

Salem Baptist Church pairs worship and the Word in new 'Fruitful' series

Pastor Jarvis Ellis, Minister of Music Ananias Montague discuss collaboration, creativity and what they hope worship produces beyond Sunday morning

OMAHA, NE, UNITED STATES, October 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- At Salem Baptist Church, Sunday worship begins long before the first note is played or the first word is preached.

It begins in conversations between the pastor and minister of music, in rehearsals with musicians and singers and in careful planning around a central question: What do people need when they walk through the doors?

For the Rev. Dr. Jarvis A. Ellis Sr., senior pastor of Salem Baptist Church, and Ananias Montague, the church's minister of music, that question has led to a deeper partnership between the pulpit and music ministry.

This summer, the congregation experienced that collaboration through "Summer in the Psalms," a worship and preaching series centered on the Psalms. Scripture was paired with music from multiple genres, including gospel, hymns, contemporary Christian music and familiar songs from popular culture.

Now Ellis and Montague are building on that experience with "Fruitful," a fall series based on Galatians 5 and the fruit of the Spirit.

The two recently discussed what they learned during the summer, why worship requires intentional collaboration and what they hope the next season will produce in the lives of Salem members and the Omaha community.



WORSHIP & WORD SERIES

FRUITFUL:

WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE BY THE SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit doesn't merely change what we do; He changes who we are.

FOUNDATIONAL TEXT: GALATIANS 5:22-23

Fruit isn't manufactured—it grows when we remain connected to Christ.

SEPTEMBER		OCTOBER		NOVEMBER	
SEPT. 13	LOVE "Love That Looks Like Jesus" Spirit-filled love isn't based on how people treat us; it's based on how Christ has loved us.	OCT. 4	PATIENCE "The Power of Patience" Sometimes God develops us while we're waiting for what we're asking Him for.	NOV. 1	GENTLENESS/MEEKNESS "Gentle Strength" Gentleness isn't weakness; it is strength under the control of the Holy Spirit.
SEPT. 20	JOY "Joy in the Middle of It" Biblical joy isn't dependent upon circumstances—it is rooted in Christ.	OCT. 11	PASTORAL ANNIVERSARY Guest Preacher: Pastor Sam N. Winston, Dayton, OH	NOV. 8	SELF-CONTROL "Mastering Me" If the Spirit controls us, we don't have to be controlled by our appetites, emotions, impulses or circumstances.
SEPT. 27	PEACE "Peace in the Storm" Jesus can give us peace even when He doesn't immediately change the storm.	OCT. 18	KINDNESS & GOODNESS "Goodness & Kindness on Display" The goodness of God should become visible through the lives of His people. Kindness reaches people who may never be able to repay us.	NOV. 15, 22 & 29	A SEASON OF THANKSGIVING We will close the month by focusing on what it means to live thankfully as children of God.
THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, LONGSUFFERING, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS AND SELF-CONTROL. — GALATIANS 5:22-23		FAITHFULNESS "Faithfulness: Can God Count on You?" Faithfulness means being dependable to God even when nobody is watching.		<i>As we remain connected to Christ, the Holy Spirit will grow His fruit in and through us every day.</i>	
LET'S GROW TOGETHER.		LET'S SERVE TOGETHER.		LET'S MAKE AN IMPACT TOGETHER.	
MAY THIS SEASON HELP US BECOME NOT ONLY HEARERS OF THE WORD, BUT PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES VISIBLY BEAR THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT.				<i>"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit." — JOHN 15:5 (NKJV)</i>	

The schedule for the "Fruitful," a fall series for the remainder of the year.

Ellis: Where did the idea for “Summer in the Psalms” begin?

Montague: We had already been talking about doing something together, and “Summer in the Psalms” gave us a chance to intentionally unite the Word and worship.

The Psalms gave us so much to work with because they touch almost every part of human life. There is joy, struggle, confidence, questions and trust in God. Musically, that allowed us to explore a lot of different directions while still being connected to the Scripture and the message.

Ellis: One of the turning points for me came when some of our team traveled to Houston for the IC3 conference. I attended a session where the discussion focused on the relationship between the minister and the minstrel — the pastor and the minister of music. The question was: What could happen if the two sat down weekly and intentionally planned worship together?

When we came back to Omaha, I told you we needed to do that. What do you think people are most connected with during the summer?

Montague: I learned to look beyond the title of a song and really examine the lyrics.

We used Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On,” for example. When you listen to the words and then consider what Scripture is saying, you can discover meaningful connections.

The Psalms also make things personal. When Scripture says, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help,” people can see themselves in that. They can connect their own lives to the text.

The music was not separate from the message. Worship and the preached Word were working together.

Ellis: That stretched me as a preacher, too. Every week I was asking, “How do I bring this text alive? How do I help people see themselves in Scripture?” People were stopping us after worship and talking about what they were experiencing. What was that like for you?

Montague: It was a blessing.

People would pull me aside and say how much they enjoyed worship or how much the series meant to them.

What made it especially meaningful was that we could draw from different genres. We were not limited to one particular sound.

You have challenged Salem to think about reimagining worship, and this gave us a chance to do

that. We could take music people know, introduce something they might not expect and connect it back to Scripture.

Then you see the congregation respond. That was powerful.

Ellis: Salem is a multigenerational church with a rich history of worship and music. You have served here for 18 years. How do you continue to stay innovative while serving people across generations?

Montague: First, it is God.

I am also grateful Salem gives me the resources and space to grow. I study what other people are doing. I attend conferences. I watch different platforms and productions.

I may look at the Stellar Awards, the Oscars or other major productions. It is not because everything belongs in worship. It is because there are things we can learn about creativity, presentation and excellence.

Then I ask, "What can we learn and appropriately bring back to Salem?"

I am grateful to serve a church that gives us room to learn and create.

Ellis: Salem has made that investment intentionally. Our leadership has encouraged us to learn, develop and bring those ideas back to Salem and the Omaha community.

Now we are moving into "Fruitful," which focuses on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Why do you think this series matters?

Montague: The fruit of the Spirit takes me back to what I learned as a child in Sunday school and what my parents taught us growing up.

Now we get to explore those lessons in a fresh way.

We can once again connect the Word with a diverse collection of music that helps people relate to what is being taught. I think people will be surprised by some of the music and some of the sermon titles.

Ellis: For me, the fruit of the Spirit gets to the heart of discipleship. I do not believe the role of a believer is simply to come to church. We are called to be the church.

One way we measure spiritual growth is by asking: What is growing in you?

Do I have more love? Is there more joy? Do I have peace? Am I becoming more patient? Am I

learning self-control?

We can attend church every Sunday and still have to ask whether our lives are producing evidence of what God is doing within us.

Ellis: People come into worship carrying things we may never know about. What do you see as your responsibility when someone walks through Salem's doors on Sunday morning?

Montague: People bring a lot with them.

They have lived through Monday through Saturday before they ever get to Sunday. They may be carrying disappointment, stress, family concerns, financial pressure or grief.

Our responsibility is to help create an atmosphere where they can bring those burdens to God.

We want people to worship, receive the Word and leave differently than they came.

That does not mean every situation changes instantly, but we know God is able. If we can help somebody encounter God, lay something down and receive strength for another week, then worship has accomplished something meaningful.

Ellis: I know that personally. There have been Sunday mornings when I have stepped into the pulpit carrying my own concerns and the responsibility of caring for other people. Then worship begins, and I can feel something shift.

People may not always understand how important worship is in preparing the atmosphere for the Word. It does not only shift the congregation. It shifts the preacher, too. The preacher needs worship. That is where I believe Salem is headed. Sunday morning should be an experience, not entertainment, but an encounter with God.

"Summer in the Psalms" helped us discover what can happen when worship and the Word intentionally work together. Now "Fruitful" asks the next question: After we worship, after we hear the Word and after we leave the sanctuary, what is growing in us? Because we are not just trying to have church. We are trying to become the people God has called us to be.

WATCH THE FULL INTERVIEW ON YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHiWoUzfqdA>

About Salem Baptist Church

The Salem Baptist Church is transforming lives by Exalting the Savior, Evangelizing the Lost, Equipping the Saints, and Expanding the Kingdom of God. Salem is home to the most prominent African American church population in Nebraska. The church was founded in 1922 and has played essential roles in the history of African Americans in Omaha and the city's religious community. Church leadership has impacted the city in a variety of ways. Salem's long-time

senior pastor Rev. J.C. Wade was recognized in the [Congressional Record](#) in 2000.

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