

Well, here we are with the first *Laptop* of 2014. I know you're excited! Excited or not, I appreciate your taking the time to read these musings from week to week.

For the past few days, I've been doing a good bit of thinking about several things, namely: (1) where we are in our strategic planning process; (2) what I'm preaching about next Sunday, *Staying in the Center of God's Will*, a title suggested by Kinderman; and (3) reviewing a number of materials in preparation for next Sunday's Church Council meeting, the first of the New Year.

Given those three general topics floating around in my head, I was interested to read Henry Blackaby's devotional thought for today, which had application to all three of them. Here's what he wrote:

**“The world operates on *vision*. God's people live by *revelation*.** The world seeks grand and noble purposes and goals to achieve. People dream up the greatest and most satisfying things in which they can invest their lives. Institutions establish goals and objectives and then organize themselves to achieve them.

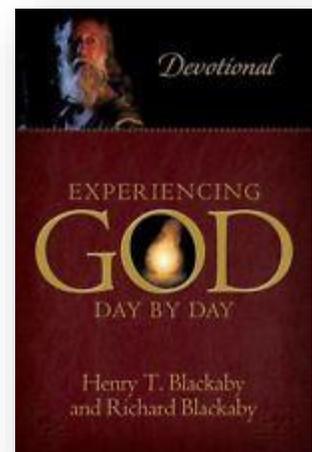
**“God's people function in a radically different way.** Christians arrange their lives based on the revelation of God regardless of whether it makes sense to them. God does not ask for our opinion about what is best for our future, our family, our church, or our country. He already knows! What God wants is to get the attention of His people and reveal to us what is on His heart and what is His will, for God's ways are not our ways! (Isaiah 55:8-9).

“Whenever people do not base their lives on God's revelation, they *‘cast off restraint’* (Proverbs 29:18). That is, they do what is right in their own eyes. They set their goals, arrange their agendas, and then pray for God's blessings. Some Christians are living far outside the will of God, yet they have the audacity to pray and ask God to bless their efforts!

**“The only way for you to know God's will is for Him to reveal it to you. You will never discover it on your own.** When you hear from the Father, you have an immediate agenda for your life: obedience. As the writer of Proverbs observed: *‘Happy is he who keeps the law’* (Proverbs 29:18).”

Later, at the office, I began going through my large “Church Council” file folder, sorting things that needed to be archived and identifying things that still need work. It was in that process that I re-read the report of our 2010 congregational survey and the 2006 Annual Report, and I discovered a self-study from 2000 that I don't remember seeing before.

That report, the ***Columbia Baptist Fellowship Self-Study Final Report, June 2000***, was the result of careful research by our own **Tracy Manning, Ph.D.** and the Applied Social Psychology Class of The College of Notre Dame of Maryland. The report offered careful quantitative and qualitative evaluation of our congregational life more than a dozen years ago, and resulted in sixteen recommendations being made to the Fellowship. Those recommendations appear below, and I was quite interested to discover how “up-to-date” they sound. I'll say more about them after you've read them:



Recommendation #1: Develop a systematic “joining-up” process for new members that includes identifying their interests/talents/hopes, along with socialization on CBF’s founding vision, subsequent history and organizational culture, as well as current ministry areas and future dreams.

Recommendation #2: Find new ways to make “small commitments” easier and more socially acceptable, e.g. a one-month Bible study, a task force to study feasibility of a new ministry, and personally invite people to join them.

Recommendation #3: Interview newer or less involved members in a deliberate effort to identify their gifts and talents/experiences/interests, not with an ulterior motive, but asking how CBF can help them develop in those areas (not necessarily at CBF).

Recommendation #4: Discover where people’s passions are and match those with CBF (or other) ministry areas. If they’re already involved in unexciting areas, help to get them into ministries that are more energizing for them.

Recommendation #5: Find times and places for people to openly discuss the benefits they’ve gained from participation in CBF activities, similar to but more extensive than mission moments and spontaneous LOVE testimonials.

Recommendation #6: Find ways, like a booth at the Columbia Fair, but on a more regular basis, to put CBF authentically “out there” in the community, particularly where young adults and young families would discover common ground with CBF.

Recommendation #7: Help youth identify how their involvement in youth group can help them and the community.

Recommendation #8: Include youth in significant ways in the larger fellowship, with important roles in CBF activities, rather than in exclusively (or basically) youth activities.

Recommendation #9: Have members invite their children’s friends and children from the local community to more CBF activities than Vacation Bible School. Develop a sequence of low-risk, attractive occasions to follow up with and involve children, gradually including their parents.

Recommendation #10: Conduct a focus group with parents who are currently not very involved with CBF to identify ways CBF could help them as parents. Alternatively, consult with Columbia administrators to see what community and family needs have been identified that CBF could help meet.

Recommendation #11: Ask those at CBF what they would like to be involved in, beyond or instead of what they’re currently doing. Solicit new ministry ideas this way as well.

Recommendation #12: Provide training to those in leadership roles in ways to invite participation and actively solicit others’ input to projects or ministries.

Recommendation #13: Hold ministry fairs to expose people to different ways of being involved at CBF in a friendly, educational, casual, and non-pressured environment.

Recommendation #14: Have visitors’ days for groups, Sunday school classes, programs, inviting people from within and outside of CBF. Try to help visitors meet others in CBF with similar interests, who will then follow up.

Recommendation #15: Tap people for work talents that might extrapolate to a time-limited service, e.g. ask someone who's a manager to consult to a group doing strategic planning for a new community ministry outreach.

Recommendation #16: Have open discussion about CBF past, present, and future, acknowledging and celebrating CBF's liberal/conservative and Southern Baptist/non-Southern Baptist diversity, among others.

What was it like to review those recommendations or to read them for the first time? While I know very little about how CBF responded to that report when it was presented, and only a bit more about what we've done across most of the years since, I was struck by how similar these issues are to the concerns and needs most congregations face most of the time.

And whatever we've done to address these issues for the last fourteen years, most of them remain pretty applicable to our current situation, and they continue to suggest helpful directions for making progress. We've actually done a number of things that are very similar to some of these recommendations in the last two years.

One of the major findings of the research report was that the more involved people were in the life of CBF, the more rewarding they found their participation in the Fellowship and the more ideas they had about how to make things better. The converse was also true. While we've all heard the saying "**you get out of something about what you put into it,**" or words to that effect, this research confirmed that reality yet again.

What we're attempting to do with our current strategic process is to identify a handful of strategic goals that will energize us as a people for the next 5-10 years. One very important way to attend to such matters is to conduct research such as Tracey and her class did for us, and, were they to do the same study again this winter, I suspect that their results would be uncannily similar to what was the case in 2000 . . . so we'd do well to take those recommendations seriously.

All of this research notwithstanding, I still think that Henry is right to say that "**the only way for you to know God's will is for Him to reveal it to you. You will never discover it on your own.**" And it is at this point that I want to invite you to take your involvement in our prayerful conversation to a new level.

As our strategic process moves toward its final stages, I invite you to seek God's guidance with respect to three or four—not more than five—initiatives that will pull us passionately and vibrantly into God's future for CBF. Ask God for guidance that is worthy of significant investments of your own time, talents, and treasure. Listen for insight that captures your imagination and that makes your heart sing.

And as God begins to reveal things to you, share those with members of our strategic team. As a reminder, the persons you have called to this task are Lucille Barnum, Karen Canfield, Ben and Janet Davis, Chima Ebinama, Steve Gore, Imani Henderson, Francine Johnson, and Sam Odulana. Pastor Neville and I round out the group.

**The best is yet to be.** If not you, then *who*? If not now, then *when*?

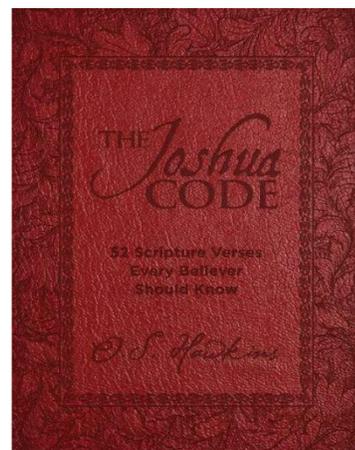
Let's roll!

Dave

A graphic with the text "But Wait..." in a blue, cursive font, and "THERE'S MORE!" in a bold, yellow, blocky font with a red outline and a drop shadow effect.

## A new regular postscript for 2014:

Dr. O. S. Hawkins, CEO of GuideStone Financial Resources (formerly the Southern Baptist Annuity Board), has recently written a book called *The Joshua Code: 52 Scripture Verses Every Believer Should Know*, which you can get online or at Christian booksellers. I found the title interesting, so I bought the Kindle version of the book.



While I encourage you to buy the book, I'm going to tell you each week what Dr. Hawkins's verse for the week is, together with a bit of his commentary about it. Perhaps these vignettes will take each of us deeper into the Word and Heart of God this year. I *know* that memorizing Scripture will do that.

The verse for week 1 is Genesis 1:1, "***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.***" Dr. Hawkins's discussion centers on the fact that each of us has a worldview through which we make what sense we can of life, whether we know what that worldview is or not. And a biblical worldview doesn't really begin with Genesis 1:1, of course. *God has always been*, as Father, Son, and Spirit.

**WHEN?**      *In the beginning*

**WHO?**        *God*

**WHAT?**      *Created the heavens and the earth*

Four words set the stage for all that follows, including your life and my life:

# IN THE BEGINNING . . . GOD!