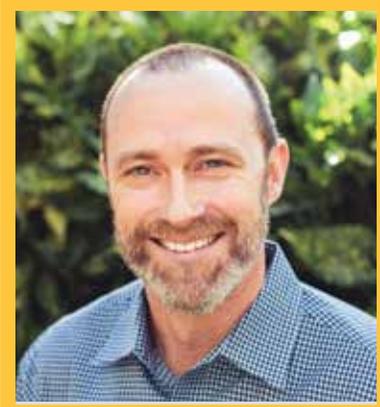


From the President, SBC of Virginia



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they are not alone.

And it happened when [Jesus] was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, You can make me clean." Then [Jesus] put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing, be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him. ~ Luke 5:12-13, NKJV

It's hard to imagine anyone more alone than a leper during the time of Jesus. Those who had leprosy were forbidden to approach anyone. If lepers were walking down the street, they had to cry out, "Unclean!" to prevent anyone accidentally coming into contact with them. They were lonely. They were soul-sick. They were alone.

Although leprosy isn't the plague it once was, people far and wide sing the litany of loneliness and feel the despair of distance. They look across the chasm to community too wide for them to cross. They long for life-shaping, heart-satisfying love and fellowship that seems just out of their reach. They are isolated. They are soul-sick. They are alone.

But Jesus came to declare, **They are not alone!**

Jesus came to bring the joy of belonging to sinners separated from God and from hope by their sin. He came to break through the barrier to belonging and remove the litany of loneliness that shouts in the soul of those far from God. Jesus left the throne room of heaven to walk this earth and die for sinners so that He might tear away every barrier between us and God and one another. Because of sin, they are isolated. They are soul-sick. They are alone.

Jesus declares to those who are far from God: **They are not alone!**

When Jesus reached out to touch the leper, the crowd must have gasped. He reached out beyond the social barriers to help the hopeless find healing—for God's glory and fame. And we must do the same. Our faith is not some pre-packaged commodity to be pulled out only on the weekends or in crisis. Our faith directs our steps through real life and meets real people with purpose on our journey.

They Are Not Alone! This is more than a slogan that marks a theme of an annual gathering of SBC of Virginia churches. It is the heartbeat of heaven and the mission of Jesus given to His Church. As our churches gather together, I pray that we might once again be captured by the song of God's salvation for those who are far from Him.

Lepers expect rejection, but Jesus brings cleansing. Sinners expect condemnation, but Jesus delivers forgiveness. This is the great hope that we live and share. This is our mission to the Commonwealth and to the world. We seek to honor God by connecting people to Jesus.

With Jesus, we declare to the world: **They are not alone!**