parking deck take shape right outside the front door of the church. When the entire construction project is completed, we’ll have more parking than ever before. Most of our members live south of our campus, but now most of our parking is to the north, so some of you should consider braving the north forty and parking in the new parking lot behind the Student Center and riding one of the shuttles.

Over the past 30 years our Sunday School attendance, which we now call Sunday Morning Bible Study, has grown consistently (*figure 3*). In 1977 there are about 1,100 people attending Sunday School, and last year we had an average attendance in SMBS of 3,245. These are the people who have plugged in to a small group experience where they can know people by name and be known. I often say that if you only attend worship, you’re missing out of the richest, most fulfilling experience God has for you at Green Acres.

Our SMBS attendance has peaked over the past couple of years simply because we’re out of space. That’s why we’re building space for children and adults now. There are no rooms left on our campus to begin new SMBS units for married adults, single adults, or children. I predict when we move into our new buildings over the next two years, we’re going to see this number increase dramatically.

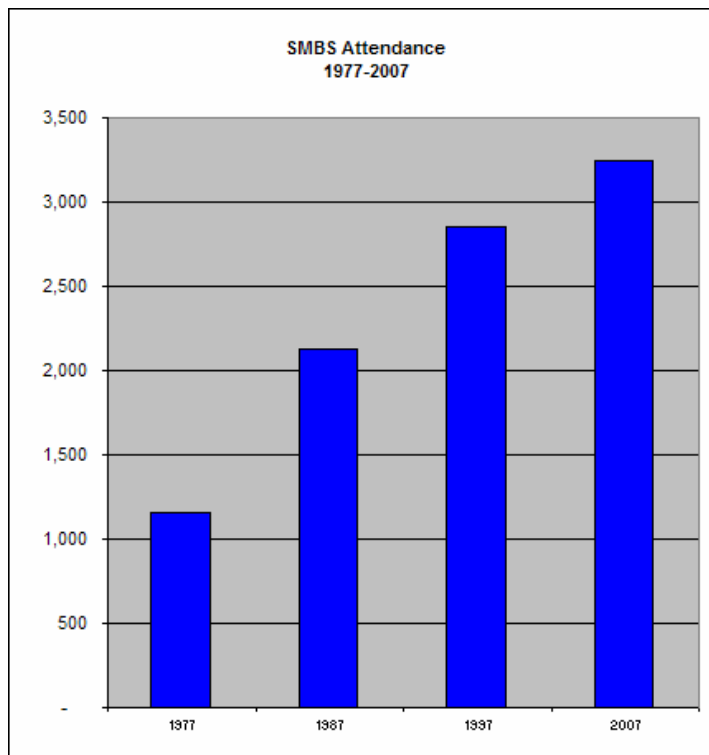


figure 3

The next graph traces the total offerings giving over the past three decades. From the very first Sunday Green Acres first constituted in 1955, the church has been able to provide the financial support necessary to carry on the ministry. This is one

of the most unselfish, generous churches in America. In 1977, the church’s offerings totaled about \$1 million. Over this past year, we received an amazing \$21.8 million in offerings.

We’ve seen God-sized financial miracles happen year after year, like paying \$28 million for this Worship Center while earning more interest than we paid! I’m often asked by other pastors, what stewardship “program” we use. I say, “We don’t use a program. We just expect the Lord’s people to bring the Lord’s tithe to the Lord’s house on the Lord’s Day.” It’s pretty simple actually. Those of you who have attended here for years know that I hardly ever say anything about giving. I may preach one message a year on what God’s Word says about giving—that’s all. I just believe that once a person falls head over heels in love with Jesus they will

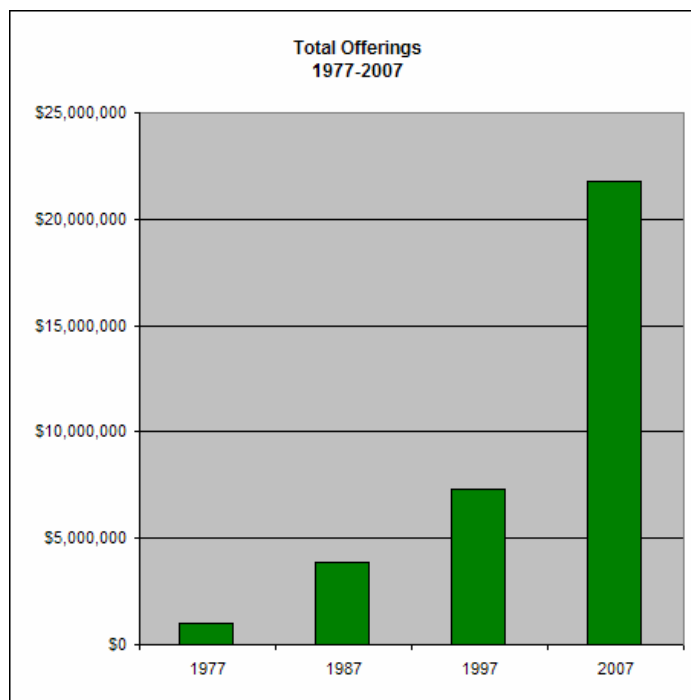


figure 4

give generously. Where your heart is, that’s where your treasure will be. So we just encourage people to make knowing Jesus the greatest treasure of life.

This final graph (*figure 5*) shows how Green Acres has invested money in Missions over the past 30 years. In 1977, the church spent a little over \$150,000 on Missions, and this past year, we invested \$3.3 million in taking God’s Word to the world. This amount includes our designated gifts to Missions and our World Mission Offering. It also includes the amount that we give to the Cooperative Program. All 45,000 Southern Baptist churches pool some of their resources to support Missions and Christian Education—this pool is called the Cooperative Program. Over the past six or seven years, Green Acres has given more to the Cooperative Program than any church in America.

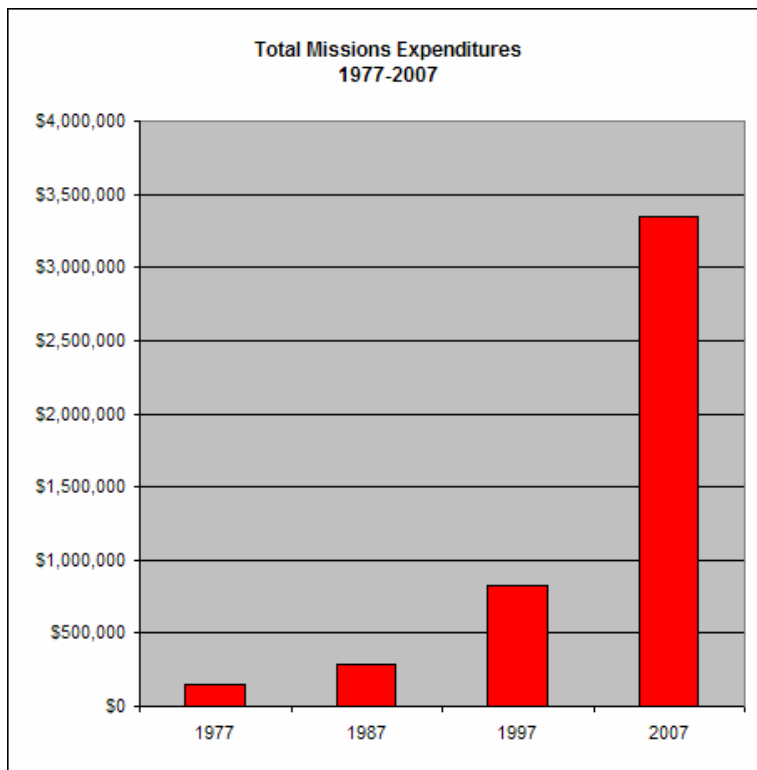


figure 5

These five graphs only tell a small part of the story. There are so many wonderful things going on that you can’t measure with numbers. We’re blessed to have the most talented, committed staff team I’ve ever known anything about. Our Deacon Body is comprised of a godly group of men who understand what it means to be a servant of Christ. There are many other positive factors that can’t be measured objectively: A growing hunger for God’s Word; a desire to spend time in intercessory prayer; all the love that exists among our members; the precious unity we enjoy—those are all blessings that we can’t put on a chart. When I think about everything God is doing I want to say: God is good...all the time. And all the time...God is good! But I don’t want us to spend all our time looking in the rearview mirror, let’s look ahead at some of the challenges we face. Now I want to talk to you about how we must:

2. TRUST GOD FOR THE CHALLENGES BEFORE US!

I want to lay five specific challenges before you as we face the next 12 months. All of these are things only God can enable us to do. None of these challenges can be accomplished in our own strength:

Challenge #1: Ask God to provide the money to pay as much cash as possible on our construction project!

Since this is a family meeting, I want to lay all the facts and figures on the table before you. Let me share with you how much we've received and spent since we launched The Joy of All Generations a year ago. As of a couple of weeks ago, we have received offerings designated for our Building Program totaling about \$8.6 million. Last year we received what we called a love offering for Jesus. The first \$500,000 of that we gave directly to our World Mission Offering. In addition to Missions and our expansion project, we also directed funds to relocate Good Samaritan Outreach Center. Since last year, we have spent \$1.1 million on purchasing the First Assembly of God property and renovating it for our Good Sam ministry. In addition to the Good Sam project, as you've seen the steel going up next door, we've already spent \$5.6 million on the construction done so far. And by the end of 2007 our building costs will go to \$8.6 million.

The good news is that ALL the money we need to complete this project is available. The bad news is it's still in your pockets! Last year we asked members to give and make a three-year commitment to The Joy of All Generations. We had over \$21 million committed over a three-year period. We are going to need everyone who made a commitment to keep giving that amount and even more. By the way, if you've forgotten what you committed, you can call our Finance Office and they'll be happy to remind you of your commitment. In addition, we need all our new members to join us in giving over and above your tithe to support this expansion project.

We aren't in any kind of problem. We have line of credit at Southside Bank and we can access it next year to pay the construction costs until all the commitments are paid. We've even budgeted money in our proposed budget to service this short term debt. However, I believe many of you are glad Green Acres has been totally debt free for the past 15 years or so.

I just believe it's a better use of God's money to spend it on missions and ministries, rather than on interest. And if you agree, then please join me in making a sacrificial gift this Sunday or next to The Joy of All Generations. If you're a new member, ask God what He would have you give to give Him the greatest glory.

Take a moment and hear again God's call to His growing family from Isaiah 54: “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left...for I will make you the everlasting pride and JOY OF ALL GENERATIONS.” (Isaiah 54:2-3; 60:15)

Challenge #2: Ask God to keep us focused on MINISTRY to hurting people

One of the greatest temptations we must resist during a building program is to focus on the building project instead of on ministry. We've got to remember that we aren't in the construction business, and we aren't in the fund raising business—we are in the *people business*—ministering to hurting people.

Do you remember the movie, “Field of Dreams” with Kevin Costner? As he walked by his cornfield he kept hearing a voice saying, “If you build it, they will come.” He built a baseball field, and he was visited by some interesting ball players from the past. Too many churches succumb to the “Field of Dreams” mentality that imagines all we have to do is to build a nice

building and people will come. That’s not true. We must design and provide life-changing ministries that make a difference in the lives of people.

This year we have created a new position for Kevin Burdette. He has become the Minister of Adult Impact. His job is to match new volunteers for ministry projects. If you have an idea for a new ministry to reach people, don’t just sit on it. Tell me about it, tell Ken about it, or tell Kevin about it. That’s how some of the greatest ministries in our church were started. Somebody just like you looked around and said, “You know what, we should be doing THIS ministry.” They came and talked to me or someone else about it. Chances are we said to them, “Great! You’re in charge of that ministry since God put it on your heart. Let us know how we can help!”

Let me be more specific about this challenge. I would love to stand here one year from today and say that over the past twelve months, we have launched 20 new ministries in Green Acres. Let’s ask God to keep us focused on ministry; not construction.

Challenge #3: Ask God to call out at least 500 men from GABC to be spiritual leaders in our community!

One of the greatest movements of God in our church is happening among our men who have stepped to the plate and started meeting with me on Friday mornings for Men’s Fraternity. These past few months, we’ve enlisted about 50 men who’ve agreed to be coaches for small groups of men. But we’re only scratching the surface. I want to challenge all the men who’ve attended Men’s Fraternity to befriend and enlist at least one man who has never been to Men’s Fraternity, and make it your personal goal to include him in Men’s Fraternity when we resume in January.

But this challenge also goes far beyond just meeting on Friday mornings. I want to personally challenge every business owner and businessman in our church to start meeting with men at your place of business and start training them to be spiritual leaders. I am asking God to raise up an army of committed men in East Texas who will be spiritual leaders in their families, in their churches, and in their jobs.

You may be wondering why I’m not challenging our women’s ministry. Well, it’s because they’ve had great participation for years. The men are way behind and we need to catch up and have the same kind of quality and commitment to make disciples that our women’s ministry has demonstrated.

Challenge #4: Ask God to lead at least 5,000 of our members to be personally involved in World MISSIONS!

On December 2, we’re having our annual World Mission Emphasis, and I’ll be saying much more about this, but Dale Pond and our Missions Ministry are launching a new organizational structure. Green Acres has always been involved in Missions, but this new organization will allow us to be much more intentional.

The main change is that we’re identifying 15 Mission Partnerships. These include Local Missions, U.S. Missions, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Belize, Columbia, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia,

East Asia, Central Asia, Iraq, and to an unreached people group, the Bean people. Each of these 15 partnerships will have a coordinator, either a staff minister, or a volunteer minister. And we’re going to ask everyone who attends GABC to identify one of those 15 areas and concentrate on praying for that work. We can’t make our goal of 5,000 supporters without you. We’re going to need every one of you!

I think the world has yet to see what God can do in and through a church that is fully devoted to Missions. May God make us that church!

Challenge #5: Ask God to rekindle our passion to reach MISSING people in our own community!

Sure there are thousands who attend Green Acres, but I’m not satisfied, are you? I want you to look around at the empty seats around you. Look at each seat, and I want you to visualize someone sitting in that seat that hasn’t yet come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. There’s a child in that one, there’s a teenage boy in that one, and a teenage girl in that one. There’s a college student in that one. There’s a single adult in that one. There’s a young couple in those two seats. And there’s a family of five in those five seats right there.

What kind of God is our God? In Luke 15 Jesus said that He is the kind of God who is like a shepherd who has 100 sheep. Just one of the 100 sheep wanders away and gets in trouble. God is the kind of God who leaves the 99 safe in the fold and goes out to rescue the one lost lamb.

All around you at school, and work, in your apartment complex, in your neighborhood, there are thousands of people who are missing. Let’s ask God to give us a burden for those who haven’t yet learned of the hope and forgiveness that can be found in personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

If you grew up like I did during the “space race,” you remember many of the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo Missions. Apollo 11 and 12 were flawless missions to the moon, so when Apollo 13 blasted off on April 11, 1970, hardly anyone noticed—that is until an oxygen tank ruptured endangering the crew. James Lovell calmly uttered those five now-famous words, “Houston, we have a problem.” The NASA engineers started figuring a way to guide them safely home. The moon mission was scrapped and the crew moved into the Lunar Module to survive. But they couldn’t just put the spacecraft in reverse and fly back to earth, they had to fly to the moon and circle around it for the gravitational forces to slingshot it back toward earth. For a few scary days the hearts and prayers of Americans were focused on those three brave astronauts who finally returned safely.

We live in a damaged world where there are thousands of people in our community who need to admit, “God, I’ve got a problem.” It may be a drug problem, a drinking problem, a marriage problem, a money problem, or simply a sin problem. But our thoughts, and prayers and hearts should be focused on guiding them safely home. We should never be satisfied with empty seats,

because they represent missing people who need to know that Jesus cares and Jesus can offer them hope, forgiveness and eternal life.

God has been good to us, but the best is yet to be as we TRUST Him for our future!

OUTLINE

1. THANK GOD FOR THE BLESSINGS BEHIND US!
2. TRUST GOD FOR THE CHALLENGES BEFORE US!

Challenge #1: Ask God to provide the money to pay as much cash as possible on our construction project!

Challenge #2: Ask God to keep us focused on ministry to hurting people

Challenge #3: Ask God to call out at least 500 men from GABC to be spiritual leaders in our community!

Challenge #4: Ask God to lead at least 5,000 of our members to be personally involved in World missions!

Challenge #5: Ask God to rekindle our passion to reach missing people in our own community!



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If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes