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More than 8,000 messengers in Anaheim are ready to ask questions, propose ideas for changes and use their ballots during the 2022 SBC Annual Meeting.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Voicing concerns

Microphones get workout during SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim

Southern Baptist messengers came to Anaheim prepared to engage with those on the platform, and for two full days they did just that.

Southern Baptist Convention President Ed Litton, Committee on the Order of Business Chairman Steven Bates and others involved with organizing the 2022

SBC Annual Meeting on June 14–15 said they anticipated increased interest and built in extra time for discussion.

Messengers lined up at the microphones almost every time the schedule allowed for floor discussion. Some suggested wording changes to resolutions.

Some pushed back against proposals. Some requested clarification at various points. And several expressed frustrations.

In a few cases, messengers used the opportunity to lobby for a cause or challenge an entity leader. Seminary presidents and others were ques-

tioned about the extent of their pro-life views and how they see the role of women in church ministry positions.

Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, is currently being assessed by the SBC

Credentials Committee for ordaining three women and adding pastor to their titles.

Pastor Rick Warren made a surprise showing June 14 to highlight the ministry work Saddleback has done. (TAB)



Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, reads what he describes as a "love letter" to Southern Baptists.

Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist



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Sexual Abuse Task Force report approved

Southern Baptist Convention messengers took a “good first step” in dealing with sexual abuse issues within the denomination, said Bruce Frank, pastor of Biltmore Baptist Church in Arden, North Carolina, and chairman of the Sexual Abuse Task Force.

During the June 14 session of the SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim, messengers overwhelmingly approved the two recommendations (read full text at tabonline.org/challenges-formal-recommendations) proposed by SATF to appoint an Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force and develop a Ministry Check database of the “credibly accused.” The approval came after lengthy discussion and one amendment to tweak the wording to change “Guidepost recommendations” to “best practices.”

“The first step is the hardest,” Frank acknowledged during a press conference following the vote. “This was an opportunity for messengers to take a step down the right road. I am proud of them for doing it,” he said.

Responding to a question on how history will view what happened, Frank said, “You could sense in the room [messengers] wanted to do the right thing. It was not even close.”

Rachel Denhollander of North Carolina, a consultant for SATF and a sexual abuse survivor, said she hopes history will “show that ballots raised showed survivors that they were believed.”

The two recommendations proposed by SATF were voted on as one recommendation. A motion to divide the question was ruled out of order because each recommendation was dependent upon the other.

‘Credibly accused’

Concerns about the “credibly accused” description of who would be included in the database were addressed by Frank during the report.

“A mere accusation does not put anyone on any list,” he said, noting the standards will be the same as



Chairman Bruce Frank fields messengers’ questions after delivering the Sexual Abuse Task Force’s recommendations at the SBC Annual Meeting.

those used “with a civil judgment ... only when evidence proves that more likely than not sexual abuse took place.”

The online database will provide a record of pastors, denominational workers, ministry employees and volunteers who at any time have been credibly accused of sexual abuse, and who have been or are associated with a cooperating Southern Baptist church or entity, the recommendation states.

Frank said the new task force will determine the details and timing of the database. The task force will be appointed by newly elected SBC President Bart Barber.

“We hope it can begin as quick as we can ... but it has to be done right,” Frank cautioned. “It will take time.”

Responding to a question about whether what SATF learned could have helped pastors 15 to 20 years ago, Marshall Blalock, vice chair and pastor of First Baptist Church Charleston, South Carolina, responded in the affirmative.

“It would have made a significant difference,” he said.

Noting that his church dealt with an abuse issue in its school several

years ago, he said the first thing they did was to notify authorities, but the next thing he did was call the church’s attorney to see what to do next. “It wasn’t that I didn’t care. I didn’t know.”

Blalock said he would now focus on providing the best kind of care he could for the abused person.

Prior to the vote Frank acknowledged the need for Southern Baptists as a whole “to humble ourselves.”

“Make no mistake, we are in a kairos moment ... a seminal moment right now,” he said. “Today, we will choose between humility or hubris ... genuine repentance or continually being passive in our approach — glory of God and good of people — or choose again business as usual.

“All of that [in the report] happened on our watch,” he said. “We are a people of the Book, we should know better than this. James 4:6 says, ‘God opposes the proud but pours out grace to the humble.’ When it says He will give grace, it means to humble ourselves. It doesn’t say pray for humility. It says humble yourself before God ... either we humble ourselves or God will humble us and the way he does that is by humiliating us or putting us in humiliating situations.” (Lonie Wilkey and Jennifer Rash)

The Alabama Baptist

“If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31-32

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

For complete coverage of the 2022 SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim, visit tabonline.org/SBC2022. More stories from the annual meeting will be in next week’s issue of *The Alabama Baptist* as well.

OPINION



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief



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GUEST EDITORIAL

What might happen if God's people truly cried out to Him?

EDITOR'S NOTE — Editors, writers, photographers and a variety of other communicators from across the U.S. shared a press room, media tables and access to those leading various efforts of the recent Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Anaheim. We will share coverage and reflections from the annual meeting in future issues of *The Alabama Baptist*. However, for this week's issue, we are featuring fellow editor Shannon Baker's article on one quiet, yet powerful, presentation made in Anaheim. Shannon serves as director of communications and editor of *BRN United for the Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey*. She also is the current president of the Association of State Baptist Publications.

By Shannon Baker
Association of State Baptist Publications

Believing our nation and the Southern Baptist Convention — if things are handled correctly — is on the precipice of revival, revivalist Bill Elliff offered ways communicators and others could prepare to “spread the fame of revival to spread the flame of revival.”

Speaking at a June 13 gathering of editors, Elliff shared how he is seeing some of the same signs of revival he experienced in the early 1970s when God poured out His Holy Spirit through the Jesus Movement.

Elliff, pastor/church director for OneCry! A Nationwide Call for Spiritual Awakening, recounted his time at Ouachita Baptist University where “there was an extraordinary atmosphere of revival,” he said.

“Many of us would pray all night long — long nights on end — and I thought that was just normal,” said Elliff, noting others around the nation were doing the same.

Elliff shared how students responded by confessing sin, getting right with each other and their parents and going to professors and confessing their cheating and dishonesty.

“It was my first taste of what I would call the manifest presence of God,” Elliff said, defining “manifest” as the “unmistakable, clear, visible and omnipresence of God.”

“Just extraordinary moments,” he said tearfully. “We call these moments, if people respond right, revival.”

‘Extraordinary movement’

Elliff shared how Richard Owen Roberts, president and founding director of International Awakening Ministries, defines revival.

“Revival is the extraordinary movement of the Spirit of God

among God's people that produces extraordinary results.”

History has shown how our nation has experienced revivals, where God's people experience God's presence and transformation, that led to spiritual awakenings, where lost people are awakened by the Spirit of God to their lost condition and are miraculously saved, every 30 to 60 years, he said.

The first Great Awakening was in 1735. “When that began to wane, people began to seek the Lord in the late 1700s again and then the Second Great Awakening happened from 1802 to about 1821, the longest movements we've ever had,” Elliff said.

“And when that began to wane a little while later, the 1857–58 prayer and revival happened. And then the Welsh Revival in 1904, which affected the whole world, literally.”

Revival transforms culture, Elliff said. “God accomplished in the Welsh Revival in nine months more than centuries of legislation could accomplish.”

But, he stressed, “Revival is just God. It's God being placed on the throne of our lives and our churches.”

The problem isn't Washington, Hollywood or anything or anyone else, Elliff said, explain-

ing it's God's people not walking with Him.

Elliff shared three things we can do to prepare for revival:

Prepare for revival

First, “understand the preparatory work of God and revival. If you study it, you will see the same pattern. Ten years before every Great Awakening, God raises up voices, God brings the message of repentance to the foreground, and desperation grows, and people don't know what to do ... and then a united cry begins to erupt and then God says, ‘Here's an answer.’”

Next, he said to “pray fervently and don't be a spectator. Be a participant.” Pray for revival in your heart and report out of your experience, as well as what you observe.

Finally, “tell the story and be ready to tell it quickly.” He pointed to the telegraph that was instrumental in spreading the 1857 revival.

“As many men have said before, ‘the fame of revival spreads the flame of revival.’ With that task in mind, tell that story, and tell it well and quickly and get the broadest readership ... that we might see a worldwide movement and the gospel will go to every tongue and tribe.”

'Be changed'

Ed Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, delivers the president's address at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting on June 14.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Litton says Southern Baptists need to have compassion like Jesus

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Ed Litton said he hasn't looked at a car accident the same way since his wife Tammy was killed in one in 2007. And he doesn't look at a homeless person the same way ever since his "prodigal" son lived on the streets of Atlanta for more than a year and a half.

"There are a few times in my life when I have received bad news, really bad news. You have, too," Litton said June 14 during his president's address at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting. "Whatever it is, we often say our hearts were broken, but actually it was not from the heart that we felt it. We felt it in the gut. It is visceral. It's a deep inward feeling rather than intellectual."

Seeing compassion

It's changed the way Litton has compassion for people who are going through what he's gone through. But Jesus has a different kind of compassion, a better kind — because a "gut punch" moved him to action toward all hurting people.

"The word in the Greek language is the word 'splankna.' It literally means the moving of the intestines, pain in the vitals, a gut punch," the

pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Alabama, said, preaching from Matthew 9:35–38. "Jesus had a gut punch in Scripture multiple times."

That gut punch moved Jesus to weep for Jerusalem, to heal the sick, to free the demon possessed.

"Compassion is the hallmark of His life and ministry. It is what drew people to Him. It is what made His preaching different," Litton said.

He said he sees that compassion present in the Southern Baptist Convention in a number of ways.

"I thank God for you. I love you. I love this convention and after serving as president, I tell you that I am not cynical. I believe the greatness of the Southern Baptist Convention is not in our heroes and not in the more famous ones and it's not in all the authors, though those are great people. I am telling you it is the faithful people who serve the Lord, much without recognition," he said. "They are going to ash out in the burned-out homes in their neighborhoods, they are helping the flood victims, they are getting on planes and flying to Poland to help refugees."

As Jesus went about His ministry, He helped and healed people

and He also preached hope to them, Litton said. That's why Southern Baptists are committed to seminary and Bible training.

"This is why we raise up Bible teachers and gospel communicators, because we are a people of the Book and the people of the Word of God. But we also do what Jesus does when we preach," he said. "Our churches exist to be places where the Kingdom is gathered together, as an embassy for neighborhoods and communities, as a place where people come to hear the Word, be changed by the Word and go out living by the Word."

Followers of Jesus must be marked by the same kind of compassion He demonstrated, Litton said.

"Jesus' gut punch was that He saw something, He felt something and He did something. That was His pattern, and it needs to be our pattern too. ... I say this to my people at my church in Alabama, when you see something do not look away."

Feel the gut punch

That's how Southern Baptists need to respond to the recommendations of the Sexual Abuse Task Force, Litton said — to look on with compassion and feel the gut punch of the suffering and trauma.

He said Baptists' compassion cools when they distance themselves from the people who are hurting from all kinds of pain.

Isolation from a suffering world "doesn't build compassion, it builds self-righteousness," he said. "We may yet discover as Southern Baptists that our decline in baptisms is because our people have become separated from the hurt of our communities. It builds a lack of compassion for one another."

'Great Commandment'

Southern Baptists haven't made headlines lately for their compassion and "don't you wish they did? We are not only a Great Commission people, we are a Great Commandment people," Litton said. "And that Great Commandment requires that we have His compassion."

Baptists need Christ's compassion and vision to reach the billions of lost people in the world, Litton said. The two go hand in hand.

"There is no sending and no going without a gut wrenching — gut-wrenching reality of my own sin, the gut-wrenching reality of my own pride, the gut-wrenching reality of idols that need to fall in my life," he said. "We can't say we are the greatest missions sending agency in the world when we have a heart that lacks His compassion and a vision that lacks His vision for the world."

To view a photo gallery from this business session, visit tabonline.org/SBC2022-business-session1.

Are we mixing the Kingdom with culture?

Influence comes from believers' Christlike distinctiveness, Evans says

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Tony Evans, founder and pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, says when two professional football teams hit the field, there's no question — there's about to be three hours of conflict.

"Nothing you can do can ever make those two teams get along because they're headed in two different directions," he said. "One has a goal in this direction, the other has a goal in that direction, which means there's going to be three hours of conflict that is nonnegotiable."

The culture looks like that today, Evans told a full house at the National African American Fellowship's night of worship June 12 at Friendship Baptist Church in Yorba Linda, California.

"Today we are living in a time of conflict, and the teams have decided this is nonnegotiable. The political teams, the Democrats and the Republicans, have decided we can't negotiate the well-being of the American citizens," he said. The same type of nonnegotiable conflict seems to also exist now, Evans asserted, between Black and white, rich and poor and people on each side of the gender issue.

Another team option

But on the football field, there's a third team at play, Evans said — the referees.

"These seven officials are on the field but not of the field," he said. "They're in the middle of the conflict but they're not part of the conflict because these seven officials belong to a different kingdom. You see, 345 Park Avenue in New York is where the NFL offices are. The NFL offices have representatives on the field of play. Those officials are to represent the kingdom in New York in the chaos on the field of play."

Officials might prefer a team, but



Photo by Susan Stevens/The Alabama Baptist

Tony Evans, founder and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, speaks at the National African American Fellowship of the SBC at Friendship Baptist Church in Yorba Linda, California, for a time of worship on June 12.

it's irrelevant because their decisions are made based on their book of governing guidelines, he said.

"They are easily distinguishable in the game, because they wear black and white jerseys that distinguish them from the competing teams on the field," Evans said. "The unfortunate thing in a football game is if the referees decide to join one of the teams. It becomes unfortunate when those who are to be the independent on the field decide to join the jerseys of the competing teams. Because the moment they do that, they have lost their uniqueness, their distinctiveness. And what you find out is that the competing teams use them rather than follow their lead."

Followers of Christ need to remember they operate by a different authority — the kingdom of heaven. They're supposed to represent that Kingdom, not mimic the kingdoms of the culture, Evans said.

But more and more often, referees are trading their uniforms for jerseys and losing their distinctiveness, he explained. "They have

decided to be more Democrat than Christian, or more Republican than Christian, more Black than Christian or more white than Christian."

So, Evans told the crowd, "I'd like to take a few moments and reintroduce you to the Church."

Starting with Matthew 16:13–19, he talked about how Jesus told Peter and the other disciples He was going to build His Church on a rock — this word for "rock" in Greek is translated as a group of stones knitted together to form something bigger than they could form on their own.

Evans said he believes this is what Peter refers to when he writes in his epistles about followers of Christ being "living stones."

'Knitted together'

"The success of what God was building would not be tied to a personality, it would be tied to a conglomerate of individual stones knitted together," Evans said.

This is what Christ intended the Church to be, and it's what He wants the Southern Baptist Convention to be, Evans said. "Jesus said,

'I'm building my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.' Therefore if hell is winning, we must not be building His Church. We must be building our church using His name. He said, 'I will give you the keys to the Kingdom. I'm not going to give you the keys to the culture.'"

Our roadblock

The problem, Evans said, is that Christians have mixed the two kingdoms together.

"We want the Bible, but we want the culture. We want the Bible, but we want the race. We want the Bible, but we want the politics. We are mixing it up," he said.

And when it gets mixed up, it loses its distinctiveness, Evans said. He used an illustration of how the nutritional value of an apple is lost when it's dipped in sugar to become a candied apple. He said that can happen with our Christian distinctiveness and influence in the world, too.

"We come to church and hear God's word, and then we dip it in [the expediency of culture], and we wonder why it does not work," Evans said. "We are actually as Christians participating in cancel culture because we leave church and cancel out the Word of God by the adoption of the secularism of the culture and deciding only when it's convenient to be Christians."

That approach is "why you can have slavery go on, and racism go on, and culturalism go on, and misogyny go on and this and that," he said.

The Church needs to remember who it is supposed to be and what it looks like to carry the authority of a Kingdom that looks different from the culture, Evans said. "There are two answers to every question, God's answer and everybody else's, and everybody else is wrong. He has spoken, and He has not stuttered."

Scarlett Nokes, a messenger from Temple Baptist Church in Whitehouse, Tennessee, and part of the legal team from the Bradley law firm assisting the Executive Committee on an interim basis, shares about being a witness in the corporate world.

SBC Executive Committee

Messengers approve budgets, opportunity for NAMB to resource collegiate ministry leaders

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Four recommendations from the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee were approved by messengers to the SBC Annual Meeting, June 14–15. Of the four, only one — related to the North American Mission Board — drew questions from messengers.

The recommendation is an adaptation from a proposal made during the 2021 annual meeting, a proposal rejected by messengers. It adds collegiate ministries to NAMB's ministry assignment list, while also keeping it as part of Lifeway's ministry assignment. The 2021 proposal suggested moving it from Lifeway to NAMB, while the new proposal allowed them both to have the assignment.

Lifeway's focus will be producing discipleship and other products for collegiate ministries, and NAMB's will be helping develop collegiate ministry leaders.

At the request of outgoing EC Chairman Rolland Slade, NAMB President Kevin Ezell presented the recommendation to messengers and spent several minutes explaining the goal is to resource and encourage, not take over.

Resourcing, coaching

"We want to support our collegiate ministries. ... We want to work in partnership with our state conventions. All the BCMs we relate to are connected to state conventions," he said. "We want to come beside and provide resourcing and coaching. ... We want to provide a sense of brotherhood ... and a national home."



Photo by Taylor Mitchell/The Alabama Baptist

erhood ... and a national home.

"There's not a hidden agenda," he said. "We just want to come along and help where we can help."

Ezell said NAMB hopes its church plants will be a natural step for students involved with the college ministries NAMB supports through the coaching and collaborative-based resources.

"We want those college students when they leave those campuses to go and be a part of our church plants (which is the focus of more than 50% of NAMB's budget)," he said.

A second recommendation adapted language in the SBC constitution related to SBC officers. The vote was the second of two required votes of approval in subsequent annual meetings to change the wording in the constitution.

A sentence about the timing of first and second vice president elections was deleted, and a new sentence was added that says "No person may simultaneously be a candidate for two offices."

Messengers also approved both recommendations related to budgets.

The 2022–2023 SBC Cooperative Program Allocation Budget will be \$192 million, and the SBC EC operating budget will be \$8.3 million.

Prior to concluding the EC report, Slade called on Scarlett Nokes to share a personal message to Southern Baptists.

Nokes, a messenger from Temple Baptist Church in Whitehouse, Tennessee, is part of the legal team from the Bradley law firm assisting the EC on an interim basis.

Nokes shared how she and fellow attorney Gene Besen "have dealt

with character attacks because of the stance our employer takes (related to support of the LGBTQ community)."

Referencing the difference many pastors and others make for the Kingdom, Nokes said, "I wholeheartedly appreciate the pastors in this room ... especially the three (standing with) me. ... There's no doubt these godly men and so many other men and women have made a profound impact on my life and my faith."

"But those of us working in corporate America are also making an impact," she emphasized. "We are serving where we are. I am serving where I am. Our places are a missions field. ... The Cooperative Program is funded in large part by people who faithfully give from what they earn from secular businesses like Bradley."

"How does the gospel advance if we insulate ourselves from the world entirely? But that seems to be what is being proposed in regard [to] the legal issue," she said. "Those legal issues (related to the sexual abuse investigation) are varied and complex, and they are coming with a vengeance."

'To be of service'

"They require a specific set of skills," Nokes said. "God has given me certain opportunities, skills and abilities to be of service to His people during this season. ..."

"My prayer will continue to come from Matthew 5, that my light will shine before others ... and that that will prompt them to give glory to my Father in heaven."

Messengers and guests responded with a standing ovation.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Executive Committee Chairman Rolland Slade, pastor of Meridian Baptist Church in El Cajon, California, rotated off the board June 15. He served two one-year terms as chairman and two four-year terms as an EC member.

New officers

Texas pastor Bart Barber elected SBC president in run-off election

Bart Barber, pastor of First Baptist Church Farmersville, Texas, and active denominational leader, was elected 64th president of the Southern Baptist Convention on June 14 during the 2022 SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California.

Barber received 3,401 votes in a runoff, garnering 60.87% of the 5,587 total ballots cast in the vote.

In a four-way presidential bid that included Tom Ascol, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida; Robin Hadaway, senior professor of missions at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Frank Cox, pastor of North Metro Baptist Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia, Barber and Ascol claimed the top two spots for the runoff.

Ascol received 2,172 votes for 38.88% of the votes in the runoff. At the time of the presidential runoff election, 8,098 messengers were registered.

On the first ballot, Barber received 3,258 (47.58%) of the 6,847 votes cast. Ascol received 2,332 (34.06%) votes, Cox received 887 (12.95%) votes and Hadaway received 340 (4.97%) votes. At the time of the first ballot for the presidential election, 8,095 messengers were registered.

In announcing his intention to nominate Barber as SBC president, 2022 SBC Pastors Conference president Matt Henslee said, “Barber is what Southern Baptists are when they are at their best,” referencing FBC Farmersville’s support of the Cooperative Program and direct support of missionaries and church planters, as well as Barber’s personal involvement in the local association, state convention and denomination.

‘God might want me’

Although Barber said he had “rebuffed the encouragement of others to accept the nomination” for several years, he “relented” this year ... “accepting the possibility that God



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Five new officers were elected at the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting. Each officer was approved by a majority vote of the ballots cast by messengers present during the election. The new officers are Bart Barber (right) of Texas, president; Victor Chayasirisobhon (third from right) of California, first vice president; Alex Sands (fourth from right) of South Carolina, second vice president; Nathan Finn (fifth from left) of South Carolina, recording secretary; and Don Currence (third from left) of Missouri, registration secretary.

might want me to help improve the health of the convention while holding an official position for a while.”

Acknowledging numerous challenges facing the SBC, Barber believes today’s challenges “pale in comparison to those faced by our forefathers,” who were often martyred for their faith.

He wants to call Southern Baptists “to lean into our historical doctrinal commitments. ... I believe when all of these challenges have passed, we will still be standing.”

Barber, who has served FBC since 1999, joins a long list of pastors who have served in the SBC president’s role in recent years. The past 11 SBC presidents served as pastors, primarily of megachurches in the South, during their service. The most recent Texas Baptist pastor to serve as SBC president was Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano (2004, 2005).

In addition to his pastoral role,

Barber, 52, chaired this year’s SBC Committee on Resolutions. The native of Lake City, Arkansas, preached at the SBC Pastors Conference in 2017, served as SBC first vice president (2013–2014), and served on the SBC Committee on Committees in 2008.

Additionally he served on the executive board of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (2008–2014) and as a trustee of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas (2009–2019), where he also taught as an adjunct professor (2006–2009). He also is involved with Southern Baptist Disaster Relief.

Barber earned his undergraduate degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and received his master of divinity and doctorate from Southwestern.

Discussing some concerns that the denomination is drifting into more moderate theological perspectives and practices, Barber told the Christian Index, “The most

readily observable ‘drift’ in the Southern Baptist Convention is a drift away from fairness in making accusations and from civility in discussing differences.”

Awaiting ‘ship of revival’

Speaking to The Alabama Baptist, Barber said, “The president of the SBC can, with God’s help, steer us away from creating new divisive controversies and toward resolution of old scandals. By doing so he can eliminate distractions and obstacles that compete with revival for our prayers and affections. That’s my hope ... to be the minesweeper clearing the way ahead of the ship of revival.”

In response to the May 22 report of the Sexual Abuse Task Force, Barber wrote in his blog the report “demonstrates very well that these bad decisions (deliberate mishandling of abuse allegations) arose out of a fundamental misunderstanding of the distinctive Baptist belief in the autonomy of the local church.”

He concluded, “Sometimes our assertions of ... autonomy have seemed insincere ... Do we want people to take seriously what we say about local church autonomy? Then we should demonstrate with actions our commitment to love them ... and seek justice for them to the fullest extent that we can achieve within our beliefs.”

Barber and his wife, Tracy, have been married for 30 years.

The couple have two adopted children, Jim and Sarah, whom they homeschool.

His church website states that in his spare time, Barber has a private pilot’s license, is a self-identified “tech geek” and musician, playing the guitar, banjo and mandolin. He writes for the SBC Voices blog and for his own blog found at praisegodbarebones.blogspot.com. His favorite hobby is simple: “Learning something new.” (The Alabama Baptist)



BARBER

To view a photo gallery from this business session, visit tabonline.org/SBC2022-business-session2.

Together

Unity the theme for Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Unity was the message as more than 150 ministry leaders gathered for the 2022 Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders in Anaheim June 12–13.

The conference focused on the theme “Pursuing Love and Good Works,” based on Hebrews 10:24.

More than 100 spouses, sponsors and ministry partners also were there, and Ray Gentry, SBCAL president and CEO, called it a “great turnout” for a West Coast location.

Featured speakers were Ben Mandrell, president of Lifeway Christian Resources; Jeff Iorg, president of Gateway Seminary; Rick Curtis, assistant to the president at the North American Mission Board; Hance Dilbeck, president of GuideStone Financial Resources; Trevin Wax, vice president of resources and research at NAMB; and Steve Viars, pastor of Faith Church in Lafayette, Indiana.

Ben Mandrell

Mandrell opened the conference speaking on three “basic disciplines of strong and mighty Christians”:

- ▶ They draw near to Christ in prayer.
- ▶ They hold on to hope in Christ.
- ▶ They provoke one another in love.

Prayer completes that list, Mandrell said.

“We draw near to the heart of God when we enter into prayer with the full assurance of our faith,” he said. (Read more about Mandrell’s sermon on the next page.)

Jeff Iorg

Referencing the “unprecedented” conflict that has flooded into church life over the past three years, Iorg spoke from Colossians 3 and emphasized “unity is grounded in our relationship with Jesus Christ.”

In Christ there are no racial, religious, cultural or legal status differences, Iorg said.

“Our world wants to divide people



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
Members of the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders put their conference theme of unity into action by praying over Ray Gentry, president of SBCAL, as his family walks through a grief process.

up, put them in categories and give them privilege and honor and opportunity based on some of these categories,” Iorg said. “In Jesus Christ all this has been abolished. None of these differences divide us. We are one in Christ.”

And unity is a corporate effort, he emphasized.

“You do not build unity sitting in a coffee shop talking about how unified we need to be,” he said. “You build unity when you get another believer by the hand and go out and do something in the name of Jesus for somebody else.”

“We get people doing things together, and in the process God has a way of unifying our hearts in a way only He can accomplish.”

Rick Curtis

Curtis challenged leaders to go beyond their primary mindset of leading others to Christ and define their secondary and tertiary mindsets.

“A secondary mindset can be very, very positive and ... should give

glory to your primary mindset,” he said. “A negative secondary mindset will actually diminish your primary mindset.”

Curtis called the role of associational leader “the single most important denominational role in the SBC because no one can transform the life of the local pastor like [an associational leader] can.”

“When God saw your geography and saw the purpose needed for that geography, He called your name,” Curtis said. “And to be a leader of leaders in God’s Church, among His bride, is no insignificant task.”

Hance Dilbeck

Speaking during the Sunday night dinner session, Dilbeck shared how GuideStone’s Mission:Dignity is helping retired pastors and widows financially. Recipients are grateful “somebody cares.”

Trevin Wax

In the June 13 morning session, Wax offered four “signposts on the

road to joy” from Philippians 4:2–9:

- ▶ We pursue unity in Christ.
- ▶ You show grace because you have hope.
- ▶ You pray because you are thankful.
- ▶ You focus because you have peace.

“It’s been a rough season for a lot of us, for a lot of our churches,” he said. “Go back to God’s word. ... Refocus. ... Recognize the road to joy matters because ... God wants your joy more than you do.”

Steve Viars

In the final plenary session of the conference, Viars, author of “Loving Your Community: Proven Practices for Community-Based Outreach Ministry,” shared how Faith Church has become an influencing presence in its city by establishing community-based facilities and civic partnerships that serve both the church and the surrounding neighborhoods.

“There are a lot of people in our communities who believe God is dead or He’s really mad at them,” Viars said. “Why? Because the church close to them is either dead or really mad at them.”

“As we love our communities, as we look for opportunities to meet needs, that gives others the right opinion of our God,” he said. “We want our neighbors at all of our campuses to constantly have a reason to ask us, ‘Why did you do that for us?’ ... Then we can say, ‘Because God loves you, and I’d love to tell you about how He demonstrated that [love] most supremely when He sent His Son to die on the cross.’”

Business meeting

SBCAL members met in a business session June 12 and approved a 2022–2023 budget of \$160,000, an increase of \$65,000 over last year’s budget. Members also adopted the 2022 Vision Script, which includes funding two full-time staff members, a president/CEO and a director of communications/event planner, beginning July 2023.

This year’s Week of Prayer for Local Baptist Associations is Oct. 23–29, 2022. For more information on the organization, including downloadable resources for the Week of Prayer, visit sbc.org.

“This is a positive direction for us,” said Bob Lowman, SBCAL executive team vice chair and finance team leader.

SBCAL funding comes from three primary sources: associational ministry partners, including individual members and associations that provide ongoing financial support; SBC ministry partners; and conference sponsorships.

SBCAL membership has grown to nearly 500, thanks in part, Gentry said, to partnerships with several state conventions that pay the annual membership dues for all associational leaders in the state. Partner state conventions include Alabama, Arkansas, Michigan, North Carolina, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Mississippi and Indiana.

Members have access to SBCAL’s online library of resources, plus coaching and training tools including virtual conferences planned for August and January.

Likewise a growing number of local and regional associations provide regular, ongoing support, he said.

‘Step of faith’

The planned expansion of SBCAL is a “step of faith,” he added, but members and state leaders recognize the need for more support and training of associational mission strategists and AMS search teams around the nation.

Gentry said he is pleased many AMS search teams are using the SBCAL-sponsored book “The Baptist Association: Assisting Churches, Advancing the Gospel.”

“We want to keep doing other resources, as well,” he said.

SBCAL members also elected officers for the 2022–2023 executive team. They are: Bob Lowman (North Carolina), chair; Todd Robertson (Kentucky), vice chair; James Risner (Ohio), recording secretary. Associational members who will serve on the executive team are: Josh Ellis (Texas, term expiring in 2023), Don Pucik (Louisiana, 2023), David Roberts (Michigan, 2023), Bob Bumgarner (Florida, 2024), Gary Mathes (Missouri, 2024), Scott Shields (South Carolina, 2024), Mike Carlisle (California, 2025), Chris Crain (Alabama, 2025), Steve Laughman (Georgia, 2025), and Jonas Perez (North Carolina, 2025).

To view a photo gallery from the SBCAL Annual Meeting, visit tabonline.org/SBCAL2022.

Lifeway president: ‘Let us provoke one another in love’ during SBC 2022

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

California’s iconic redwood trees offer an apt metaphor for Southern Baptists in these challenging times: “We are stronger together.”

That was the message Ben Mandrell, president and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources, brought to those gathered in Anaheim for the June 12 opening session of the Southern Baptist Convention Associational Leaders Conference.

Redwoods thrive in thick groves where their shallow roots can intertwine and even fuse together, Mandrell explained.

“Their relationship with surrounding trees gives them strength,” he said. “Conversely, a redwood when it stands alone is a weak tree.”

“We need each other,” Mandrell said. “It’s why the Southern Baptist Convention exists.”

And thinking of the SBC Annual Meeting, Mandrell said the theme verse for the SBCAL meeting, Hebrews 10:24, resonated even more deeply this year.

“This statement — ‘Let us provoke one another in love’ — this is what good Christians, strong Christians, do,” he said.

“They look to positively irritate each other.”

Many Southern Baptists are provoking each other, especially through social media, but not in a positive, biblical way, said Mandrell, who noted he was proud of his “boring” Twitter account.

“We are provoking each other to anger and to resentment, not to love and good deeds,” he said. “The virtual environment we live in is a dangerous one because we are dehumanizing one another. We’re ... demonizing one another in public view for all to see, in a snarky, hateful kind of way. ... Wouldn’t it be amazing if at every Southern Baptist Convention meeting, everyone was focused on positively irritating?”

To watch Mandrell’s full message, visit tabonline.org/Mandrell.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Lifeway president and CEO Ben Mandrell speaks during the Southern Baptist Convention Associational Leaders Conference in Anaheim June 12.

Mandrell said believers should draw near to Christ in prayer as conflict swirls, pointing to Hebrews 10:22.

Prayer is no longer “our first reaction to conflict, our natural reflex when we feel hurt by other believers,” Mandrell said.

“If Hebrews had been written today, another verse might read, ‘too much tweet-ing, not enough praying.’

How does that sit with you personally? Don’t you just feel the weight of that around our convention?”

“Lord, help us when we reduce each other to 144

characters rather than building up the character of those around us,” he urged.

Mandrell encouraged those gathered to “hold on to hope in Christ” (Heb. 10:24).

Three prayers for the SBC

“Strong Christians do that,” he said. We “hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering [because] He who promised is faithful.”

Mandrell offered three prayers for the SBC in the days leading up to the annual meeting.

First, that “every microphone would be filled by a voice who speaks the truth in love.”

“It’s quite possible to say the right

thing in the wrong way,” he said. “Questions can be honestly asked, even hard questions, in a respectful way,” he added, citing Ephesians 4:29.

Second, that “the tribes within our denomination would humbly search for common ground.” Mandrell said groups within the SBC have “Balkanized,” but his prayer is “the Lord would begin to show us how much we have in common.”

“Let’s start searching for reasons to stay together, not reasons to split apart,” he implored.

If messengers focus on a cooperative spirit, they can leave feeling “like we have just been with sweet people who care about our mission,” and a third prayer will have been answered.

“We have stuff to get out, we have to vent, we have to get motions out on the table,” Mandrell said. “I pray that every person as they are walking to the microphone would feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit to be kind — convictional, but kind — treating every person, including the ones on the platform, with respect.”

“God, help us to mind our manners,” Mandrell said, focused on “getting our roots closer together ... that we might get back on track.”

FBC Cypress hosts a sports camp as part of the Crossover evangelism effort across the greater Los Angeles area.

Ready to serve



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Sports camps, surfing lessons engage the community through Crossover 2022

After a few moments of awkward silence, Jami stepped up to a karaoke microphone to sing in the parking lot of Friendship Baptist Church in Yorba Linda, California.

As she sang, she got emotional. Her father, a former Hell's Angel, had been incarcerated during her childhood. She shared how God delivered her from a life of pain, heartache and confusion.

"I felt that abandonment, not being enough, dealt with a lot of pain and insecurity from a young age," she said, then shared that God has healed her and equipped her for ministering to others who have faced tough times.

Jami's song and testimony were part of Crossover, an annual event that precedes the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting which was in Anaheim June 14–15.

While she and other volunteers shared with a crowd of locals gathered at Friendship Baptist, others were scattered at more than 30 other events around the greater Los Angeles area.

At two churches, First Southern Baptist Church of Anaheim and First Baptist Church of Cypress, volunteers hosted

sports camps for children and teenagers.

Dante Perez said it has long been on his heart to reach the community of FSBC through sports

outreach, so this year's Crossover effort was a perfect fit.

Praying for an opportunity

"I've been praying for a while for an opportunity like this that would bring families together so they can learn more about Jesus," Perez said.

Church staff members helped recruit adult and student volunteers

from the congregation and from the church's Anaheim Discovery Christian School to serve. At the camp, 50 or so children and teens enjoyed playing together at three skills-and-drills stations focused on baseball, basketball and soccer.

At a fourth station children heard the gospel through object lessons that included foam dart guns, water balloons and sports analogies.

At FBC Cypress, children in attendance did something similar, playing their way through stations with street hockey, basketball, gaga ball and soccer, as well as listening to a Bible study and gospel presentation.

"Every kid has a chance to hear the gospel at least once ... but we also have incredible volunteers at every sport who are sharing their testimonies, who are praying with kids," Pastor Trevor Cooper said.

He said events like the sports

camp show the community FBC Cypress is there and ready to serve.

"We're trying to make an identity for this church through the gospel and through our sports camp, just inviting the community to hear about the gospel and hear the Word, but also to know that we exist here for the community," he said.

Chris Lohman, pastor of the Garage Church at Huntington Beach, said his church's Crossover event was aimed at doing the same thing.

"We want to build relationships with our local community," he said. "We are very relaxed. No one's judging — everyone in our church has already [made mistakes]. We just want to love on people. Our job is to make it realistic for them to come to a place where

they can feel loved and learn about God."

Building relationships

That's why Lohman was out on the beach June 11 with four surfboards and a team of volunteers. He wanted to teach people how to surf and maybe get them to a place where they might want to learn about God, too.

"That's why we do everything we do," he said. (The Alabama Baptist)

To view a gallery of photos, visit tabonline.org/Crossover-2022.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

The Garage Church in Huntington Beach hosted a beach game and surf day for Crossover 2022 with the help of volunteers like David Rose (right), pastor of FBC Winnsboro, Texas. Chris Lohman (left) is pastor of The Garage Church.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
Friendship Baptist Church in Yorba Linda hosts a block party for Crossover, an annual event that precedes the SBC annual meeting.

God has been FAITHFUL

WMU's annual meeting looks different this year with Rolling Missions Adventure

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Connie Dixon covered some miles this past year as she served as national Woman's Missionary Union president. She visited 20 states, had 29 speaking opportunities, attended 94 Zoom calls, recorded five videos and two podcasts, wrote 27 articles and walked through 61 airports.

"I have loved every minute of it, but more than anything I am so honored to serve as president of an organization I love so much," said Dixon, a member of First Baptist Church Elida, New Mexico.

The year was a "whirlwind," she said, and in a way this year's WMU missions celebration and annual meeting June 12 mimicked that. Instead of gathering at a venue near the convention center, participants loaded up on three buses for an experience called Embark: WMU's Rolling Missions Adventure and traveled around the greater Los Angeles area to get to know the churches and ministries there a little better.

Hearing stories

They started at Gateway Seminary where they toured the facilities, met faculty and staff, heard their stories and prayed for them.

Afterward, Dixon kicked off the annual meeting with her report, which celebrated ways she has seen "Hope in Christ" — the meeting's theme — displayed over and over through WMU this past year.

One of the ways was how compassion was "demonstrated so beautifully by the care given by WMU groups across the nation to refugees," she said.

Dixon said hope has also been shared through partnerships across the states and around the world, and it has been shared through 25 HEART (Humanitarian Emergency



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist
The 2022 WMU missions celebration goes on the road in Anaheim, California, during its annual meeting. Participants enjoy visiting the David and Faith Kim School of Global Missions at Gateway Seminary in Ontario, California.

Aid for Rebuilding Tomorrow) Fund grants totaling more than \$300,000 given jointly by the WMU Foundation and national WMU over the past year.

"That is the largest amount and largest number of grants given in a single year in the history of the fund," Dixon said, noting the grants went to help survivors of hurricanes, volcanoes, ice storms and other crises.

"God has faithfully used the tool of WMU, and I believe He will continue to work through WMU in the future," she said.

During the meeting Dixon was reelected to serve another year as president, and Shirley McDonald of Greens Creek Baptist Church in Dublin, Texas, was reelected recording secretary.

Also during the meeting

► Libo Krieg, Hispanic trainer for WMU of Texas, was awarded the Dellanna West O'Brien Award

for Women's Leadership Development.

"A trainer and leader for over 30 years, sister Libo Krieg has demonstrated servant leadership, personal integrity, courage and selflessness," said Tamiko Jones, executive

director-treasurer of WMU of Texas. From being a Mission Friends teacher to serving as an associational Hispanic WMU director, Krieg "has a heart to develop leaders, especially in Hispanic churches and communities around the United States and around the world,"

Jones said. "She is a bridge builder and an encourager of bridge building. She recognizes and knows the potential in women."

► Cindy Townsend, minister of WMU at First Baptist Church Jackson, Mississippi, shared that the WMU Foundation's Mission Matters Most campaign had exceeded its goal of raising \$50,000 for the Vision Fund, which goes directly to

support the ministry of WMU.

► Participants heard the stories of four Acteens panelists — Aileen Gregorio Mejia and Nieves Montanez, both of Freeman Heights Baptist Church in Garland, Texas; Grace Carter of University Hills Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina; and Taylor Glover of Harps Crossing Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Georgia.

Kindle your passion

► Jeff Iorg, president of Gateway Seminary, encouraged meeting participants to kindle their passion for ministry so that they will share their hope in Christ even more broadly.

► Sandy Wisdom-Martin, WMU executive director, shared a story from WMU's new emphasis book, "Because of Hope," which will be released later this month. The story highlighted the faith of Albert Peeks, a man who suffered a major brain injury in a Navy accident and overcame huge odds to earn a college diploma decades later.

Wisdom-Martin said his story is one of 50 in the book that highlights what it looks like to have hope in Christ. "When hope in Christ is all you have, hope in Christ is all you need," she said. "What comes today or in the future matters not. The redemptive work of our Savior is complete. And we declare with confidence — with boldness — our hope is in Christ."

After the meeting's conclusion, each bus went to one of three ministry sites — First Baptist Church San Bernadino, Orangecrest Community Church in Riverside and Mount Zion Church of Ontario — to learn about the work being done there.

The buses headed out again the following day to visit ministry sites including Chinese Baptist Church of Orange County, Kings MMA Anaheim, First Baptist Church Cypress and First Southern Baptist Church Anaheim.



DIXON

PASTORS CONFERENCE

‘We are servants’

Pastors Conference walks through Colossians, challenges pastors to ‘proclaim Him’

Al Jackson says the names you find at the end of Colossians 4 “are not familiar to us.”

“We name our sons Paul or Peter or John,” he said. “We don’t name our sons Tychicus or Aristarchus.”

But even though few might know their names, there are “no insignificant saints, no insignificant churches, no insignificant pastors,” said Jackson, pastor emeritus of Lakeview Baptist Church in Auburn, as he preached during the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference June 13 in Anaheim, California.

“My dear pastor, fellow pastor, you do not have an insignificant ministry. You may be in a very isolated place. You may preach to only a handful of people. But whether you preach to five or 5,000, your work is infinitely and eternally significant,” he said.

Jackson’s closing exhortation fit the theme of the conference, “We Proclaim Him.” His message closed out the Book of Colossians, which Pastors Conference speakers had preached through during the gathering.



HENSLEE

Matt Henslee, Pastors Conference president, associational mission strategist for Collin Baptist Association in Texas and assistant preaching pastor at First Baptist Church Farmersville, Texas, said his hope for the conference was that it would “help us to embrace endurance in the trenches of gospel ministry through engaging worship that will encourage unity — and my brothers and sisters in Christ, we need unity.”

Also during the event, pastors elected Daniel Dickard, pastor of



DICKARD



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

During the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference, pastors and guests donated to a special offering for Mission:Dignity in honor of Al Jackson, pastor emeritus of Lakeview Baptist Church in Auburn.

Friendly Avenue Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, as the new Pastors Conference president. Dickard won the election over Voddie Baucham, dean of theology for African Christian University, by a vote of 690 (50.85%) to 608 (44.8%) with 59 ballots (4.35%) disallowed.

Prayer event

To start the conference June 12, pastors gathered for a prayer event with Robby Galaty, senior pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee, then Mark Clifton kicked off the preaching with Colossians 1:1–8.

“Where the gospel is, it is alive,” said Clifton, senior director of replanting at the North American Mission Board, who has served more than 40 years as a pastor, church planter, strategist and mentor for church leaders. “And where it is alive, it spreads. And where the gospel is, there is fruit. And the fruit is love and compassion.”



CLIFTON

He noted the adversary tries to take advantage of the insecurities pastors often feel.

“If he can make us feel isolated and alone and cut off and unimportant and small, he can keep us where he wants us,” Clifton said. “Let me tell you, you are not isolated, you are not alone and you are not small. You have all the power of the risen Christ with you.”

Omar Johnson, pastor of Temple Hills Baptist Church near Washington, D.C., preached on Colossians 1:9–14.

He urged pastors to resist the temptation to add something to the message of Jesus to make it more palatable for more people. In Colossians, the church was encountering false teaching that turned the focus from Christ and toward sources promising more robust knowledge of God.

“That’s still a threat pressing in our churches today, isn’t it? We need Jesus plus something. We need the Scriptures plus something.”



JOHNSON

But Christ is supreme, said Hanley Liu, pastor of First Chinese Baptist Church Walnut, California. Preaching from Colossians 1:15–20, he said every verse “proclaims the abso-

lute supremacy of Christ.”

“What’s encouraging for us, pastors and leaders of the Church, is that when this text teaches us that Jesus is supreme, sovereign over all things, all things in



LIU

heaven and all things on earth, this includes every single thing that has discouraged or divided the Church. Everything that has caused you ... sleepless nights and stress ... falls under the sovereignty and supremacy of Christ,” he said.

Matthew Mueller, pastor at Valley Life Church North Peoria in Peoria, Arizona, said pastors need to show a hurting world they have a foundation like that to stand on.

“The world desperately needs truth,” he declared

as he preached from Colossians 1:21–23. He noted the importance of pastors remaining grounded and steadfast in the gospel.

“We all want our people, churches to not shift from the hope of the gospel,” he said. It’s only in the truth and a firm foundation in the gospel, he assessed, that people can place their hope.

Clay Smith, pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Georgia, said the past couple of years have made

it extra hard for pastors to stand firm. He said there were “plenty of days when I wondered, ‘Am I going to make it?’ Have you been there?”



MUELLER



SMITH

Preaching from Colossians 1:24–29, Smith encouraged pastors to look to Paul for an example of being joyful in their ministry assignments, even in challenging circumstances.

“We are shepherds, undershepherds of the flock of God,” he said. “This is our assignment from God, to be this servant He’s called us to be, and let’s be honest — ministry is tough. It’s hard.”

One aspect that can make it hard is the conflict pastors sometimes face with others, said Marcus Hayes, pastor of Crossroads Baptist Church in The Woodlands, Texas.

Hayes said Paul encouraged the believers in Colossians 2:1–7 to “be knit together in love,” as different ideologies, philosophies and religious practices were threatening the truth that Jesus is enough.

Christians are called to “keep Jesus close. Don’t allow culture to cause you to fumble,” Hayes said.



HAYES

Pastor P.J. Tibayan, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Bellflower, California, said, “There are all kinds of bad ideas out there. Most of those ideas are not attractive to us as pastors and to our members.

“But ... some of them are captivating,” he noted. “These are the ones that threaten our souls, our ministries, our churches and our witness.”

He noted the purpose of Colossians 2:8–23 is “to equip us and strengthen us to continue in Christ

and avoid being captivated by attractive bad ideas, dangerous ideas.”

To avoid being derailed in your faith, Tibayan said, “God is calling you to discern and deny non-Christian judgments so that you continue living your fullness in Christ Jesus.”



TIBAYAN

Preaching from Colossians 3:1–11, Daryl Jones challenged pastors to seek Christlikeness

while constantly rejecting the old ways of the world.

“I am speaking to you, pastor. We think we’ve graduated beyond these 11 verses, but we need to take inventory,” said Jones, pastor of The Rock Fellowship Church in Miami Lakes, Florida.

Christians should be “motivated by Christ alone. ... I am no earthly good if I’m not heavenly minded,” Jones said, adding, “The only thing that matters is that which belongs to Christ, and that is where our mindset should constantly be.”

Christ-focused mindset

Matt Carter, pastor of Sagemont Church in Houston, Texas, said maintaining a Christ-focused mindset is critical.

“Make no mistake, there are times when lines need to be drawn in the sand,” said Carter, preaching from Colossians 3:12–14. “But the Scripture makes itself crystal clear that no matter what we face as a convention, that we are always to engage each other in a Christ-like kind of way.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Israel Villalobos, Spanish service pastor for Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving, Texas, preaches on Colossians 3:18–4:1, highlighting a view of marriage that “elevated women” to a level they did not experience in that time.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Daryl Jones, pastor of The Rock Fellowship in Miami Lakes, Florida, preaches from Colossians 3:1–11 and challenges his fellow Southern Baptist pastors to seek Christlikeness while constantly rejecting the old ways of the world.

“We’re not doing that, and I’m not sure the Lord is pleased,” he said.

Carter called Baptists to be a people known for biblical faithfulness and tenderheartedness, for love of missions and love for one another.



CARTER

From there, Israel Villalobos, Spanish service pastor for Plymouth Park Baptist Church in

Irving, Texas, picked up with Colossians 3:18–4:1.

He noted some people “cringe” with the verses that address wives submitting to their husbands. He noted some may view these verses as “chauvinistic” with Paul saying men are superior to women.

“But, if you fully comprehend the culture when women were objects to be used and enjoyed simply for bearing children and for the man to have an heir, then you can see how Paul was presenting a view of marriage that actually elevated women to a level of equality and value they did not experience during that time — and perhaps had not even considered.”

But even today, he said, husbands struggle to love their wives.

“Sadly even today that instruction is still even mind-blowing,” he said. “How often do husbands in marital counseling need to be reminded to love their wife?”

He noted, “Remember, wifely submission and husbandly sacrificial love are God’s established rules. We must do these things so God the Father is glorified.”

Julio Arriola said Colossians 4:2–6 serves to remind Christians of who they are.

“In other words, dear Southern Baptists, we are servants,” said Arriola, director of Send Network SBTC, a church planting partnership between NAMB and Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

“[God] is the one that deserves all the glory, and we are His servants, servants of Christ, rescued from the pits of hell, reconciled with God by the blood of Jesus, to live lives that would [glorify] the Father.”

Though God is sovereign and supreme, Arriola said, He has decided to move and to act upon His servants’ prayers. And when God’s people pray, he said, prayer changes everything.



ARRIOLA

“Dear pastor, you may be facing the toughest seasons in ministry right now,” he said. “But I challenge you to pray with gratitude to God. You will have peace, and it will give you also hope for tomorrow.” (Grace Thornton, TAB Media staff)

To view a photo gallery of the Pastors Conference, visit tabonline.org/SBC-Pastors-Conference.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Messengers save the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. Brent Leatherwood, acting president of ERLC, urges them to vote not to retreat from public policy advocacy.

Motion to abolish ERLC voted down by messengers

By Carrie B. McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

A motion to abolish the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission failed as the June 15 morning session of the SBC Annual Meeting concluded.

Messengers defeated the motion put forth by Joshua Scruggs of North Carolina. Scruggs defended his position, stating ERLC's ministry assignment to speak for Southern Baptists on moral, ethical and religious liberty concerns "inevitably" creates division in the denomination.

Brent Leatherwood, acting president of ERLC, said that while Baptists have had "frustrations with different personalities and stances" of ERLC over the years, this is not a time to retreat from public policy advocacy.

Leatherwood said the Supreme Court ruling in the Dobbs case, expected to come before the end of June, could return the battle for life to the states and

"require a state-by-state approach" to the issue. That is exactly what ERLC has been doing at the federal level, he said, and ERLC will do it at the state level as well.

Against the effort

"To turn our back on the public square at a time when it is needed most would be to move away from the gospel," Leatherwood told messengers.

Former ERLC president Richard Land also spoke against the effort, citing similar concerns.

"I cannot imagine a more damaging moment for the Southern Baptist Convention to defund the ERLC," Land

said from the convention floor. "We are on the verge of having Roe v. Wade overturned [and] that will immediately lead to a battle in all 50 states. Southern Baptists will be leading that charge, and the ERLC is perfectly primed to be a resource, to be a help and to share information among the 50 states."



Photo by Sam Evans/TAB
Messenger Joshua Scruggs of North Carolina explains why he believes ERLC should be abolished.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Ryans Creek Baptist Church seeks God's man to be our pastor. The church is located in Brushy Pond near Smith Lake. Baptist pastors interested may mail your resumé to the church at 24849 County Road 222, Bremen, AL 35033, or email to: RCBC35033@gmail.com. ATTN: Search Committee.

PASTOR

First Baptist Church Irvington, is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: DARBREL59@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Clayton Baptist Church, P.O. Box 4, Clayton, AL 36016 (Barbour County) is accepting resumé for pastor. Please email resumé to: claytonbaptist@bellsouth.net by June 30.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Northside Baptist Church, Selma, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumé to: Northsidebaptist2021@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paden Baptist Church, Gadsden, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumé to: padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com or to: Paden Baptist Church, 900 Padenreich Ave., Gadsden, AL 35903.

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, Alabama, is seeking a part-time office administrator. Work hours are Monday-Friday with 25-30 hours per week. Applicants should have a minimum of 5 years experience supervising at least 8 people, 5 years office management experience, advanced computer skills. A bachelor degree in business, accounting or related field is preferred. Inquiries or resumé should be submitted to: Southside Baptist Church, 1213 Western Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420, ATTN: Personnel Committee.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR — WORSHIP & EDUCATION

Linden Baptist Church is now accepting resumé for the position of associate pastor. This is a full-time position. The primary focuses of this position will be worship leadership and education, though there will be other responsibilities. For a complete job description and to apply online, visit lindenbaptist.org and click the "Assoc. Pastor Application" button. To apply by mail, send resumé and cover letter to:

P.O. Box 480776 Linden, AL 36748. Applications will be received until July 15.

FAMILY PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Atmore, Alabama, is seeking a full-time family pastor. He will serve as "second-chair" to the pastor with oversight of volunteers within age-group and small-group ministries, having direct responsibility over student ministry. Resumé may be submitted to: keving@fbcatmore.org.

YOUTH PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Hokes Bluff is seeking a godly, dynamic part-time youth pastor. Interested applicants should send resumé to: secretary@fbchb.org.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH DIRECTOR

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, accepting resumé for position of bivocational youth director. Send resumé to: Southside Baptist Church, 1213 Western Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420. ATTN: Youth Search Committee.

OTHER POSITIONS

IL BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOME AND FAMILY SERVICES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

IL Baptist Children's Home and Family Services (BCHFS) is looking for an executive director. See qualifications and standards at <http://www.bchfs.com/employment>. BCHFS is a Licensed Child Welfare Agency whose mission is to "Provide Christ-centered services that protect, heal and restore." The agency has a rich history of providing care for children and families in crisis for over 100 years. BCHFS has an annual budget of \$3.9 million and provides care for children and adults through various programs including residential care, maternity care, adoption services, counseling services and a pregnancy resource clinic. To apply, send a letter of interest and resumé to: Eric Bramlet, Search Committee Chair, ericbramlet@kogerbramletlaw.com.

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PODCAST

STORIES SEASON 6: MUD BOGGER STORY

Terry Billings used to spend his life mud racing in his old drinking truck, until one day everything turned on a dime — in Walmart. Now he and his truck have both had a transformation — and have found a very different purpose. This season, the "Stories" podcast shares his story. TAB's Grace Thornton writes and produces the shows. Listen at tabonline.org/stories or wherever you listen to podcasts.

MINISTRIES

TAB DIGITAL

In addition to the print edition The Alabama Baptist also releases a weekly digital edition of the newspaper to every subscribers' email. The digital edition comes in PDF form as well as part of an app and is included with all subscriptions. To update your email address, contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

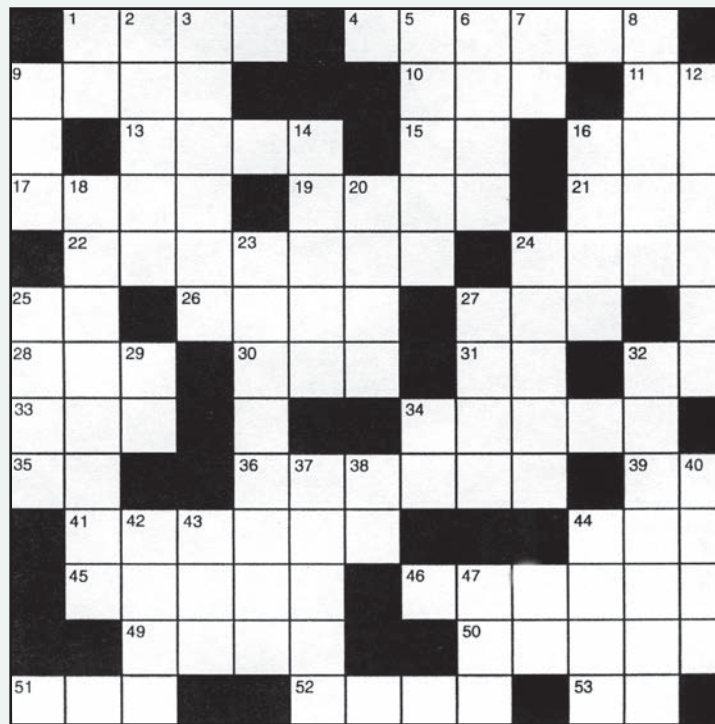
TAB HIGHLIGHTS

TAB Highlights is an email newsletter delivered every Monday-Wednesday-Friday with the day's top stories from the world of faith-based news. The complimentary service is managed by the TAB Media team. Headlines come from international, national and Southern Baptist coverage as well as one story that has been trending during the week. TAB Highlights also provides a link to the latest podcast released from the TAB Media team. To sign up, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. Ark builder.
4. The ark rested ...
upon the mountains
of _____. (Gen. 8:4)
9. How long _____ ye
between two
opinions?
(1 Kings 18:21)
10. Creative work.
11. I _____ the Lord thy
God. (Deut. 5:6)
13. A bit of news or
information.
15. And _____ came to
pass. (Gen. 8:13)
16. Also known as. (abbr.)
17. He sent forth a _____.
(Gen. 8:8)
19. Possesses.
21. Metropolitan. (abbr.)
22. One hundred years.
24. Confined.
25. South Carolina. (abbr.)
26. For a good man
some would even
_____ to die.
(Rom. 5:7)
27. A metal container.
28. A son of Noah.
(Gen. 5:32)
30. Hotel.
31. Out of print. (abbr.)
32. Junior. (abbr.)
33. Eastern Standard
Time. (abbr.)
34. A musical play.
35. Michigan. (abbr.)
36. Wood that the ark
was made of.
39. Pronoun. (abbr.)
41. Medicine acting as a
sedative.
44. _____ is more precious
than rubies.
(Prov. 3:15)
45. Under _____. (below)



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46. Hannah's son. _____ the _____. (Rev. 3:14)
 49. He shall be like a
_____ planted by the
rivers. (Ps. 1:3)
 50. And the flood was
_____ days upon the
earth. (Gen. 7:17)
 51. Fuel.
 52. Bring up, raise.
 53. Sound expressing
doubt or surprise.
- ## DOWN
1. North America.
(abbr.)
 2. In her mouth was an
_____ leaf. (Gen. 8:11)
 3. _____ unto me, and hear
me. (Ps. 55:2)
 5. Save for a _____ day.
 6. _____ and crafts.
 7. Route. (abbr.)
 8. Thine iniquity is _____
away. (Isa. 6:7)
 9. Possessed.
 12. _____-of-fact.
 14. Blessed are they that
_____. (Matt. 5:4)
 16. These things saith
 18. There is none _____
of stumbling in him.
(1 John 2:10)
 20. Small songbird.
 23. Drive too closely.
 24. Used to write on.
 25. Son of Noah. (Gen.
5:32)
 27. Deal with problems.
 29. Mountain. (abbr.)
 32. And _____ and Japheth
took a garment
(Gen. 9:23)
 34. Exclamation.
 37. Different in nature or
kind.
 38. Physical education.
(abbr.)
 40. Depend.
 42. Domesticated
animals.
 43. Let God be true, but
every man a l _____.
(Rom. 3:4)
 44. Make your calling
and election _____.
(2 Pet. 1:10)
 47. Africa. (abbr.)

Mission:Dignity helps pastors, widows

By Susan Ervien
GuideStone Financial Services

In the Old Testament we find these words: "I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous abandoned" (Ps. 37:25a).

On June 26 we have the opportunity to return a blessing to righteous, unsung heroes of the faith, namely retired Southern Baptist pastors, workers and their widows who served and abundantly blessed those in their care during their years of ministry.

Jeanetta Watson served with her husband, Wendell, for 45 years. Wendell, a bivocational pastor, always served small churches. The Watsons weren't able to save much in the way of retirement, but the Lord always provided for their daily needs.

Skiping doctor visits

Wendell's health worsened after the Watsons retired from the ministry.

Finances became tight as Jeanetta tried to keep up with car, home and supplemental insurance payments. Jeanetta would not even go to the doctor or dentist because that was another expense she couldn't pay.

"I didn't know what I was going to do, but then I got a call saying that I'd been accepted by Mission:Dignity," Jeanetta says.

"It was such a burden lifted off my shoulders. There are no words to explain what this ministry has meant to me.

"I pray that all of you realize what this means to

know our years of service have not been forgotten."

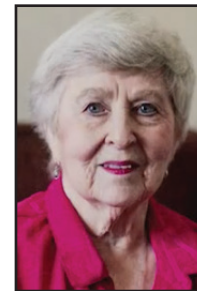
Stories like Jeanetta's highlight the importance of Mission:Dignity.

"Mission:Dignity is the very heart of GuideStone and has been since our inception in 1918," GuideStone President Hance Dilbeck said.

"We have a heart to help pastors and other servants of the Lord finish well. Through Mission:Dignity, we offer financial assistance to retirement-aged Southern Baptist ministers, workers and widows struggling to meet basic needs."

The Southern Baptist Convention has set aside the fourth Sunday in June for churches to celebrate and raise a special offering for Mission:Dignity. Churches, Sunday School classes and other groups can order free Mission:Dignity Sunday materials from GuideStone by visiting MDSunday.org or texting MDORDER to 41444. The materials are not dated, so churches can use them any time of the year they wish.

"It is a tremendous blessing for us to come alongside thousands of churches to celebrate what God is doing through Mission:Dignity," said Aaron Meraz, director of Mission:Dignity. "With 100% of donations given through Mission:Dignity going to help a retired Southern Baptist minister and wife or his widow, our churches can be assured that these dear 'soldiers of the cross' are not forgotten."



WATSON

**Mission:Dignity
Sunday is June 26.**

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Dawson helps church planters in rural areas

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Joel Littlefield remembers it as an emotional moment.

He and his wife had moved to Maine in 2016 to plant a church, and it felt like an overwhelming task.

"We had no partnerships at the time — I was still learning about that," he recalled. "In that process of planning and gathering our core team, the North American Mission Board made us aware of a gathering in Portland and said there was a church from down south that had come up to bless church planters."

A night off

The church was Dawson Memorial Baptist in Birmingham which had brought around 100 students to entertain church planters' children while they got a night out. That included Littlefield's youngest child, who recently had been adopted and needed extra care.

It was the first time in a long time the Littlefields had a night off.

"Before they sent us out, the entire team of teenagers and leaders from Dawson surrounded us and sang a blessing over the planters,"

Littlefield remembered.

"The place was filled with tears. It was so moving and eye-opening to us that there were churches outside our state who were there for us and praying for us."

Not alone

"It really began to sink in that we weren't going to be in this alone."

That is exactly why Dawson chose in 2014 to get involved in the work, said Ben Hale, evangelism and missions pastor.

"We chose Maine for two reasons. [NAMB] had recently [redirected its] funding to focus on major cities," Hale explained. "The second reason is that they are one of the least-reached states, with less than 2% evangelical Christian."

Tom Thompson, Dawson's volunteer leader for the work in Maine, said their goal was twofold: plant five churches over five years and strengthen existing churches any way they could.

Littlefield's congregation, New City Church in Bath, Maine, was one of those church plants. He said Dawson stepped in to help financially in a way that allowed him to quit his secular job and focus on the church.



Photo courtesy of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church

In 2017, Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, sent its high school choir on a missions trip to Maine. They helped build accessible playgrounds for three elementary schools.

"In the midst of that period there was all kinds of connection and support," Littlefield remembered, "everything ranging from a need here and there to offering counseling and consulting to sending a team of people to help us put on a family and marriage conference."

Looking to plant

"Here we are nearly six years in. Having grown some, we're now in the phase of ourselves looking to plant churches."

Dawson is now coming alongside to help establish a church planting residency program to train planters to

send out. The first will come from New City Church which started with a core team of 25 and now averages about 85 in attendance.

"It's been a wonderful partnership with Dawson, absolutely wonderful," Littlefield said. "I have no doubt New City Church is healthy and where it is because of Dawson's help."

Travis Bush, pastor of Summit Community Church in Gorham, Maine, said

his experience with Dawson has been similar. While other churches visited and said they wanted to partner, Dawson was different. They "just kept coming," he said.

"The difference between folks we had seen over and over and Dawson folks was Dawson kept coming and didn't want to be an ATM, where they just sent funds. They kept wanting to send their people and meet needs," Bush explained. "The relationship has kept going. The guy who leads our worship has a biweekly call with Dawson's worship pastor to this day."

Summit Community was one of the existing churches

Dawson came alongside, except at the time it was SouthCoast Community Church.

"Dawson approached us with the question, 'If you could do something in your community and had 125 sets of hands, what would you do?' So we went to our school system, and there was a huge need for handicapped-accessible playground equipment," Bush recalled.

The result was We Love Gorham Day in 2017 during which Dawson brought a team and pulled together other local churches to help build accessible playgrounds at three schools.

"It was a huge project," Bush said, and [it] opened doors to show the love of Christ to the community.

After working together, one of the local churches that helped, South Gorham Baptist, approached Bush about a possible merger. Dawson helped the two churches think through the process, and in January 2018 they combined to

become Summit Community Church.

"Dawson has just been a part of the fabric of our church in so many ways," Bush said.

Thompson added that the church is "just booming, thriving and growing."

And Hale said the effort has been an encouragement to Dawson as well.

"Not only has our work in Maine supported the churches there as they reach people for Christ, but it has opened our members' eyes to the lostness in our country and it has provided meaningful opportunities for our people to serve relatively close to home," he said.

**"I have no doubt
New City Church is
healthy and where
it is because of
Dawson's help."**

**Pastor Joel Littlefield
New City Church
Bath, Maine**



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 26

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology, University of Mobile



DIVIDED 1 Kings 12:6–19

King Solomon died in 931 B.C., and his son, Rehoboam, ascended to the throne. Significantly, Rehoboam's coronation was not held in Jerusalem but in Shechem. It was a city notable for its connection to Abraham and Jacob and as the place where Joshua led the nation in a renewal of their covenant with God. More importantly Shechem was in northern territory. Rehoboam's journey north for his coronation reveals he knew the grievances of the northern tribes had to be heard.

Jeroboam, a former servant of Solomon, was summoned out of exile in Egypt to lead the northern tribes as they met with Rehoboam in Shechem. They wanted relief from Solomon's policies that had become increasingly oppressive. Those policies had favored Solomon's own tribe of Judah. This heavy yoke included harsh labor and an oppressive tax burden. Their request was not unreasonable. They did not demand the removal of all the burdens imposed, but only that the king would lighten them.

Experience Speaks (6–7)

When Rehoboam heard the grievance of the people from the northern tribes, he asked for three days to formulate a decision. In order to make his decision, he first consulted the elders who had served his father.

The elders gave Rehoboam a twofold response. First, he should be a servant leader to the people. Second, he should respond to their request with kind words. The elders knew this response would go a long way in building bridges. The people in the north had grown weary of being forced labor for Solomon's building projects located primarily in Jerusalem and Judah. They were fed up with having to pay high taxes for the upkeep of the temple and the royal court.

The elders assured Rehoboam if he followed their counsel the people of the northern tribes would be his servants forever. They knew

people will follow leaders they trust and who will not exploit them for selfish reasons. If Rehoboam chose to serve the people, he would not lose authority. He would earn credibility and their loyalty.

Arrogance Reigns (8–15)

Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the elders. He was not interested in being a servant leader.

Rehoboam consulted with the pampered young men (literally "children") who had grown up with him in the palace.

These young men knew what he wanted to hear. They believed in intimidation and domination, not servant leadership. They celebrated Solomon's hardships and mocked the peoples' request. They told Rehoboam to intimidate the crowd by declaring he was tougher than Solomon ever dreamed of being.

Rehoboam promised the northern tribes they could expect greater burdens.

He abused his position by answering harshly. He refused to negotiate or compromise in any way. He responded with inflammatory, threatening language.

Up to this point, we see men acting on the basis of their sinful desires. The hand of God has been unseen, but it has not been absent. Verse 15 says, "This turn of events came from the Lord to carry out His Word" (see 1 Kings 11:29–39).

God was not coercing the action. Rehoboam was acting freely, but his actions accomplished God's sovereign plan.

Division Ensues (16–19)

The people rejected Rehoboam's authority over them. They denied any responsibility to David's dynasty and left Rehoboam to rule Judah. One poor decision tore down in a few days what David and Solomon had labored 80 years to achieve. Rehoboam fled for his life while Jeroboam became the king in the north, fulfilling God's word. The once-thriving kingdom was divided.

Bible Studies for Life

By Roy E. Ciampa, Ph.D.
Armstrong Chair of Religion, Samford University



FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT Ephesians 5:8–21

Walking is used in the New Testament as a metaphor for how one lives one's life. It is an important theme, introducing key sections in the second half of Ephesians. Believers are to walk (live or behave) in a manner worthy of our calling in Christ (Eph. 4:1). That means we must not walk like unbelieving Gentiles do (Eph. 4:17), since they were known for their vices, especially idolatry and immorality. Rather, we must imitate God by walking in love (Eph. 5:2), walking as children of light (v. 8) and walking wisely (v. 15). To walk, or live, as God intends, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We are no longer to walk in the ways of the world. (8–14)

Darkness has been associated with what is bad, wicked, false or wrong since the beginning.

Paul says light has to do with all that is good, righteous and true. God has made us light, and we must walk as children who reflect what is good, righteous and true.

We are also to test or examine things to see if they are compatible with the light and pleasing to the Lord. We must reject activities that fail that test and warn others about their dangers as we would if we found a bridge in danger of collapsing.

Integrity has to do with how you would behave if you knew no one would see or find out. Many will engage in shameful activities in secret, but everything we do is visible to God. God calls us to bring light into the darkness so people can see things for what they really are, including spiritual dangers hiding in the shadows.

We walk wisely when we walk under the Spirit's control. (15–18)

When Paul says we should walk "as wise," he is once again expounding on being "imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1).

Since wisdom is another well-known divine attribute, we are

imitating God when we walk in wisdom rather than as unwise people. The wisdom we need to walk in is not the wisdom of this world but the wisdom given to us by God. To be truly wise, to walk in wisdom, is to live a life marked by the fullness of God's Spirit. The Spirit gives us God's wisdom to live a disciplined and controlled life rather than a life marked by reckless or uncontrolled living, as when one allows one's life to be governed by alcohol or passions.

Given the ongoing battle between the reign of God and the reign of the powers in rebellion against God, wisdom dictates we take every opportunity to advance God's kingdom agenda, living lives governed by His Spirit rather than other influences surrounding us.

We worship and live thankfully when we walk under the Spirit's control. (19–21)

We walk as wise people when we live Spirit-filled lives, and we are walking under the Spirit's control when we worship from the depths of our hearts and express our gratitude to God for all He gives us. In these verses Paul unpacks what it means to live a Spirit-filled life, using a series of participles to unpack the meaning of that expression: speaking, singing and making music, giving thanks and submitting to each other.

In other words, when we glorify God by entering fully into authentic worship, in a spirit of deep gratitude and appropriate submission to other members of the worshipping community, we are expressing the life of the Spirit within us.

There is no magic formula for being filled with the Spirit (no need to attend special conferences to receive some secret key to the fullness of the Spirit). To submit oneself fully to the Spirit's leading in any moment is be filled with the Spirit, resulting in the glorification of God. The fullness of the Spirit is reflected whenever we glorify God.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Artist's 'Secrets' song encourages those 'battling silently'

Many know what it's like to be in an unhealthy relationship. Many have dealt with family issues. Many have had suicidal thoughts, even if they never planned to act on them.

Rachael Nemiroff, a singer/songwriter in Nashville, knows those feelings and decided to be open and honest about her experience when she co-wrote "Secrets."

When co-writers Beni Cowart and Nick Schwartz met with Nemiroff and heard what she had gone through, the subject of the new song was obvious.

"When I was processing a lot of what had happened, I just remember one night not wanting to really live anymore," Nemiroff recalled.

"It was the first time I had suicidal thoughts.

"Literally, I remember looking online, needing to get some help [and thinking] maybe I need to check myself into some kind of treatment center."

"I consider myself a pretty optimistic, joyful person," Nemiroff said.

"I don't deal with depression or anxiety on a day-to-day basis."

It was only during the years of the

pandemic in 2020–21 that "pretty traumatic things" happened in Nemiroff's life.

The night she was so low emotionally, she ended up texting a friend who helped her talk through what happened in the failed relationship.

Though her friend supported her through that crisis, the depression lingered.

Friends and family helped, and she went to therapy, eventually processing the difficult time.

However, the experience fueled her passion to help others, Nemiroff said. By the time she got to that co-writing session, she was ready to share what happened.

"It was such a beautiful moment to be able to come together with them and write an honest song," she recalled.

"I feel like sometimes in Christian music it's very easy to just glaze over things. It's really beautiful seeing God use this song, getting on some pretty big playlists. ... My other

co-writer said that's what happens when you write an honest song."

"It's not always done in my genre," Nemiroff acknowledged, "because I think it can be scary wondering how other people might receive it.

"I get it. It's scary to put yourself out there. It is very scary to be vulnerable and be like, 'Hey, I didn't want to live anymore,' because sometimes that can bring a type of attention you don't want."

Pursuing a dream

Nemiroff has loved singing since she was young. Her mother encouraged her to pursue her dream, and when times were hard, her mom was her cheerleader.



Photo courtesy of Rachael Nemiroff

RACHAEL NEMIROFF

Nemiroff moved to Nashville when she was 18 but wasn't sure where it would lead.

"If I could go back and tell myself something, I would say to keep going," she said.

"There's probably gonna be a lot of doors that might close on you. But don't let that discourage you from listening to that still, small voice that says, 'You've got this.' Try to be as authentically 'you' as you can and just be careful of who and what you're letting speak into your life, especially at pivotal points."

Before Nemiroff was offered a contract that led to writing "Secrets," she planned to enroll in a graduate program to become a licensed therapist.

She asked God to give her a sign this was what He wanted. Feeling a peace about signing the contract, she dropped out of the graduate program the day before it started.

That same desire to help others by becoming a therapist assisted her in getting past her fear and vulnerability to write "Secrets." She said she loves connecting with fans, hearing the stories of those who listen to her music and knowing its impact. The hope-filled accounts she hears validate her decision to sign the music contract.

'He hasn't left us'

Nemiroff's main goal for her music is to encourage those "battling silently."

"I got through this. We need to talk about these things because it takes the power away from it the more we open up and share," she noted.

"Also, God is literally there with us in these moments. He hasn't left us. He's not ashamed of us dealing with these things.

"It's OK to reach out and ask for help and to acknowledge that, 'Hey, this is what I'm feeling right now,'" Nemiroff said, "and starting, at least for me, to lift that shame. I remind myself that I am human. It's okay because the more that I try

to hide things and keep them secret, it piles up.

"My hope is that people can hear ['Secrets'] and know that they are seen and they're not alone and we really are in this together," Nemiroff affirmed.

"This isn't going to last forever. We all have our stuff — whether [it's] things that we've done in the past that we're not proud of [or] things that have happened in the past to us that were traumatic that were never our fault."

Nemiroff released an alternate version of the song in May supporting Mental Health Month.

For more about her and her songwriting visit Instagram, Twitter or Facebook.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.



Alabama Baptists at convention



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Kevin Blackwell, assistant to the president for church relations at Samford University, greets Mississippi messengers at the university's booth in the exhibit hall.



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Ric Camp of Shelby Baptist Association is ready for the meeting with his wife, Lisa, and daughter, Raegan.

Endel Lee (right) is a retired Navy chaplain working with the North American Mission Board to plant churches near military bases. He and his wife, Kathy, are members of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile.



Photo by Debbie Campbell/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Debbie Campbell/The Alabama Baptist

Left: Retired Army Colonel Jim Atkinson and his wife, Katie, are among many Alabama Baptists attending SBC. They are members of Flint River Baptist Church in Hazel Green. **Right:** Danny Courson (left), DOM for St. Clair Baptist Association, and SBOM's Rick Barnhart.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Debbie Campbell/The Alabama Baptist

Some Montgomery leaders stop for a quick visit before the convention begins: (l to r) Terrence Jones, pastor of Strong Tower Church, with his wife, Thais; DeAndre' Burns, associate pastor of Flatline Church; Dewayne Rembert, pastor of Flatline; a friend of DeAndre'; and Montgomery associational missionary Neal Hughes with his wife, Mary.



Photo by Debbie Campbell/The Alabama Baptist
Edwin and Joan Jenkins are ready for the annual meeting. Jenkins is teaching pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Huntsville.



Photo by Debbie Campbell/The Alabama Baptist
Alabama Baptist State Convention president Buddy Champion (left) and SBOM executive director Rick Lance connect in Anaheim.



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Alabama leaders — church, State Board of Missions and Alabama WMU — meet and catch up in the lobby of the Anaheim Convention Center.