

The Top Ten Challenges Facing Free Will Baptist Pastors in 2024

Results from the Great Commission Research Network Survey
Nafwb.org/ExecutiveReport




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This study

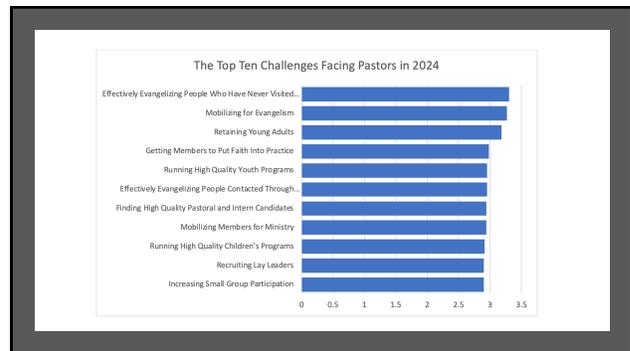
- 79 challenges: 1 not a challenge, 2 a slight challenge, 3 a significant challenge, 4 a very significant challenge, 5 a nearly insurmountable challenge
- 347 respondents
- Data gathered between September 2023 to December 2023
- The top ten challenges includes 11 because two tied for tenth place

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Free Will Baptist Respondents (127)

- Gender: all of the Free Will Baptist pastors were male.
- Church size: significantly more Free Will Baptist churches were between 51-100 versus 101-200 for other churches.
- Church growth: Free Will Baptist church pastors reported significantly slower growth than other pastors.

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Results: Three Clusters

- Evangelism
- Retaining young adults
- Training and discipleship

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Top Ten Challenges Faced by Free Will Baptist Pastors

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Effectively Evangelizing People Who Have Never Visited the Church	1	3	3.27	3.3
Retaining Young Adults	2	3	3.32	3.18
Mobilizing for Evangelism	3	2	3.21	3.27
Finding High Quality Pastoral and Intern Candidates	4	5	3.19	2.84
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Running High Quality Youth Programs	9	6	3.02	2.95
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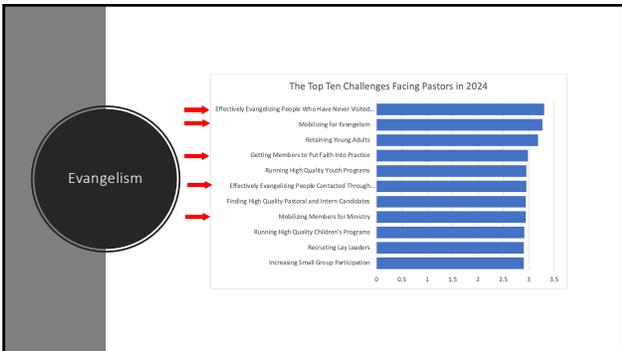
Free Will Baptist pastors identified the same top ten concerns (although in a different order) apart from "Effectively Evangelizing People Contacted Through Outreach Activities," which was the thirteenth highest concern for Free Will Baptist pastors and the fifth overall concern for all pastors

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Significantly Greater Challenges for Free Will Baptist Pastors

Concern	FWB Pastor Rank	Mean	Probability
Finding High Quality Pastoral and Intern Candidates	4	3.19	.005
Recruiting Lay Leaders	5	3.17	.000
Increasing Small Group Participation	6	3.16	.000
Getting Church Members to Put their Faith Into Practice	7	3.15	.010
Mobilizing Members for Ministry	8	3.11	.007
Reducing Member Indifference	11	2.98	.017
Meeting the Demands of My Schedule	15	2.89	.033
Managing My Time	17	2.86	.006
Developing Effective Strategy	19	2.80	.009
Promoting Active Participation in Worship	23	2.76	.013
Using Technology Effectively	24	2.76	.052
Creating High Quality Worship Services	28	2.72	.000
Casting a Clear Vision for the Church	31	2.67	.006
Creating Attractive Programs	35	2.61	.016
Resolving Personal Frustrations	42	2.51	.047
Combatting False Doctrine	47	2.46	.007
Staying Connected to God	55	2.35	.003
Maintaining My Mental Health	56	2.34	.043
Making the Gospel Attractive	67	2.15	.0012

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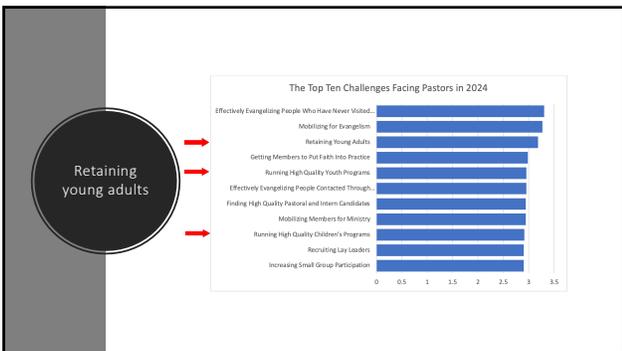
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Evangelism

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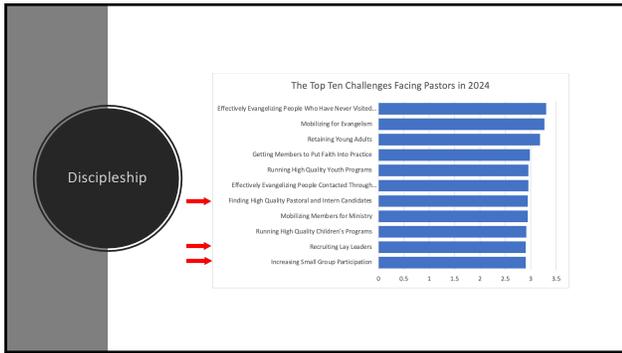
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Retaining Young Adults

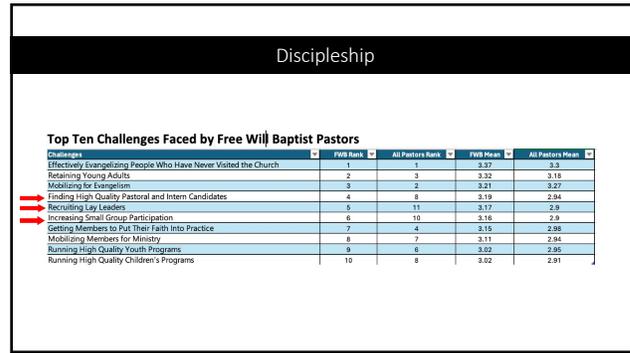
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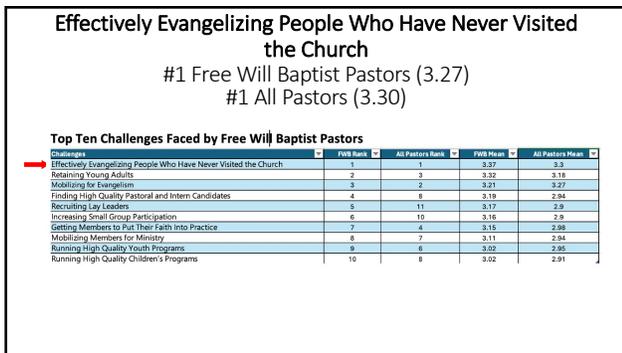
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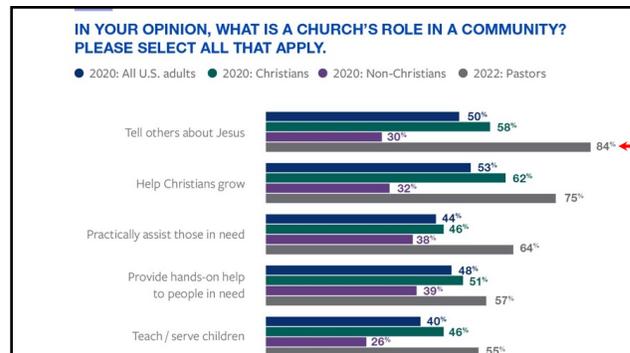
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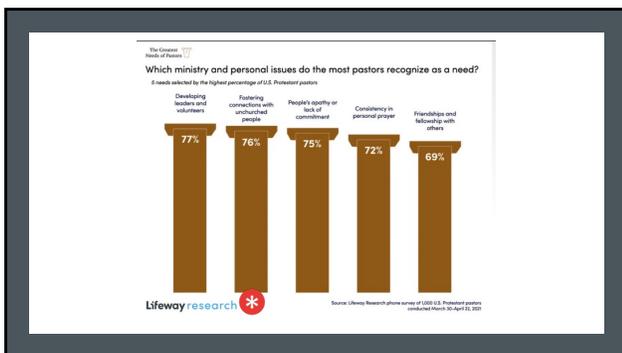
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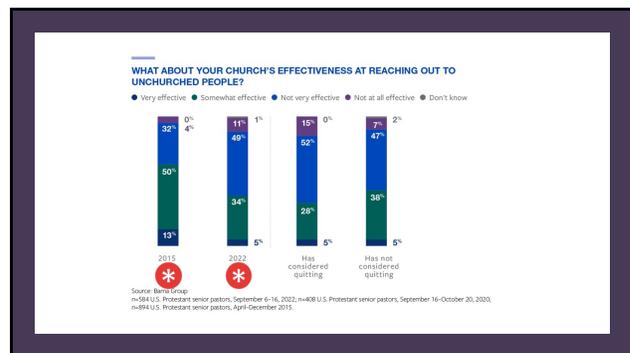
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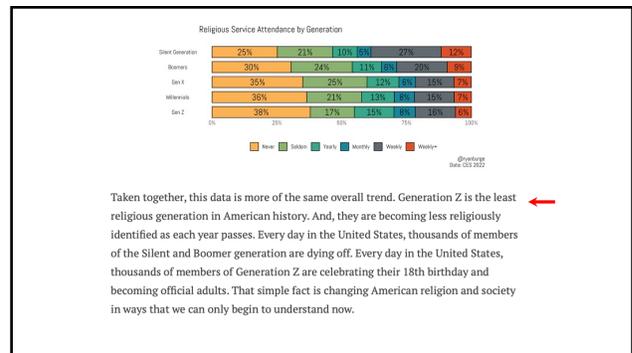
Retaining Young Adults

#2 Free Will Baptist Pastors (3.32)
#3 All Pastors (3.27)

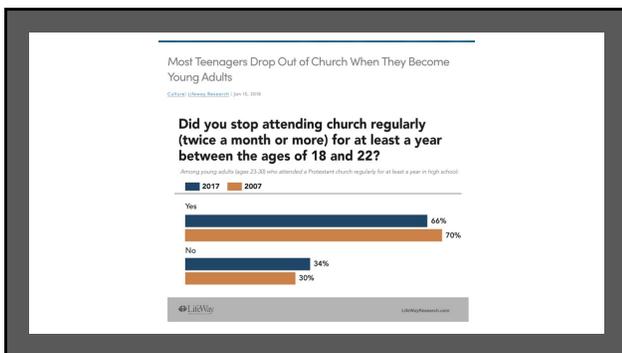
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Running High Quality Youth Programs	9	6	3.02	2.85
Running High Quality Children's Programs	10	8	3.02	2.81

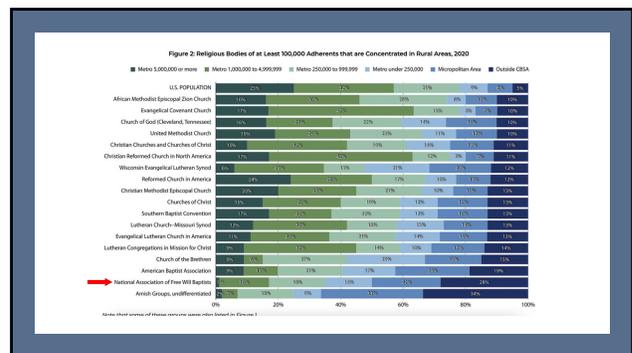
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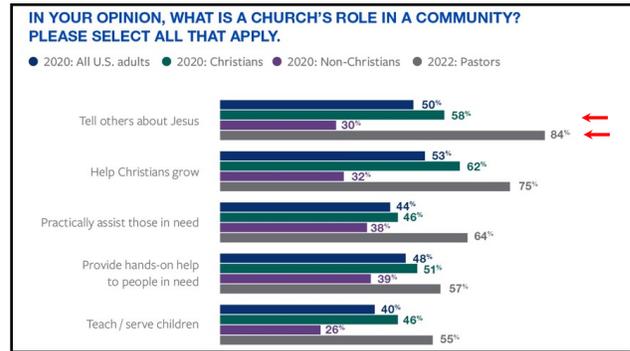
Mobilizing for Evangelism

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Finding High Quality Pastoral and Intern Candidates

#4 Free Will Baptist Pastors (3.19)
#8 All Pastors (2.94)

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*** Rated as a significantly great challenge for Free Will Baptist pastors, probability of .005**

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- The average pastor says they are 17 years away from retiring
- One quarter of pastors plan to retire within the next 7 years

The Pastoral Succession Crisis Is Only Getting More Complicated

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Recruiting Lay Leaders

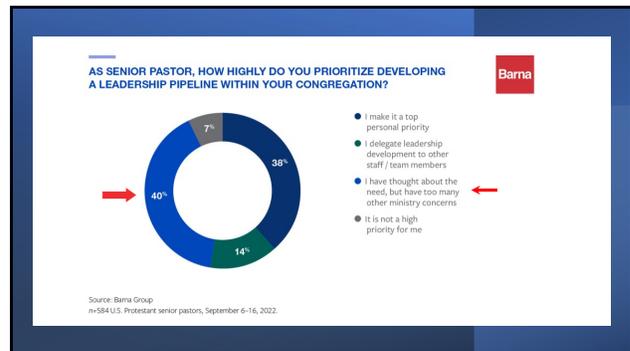
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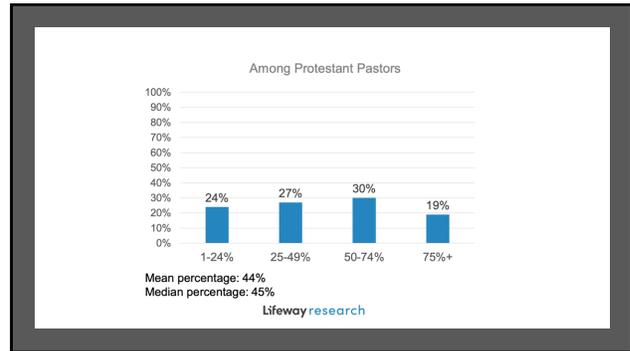
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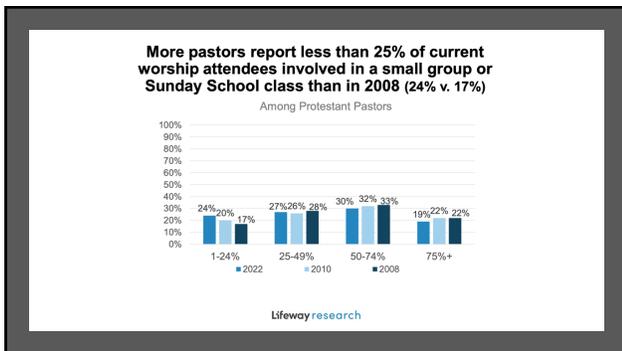
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Getting Members to Put their Faith into Practice

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Getting Members to Put Their Faith Into Practice

Few Pastors Say Younger Generations Are Extremely Effective at Demonstrating Generosity

One in three pastors (34%) feel that older congregants at their church are "extremely" effective at demonstrating generosity—an opinion they are seven times less likely to express about younger congregants (5%). In fact, the slight majority of pastors (56%) only go so far as to call younger congregants "somewhat" effective in this area. While they rarely have any criticism of the generosity of older congregants, one in five pastors (18%) call younger congregations "not very" effective in generosity. There's no sugarcoating it: Pastors don't think highly of younger generations' generosity.

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Mobilizing Members for Ministry

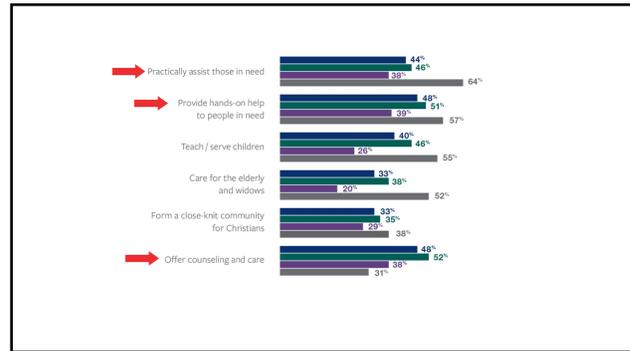
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Running High Quality Youth Programs

#9 Free Will Baptist Pastors (3.02)
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Three Factors that are Key to whether an adult child remains in their faith after high school:

- If the parent attends church at least once a week.
- If the parents reported that their faith was "extremely" important.
- How often they have conversations about religious matters.

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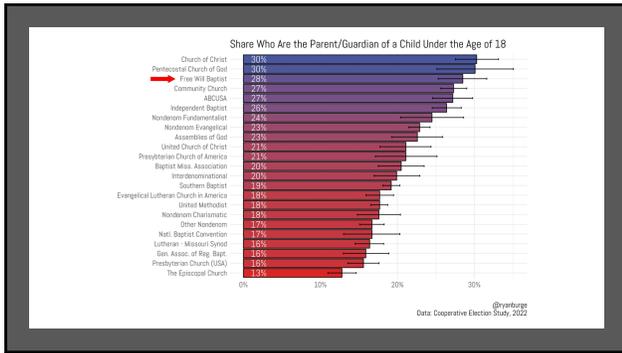
Youth groups partnering with parents has the strongest impact on lasting faith.

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Smaller church sizes

2022 results from the Cooperative Election Survey (CES) indicate that the Free Will Baptist denomination is one of the youngest denominations in America. Twenty-eight percent of Free Will Baptists in the sample reported being a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 18. This is the third highest for any large protestant denomination in the U.S. and even higher than that reported by nondenominational churches (23%).

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Our Sample

99.25% report regular church attendance

87% report being involved in church ministry, most of which involved multiple ministries

85% attend a Free Will Baptist Church

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Reducing Member Indifference

#11 Free Will Baptist Pastors (3.29)
#18 All Pastors (2.81)

Significantly Greater Challenges for Free Will Baptist Pastors

Challenge	FWBP	All Pastors	Significance
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Making the Gospel Attractive	67	2.15	.002

*** Rated as a significantly great challenge for Free Will Baptist pastors, probability of .017**

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Smaller church sizes

- Fifty percent of Free Will Baptist churches are located where 13% of the U.S. population lives. The other 50% of NAFWB churches are located in more populated areas.



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