

*Baptist*  
HISTORY  
&  
HERITAGE



CELEBRATING  
60 YEARS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

VOLUME LX | NUMBERS 2 & 3 | 2025

# CELEBRATING

# 60

# YEARS

*Congregational and Small-Group Discussion Guide  
for Baptist History & Heritage, Volume LX, Numbers 2 & 3 (2025)*

Designed for Sunday school classes, small groups, adult forums, deacon retreats,  
and other congregational conversations.

This guide uses one repeatable 45-minute format for the entire anniversary volume,  
while allowing each article to lean toward the kind of conversation it invites best—  
biography, Baptist identity, public witness, or truthful remembrance.

Each session is designed to stand alone. Leaders may work through the issue in  
order, select a short thematic series, or choose individual articles that connect  
with the life of the congregation.

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This discussion guide is built for churches that want more than a historical overview. Each session invites participants to read an article from the anniversary volume, understand its main argument, and then ask what that article means for congregational life now. The sessions work best when participants read ahead, but leaders can still use them when only a few people have done the reading.

The goal is not to cover every detail in the article. In a 45-minute gathering, most groups will do better by focusing on the article snapshot, selecting three or four questions, and leaving enough time for closing reflection and prayer.

## Recommended 45-Minute Flow

<b>0-5 min</b>	Opening connection question. Start with experience before moving to analysis.
<b>5-10 min</b>	Leader framing. Summarize the article and name two or three key themes.
<b>10-20 min</b>	Pairs or triads. Let quieter voices respond to one text-centered question first.
<b>20-35 min</b>	Whole-group discussion. Use two to four of the guide questions as time allows.
<b>35-45 min</b>	Closing response and prayer. Name one takeaway, one action step, or one practice to revisit.

## Choosing Sessions by Theme

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Recommended sessions</b>	
Biography and leadership	1. Hezekiah Smith 4. Barbara Jordan	6. Annie Armstrong
Baptist identity and congregational practice	2. Varieties of Freedom 5. Regenerate Church Membership	9. Johnson Amendment
Truthful memory and difficult history	3. Albert Henry Newman 7. With Their Own People	8. Many Voices 10. Antônia Teixeira

## Leader guidance for sensitive sessions

Sessions 7-10 address race, women’s history, political partisanship, sexual abuse, and institutional failure. Name those topics ahead of time. Remind participants to listen carefully, return to the text when conversation becomes abstract or heated, and avoid pressuring anyone to share personal experiences.

# SESSION 1



## Hezekiah Smith of Haverhill

John David Broome | pp. 8-17 | Lens: Biography to discipleship

**SESSION AIM:** To consider what kind of Baptist leadership produces deep local care and long-range missionary impact.

### Article snapshot

Dr. John David Broome portrays Hezekiah Smith as far more than a local pastor. He emerges as founder of the Haverhill church, a preacher of unusual influence, a Revolutionary chaplain, an associational leader, and a tireless missionary presence in New England. This article invites congregations to ask how one leader's faithfulness can strengthen both a single church and a wider Baptist witness.

### Key themes

- ◆ Local ministry and regional influence belong together.
- ◆ Pastoral care, preaching, mission, and institution-building can reinforce one another.
- ◆ A lasting legacy is usually the fruit of steady faithfulness rather than spectacle.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

Who is one church leader—ordained or lay—who helped shape your faith, and what made that person influential?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ What parts of Smith's ministry seem most central to his influence: pastoral care, preaching, public witness, associational leadership, or missionary persistence?
- ◆ How does the article connect Smith's local church work in Haverhill to the wider growth of Baptist life in New England?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ What habits of leadership in this article still translate well into congregational life today?
- ◆ What would a church need to do now if it hopes to cultivate leaders whose ministry outlasts a single generation?

#### *Closing response*

Name one ministry practice your congregation should strengthen if it wants to develop leaders whose influence multiplies beyond the local church.

#### *Prayer focus*

Give thanks for leaders who serve faithfully in both visible and hidden ways.

#### *Facilitator note*

*Do not let the group stop at admiration. Keep asking what this life reveals about the shape of faithful ministry now.*

# SESSION 2



## Varieties of Freedom in the Baptist Experience

Bill J. Leonard | pp. 18-33 | *Lens: Identity and practice*

**SESSION AIM:** To help participants name the kinds of freedom Baptists cherish and test how those convictions shape actual congregational life.

### Article snapshot

Dr. Bill Leonard argues that freedom is not a side theme in Baptist life but one of its defining threads. This article moves from God's freedom to soul liberty, freedom in the church, freedom for ministry, and freedom in relation to the state. At the same time, Leonard is clear that Baptist freedom is cumbersome, sometimes divisive, and never a license for indifference or selfishness.

### Key themes

- ◆ Freedom is woven through Baptist theology, church life, and public witness.
- ◆ Soul liberty and congregational freedom depend on trust in the people of God.
- ◆ Baptist freedom requires responsibility, discernment, and room for dissent.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

When you hear the phrase 'Baptist freedom,' what comes to mind first—and what concerns you about it?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ Which forms of freedom does Leonard describe, and how are they related to one another?
- ◆ Why does the article insist that freedom is essential to Baptist faith rather than an optional distinctive?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ Where can a congregation confuse Christian freedom with personal preference or individualism?
- ◆ How can a Baptist church make room for disagreement without turning every difference into division?

#### *Closing response*

Identify one practice in your church that protects Baptist freedom well and one practice that may quietly weaken it.

#### *Prayer focus*

Ask for freedom joined to humility, courage, and love for the neighbor.

#### *Facilitator note*

*Keep bringing the discussion back to concrete church practices such as membership, preaching, decision-making, and public witness.*

# SESSION 3



## Albert Henry Newman

Glenn Jonas | pp. 34-56 | *Lens: History and discernment*

**SESSION AIM:** To explore how Baptists tell their story and how conviction can both strengthen and distort historical memory.

### Article snapshot

Dr. Glenn Jonas presents Albert Henry Newman as one of the most important Baptist historians of his era—a general church historian, a pioneer in Anabaptist studies, and a major interpreter of Baptist origins. This article shows both Newman’s scholarly rigor and his Baptist commitments, making it an ideal conversation starter about how churches remember their past honestly without turning history into self-defense.

### Key themes

- ◆ Historical interpretation is never value-free, even when it is careful and learned.
- ◆ Love for a tradition can sharpen research, but it can also create blind spots.
- ◆ Congregations need truthful memory, not merely heroic memory.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

Why do churches care so much about their origin stories?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ What made Newman such an influential historian within Baptist life and beyond it?
- ◆ How does the article show the relationship between Newman’s scholarship and his Baptist convictions?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ When does strong commitment to a tradition help people read history well, and when can it make them selective or defensive?
- ◆ How can a congregation teach Baptist heritage gratefully while still telling the truth about complexity, conflict, and change?

#### *Closing response*

Name one part of Baptist heritage you would want to preserve with gratitude and one inherited story you think should always be re-examined carefully.

#### *Prayer focus*

Pray for the humility to remember the past truthfully and to learn from it wisely.

#### *Facilitator note*

*Translate ‘historiography’ into ordinary language. This session is really about how churches remember, interpret, and tell their story.*

# SESSION 4



## The Life and Times of Barbara Jordan: A Twentieth-Century Baptist and Political Pioneer

Bonnie Oliver-Brandon | pp. 57-71 | Lens: Biography and public witness

**SESSION AIM:** To consider how Baptist faith can shape public vocation marked by moral courage, discipline, and service to the common good.

### Article snapshot

Dr. Bonnie Oliver-Brandon traces Barbara Jordan's formation, gifts, and public life with special attention to her Baptist heritage, rhetorical power, and constitutional vision. This article presents Jordan not simply as a successful politician but as a moral leader whose faith informed her convictions about justice, dignity, and democratic responsibility. It offers churches a way to discuss vocation beyond the walls of the congregation.

### Key themes

- ◆ Faith can shape public leadership without collapsing into partisanship.
- ◆ Moral courage is formed long before it is tested in public life.
- ◆ Churches help prepare people for vocations in law, politics, education, and public service.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

Who has modeled public courage for you, and what made that person trustworthy?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ What parts of Barbara Jordan's early formation seem most important to the leader she became?
- ◆ What does the article suggest about the relationship between Barbara Jordan's Baptist identity and her public witness?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ What is the difference between partisan ambition and principled public service?
- ◆ How can a congregation encourage young people to see public leadership as a Christian vocation rather than as a compromise of faith?

#### *Closing response*

What trait from Barbara Jordan's life would you most want a younger generation in your church to emulate?

#### *Prayer focus*

Pray for leaders who speak with integrity and use authority for the good of others.

#### *Facilitator note*

*Keep the session focused on formation, vocation, and moral witness rather than on current debates.*

# SESSION 5



## Arguing Regenerate Church Membership: Baptist Identity during Its First Decade, 1610-1620

Bill Pitts | pp. 72-93 | Lens: Identity and practice

**SESSION AIM:** To understand why believer's baptism and regenerate church membership became foundational markers of early Baptist identity.

### Article snapshot

Dr. Bill Pitts argues that the early Baptist rejection of infant baptism was grounded in a deeper claim about the church itself: the church should be made up of people who have consciously responded to Christ in repentance and faith. By tracing debates among early Baptists and related dissenters, this article shows that baptism was understood not as the beginning of faith but as its sign and consequence.

### Key themes

- ◆ Early Baptist identity was rooted in a vision of a regenerate church.
- ◆ Believer's baptism was tied to conversion, confession, and discipleship.
- ◆ Questions about church membership are never merely procedural; they express theology.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

Why do questions about baptism and membership still matter so much in Baptist life?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ According to Dr. Pitts, why is the debate about infant baptism really a debate about the nature of the church?
- ◆ What did early Baptists change in the relationship between faith and baptism?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ What are the strengths and challenges of insisting that church membership rest on personal confession and discipleship?
- ◆ Where might contemporary Baptist churches drift away from the vision of regenerate church membership even while keeping Baptist language?

#### *Closing response*

Name one membership practice your congregation might revisit if it wants its theology and its habits to align more closely.

#### *Prayer focus*

Pray for churches to join conviction with grace, clarity, and pastoral wisdom.

#### *Facilitator note*

*Use ordinary church language. Participants do not need to master every seventeenth-century figure in order to grasp the article's central claim.*

# SESSION 6



## Building a Publishing Empire: The Annie Armstrong Era of WMU, SBC

Carol Crawford Holcomb | pp. 94-115 | Lens: Leadership, mission, and stewardship

**SESSION AIM:** To recognize how mission work depends on organizational imagination, communication, and often-overlooked forms of leadership.

### Article snapshot

Dr. Carol Holcomb shows Annie Armstrong as a gifted strategist, organizer, communicator, and fundraiser whose work helped build the Woman's Missionary Union into a far-reaching publishing and financial enterprise. This article highlights the power of correspondence, promotion, and administration in mission work, while also revealing the gendered limits and conflicts Annie Armstrong faced within Baptist life.

### Key themes

- ◆ Mission is sustained by systems, communication, and stewardship as well as inspiration.
- ◆ Women's leadership has often shaped Baptist life even when it was not fully recognized.
- ◆ Behind-the-scenes labor can become a major force for congregational and denominational change.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

What kinds of ministry leadership are easiest for churches to notice—and which kinds are easiest to overlook?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ What gifts made Annie Armstrong especially effective in building WMU's publishing and fundraising work?
- ◆ What does the article reveal about the relationship between practical administration and missionary vision?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ Why do churches often celebrate public-facing leadership more readily than organizing, budgeting, correspondence, and planning?
- ◆ What hidden or under-valued forms of leadership in your congregation deserve greater gratitude and support?

#### *Closing response*

Identify one ministry in your church that would become stronger if administrative and communication work were treated as ministry rather than mere maintenance.

#### *Prayer focus*

Give thanks for those who build, organize, and sustain ministry from behind the scenes.

#### *Facilitator note*

*Do not reduce the session to personality. Keep attention on the structures, labor, and stewardship that made ministry possible.*

# SESSION 7



## “With Their Own People”: Mexican-American, African-American and Anglo Baptists in Texas, 1900-1965

David J. Cameron | pp. 116-129 | Lens: Truthful memory and racial justice

**SESSION AIM:** To tell the truth about Baptist cooperation, paternalism, segregation, and the unfinished work of shared ministry.

### Article snapshot

Dr. David Cameron examines efforts at cooperation among Anglo, African-American, and Mexican-American Baptists in Texas while showing how those efforts were repeatedly limited by segregation, paternalism, unequal power, and fears about the loss of autonomy. This article makes clear that some real partnership did occur, but it also insists that much Baptist cooperation remained separate, unequal, and constrained.

### Key themes

- ◆ Cooperation without shared power can still preserve inequality.
- ◆ Autonomy can be a protection for marginalized communities when dominant groups are paternalistic.
- ◆ Truthful memory about race requires more than celebrating scattered moments of progress.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

When people say a church or denomination was ‘making progress,’ what kinds of evidence should we look for?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ What forms of cooperation across racial and ethnic lines does the article describe, and where did those efforts fall short?
- ◆ Why did many Black and Mexican-American Baptists pursue collaboration while still fearing the loss of autonomy and cultural integrity?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ What does paternalism look like in church life, even when people claim they are trying to help?
- ◆ What would equal-footing ministry and shared leadership require in a congregation or association today?

#### *Closing response*

Name one concrete step a church could take to move from good intentions to shared responsibility and mutual respect.

#### *Prayer focus*

Pray for honesty about the past and courage to practice shared ministry in the present.

#### *Facilitator note*

*Name the topic in advance and keep the group from rushing to self-congratulation or self-defense. Let the text do its work.*

# SESSION 8



## Many Voices: The Complexity of Baptist Women's History

Mandy McMichael | pp. 130-143 | Lens: History, interpretation, and inclusion

**SESSION AIM:** To broaden the way congregations think about Baptist women's history and to ask whose voices shape the stories we tell.

### Article snapshot

Using a contemporary Baptist controversy as an entry point, Dr. Mandy McMichael argues that Baptist women's history is not one story told one way. It is diverse, contested, and inseparable from Baptist history as a whole. This article pushes readers beyond isolated biographies toward a fuller account of women as interpreters, witnesses, critics, organizers, and participants in the life of the church.

### Key themes

- ◆ There is no single way to be a Baptist woman and no single way to tell that history.
- ◆ Women's voices are essential for understanding the whole Baptist story.
- ◆ Careful history attends to complexity, conflict, and change rather than flattening them.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

Whose stories get told most often in your church's memory—and whose stories are easy to miss?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ Why does Dr. McMichael argue that Baptist women's history cannot be reduced to a handful of biographies?
- ◆ What does the article reveal about the variety of responses, experiences, and convictions among Baptist women?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ Which women's voices are easiest for churches to celebrate, and which are easiest to ignore or sideline?
- ◆ How would your congregation's self-understanding change if women were treated not only as participants in Baptist history but as central interpreters of it?

#### *Closing response*

Identify one woman or one overlooked group of women whose story your congregation should recover, teach, or honor more fully.

#### *Prayer focus*

Pray for ears to hear voices that have been neglected and wisdom to tell the church's story more fully.

#### *Facilitator note*

*This session can surface pain or defensiveness. Keep the focus on listening carefully and resisting simplistic narratives.*

# SESSION 9



## Baptists and the Johnson Amendment

J. David Holcomb | pp. 144-157 | Lens: Public witness and church-state discernment

**SESSION AIM:** To examine Baptist tensions around political speech, religious liberty, and the risk of letting partisan agendas shape congregational life.

### Article snapshot

Dr. David Holcomb traces the origins of the Johnson Amendment and explores Baptist debates about whether it protects churches or unfairly restricts them. This article distinguishes between moral witness from the pulpit and direct partisan intervention, and it places the controversy within the larger Baptist tradition of religious liberty and church-state separation. It is a strong entry point for conversations about politics and the church.

### Key themes

- ◆ Baptists have long valued both free religious expression and distance from state control.
- ◆ Prophetic speech is not the same thing as partisan endorsement.
- ◆ Churches are vulnerable to manipulation when they become vehicles for narrow political agendas.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

What is the difference between a church speaking to moral issues and a church functioning like a campaign platform?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ How does the article explain the origins of the Johnson Amendment and the main lines of the Baptist debate around it?
- ◆ Why does Holcomb treat church-state separation as a Baptist concern rather than a secular intrusion?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ What risks arise when congregations become identified too closely with a party, candidate, or political bloc?
- ◆ How can a church speak clearly about justice, morality, and public life without letting partisanship become its practical theology?

#### *Closing response*

Name one principle your congregation should keep in view when thinking about preaching, politics, and public witness.

#### *Prayer focus*

Pray for courage to speak truthfully and restraint to resist the lure of partisan power.

#### *Facilitator note*

Ask the group to stay with the article's historical argument. This session works best when it avoids becoming a debate over current candidates.

# SESSION 10



## Rufus Burleson and the “Brazilian Girl”: The Story of Antônia Teixeira

Mikeal Parsons | pp. 158-171 | Lens: Truthful memory, power, and accountability

**SESSION AIM:** To face how institutions protect power, why painful stories are often buried, and what justice-shaped remembrance requires.

### Article snapshot

Dr. Mikeal Parsons retells the story of Antônia Teixeira by centering the young woman whose experience was minimized while institutional leaders and cultural power shaped the public memory of the case. This article exposes the entanglement of race, gender, reputation, and institutional protection, and it presses readers to ask what honest remembrance and accountability look like in Christian communities.

### Key themes

- ◆ Institutional memory often protects the powerful unless it is intentionally corrected.
- ◆ Race, gender, and status can shape who is believed, defended, or forgotten.
- ◆ Christian communities need practices of truth-telling, care, and accountability.

### Discussion prompts

#### *Opening connection*

Why do institutions so often remember their heroes more easily than the people who were harmed in their story?

#### *Understanding the article*

- ◆ How does the article change when Antônia’s perspective, rather than institutional reputation, becomes the center of attention?
- ◆ What roles do race, gender, power, and prestige play in the way this story unfolded and was later remembered?

#### *Connecting to congregational life*

- ◆ What practices can churches, schools, or ministries adopt to resist the temptation to protect image at the expense of truth?
- ◆ What does justice-filled remembrance require when a community uncovers harm in its own past?

#### *Closing response*

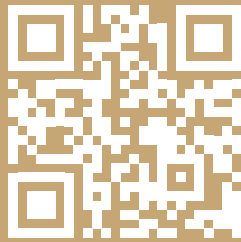
Name one commitment a Christian institution should make if it wants remembrance to lead to repentance, repair, and changed practice.

#### *Prayer focus*

Pray for survivors, for truthful memory, and for institutions willing to choose accountability over self-protection.

#### *Facilitator note*

*Tell participants in advance that this session addresses sexual abuse and institutional failure. Do not pressure anyone to disclose personal experiences.*



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