

The Alabama Baptist

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December 8, 2022

Vol. 187, No. 48
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



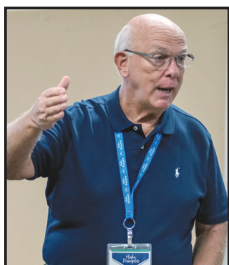
Missionary couple recognized for decades of service

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Pastors working as Santas bring joy, extend ministry to others during holidays

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Tips for growing small groups, making most of time

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Michelle Norwood (left), her son Hunter (second from right) and two friends make the most of an ice cream truck, growing A Little Something Extra ice cream into an expanding ministry.

Photo courtesy of Michelle Norwood

‘Something extra’

Ice cream truck dreams turn into ministry for families of children with Down syndrome

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Michelle Norwood says on a much smaller scale, she might know what Noah felt like.

For her it wasn't an ark — it was an ice cream truck.

“I had seen one for maybe three minutes in my life,” she

recalled. “I was visiting my sister in Memphis one summer. We walked out, and I bought the kids an ice cream.”

But in 2017, Norwood said she woke up night after night at 2 a.m., and God started to speak to her about how to build one.

“I’d wake up, and little by little there would be another idea of what I needed to research or figure out,” she related. “I made notes and started making connections.”

It was a new thought, but the purpose behind it had been in Norwood’s mind and heart for

years. Norwood and her husband Anthony’s middle child, Hunter, was born with Down syndrome. From the beginning, she was invested in the journey of helping him achieve God’s purpose.

Back to school

“When he was five, I went back to school to become a special ed teacher,” said Norwood, a member of Rainsville First Baptist Church. “[I went] so I could help him but also because I knew what it was like to sit on the other side of the table as the parent and feel

like you’re failing when your child isn’t hitting the milestones. I wanted [parents] to know I was on their side and that what their children are capable of just happens on a different timeline.”

She began teaching at the high school level. As her students started working in the school snack store, she noticed what a difference it was making in their lives.

“They were beginning to thrive,” Norwood recalled. “They were learning employment skills, and they were (See ‘Giving,’ page 14)



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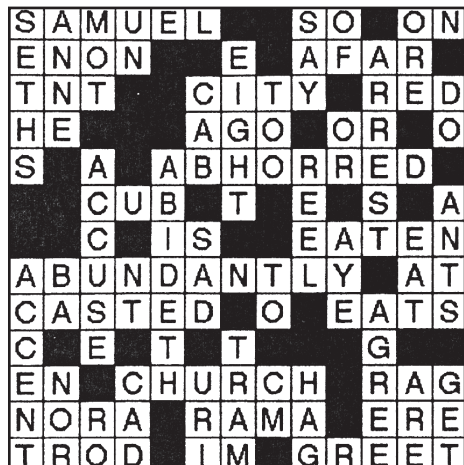
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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

Gilbreath's book offers hope for those in crisis

Sammy Gilbreath's life has been a miracle according to his family, his friends and especially his doctors. They told him he would die decades ago.

But he didn't. His heart's still beating, and he's still got stories to live and stories to tell.

The Alabama Baptist has covered him over the years, most recently through Season 1 of the Stories podcast available at thealabama-baptist.org/stories-podcast/season-one.

But now Gilbreath's story is available in a different format — a book called "Learning to Live Like You're Dying" that chronicles his adventures, heart journey and passion to share his faith in every possible circumstance.

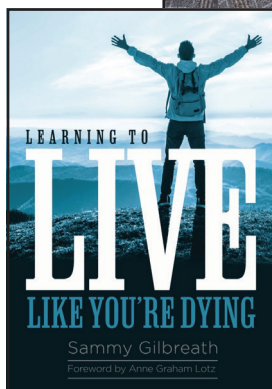
The book also provides a four-part Bible study based on the four points of Gilbreath's "Live Like You're Dying" sermon, which he's preached in churches all over the place through the years: value the promise of life, value spiritual blessings over physical things, value a clear



Photo courtesy of Sammy Gilbreath

Sammy Gilbreath has devoted his life to sharing the gospel story, but God also has given Gilbreath quite a life story to tell.

Both are the subject of Gilbreath's new book and Bible study.



For more information or to order a book, visit sammygilbreath.com.

conscience and value remembering.

"I want the book to offer hope for anyone facing a life or health

crisis," Gilbreath said. "I want it to point people to Christ as their Lord and Savior." (Grace Thornton)

Extend spirit of Giving Tuesday through the end of 2022, beyond

Ten years ago, Giving Tuesday began as a way to encourage individuals to give their money, time and skills to help nonprofit organizations.

TAB Media Group is grateful for the support of subscribers, churches, advertisers and others who support us throughout the year.

As we approach the end of 2022 and look ahead to 2023, would you consider helping us in one of the following ways?

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► **Tell us what you love** about TAB and let us know what you'd like to see more of in 2023. Email your thoughts and ideas to news@tabmedia.group. (TAB Media)

— Correction —

In the article "Edwards receives Missions Volunteer of the Year Award" in the Nov. 24 issue, the website for Well Worn Paths was incorrect. The correct website is wellwornpaths.org.

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)

© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.

Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org

Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org

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Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

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GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of **The Alabama Baptist**

By Rosalie Hunt, retired missionary and member of TAB board of directors

Lottie Moon: From scoffer and skeptic to scholar and saint

A barking dog is an important character in the conversion story of Lottie Moon, the namesake of our annual Christmas offering to support international missions.

A student at Albemarle Female Institute in Virginia, Lottie Moon was known on campus both for her brilliant mind and her skepticism of the value of religion.

Raised in a wealthy Southern home, indulged and petted, the tiny quicksilver child very early grew tired of hearing family and relatives acrimoniously arguing about religious doctrine. Moon determined she didn't need God; she was fine like she was.

As a girl, Moon read the biography of missionary Ann Judson. The religious aspect of the story did not capture her attention — it was the amazing adventures, the courage and bravery.

Finest education

Moon's education was the finest to be had for women prior to the Civil War, and other than deportment, she excelled in every subject, especially foreign languages and writing.

One professor, in awe of her towering intellect, declared: "She writes the best English I have ever been privileged to read."

Barely as tall as the average 10-year-old, her brilliance and skepticism were evident to all.

Next to campus, the eminent John A. Broadus was leading special meetings, and Moon's fellow classmates were flocking to hear him, both in the evening services and each morning.

In relating the account of her conversion, Moon confessed, "I went to the service that night to scoff, but I went back to my room to pray. I was prevented from sleeping by a barking dog," she admitted, "and I ended up praying all night and giving my heart to Christ."

According to one of her closest friends, Julia Toy (who later became the chief architect of Mississippi Woman's Missionary Union) there was great excitement among Moon's friends when she was discovered in earnest conversation with Broadus.

In a short time and to the amazement of the entire student body, Moon calmly and firmly announced her determination to consecrate her life to Christ.

The changes in her behavior and focus were both immediate and permanent.

Moon's story and her 39 years of service and sacrifice in China continue to inspire. In 1918, just six years after her death, the single largest missions offering

in the world was named in her honor.

Moon's beloved church family in Tengzhou (now called Peng-Lai) left a monument that sums up the deep love the people of China had for their Tyan Shu Ke (Heavenly Book Visitor): "The Tengzhou Church remembers forever."

Loneliness

Of all the challenges that confronted Lottie Moon, none was quite as daunting as the specter of loneliness.

"Sometimes I am so lonely. I pray that no missionary will ever be as lonely as I have been. Yet," she wrote, "every moment of loneliness is more than worth it when someone like young Miss Wang comes up right after her baptism and whispers in my ear, 'Oh Miss Moon, how can I ever thank you aright for having come to bring me the wonderful news of salvation?'"

When Moon died on Christmas Eve 1912, in North China there were 16 thriving churches, 56 schools with thousands of students, 42 Chinese evangelists and thousands of believers.

And there was Li Shou Ting, whose elderly uncle first heard the gospel from Moon in the interior village of Shaling.

Moon gave the man a Bible, but he could not read. He took it to his nephew, Li Shou Ting, a bright young Confucian scholar. Li asked Miss Moon to teach him, and that young scholar became the greatest evangelist China has ever known, baptizing over 10,000 believers.

Tiny in stature, yet mighty in spirit, courage, bravery and commitment, Lottie Moon remains to Baptists a symbol of service and sacrifice.

Each year in December, this remarkable woman and her loving legacy inspire us anew to also give, pray and go.



Your Voice



Share your comments, letters to the editor, blog excerpts, social media posts

Letter to the editor in support of keeping medical cannabis legal

By Grady Thornton

Birmingham, Ala.

My brother Buster was dying. We both began to weep as he spoke of his bleak prognosis. We had gone through the deaths of both parents and several aunts and uncles. Now we faced his death as well.

The next few months would be torturous for Buster. When he was diagnosed in January 1982, he had three small spots on his spinal column. The doctor referred to them as “hot spots.”

When he died in July 1983, the doctor said his whole skeleton was glowing in the scans. There were tumors in his chest and more on his brain.

I would have done anything to alleviate his pain and nausea because conventional medicine was not working. Now I believe medical cannabis, also known as medical marijuana, could have made his life a little less agonizing.

Legalization in Alabama

Medical cannabis is now legal in Alabama. Scores of concerned professionals came together in a united effort to bring comfort to a suffering segment of our society.

I am a politically conservative evangelical Christian. My personal experience with my brother, my research and my faith all lead me to support the use of medical cannabis to help relieve the suffering of fellow human beings.

The Alabama Medical Cannabis Commission was created to oversee the industry and implement careful

regulations. AMCC is guided by a 2,000-page operations manual that covers almost every conceivable aspect of the process.

The commission includes experts in the fields of oncology, neurology, pediatrics, pulmonology, biochemistry, farming, banking, health care law and law enforcement.

Some argue medical cannabis is legal because of greed and control over legislators.

I disagree. The legislators are neither demonic nor duped.

Alabama’s legalization of medical cannabis is perhaps the most studied, regulated and efficient program in the nation.

I believe this is the most important move in modern medicine in Alabama thus far in the millennium.

Alabama has legalized marijuana derivatives for medical purposes only.

The Alabama law will allow registered doctors to issue a medical card for a range of conditions, including autism, cancer-related weight loss and chronic pain, Crohn’s disease, depression, seizure-causing conditions, Parkinson’s disease, PTSD and other illnesses characterized by chronic pain for which conventional therapies and opiates should not be used or are ineffective.

Read that list again and notice how many people you know who are afflicted by one or more of those conditions. Perhaps you have suffered from one of them yourself.

The AMCC website indicates the medical cannabis will be highly regulated in quality and quantity. Smaller doses will be used at first,

then increased only under strict procedures and only for limited conditions.

At the top dose level, 75 milligrams, the patient will have to surrender their driver’s license as long as they are taking that amount.

Parents or guardians can register and be approved to allow children to receive measured doses of medical cannabis for the conditions listed earlier.

At age 19, a person may apply for a medical card and may be approved without the consent of the parent.

Many Alabamians have been reluctant to embrace medical cannabis because of the justified fear we have of illicit drug use.

Most Alabamians have seen the wreckage caused by drug abuse.

We have been afraid medical cannabis would create more addicts, more crime and more destroyed youth.

This is due to our healthy fear of drug abuse and our lack of understanding of medical cannabis.

I have addiction in both sides of my birth family, and I have seen it in every phase of my career as a counselor.

It is heartbreaking to see what addiction can do — not just to the addict, but to their friends and family too. I would never advocate for something that would cause the curse of addiction.

Some opponents of medical cannabis regularly refer to regulated dispensaries as “pot shops.” That is deceptive and an insult to those who will benefit from medical cannabis.

Two organizations for which I have great respect, the Eagle Forum and Alabama Citizens Action Program, oppose medical cannabis and AMCC.

I think these organizations are operated by God-fearing people who have the welfare of His children in mind.

Opposite viewpoint

On this issue, however, I must disagree. (ALCAP’s opposition on the issue ran in a previous issue and can be found at tabonline.org.)

The Alabama Baptist State Convention met in Birmingham in November and passed a resolution urging repeal of the 2021 law that legalized medical cannabis.

We cannot let that happen.

We cannot let our fear of illicit drug use blind us to the medically beneficial use of a natural substance to treat the curse of disease and pain.

Given the list of treatable conditions listed earlier, support of medical cannabis will surely benefit all of us.

To see how carefully AMCC has structured the program, visit amcc.alabama.gov and educate yourself about the process.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Grady Thornton is an Alabama Baptist and a citizen advocate for medical cannabis. He is retired from a counseling career that included work in the areas of crisis intervention, suicide prevention, domestic violence and at-risk youth.



THORNTON

View the full resolution on medical marijuana adopted at the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention at tabonline.org/resolutions-2022.

“Don’t let the gap between God’s word and our will become so wide that we fall.”

AMY HACKER

From “Mind the gap” at the-scroll.com

“We can go through life doing all kinds of things in the name of the Lord, and if we don’t do it with love, we’re just a clanging cymbal,” said **Buddy Champion, president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention**, during his message at the state’s annual meeting.

“I’m just praying that here in America, here in Alabama, that next generation will know the Lord because you and I were faithful in the present,” said **Joel Carwile, pastor of First Baptist Church Athens**.

“It doesn’t matter where you’re from, you can walk and you can pray. We need to be doing more and more of that because that’s where the seeds are able to be planted,

where the soil has been wet and tilled. That’s where the churches are going to grow,” said **Kathie Aiken, on-site coordinator — alongside her husband, Dewey — for North Carolina Baptists on Mission**.

“God has used us while we’re in this little RV. ... God uses you no matter where you are,” said **Karla Rossi-Gonzalez, who shares the gospel and ministers in RV camps alongside her husband, Henry**.

“The experience was painful and life changing, affecting our entire family,” he noted. “We now believe the Lord allowed us to go through that season to transform us,” said **Barry Holcomb, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Belmont**,

Mississippi. Holcomb and his wife, Kathi, started a ministry, Remember the Way, that helps couples find their way back to fruitful ministry after a season of conflict.

“Why can’t we work together for the greatest good? We see the church as the congregation. God sees the church as His body,” said **Mike Carlisle, director of missions for the San Diego Southern Baptist Association**.

Other Bible-believing churches are not your competition, they’re your family.

Shane Pruitt
National Next Gen Director
North American Mission Board

From the *Twitterverse*

@ricklance

As we begin the Advent season, may we remember that Jesus is both our Source and our Resource. May we allow Him to flow through our lives like a river resourcing the lives of others — with the gospel and with ministry and discipleship.

@ValleydaleSBC

The season of Christmas isn’t about gifts and decorations and spending. It’s about the anticipation of the Son of God born to rescue us through His love. #christmas #hope

@tylereiland2414

“What if we stopped celebrating being busy as a measurement of importance? What if instead we celebrated how much time we had spent listening, pondering,

meditating and enjoying time with the most important people in our lives?” —Greg McKeown

@LLBCAthens

Doubt doesn’t stop God. It stops us from experiencing the glory of God. —Andy John King

@ChurchAnswers

“Vulnerability can be used for either selfless or selfish reasons. Pastors and church leaders should express weakness to serve others rather than trying to garner sympathy.” —Sam Rainer

@LifewayResearch

“Jesus ‘knows if we’ve been bad or good,’ but by His grace, we are good for His sake — not goodness’ sake.” —Caroline Case

@CaskeyCtrNOBTS

“The good news is that if you have been born again, you are already on God’s team. The even better news is that God wants to use you as an impact player.” —@newsomblake

@haines_matt

What impresses Jesus is not shallow religious belief, but sacrificial faith.

@Dawson_Church

“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:11).

@NAMB_SBC

Is there anything better than celebrating lives changed by the gospel?

Share the Light of the World

This time of year, I love to look at Christmas light displays.

If you go to the mountains to see them or even to a place near you that has majestic lights, it’s breathtaking.

People travel great distances to see these popular places with Christmas lights and displays.

These are the questions we must consider as followers of Christ:

Are we displaying Christ in our lives daily as a testimony of how His light split the darkness of sin in our lives?

Are we displaying the light of hope in challenging times in our lives?

When you have to wait in a long line to purchase a Christmas gift, can folks see the light of Christ shining brightly in your life?

What happens when you go to a shopping center and the traffic in the parking lot is heavy? Do folks see the light of Christ on your face, or do they instead see frustration?

When you go to a restaurant that is packed and short staffed, are you burning brightly for the One you serve to the person who is serving your meal?

Let’s draw close to the Lord and be a display of His light during Christmas.

First, share your testimony today with someone who is not a follower of Christ. Tell how the Light split the darkness of sin in your life.

Second, do you know someone who is going through a dark valley of loneliness, depression, grief, illness, divorce or another difficult situation?

Seek to encourage that person today and throughout this season of light.

Steve Sellers
Interim associational
director
Friendship Baptist
Association

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Florida Baptist Convention

On Nov. 23, Disaster Relief volunteers from Florida and North Carolina served hundreds of meals to Florida residents continuing to recover from Hurricane Ian's impact. David Coggins, FLDR director, said volunteers served their neighbors from Lowe's parking lots in Port Charlotte and Fort Myers. Lowe's and local officials requested the meals. Volunteers also shared prayers, Bibles, a word of hope and the gospel message, Coggins said. (Florida Baptist Witness)

Former SBC seminary professor files suit

Former Southern Baptist seminary professor David Sills, who resigned following accusations of sexual abuse, and his wife, Mary, have filed suit in Alabama against the Southern Baptist Convention and 11 other defendants claiming defamation of character and conspiracy.

Sills was a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary until his May 23, 2018, resignation.

In 2019, former Lifeway Christian Resources vice president Jennifer Lyell told Baptist Press she had been abused by Sills, her former professor. Lyell is a defendant in the suit.

The Sillses say they were subjected to "public contempt, disgrace, ridicule or attack" because of the statements made against them by the defendants.

Read the full story at tabonline.org/sills-suit. (The Alabama Baptist)

Hunt to resume public ministry amid concerns

A group of four pastors serving as an accountability group has declared former longtime pastor and former SBC president Johnny Hunt fit again for ministry. They made their announcement in a late November video that also included a segment from Hunt.

Hunt was named earlier this year in the Guidepost Solutions report on sexual abuse in the SBC. Hunt allegedly sexually assaulted another minister's wife in 2010. Hunt alleges the incident was consensual.

Among those sharing concerns about the integrity of the restoration process was SBC President Bart Barber, who clarified the group's declaration was not endorsed by the SBC nor Hunt's former congregation at FBC Woodstock.

Read the full article at tabonline.org/hunt-update. (RNS, TAB)

Persecuted church

Ukrainian pastor, wife held by Russia freed after month-long detention

MARIUPOL, Ukraine — A Protestant pastor and his wife were freed Oct. 21 after being held by Russia's military for a month.

On Sept. 21, masked Russian soldiers came to the home of Leonid Ponomaryov, pastor of Baptist Council of Churches in Mariupol in the Donetsk Region, and his wife, Tatyana. Neighbors reported hearing cries and groans after the soldiers arrived, noted human rights group Forum 18.

The two were held for a month.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, Russian officials and soldiers have targeted religious entities in occupied areas. Religious leaders have been seized, places of worship closed and equipment and literature confiscated. Forum 18 also reported the torture of some religious leaders.

"Russian officials told local church members in Lysychansk that the military administration has banned all Baptists, Pentecostals and Adventists as extremists," said Eduard Nosachov, who was pastor of the largest Protestant church in Lysychansk, in the Luhansk Region.

In July, Russian forces seized the church, which they now use for city administration.

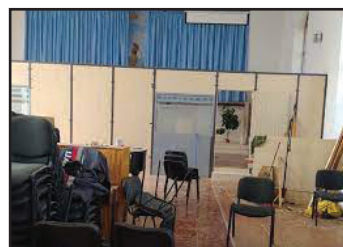


Photo courtesy of Lysychansk Baptist Church/Forum 18

Dozens of Nigerian Christians killed, girls held hostage by extremists

ABUJA, Nigeria — Some Nigerian officials have called for citizens to arm themselves after more than 70 Christians were slain in eight days.

Muslim Fulani herdsmen are suspected of the slayings in Benue State in the villages of Gbeji, Yelewata and Daudu between Oct. 12 and Oct. 20, according to Morning Star News.

Speaking on behalf of Benue's Gov. Samuel Ortom, secretary to the state government Anthony Ijohor called on the federal government to arm volunteer guards. "The security agencies have been overstretched and ... our people have to defend themselves," Ijohor said.

In Kebbi State, 11 high school girls remain captive 16 months after Islamist extremists abducted them from their school. Five of the 11 captives are Christians. Morning Star reports that a total of 70 girls were abducted in June 2021, and 59 Muslim captives have been released since then.

Nigeria is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Eva Nell Hunter**, longtime church library director for Central Baptist Church, Decatur, and library specialist for Lifeway Christian Resources, died Nov. 21. She was 94.

She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Southern Mississippi and a master's degree from the University of Alabama.

She taught at Decatur and Austin high schools and later served as assistant principal at Decatur High.

As one of four library specialists for Lifeway, she hosted the North Alabama Church Library Conference every year, with at least 100 people attending from Alabama and surrounding states.

She served 64 years with Central Baptist's library ministry (now called the Serving Center because the resources have expanded beyond books) before retiring late last year from the full-time post. She served as director for 61 of the 64 years and continued in a volunteer role after her retirement.

She also started libraries for churches across the U.S. and missionaries overseas until she was in her late 80s.

Hunter was preceded in death by her husband of 58 years, Mark George Hunter; son, Haran; and a stillborn daughter. She is survived by three daughters, seven grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.

► **Calvin Jackson Crocker**, 98, a bivocational minister, died Nov. 18. He was born in Perry County and was a veteran of World War II, having served in the U.S. Navy from 1943 to 1946. Upon his return, he moved to Birmingham where he met and married the now late Ida Mae Bamberg and made a public profession of faith. In December 1955, they moved to Chilton County, settling in "Dry Valley" where they began to farm.

They were active members of Providence Baptist Church, where Crocker made public his call to preach and was ordained Nov. 30, 1958, at the request of Friendship Baptist Church, Lawley, his first pastorate. For the next five decades Crocker was active as a bivocational pastor in Chilton, Shelby and Bibb counties. In addition to farming, he worked a variety of jobs to support his family.

He earned certificates in Christian training from Howard Extension (now Samford University) in 1968 and 1975. He never retired from

the call to preach, but he retired from pastoral ministry in 2004. His last pastorate was Blocton Third Baptist Church, West Blocton.

He is survived by five children, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► **Thomaston Baptist Church** celebrated its 82nd homecoming Oct. 30 with guest preacher Wayne Sharpe (right with Jeff Laduron, chairman of deacons and mayor of Thomaston).

When Sharpe was asked to preach for the special service, the church leaders didn't realize this was a special anniversary for Sharpe as well. He was ordained at Thomaston in July 1972.

The church presented Sharpe with a plaque commemorating his 50th anniversary in ministry.

Sharpe served 10 years as pastor of Forest Hill Baptist Church, Linden, then 17 years at First Baptist Church Gantt before retiring. Since then, he has served 23 years in revival ministry and interim pastor roles.

He and his wife, Willene, are members of Opp First Baptist Church.



Photo courtesy of Thomaston Baptist Church

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will present "The Nativity Story," a live nativity experience Dec. 16-18, 6-8 p.m. Guests will take a 30-minute hayride on an outdoor trail and view eight scenes from the life of Christ, from His birth to the resurrection. After the excursion, refreshments will be available in the fellowship hall. Admission is free. For more information, call 205-477-8265. Bill McCall is pastor.

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Clanton** celebrated its 150th anniversary Nov. 6 with former pastor Rick Marshall preaching.

Mitch Loftin, former minister of music, led congregational singing and played a piano prelude. The choir sang with Melinda McCullough, soloist. A men's ensemble performed a special. Paula Kornegay played a piano postlude.

Sarah Walters (right), wife of former pastor James Walters, presented a certificate on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission to Nikki Mote (left), children and communications director.



Photo courtesy of Nikki Mote

Jay Hurd wrote

and presented a poem commemorating the milestone.

"First Baptist members invested, with anticipation, much time in preparation for our 150th anniversary. The celebration itself far surpassed our expectations, combining ministry memories, special guests, fellowship with relocated believers and a great reconfirmation of why we exist — Jesus Christ," said pastor Matt DeBord. "May His exalted name and kingdom be the continued focus of our essence."

► **West End Baptist Church, Clanton**, will host "Savior For All," a musical, Dec. 17-18. There will be three presentations: Nightly showings will start at 6 p.m., and there will be a morning service at 10:30 a.m.

Doors will open one hour prior to each service, and an offering will be received for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Ridgeview Baptist Church, Talladega**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Nov. 13 with Tommy Strickland (left) sharing a special message. Congregational singing was led by Joseph Strickland.

Sonja Adams (right) presented a certificate on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. "We

focused on honoring the past while setting a vision for the future," Strickland said.



Photo courtesy of Sonja Adams

EAST LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

► **Lanier Baptist Church, Lanett**, will have a Bro. Billy Bob Bohannon concert Dec. 18, 6 p.m. EST. Bill King is pastor.

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► **Russellville First Baptist Church** presents "A Walk Thru Bethlehem" Dec. 13-15 from 6 to 8:30 p.m. nightly. Tours begin every 10 minutes and last 40 minutes. Reservations are suggested. Call 205-529-5908. Chase Dowdy is pastor.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **South Shelby Baptist Church, Shelby**, will host its Christmas play, "His Name is Jesus," on Dec. 17 at 6 p.m. and Dec. 18 at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Derek Deavers is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **East McFarland Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa**, will host "The Star of Bethlehem: The Mystery Unlocked" on Dec. 11, 6 p.m. NASA engineer and Bible teacher Dennis Strickland will share about miracles related to Jesus' birth.



CROCKER

Carroll faithfully flourishes through God's grace

By Laura Lee Leathers
The Alabama Baptist

When it comes to flourishing in the later years, Ruth Carroll's example is one to follow.

A few things are unchanged since she was featured as "Someone You Should Know" in The Alabama Baptist seven years ago. Her favorite hymn is still "Amazing Grace," and Psalm 23 remains her top pick of Scripture passages. Both are dear to her heart.

But a lot has changed too. For one thing, in February she celebrated her 95th birthday. Her years of widowhood have increased to 31 after 49 years of marriage to Marcus. She has two daughters, a son, five grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren. The number of great-great-grandchildren has doubled to 12.

There is the adjustment of more dependence upon family, and her children are her right-hand helpers as she navigates challenges.

On good days Carroll can be found at church or working in her yard. Reading and praying for others are other ways she engages her time.

Sunday dinner tradition

"I always took my children to church, and when we came home we enjoyed Sunday dinner with all the trimmings," Carroll remembered. "When my children were grown, I told them if they would go to church I would have everything prepared for Sunday dinner at my home. They took me up on the offer."

Her daughter, Janice, said the tradition continues.

"Mom has turned over most of the preparation to other family members, but she helps in the kitchen on Sunday morning as much as possible. She enjoys preparing cornbread and making a pot of coffee."

Carroll chimes in, "And Thanksgiving, Christmas and all the holidays."

It's apparent this tradition is meaningful to her. There is a note of pride for the many years her family has gathered and gratitude she can still participate.

This marks 65 years of Carroll

being "on mission." She has served in various leadership roles within Woman's Missionary Union: director at her church and at the associational and district levels, executive board member, Acteens and Girls in Action leader at her church and state Acteens leader.

When she was a member of Chalybeate Springs Baptist Church in Hillsboro, Carroll was a teacher for every age group in Sunday School, a choir member and a Vacation Bible School helper. She served in many other roles, and her service contin-

ued when she joined Mount View Baptist Church in Trinity in 2010.

Her pastor, Mark Milwee, said, "Mrs. Ruth Carroll is a role model of faithfulness and consistency."

As Carroll reviewed her life of service, she recalled her work with a lay renewal team for the Alabama Bap-

tist State Board of Missions. She took three trips to Alaska and also traveled to Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia and Pennsylvania.

In 1970, Carroll helped her church's first Acteens group plan their first missions project. That year marked a change in WMU's ministry to girls. Girls ages 12 and up moved from GAs to a new missions group, Acteens. Right away they wanted to do something special for somebody.

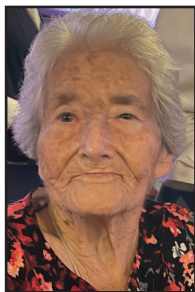
Under Carroll's leadership, the girls organized a party for women who had mental health challenges. They invited six women to the church and prepared gifts for each of them.

"I've now done the party 51 times," Carroll recalled. "This is the first year I am not serving as a leader; I've moved into a mentoring role."

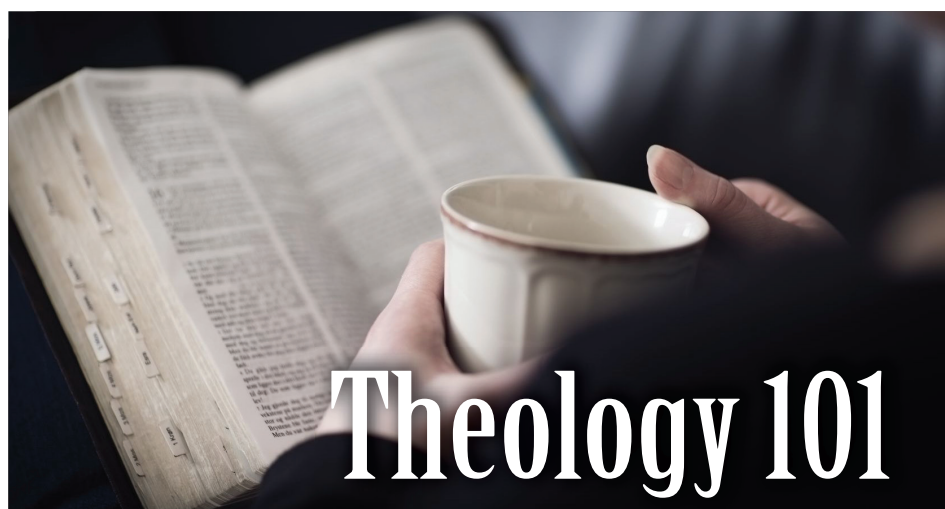
Follow the Lord's lead

Over the years, the party for outpatients of the local mental health center (male and female) has grown. It's now an annual event held at a different church within Muscle Shoals Baptist Association. Volunteers prepare and serve lunch and provide items for the gift bags.

Her advice to others is simple: "Do whatever the Lord leads you to do, and you'll be OK."



CARROLL



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Living in gratitude

Christmas Joy

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

Before this Christmas season is over, if not already, most of us will hear and even join in singing Isaac Watts' hymn "Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come."

Centuries before the hymn was composed, an angel appeared to a group of unnamed shepherds and sounded to them the note of Christmas joy: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

At this news, the shepherds began to say to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass" (Luke 2:15).

Having seen the infant Christ for themselves, the shepherds returned to their flocks, "glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them" (Luke 2:20).

Praise to God

Indeed, for the people of God, Christmas at its best is a time for great joy and praise to God. It was for Mary, the mother of our Lord.

Upon being told that she would bear a son and subsequently visiting her kinswoman Elizabeth, Mary heard Elizabeth declare, "Indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:44).

In response, Mary declared, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my

Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). The birth of Jesus was surrounded by joy: that of Mary, Elizabeth and the shepherds.

At some point following the birth of Jesus, wise men traveled from the east, being led by a star to the place where Mary and Joseph attended the young child.

Upon seeing the star that would lead them to the Christ child, Matthew 2:10 describes their reaction: "They rejoiced with exceedingly great joy."

'Full of glory'

Even though we are not numbered among those who witnessed firsthand the birth of Jesus, 1 Peter 1:8 is still appropriate for us when it says of Christ, "Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."

Without being too rigid in the distinction, we might think of rejoicing in the active sense as something we choose to do, while joy in the passive sense is a residual emotion we feel.

May all of us find fresh strength in this Christmas season. Nehemiah 8:10 reminds us "the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



‘Passion for serving the Lord’

Waldrops’ lifetime of missions, ministry spans all aspects of Baptist life

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Over the years, Leo and Margaret Waldrop have been a lot of things to a lot of people.

He’s been a summer missionary, a journeyman overseas with the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) and a director of missions.

She’s been a music teacher and an assistant to the director of a seminary campus.

And together they’ve been IMB missionaries for more than 25 years to Suriname and Curacao.

“We’ve said several times that we don’t regret a minute of the time we’ve spent getting to know and love people and share with them,” Leo Waldrop said.

Because of the way they invested all those minutes, the Northwest Baptist Historical Society honored the Waldrops with the 2022 Heritage Award on Nov. 15 during the Northwest Baptist Convention meeting in Grand Mound, Washington.

“Leo and Margaret have positively impacted all those who have come to know them,” said Mike



Photo courtesy of Northwest Baptist Convention
Mike Kuykendall, president of the Northwest Baptist Historical Society, presents the 2022 Heritage Award to Margaret (center) and Leo (right) Waldrop during the Northwest Baptist Convention meeting in Grand Mound, Washington.

Kuykendall, president of the Northwest Baptist Historical Society.

“Their passion for serving the Lord and for ministering to those around them is largely due to a calling that was planted in each of them from their earliest days.”

Leo Waldrop was in Oregon during those early days — his dad, a

bivocational pastor, moved the family there from Texas in 1959. While in his senior year at Southern Oregon University, he was chosen as the Baptist student ministry’s first overseas summer missionary.

He went to Guyana, then went back as a journeyman after graduation.

“That’s how we got into missions,” Leo Waldrop said of himself and his wife, whom he met when he returned.

Working together

After they married, Margaret moved back with him to that region, and they spent more than 25 years in Suriname and Curacao. Leo Waldrop worked to start churches and develop discipleship and leadership training programs, and Margaret Waldrop translated thousands of pages of Lifeway materials into the Antillean heart language, Papiamentu. She also translated the first hymnal in the language.

When the Waldrops were back in the Pacific Northwest on stateside assignments over the years, they served in a variety of roles. At one

point, he served as interim director of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary’s (now Gateway Seminary) Portland campus, and at another as interim pastor of Hudson Park Baptist Church in Rainier, Oregon.

Nonprofit work

The couple came back to the U.S. permanently in 1997 and began to serve in nonprofit work. Several years later, he became director of missions for Southwest Washington, and she became the administrative assistant for Gateway Seminary’s Pacific Northwest Campus.

“Margaret also distinguished herself by enthusiastically participating in the life and ministries of the convention,” Kuykendall said. “Drawing upon her missions and ministry experience, Margaret led VBS training sessions, hosted various parties and convention events and unfailingly promoted missions and education in [Woman’s Missionary Union] and other venues.”

In 2006, they retired and moved to the Glorieta Christian Conference Center in New Mexico, where they fulfilled a lifelong dream by volunteering in multiple areas of service. Four years later, they moved to the Birmingham, Alabama, area to be near the family of their daughter, Amy.

The Waldrops’ younger son, Jeremy, also lives in Alabama, and their older son, Jeff, serves as vice provost for the university libraries and as associate professor of church history at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia.

The Waldrops continue to serve in leadership roles in their Sunday School class at North Shelby Baptist Church.

“If one were to summarize the lives and work of Leo and Margaret, an appropriate phrase might be, ‘His Way, Mine,’” Kuykendall said, referring to the name of their missionary memoir.

Age-based small groups may reach more people

A new analysis from Barna Group suggests tailoring the message and goals of small groups to a specific target age might increase participation.

Generationally, Boomers are more likely than Millennials to be looking for opportunities to help others (75% vs. 55%) through group participation.

Millennials gather around other signs of curiosity, like a desire to have fun (62% vs. 37% of Boomers), to learn something new (58%

vs. 34%) or to connect with others over things they like (52% vs. 39%).

The findings come from Better Together, a partnership project of Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries. The study focuses on the types of people who are taking initiative in their communities — who gather, donate, serve, create, teach, mobilize and innovate to meet needs around them.

Read more at lhm.org/together. (The Alabama Baptist).

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Mac Brunson
Pastor, Valleydale
Church, Birmingham

GOSPEL OPPORTUNITIES

Pastors working as Santas bring joy, extend ministry to others during holidays

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Santas can be seen just about everywhere these days. They're on TV, at the mall, at Christmas parties and in parades. They come from all walks of life.

And though most are secular performers, St. Nicholas' foundation as a model of Christian generosity and kindness has inspired many current or retired ministers to spend the holidays as Santa.

"Our members, Santas, Mrs. Clauses and associates are but a microcosm of the populations within which they are raised and/or reside," said Stephen Arnold, president of the International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas.

Cameron Reeder, care pastor at World Harvest Outreach in Hartselle, and Rich Patsios, retired Birmingham-area Methodist pastor, are two Alabama Santas with ministry experience. Both say they sort of fell into the role.

Reeder inherited a Santa suit from his father and portrayed Santa for his grandchildren. When his beard started growing out, a friend asked him to play Santa for his kids.

Sharing joy

"I started to realize that not only could I bring joy to kids, I could also make a little money doing it," Reeder recalled. "Since then, I get to share the joy of Christmas with kids all over. This has encouraged me to make Santa an annual part of my life."

Patsios' beard was key to his becoming a professional Santa too.

"I decided to grow a beard on an extended vacation in 2019," he recalled. "My wife remarked that the beard was coming in almost white, and I could be a Santa. I replied that I certainly had the build for it."

Being a faith-based Santa has never been an issue for either man and has provided opportunities non-faith-based Santas probably wouldn't take.

"I do not hesitate to point folks to the manger as the real reason for the



Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

"Because I am a faith-based Santa, I have often spoken with Christian groups about the Christian underpinnings of St. Nicholas, Kris Kringle and Santa Claus," says Rich Patsios, a retired Birmingham-area Methodist pastor.

season," Reeder explained. "Most Christians celebrate Christmas with all the trappings, including Santa. There are many sincere folks who don't, so if someone did have a problem, I would tell them to hold fast to their convictions."

"I am in active ministry and that always comes first," he noted. "I consider Santa a small extension of that ministry. I sometimes get to pray with or for a child and their family, with their permission of course, especially when they are going through a tough time. Children often open up to Santa."

Patsios said his most memorable virtual visit as Santa was with some children in Morocco. "Their grandmother was in the U.S. looking for a faith-based Santa — there were none of those in Morocco! The beauty of

doing virtual visits was that grandma was on the call in Georgia, I was in Alabama, and the children were in Morocco. They were overjoyed to visit with Santa!"

Wearing many hats and speaking easily to individuals and groups are some of the abilities of pastors that help when portraying Santa. Their people skills, learned in ministry, are used every time each one puts on the suit.

This can come in handy when children are reluctant to visit with Santa. Props, such as Patsios' ukulele or Reeder's light-

up naughty/nice book, may help draw a child in, but it takes patience and understanding for Santa to spend the time needed to relieve fears or make the visit extra special.

"I remember one compliant child

who sat down next to me purely because mom wanted her to do so," Patsios recalled. "She was shaking with fear. I managed to calm her down, and as she was leaving, she turned around, smiled and waved to me."

Reeder said he never rushes "a child who wants to spend a few extra minutes with Santa. It is so special when a child hands you a note they have written or a picture they have colored just for Santa. I have a box at home where I keep these precious letters to Santa."

However, children aren't the only ones who might need a Santa.

History of St. Nicholas

"Because I am a faith-based Santa, I have often spoken with Christian groups about the Christian underpinnings of St. Nicholas, Kris Kringle and Santa Claus," Patsios said. "Sometimes I do this as a sermon. My favorite was a Christmas in July event at a ... lakeside church service. I conducted a Christmas service with carols that I played and sang and delivered the message in informal Santa attire."

Though there are many commonalities between these two faith-based Santas, the experience of portraying the character is a little different for each.

Patsios has learned "to be jolly and kind no matter what happens. It just ruins everything if Santa is cross."

Reeder discovered "preserving our traditions is critical. We live in a world where children have to grow up too quickly and face issues we didn't when we were kids. If we as Santa can give that child one moment of joy or peace, then it is all worth it."

EDITOR'S NOTE — If you are an Alabama Baptist minister, active or retired, or an Alabama Baptist layperson who spends the holiday as Santa, get in touch with us. We'd love to hear how this work allows you to serve and reach your community. Email us at news@thealabama-baptist.org.



Photo courtesy of Cameron Reeder

Cameron Reeder, care pastor at World Harvest Outreach in Hartselle, portrays Santa for his grandson.

Simplify church website design to engage more visitors online

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

Christmas is a busy time for churches, but you should take time for a simple church website fix before the end of the year. Why? This one improvement will make your website instantly better.

Your church website serves as an online hub to inform your congregation and attract your community in the long term.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many website homepages (the first page a visitor sees when going to your church's website) became a bulletin board, similar to the one many churches used to have in the lobby.

Those bulletin boards started out organized until someone decided to post a random announcement. Then a business card was tacked on. Then a Post-it note got added. Soon, old things got covered with newer things.

Finally, the clutter became an eyesore that became difficult to take in. The bulletin board soon didn't make sense.

A similar thing might have happened with your church website's homepage.

The goal was to give everyone the information they needed in the "lobby" of the church website — such as random announcements like "watch online" and "important dates."

And like the old bulletin board, over time your homepage has gotten cluttered.

A simple fix

If that describes your homepage, here's one simple church website fix to implement before the end of the year: Calm down the homepage.

Analytics gleaned from across the internet tell us



Unsplash.com

most people don't stop long on a homepage.

Most people spend just 2 or 3 seconds on the homepage. They are not there to find information, but rather to discover the main menu of your website and find the content on an inside page.

So putting a lot of content on the homepage hoping that someone will peruse through the clutter isn't a great idea.

Have the menu as the key item on the page. The ideal placement is to the right of the logo at the top.

Use the top portion of the page to show who you are and what you're known for. That usually is a large image (called a hero picture) or video combined with a few words that tell your church's story and why someone would want to visit or attend.

It's OK to have one or two important links near or below that banner to take someone to another page for the specific information they need.

If you have two buttons linking to other pages or content, don't have them equal in size or color.

Make one primary (give it more contrast in color or font or make it larger) and the other secondary (make it a link in a complementary font or color rather than a button).

For those buttons, evaluate what your audience will

look for most often. Will church members want the staff page, event listing or calendar? Choose one to be the primary button and one to be the secondary link.

Is your goal to engage the community with your website? Think about their needs.

They're looking for something that says "new" or "about us." Choose one of those to be the primary button and one to be the secondary link.

Need a website?

Then calm everything else down. Clean up the digital bulletin board look.

Allow white space, establish the look of your inside pages and keep all of them clean, easy to scan and organized.

If your church needs an affordable, easy-to-maintain website, Hosted Church is a great option. Find more information on the service at hostedchurch.com or call 205-870-4720, ext. 108.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mark MacDonald is a communication pastor, speaker, consultant, bestselling author, church branding strategist for *BeKnownforSomething.com* and executive director of Center for Church Communication. His book, *Be Known for Something*, is available at *BeKnownBook.com*.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org. To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

First Baptist Church Rogersville is in search of a senior pastor. Interested candidates may email their resumé to: seniorpastorsearch@fbcrogersville.com or mail a resumé to: First Baptist Church Rogersville, 222 College St., Rogersville, AL 35652, ATTN: Senior Pastor Search Committee.

PASTOR

Newbridge Missionary Baptist Church in Asheville, North Carolina, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, prayerfully seeks a man who will preach the inerrant word of God and has a heart for missions. Email resumé to: NewbridgePST@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Liberty Baptist Church in Morris, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor who will preach God's word, pray for God's leadership and have a heart for missions. Send resumé to: garrettm2@bellsouth.net.

WORSHIP PASTOR

Seeking someone to lead all aspects of musical program of Linden Baptist Church. This is a full-time position and will also have other responsibilities as an associate pastor. For full job description and to apply for the position, visit <http://www.lindenbaptist.org> and click on "associate pastor application." You may contact the church directly at 334-295-4278 or by mail at P.O. Box 480776, Linden, AL 36748.

MINISTER OF WORSHIP & FAMILIES

First Baptist Church of Atmore, Alabama, is realigning ministry positions. The church is seeking a full-time minister of worship and families to lead the worship ministry and serve as "second chair" to the pastor in a church undergoing an exciting revitalization. The church is also seeking a co-vocational minister to students. Resumé may be sent to: keving@fbcatmore.org.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND/OR PRESCHOOL

Parkview Baptist Church in Decatur, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time and/or part-time director of children and/or preschool. Send resumé

and questions to: search.committee@parkviewdecat.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

NURSERY COORDINATOR

First Baptist Church Spanish Fort is seeking a part-time nursery coordinator. For more information, contact the personnel committee at contact@fbcsanishfort.com.

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TAB EXTRAS

TAB DIGITAL

In addition to the print edition, The Alabama Baptist also releases a weekly digital edition of the newspaper to every subscriber's email. The digital edition comes in PDF form as well as part of an app and is included with all subscriptions. It has exclusive content for the digital edition only, and can be accessed anytime as long as you have internet. To update your email address, contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

Tips for growing small groups, making most of time

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Most people know what a small group is, though small groups are as varied as those who participate in them.

The common denominator is that they are focused on training, connection and striving to grow.

In “Reach Magazine” (a publication of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention), Shane Kendrix says small groups shouldn’t be part of a church just because people expect them.

6 questions

He suggests asking these six questions before starting:

1. Why? The reason to have small groups is to “meet the needs of the individuals, the group, the church and the community,” Kendrix said, “all for the glory of God.” He noted they can be open or closed, with open groups allowing someone to join anytime.

2. How? Is it going to be discussion or lecture? Will there be homework?

3. What? Kendrix says “the topic is defined by the type of group as much as the group is defined by the topic.”

4. Who? Is it going to be men only, women only or mixed gender?



Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist
During the Pinnacle Conference at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, Topper Reid, vice president of the church coaching division for Unlimited Partnerships, offers tips for ways to grow small groups once they have started.

Is it going to have a specific age range or be intergenerational?

5. When? Think it through before choosing a time. Young adults could probably meet later than a senior adults group. Keep an open mind about options.

6. Where? The location affects who can be there and the discussions that can be included.

Topper Reid, vice president of the church coaching division for

Unlimited Partnerships, offers tips for ways to grow small groups once they have started:

► Everyone should wear name tags every week. Don’t think about whether current members need them or not — expect that there will be visitors and learning names can make them more comfortable.

► Pray for three people “in your traffic pattern” by name and think about ways to invite them.

► Choose curriculum with your target group’s needs, interests and availability in mind.

Engage members

► Get contact information from visitors and assign someone to follow up with each one during the following week.

► Engaging the group not only helps them remember what was discussed, but also works toward fellowship and getting to know each other. Everyone needs to be involved in some way. If lecture is a component, offer a way to take notes.

► Give fellowship times a purpose, making an effort to invite guests and those who don’t come often. Having them once a month will increase connection, and a theme can be helpful.

► Take prayer requests each week and have a method to share the requests with the group so they can be praying.

► Check in on those who stop attending. Ask if they need prayer. Don’t tell them to call if they need anything — have plans for members’ crises.

Reid also noted the goal of each small group is to multiply, suggesting that when 25 attend regularly, 6–8 need to start a new group.

To that end, he said, allow an associate teacher to lead 30%–50% of the time. This allows the associate teacher to gain experience for leading a new group and provides continuity for the long term.

Scripture-grounded

In a Lifeway Adults article, Rick Howerton, a church consultant for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, suggests group leaders memorize three key verses to help them remember their mission.

► “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. ... Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex and broke bread from house to house. ... And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42–47).

► “And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24–25).

► “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Finally, keep in the forefront that God is in control.

Steve Gladen, pastor of the small group community at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, and author of several books on small groups, offers additional tips at the website smallgroups.net.

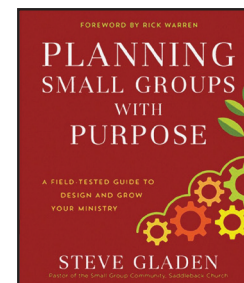
Gladen encourages leaders to remember: “You were not selected to lead this group on your own. God chose you. He will be with you. Trust in His power and lean on Him for support.”

New officers of the SBOM board of trustees



Photo by Doug Rogers

Newly elected officers of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions board of trustees are (l to r) Jim Graham, vice chairman (pastor, Coosada Baptist Church in Coosada); Mel Johnson, chairman (lead mission strategist, Autauga Baptist Association); and Debbie Oliver, secretary (ministry assistant to the executive director, SBOM).



Giving families hope

Ice cream truck ministry shows ‘the world that He creates everybody for a purpose’

(continued from page 1)
being seen. They were knowing each other’s names and calling each other by name.”

At the same time as Hunter was growing up, Norwood continued to pray as she always had — that God would show her and her husband how to guide their son through life.

The ice cream truck was an answer to her prayers.

“God showed me how to build it,” Norwood recalled. “We built it from an old FedEx truck, and God put just the right people in our path to direct us and help us.”

In 2019, they launched their new ministry, A Little Something Extra Ice Cream. The “something extra” refers to the additional chromosome that characterizes Down syndrome, but it refers to other things too, Norwood said.

“Hunter has strengths I don’t have. Just like the body of Christ, God creates us all to glorify Him, and we all don’t have the same talents. We all don’t have the same gifts.”

She and Hunter, the ministry’s CEO, run the truck along with her husband and younger son, Brodie.

Meeting new people

Hunter said he loves the unlimited ice cream as well as “meeting lots of new people and, of course, being the boss.”

He also loves working with friends who have been trained to staff the truck with him. They go by the title “ice cream experts.”

“They go through training, and we teach them financial literacy,

product knowledge, mock transactions and how to greet customers,” Norwood said. “At the end, they graduate to ‘Pomp and Circumstance’ and get a diploma showing that they’re an ice cream expert.”

She added they do it this way because they want every person involved to get the experience of a typical job or educational setting.

“I also want these parents to see their children succeed and graduate as ice cream experts,” Norwood said. “It’s been very empowering for the families, and of course for the ice cream experts.”

They wear T-shirts that say things like “I’m so extra” or “I’m an ice cream expert, what’s your superpower?” The sides of the vans are covered with circles that include pictures of the experts’ faces.

Well represented

“Not only are the ice cream experts being represented on this truck and being seen ... they’re kind of famous,” Norwood noted.

They started out doing events at churches like Vacation Bible Schools and fall festivals and now have a contract during football season with both Auburn University — where Hunter’s older sister, Hope, is a student — and the University of Alabama.

At one game, eight other people with Down syndrome — who were tailgating with their families — came over to meet the ice cream experts, Norwood recalled.

“They all wanted to meet our experts and meet us and see the truck and thank us. It gave the families hope. It’s happened at every single game we’ve been at.”

The truck is the first of its kind in the nation, and that sort of exposure has given Norwood a chance to encourage other families on a similar journey.

Open doors

“God has opened doors for us to share publicly about why we’re doing what we’re doing,” she said. “He’s allowing this ice cream truck to show the world He creates everybody for a purpose.”

David Cofield, pastor of Rainsville FBC, said the ministry is a great reminder of God’s ability to use anyone and everyone.

“Our entire church is energized by what God is doing through Michelle, Hunter and A Little Something Extra Ice Cream,” he said.

And the ministry is expanding. So far, A Little

Something Extra Ice Cream has trained 28 young adult ice cream experts across Alabama and Georgia. In May, they launched their second truck through The Arc of DeKalb County with 40 trained ice cream experts who work on the

truck and in community-based employment.

Another family is planning to launch the ministry’s third truck in the Madison County area in the spring, Norwood said.

“Our dream is to add truck after truck and opportunity after opportunity. We don’t want to keep this to ourselves.”

The people who make up A Little Something Extra Ice Cream use their tips to support various ministries and help local families at Christmas.

“One of my favorite things our experts have done is help send Bibles overseas through the Dwight Gary Missions Foundation,” Norwood noted.

“My dad, Dwight Gary, went on more than 70 overseas missions trips in his life. After he passed in

2020, his missions team established this foundation and continue the Great Commission.”

Norwood also has written two books about Down syndrome from Hunter’s perspective — “Stars in My Eyes” and “Super Powers.” “Stars” refer to the kaleidoscope-looking Brushfield spots people with Down syndrome often have in their eyes.

The book says, “The One who put the stars in the sky put the stars in my eyes. How could I not be awesome?”

Copies of both books have been given to families in Montgomery and Huntsville hospitals that have learned their child may have Down syndrome, and Norwood said that may expand soon.

“I want people to see the wonderment in Hunter,” she said of the books’ message. “I think he’s the coolest thing ever, but I also want them to see us and know that this didn’t break our family. He made our family.”



Photo courtesy of Michelle Norwood
Hunter and Auburn University’s mascot, Aubie, help sell ice cream for A Little Something Extra Ice Cream.



Photo courtesy of Michelle Norwood
A Little Something Extra Ice Cream sells ice cream on both the Auburn and University of Alabama campuses.

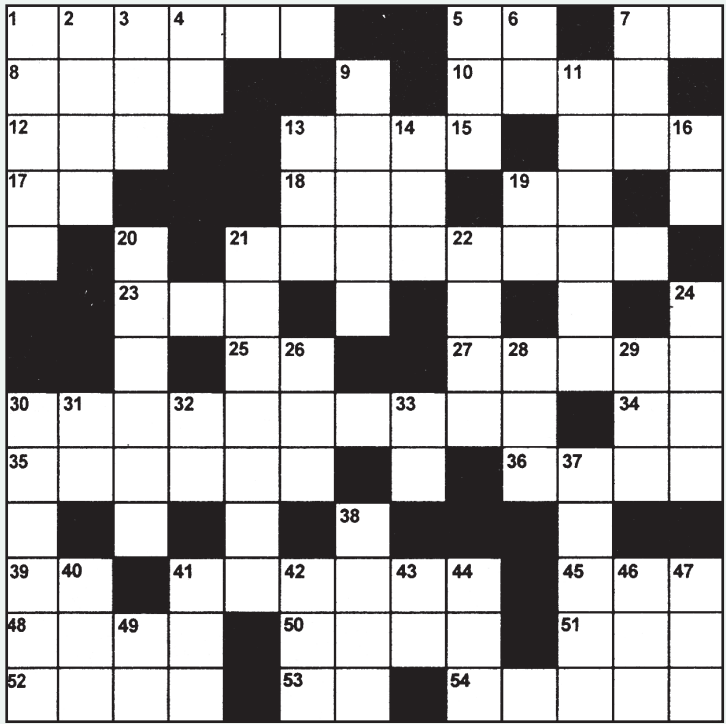
To learn more about A Little Something Extra Ice Cream, visit alittlesomethingextraicecream.com, call 256-601-7125 or email extraicecream@yahoo.com.

CHRISTIAN crossword

WORD search

ACROSS

- 1. Hannah's son.
(1 Sam. 1:20)
- 5. For ____ persecuted
they the prophets.
(Matt. 5:12)
- 7. Spirit of the Lord
came up__ David.
(1 Sam. 16:13)
- 8. John also was
baptizing in A____
near to Salim.
(John 3:23)
- 10. The promise is ... to
all that are ____ off.
(Acts 2:39)
- 12. An explosive.
- 13. The ____ of God.
(Ps. 46:4)
- 17. Whose Son is ____?
(Matt. 22:42)
- 18. How long is it ____
since this came unto
him? (Mark 9:21)
- 19. Either/____.
- 21. Hated.
- 23. A little bear.
- 25. ____ it not written?
(Mark 11:17)
- 27. I have never ____ any
thing that is common.
(Acts 10:14)
- 30. That they might have
life ... more ____.
(John 10:10)
- 34. To be a certain place.
- 35. The director ____ the
play.
- 36. A carnivore ____
meat.
- 39. Printer's measure.
- 41. Call for the elders of
the ____.
(James 5:14)
- 45. A torn-up piece of
material.
- 48. The Thin Man's wife.
(Nick and ____)
- 50. In ____ was there a
voice heard.
(Matt. 2:18)
- 51. Poetic for "before."
- 52. Walked.



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- 53. I am (contraction).
- 54. ____ them that love
us in the faith.
(Titus 3:15)
- 24. Industrious insects.
- 26. He was ____ at that
saying. (Mark 10:22)
- 28. Yes. (nautical)
- 29. Sat down to ____
and to drink.
(Ex. 32:6)
- 30. Slight variation in
speech patterns.
- 31. Sheep's sound.
- 32. New Testament.
(abbr.)
- 33. ____ have and ____
hold.
- 37. ____ with thine
adversary quickly.
(Matt. 5:25)
- 38. Type of train.
- 40. Neither/____.
- 41. A heel.
- 42. Bezaleel the son of
____. (Ex. 38:22)
- 43. 900 in Roman
numerals.
- 44. A witch is an old
____.
- 46. He is, they ____.
- 47. And so ____ them up
out of the land.
(Ex. 1:10)
- 49. Rosemary.
(nickname)

DOWN

- 1. Belonging to Adam's
son.
- 2. English princess.
- 3. A witty saying.
- 4. United Nations. (abbr.)
- 5. Take ye no thought ...
what ye shall ____.
(Luke 12:11)
- 6. A man ____ God.
- 7. Metal from mining.
- 9. He that is ____ days
old. (Gen. 17:12)
- 11. To capture a
lawbreaker.
- 13. A yellow car in NYC.
- 14. Also.
- 16. Authority to ____ these
things. (Mark 11:28)
- 19. Firstlings of thy herds
____ of thy flock.
(Deut. 12:17)
- 20. ____ not a servant unto
his master. (Prov. 30:10)
- 21. Now ____ faith, hope,
charity. (1 Cor. 13:13)
- 22. A spool of film.

- BLESSED
- BRANCH
- CHRIST
- COLT
- COMING
- DAVID
- DESPISED
- DONKEY
- EPHRATHAH
- EVERLASTING
- FATHER
- FIRSTBORN
- GOVERNMENT
- GREAT DAY
- HUMBLE
- IMMANUEL
- JERUSALEM
- JESUS
- JOSEPH
- JUDAH
- LAMB
- MANGER
- MERCY
- MESSIAH
- MIGHTY GOD
- NO END
- PEACE
- PIERCED
- REJECTED
- RULER
- SIGN
- SON OF GOD
- SORROWS
- SPIRIT
- STAR
- THRONE
- VISIONS
- ZEAL

Y K Y N E V E R L A S T I N G H
B R Y R I M M A N U E L V Q A D
L J D O G Y T H G I M L M H R J
E O X B F R D T R L Z V T F E T
S S K T H R E M Z M A A J S H D
S E G S N A M A A E R M U T E R
E P O R G M I N T H A S B T A C
D H V I I W G S P D G L C T M C
K J E F S E S E S L A E S T O T
K C R V R D R W V E J Y I L H D
S O N O F G O D O E M R T R S E
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E C E N Q I J O B P R N X N O R
C T N L V R M N S P E O G E I E
A Q T A M E B K J Z F L S O S I
E C D K R K N E B C T A B N I P
P B H C B B T Y K D F R T M V P
R T Y R T H M G N I M O C H U F
L B N T I D E S P I S E D K E H
M M E L A S U R E J J U D A H R
M L F X F F T L D R E L U R Y N

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."



JANUARY AND FEBRUARY IS TAX CONFERENCE SEASON

Be sure to make note of these dates and locations!

Church Tax Conferences

These conferences, ideal for church treasurers, will cover several special emphases including IRS forms and deadlines, what is taxable, special tax rules about ministers, and housing allowance and contribution rules.

January 5 SBOM Office Facility, Prattville

January 11 First Baptist Church, Silverhill

January 12 First Baptist Church, Decatur

January 25 First Baptist Church, Headland

(Each Church Tax Conference will be held from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. with lunch provided.)

Ministers Tax Conferences

These conferences, designed to help ministers in preparing their individual tax returns, will cover how to save money on your taxes, changes in housing allowance, benefits of having a home office, and questions about tax brackets.

February 7 SBOM Office Facility, Prattville

February 14 First Baptist Church, Decatur

February 15 First Baptist Church, Silverhill

February 22 Southeast Alabama Baptist Association Office, Dothan

(Each Ministers Tax Conference will be held from 9 a.m.-Noon with no meal.)

Questions? Contact State Missionary Lee Wright at lwright@alsbom.org, or call ministry assistant Reka Baker at (334) 613-2263.

These events are made possible by the gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

Tackle tough topics through lens of Scripture

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

The Apostle Paul might have been writing to the church at Ephesus when he advised believers to “be careful then how you live,” but hundreds of years later, the challenge remains true for students and their leaders.

Paul’s challenge to live “not as unwise people but as wise — making the most of the time because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15–16) was front and center during a recent webinar, “Can I talk about that? How to talk through relevant, challenging topics with Gen Z students.” The webinar was organized by GenSend, the student-focused ministry and missions arm of the North American Mission Board.

Featured speaker Jonathan “JP” Pokluda, pastor and author, spoke to many issues facing student ministers.

“If we look at this in a 21st century context and you were to make a list, what or how are the days evil?” Pokluda asked before offering his thoughts.

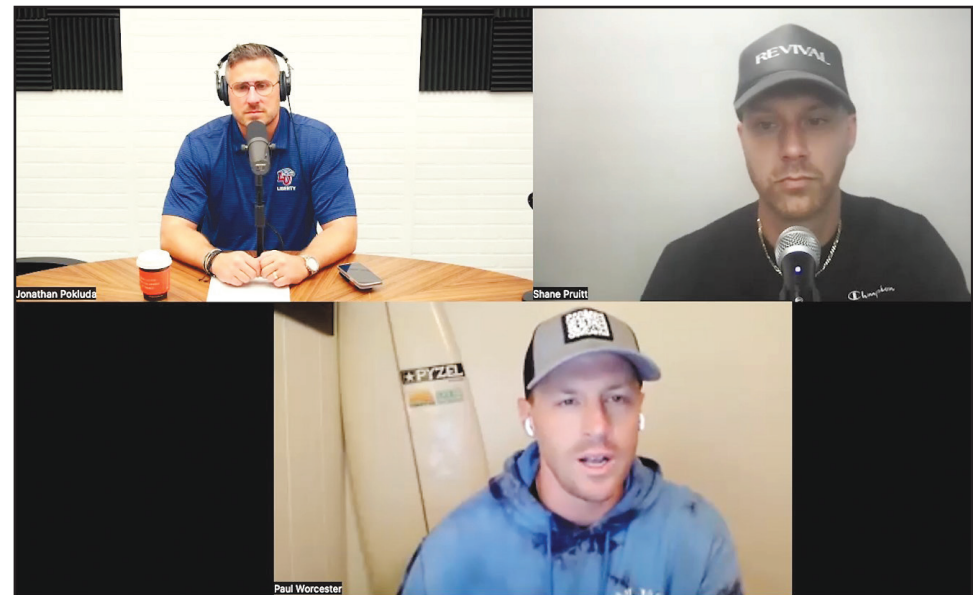
Some of the answers Pokluda proposed include subjects such as marriage, gender, sex, materialism, relationship problems and the sanctity of life. Concerns about creating division or receiving negative feedback have led to ministry leaders avoiding some controversial topics. That’s not the way, Pokluda said.

Using God’s word

Instead, “We’re going to use the word of God and attach it to the hot topics of our day because Gen Z and the young adults that are before you and the youth that are before you, they’re desperate for it,” he said.

“What does it look like to go and be the hands and feet of Jesus? What does it look like to go and have a really consistent message, but one that is rooted in love? ... It’s having an attitude of ‘What *can* I do?’ instead of ‘What *can I* do?’ while being Spirit-led,” he said.

Jesus’ example of sacrifice should set the tone, he asserted, as opposed to the modern



(Clockwise from top left) Jonathan “JP” Pokluda, Shane Pruitt and Paul Worchester discuss a variety of topics during the “Can I talk about that?” webinar.

Screenshot

emphasis on self needs. And leaders must get comfortable talking about issues including fluidity of gender, gender roles, sexuality, pornography, sexual abuse and marriage, but he recommends not teaching on these topics in lieu of Scripture.

‘Go after them’

“If you just teach through the Bible, you’re going to hit on these topics. ... Be aware of what those culturally charged topics are and don’t try to avoid them, but rather

go after them,” Pokluda noted.

Involving and equipping parents is also important. Leaders need to develop a relationship with them, while informing them about what’s going on and providing related resources.

“If you’re emailing them [regularly], and you’re saying, ‘Hey, last week we talked about James, and the week before that we were going through Matthew, and this week we’re talking about gender fluidity,’ [it helps parents feel] like, ‘We have a relationship. We’re talking. And I know it’s good for me to have a periscope into what my children are learning,’” he suggested.

Welcoming

A question often asked today, Pokluda said, is “Do you guys welcome everyone?” when actually the questioner means “Will I be

welcome here?” Pokluda said he always replies, “Absolutely.”

The person usually responds, “So, you’re not going to ask me to change?” to which Pokluda says, “We believe the Spirit of God is changing everyone. ... We are all being conformed to the image and character of Jesus by the Spirit of Jesus.”

Pokluda concluded with one final piece of advice to leaders.

“It’s OK to say you don’t know. I would teach all of my young leaders the three words: I. Don’t. Know. Because when you’re young and everybody in a little circle is looking at you, you feel you have to have the answer. And that’s where you get into trouble.”

The webinar was hosted by Shane Pruitt, national next gen director for NAMB, and Paul Worchester, national collegiate evangelism director for NAMB.

For resources, visit [GenSend.org](https://www.GenSend.org).



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 11

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Dean of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



COME AND SEE
John 1:40–51

Last week’s passage introduced Jesus as the eternal Word, the incarnate Son of God full of grace and truth and the Light who gives life to humanity.

Between that passage and our text today, John introduced his readers to John the Baptist, his ministry of repentance and baptism and his announcement of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (vv. 29, 36). This ministry likely took place on the eastern side of the Jordan River, possibly the place Origen identified as Bethabara, where Jews from Galilee crossed the river to and from Jerusalem in order to avoid Samaria.

Thanks to John’s announcements, some of his own disciples began following Jesus. The end of this chapter records that Andrew, Simon, Philip and Nathanael followed Jesus by invitation.

Andrew and Peter (40–42)

One of John’s disciples was Andrew, son of Jonah. Andrew became convinced Jesus was the Messiah, so he went to tell his brother Simon. They went to Jesus together, and the Lord called Simon by name and gave him a new name. The Master’s new name for Simon stuck, with references to the name Peter in the four Gospels, the Book of Acts and Peter’s epistles.

John repeatedly pointed to Andrew as a disciple who brought people to Jesus. In this passage, it was his brother Simon Peter whom he introduced to Jesus. Later, it was a little boy with his food (6:8–9). Still later in Jesus’ ministry, Andrew and Philip intended to bring some Greek men to speak with Jesus (12:20–22).

Philip (43–46)
Philip was from Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, just as Peter and Andrew were. And just like the Bar-Jonah brothers (Matt. 4:19) and Matthew (Matt. 9:9) were personally called by Jesus, Philip received Jesus’ invitation: “Follow me.” Philip’s immediate response was to tell his friend about Jesus. He told Nathanael that Jesus was the One promised in the Law of Moses and the Prophets.

What is the best approach when your family member or your friend is not convinced: more intensive evangelism or polemic apologetics? Philip believed simply bringing his friend to Jesus was the right approach.

Who could better convince a loved one of Jesus’ identity than Jesus Himself?

Nathanael (47–51)

Jesus characterized Nathanael as a man having no deceit. We might think of him as a man without a filter: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Jesus was not offended by his question, and Nathanael was drawn to Jesus by His willingness to engage in conversation.

Micah’s nativity prophecy points to Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace (Mic. 5:2). But Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah’s ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light ... for a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us” (Isa. 9:1–7).

Handel’s use of Scripture convinced me Jesus was the Messiah. God used “The Messiah” and a Gideon New Testament to convict me of my sinful state, Christ’s righteous work and my need to surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

JOHN 1:51

Bible Studies for Life

By Tyshawn Gardner, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



SECURITY IN PLACE OF FEAR
Romans 8:28–39

God works in all things for our good. (28–30)

God causes all circumstances, situations and ordeals in the lives of His children to work in accordance with His redemptive plan. Because we know the Lord is loving and just, we can trust He always has His best interest for our lives at heart.

As children, we don’t always understand the importance of rules. However, as adults we understand how rules helped us become productive, Christian citizens.

Although we live in a fallen world where bad things sometimes happen to good people, we also worship a sovereign and providential God who, in Christ, has subjected everything under His feet. When we look at the lives of women and men in the Bible — Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Esther and Ruth — the consistent thread in their lives was that undesirable circumstances ultimately became redemptive and beautiful purposes, for them and for others. God is always working for our good.

No one can condemn us before God. (31–34)

Since believers have been justified by God, we do not have to fear condemnation. Being justified does not mean we have license to continue in sin, nor does it mean we are exempt from the consequences of our sin. However, it does mean we are secure in our relationship with a loving and just God.

The justified have eternal security. No person can revoke or take away our security with God, thus it is imperative that Christians know of our eternal security and secure relationship with God. This security

provides us assurance to overcome fear when others attempt to bring accusations from our past. Our lives are open before God.

When He justifies us through a sincere faith in Christ, no accusations can bring condemnation before Him. The knowledge of justification should lead to a continued devotion to live in obedience to Christ with thanksgiving and praise.

Nothing can separate us from God’s love. (35–39)

Because we are justified and secure in our relationship with God, nothing can separate us from His love. The Scriptures record that God’s people have often gone astray and wandered from His will, but no circumstance ever puts them out of the reach of His steadfast love. Sin and disobedience may cause distance in our fellowship with Him, but His love ensures sin cannot change our relationship with Him.

When sin disrupts our fellowship with God, life can be cold, lonely and bewildering. However, we need not fear turning back to Him. Because of His steadfast love, He always desires to be in fellowship with us. Even when we stray from God, there is no length of time or location that can weaken His love and commitment to us.

When we find ourselves distant in our fellowship with God, we need not fear or doubt His love for us. We should quickly run to the presence of our omnibenevolent God. Our relationship and standing with God are secure because His love never changes.

“What then shall we say to these things?
If God is for us, who can be against us?”

ROMANS 8:31

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Lanell Downs Smith

The Alabama Baptist

House concerts open doors to relationship, community

Singer-songwriter and author Andrew Peterson understands the challenges emerging artists face. Back when he was an independent artist, booking concerts seemed to be the single most difficult part of his job.

“Once you’ve written the songs and recorded the album, the next obvious step is playing concerts,” Peterson said. “Connecting with listeners in a live setting is where the rubber meets the road, but finding gigs can feel like a lonely highway.”

Willing hosts

Nearly four years ago Peterson asked himself, “What if there was a platform that functioned with the ease and simplicity of Airbnb, to connect singer-songwriters with willing house concert hosts?”

Peterson, who founded the Rabbit Room in 2008 to foster the Christian arts creative community, talked to developers about the idea and began drafting a plan for how it might work. The project landed on the back burner for a while, but later at a Rabbit Room event, Peterson discussed the idea with consultant and business adviser Dowell Stackpole, who asked if he had considered a platform to facilitate house concerts.

Stackpole invited singer-songwriter and web developer Zack Smith



Andrew Peterson seeks to foster relationships and meaningful moments with music fans through platforms like Host & Artist and the Rabbit Room.

into the project, and slowly Host & Artist began to take shape.

The platform supports artists and encourages the creation of music, helping them with the audience and allowing the audience to become part of the artist’s success. It encourages meaningful moments, fostering relationships and a sense of community through which gospel conversations can develop organically.

According to Peterson, house concerts create a meaningful and easy experience for hosts, artists and the audience. Anyone with a living room has a music venue, he said.

“So many of us live in communities that aren’t really communities,” Peterson lamented. “In America, subdivisions seem custom made to inhibit connection with each other. We come home from work, turn on the television and seldom interact with our neighbors.

“But a house concert gives us an excuse not just to support the arts, but to invite our neighbors over for something unique and beautiful. That to me is a step in a good direction,” Peterson said, “no matter what the artist or the host believes. It opens the door to relationship, which is where the gospel comes alive.”

Singer-songwriters and folk, bluegrass and classical artists have a presence on the platform, Smith said. And while many are Christians, it isn’t limited to Christian artists. All genres are welcome to join.

The Hedgerow Folk, an indie-folk worship trio based in Opelika is one of the many artists hosts can book through the platform. Singer-songwriter Pierce Pettis of Mentone and folk singer Wilder Adkins from Birmingham also are available.

“I’m grateful to know a small army of singer-songwriters, most

of whom are Christians working in that middle space the Rabbit Room champions: artists who are doing good work, but for whatever reason don’t fit into the typical Christian music world or into the typical mainstream world either,” Peterson said. “I’m thinking of people like Eric Peters, Skye Peterson, Jess Ray and Taylor Leonhardt.

“Anyone with a guitar and a handful of songs can do a house concert.”

Artists can join the platform through a user-friendly interface where they create a profile that features their music and biographical information. Hosts get to know the artists, listen to samples of their music and invite them to do a show.

Potential hosts choose the audience size depending on the home setup and are guided by a simple method of preparation, Peterson said. Hosts make a financial offer to the artist. If the offer is accepted, the host pays directly through the site.

As Host & Artist grows, the group hopes to implement new features like searchable shows based on location, ways for artists to book tours and video tutorials to walk hosts through the process.

Potential venues

The overall idea, Peterson said, is to help people realize that every living room or backyard in America is a potential concert venue. Host & Artist offers the potential for millions of beautiful experiences and provides opportunities for artists, hosts and fans of music everywhere, he added.

“We seek to join the art of hospitality with the art of music by connecting people who enjoy house concerts,” Zack Smith added. “It’s wonderful what can happen for human flourishing when hosts and artists collaborate with each other.”

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.

To learn more, visit hostandartist.com.

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6 tips for naming your church Christmas event

By Mark MacDonald

The Baptist Paper

The proper naming of your church Christmas event can determine its success. People attend Christmas events for many reasons (secular and spiritual), and the name will be the first thing to get their attention. A strong name will hopefully compel community members to come. At the least, a catchy name will allow your event to stand out from other seasonal events.

Christmas is one of the times that non-churchgoers will consider attending a church. Let's give them an event that's high quality, friendly to families and focused on the gospel.

Attract attention

Here are six tips for naming your church Christmas event so more people will notice and attend:

1. Decide who you want to attend. Is it mainly for your members, people from other churches or community members who have never considered church? These questions are broad, but the name of your church's Christmas event will attract a particular audience.

If you make it sound overly religious, then you may limit the range of attendees. Christmas is celebrated by many in your community, but few see it as the religious celebration it is. Allow your event to introduce the real reason for the season.

2. Use words they'll search for. If it's mainly for your church members, your event will easily attract that audience. If you want to bring in people who have never been to your church (or any church), choose a name for your Christmas event they might discover inadvertently online.

Imagine words they'll be searching for and use those words in your name. For example, "Christmas for the Family" or "Christmas Family Fun" or "Christmas Music for the Season." When someone's searching for a Christmas event on Google or social media, your church event might surface as an option.

3. Add an event descriptor. Use a clear, short subtitle to describe what kind of Christmas event it is. Use words your community would search for, like "Musical Evening"

or "Light Show" or "Choir Cantata." The subtitle should answer the first question they will have upon discovering your event title. In the description, tell them if it's free or a ticketed event.

4. Include your community name. Use your city or region in the title. By using your location as part of the full event title and repeating it on your website and social media, potential visitors will discover the local event in their searches. A location helps people understand who is invited and where the event will take place — questions they are likely to have as they decide whether or not to attend.

5. Be honest in the description. Naming your Christmas event well will get people's attention, help Google take notice of your webpage and encourage people to stop scrolling on social media. A good description will keep their attention, but be honest, specific and open about what they'll experience if they attend.

6. Once you've named your event and promoted it online, prepare for visitors. Several weeks before your

event, walk your campus, look over your website and review your social media strategy to make sure all are friendly to guests.

Welcoming space

Create a more welcoming space by adding signage that helps visitors navigate around your church.

Consider adding an online service to your social media page or downloadable audio of a service to your website. An online service is a stepping stone to getting community members to attend in person.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mark MacDonald is a communication pastor, speaker, consultant, bestselling author, church branding strategist for BeKnownforSomething.com and executive director of Center for Church Communication, empowering 10,000+ churches to become known for something relevant (a communication thread) throughout their ministries, websites, & social media. His book, Be Known for Something, is available at BeKnownBook.com.

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MAKE DISCIPLES

Decisions, Choices and Options: Sexual purity program for students impacts lives

By Carolyn Tomlin
The Baptist Paper

When Joi Stepp Wasill founded Decisions, Choices and Options 20 years ago, she had no idea that the program — which is focused on teaching students biblical guidelines for sexual purity — would grow like it has.

Started in 2002 at First Baptist Church Hendersonville, Tennessee, the number of students reached through the program now exceeds 220,000.

Facing challenges

Wasill taught high school for 33 years before retiring to start DCO, and she understood the challenges students face in their adolescent years.

DCO serves in school classrooms and community organizations to offer sexual risk avoidance education programs, with a vision of partnering with schools, parents, communities and faith-based organizations to prepare and equip students to reach their goals and become strong leaders.

Started in one school system, the organization now includes public and private schools as well as after-school programs, home-schools and community organizations in 13 counties in Tennessee and eight in Alabama.

Multiple agencies partner with DCO across the Southeast, and the organization equips students with the



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necessary skills to achieve optimal health and successful life outcomes.

“We believe that all youth deserve access to sex education that prepares them to lead optimally healthy lives, free of the consequences

resulting from risky adolescent choices and inspired to pursue a future of success,” Wasill said.

DCO believes students will achieve success when they are given information about the decisions they face,

the future impact of those decisions and the importance of valuing themselves and their future through positive choices.

Accurate information

The mission is accomplished by providing medically accurate, science-based sexual risk avoidance information. The curricula communicate the risks and negative outcomes associated with sexual behavior, as well as smoking, alcohol use and impaired driving.

By avoiding unsafe behaviors, students have the freedom and ability to pursue their dreams, goals and hopes for the future.

For more information about DCO, visit decisionschoicesandoptions.com.



MAGIC CHRISTMAS IN LIGHTS





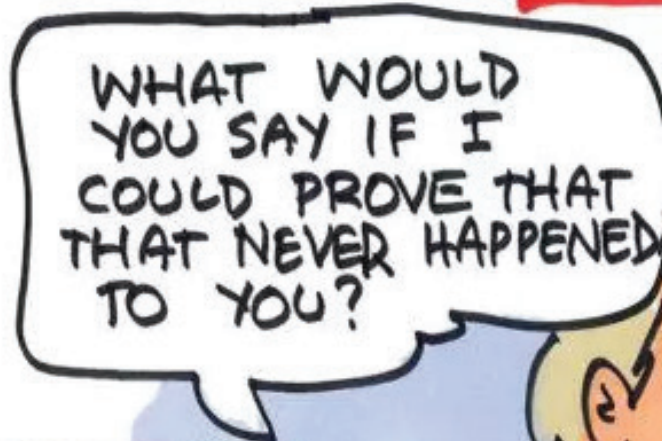
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—is never at the
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with an ARGUMENT.



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The Wellness Kitchen

"Nature is God's Wellness Kitchen where Food is Medicine."

By Pat Terry
The Wellness Kitchen

MUSHROOM AND GREEN BEAN CASSEROLE

Makes 8 servings

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup French's fried onions or homemade*	1 shallot finely diced
2 pounds fresh green beans, trimmed and halved	3 garlic cloves, minced
1 pound cremini mushrooms, sliced	3 tablespoons all purpose flour
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided	1 1/2 cups chicken stock
4 large sprigs thyme	1/4 cup heavy cream
6 tablespoons salted European butter (Kerrygold)	1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
	Kosher salt and pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Prepare the green beans and blanch in a large pot of salted boiling water until bright green and tender (7 to 10 minutes). Drain in a colander and set aside.
- In a large skillet with 1 tablespoon olive oil cook half of the mushrooms without stirring until golden brown underneath. Toss and cook until both sides are brown. Add 2 tablespoons of butter and 2 thyme sprigs. Cook until butter browns and mushrooms are very brown and tender. Remove thyme and transfer to a plate. Repeat with the other half of the mushrooms.
- In the same skillet, melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter over medium low heat. Add the diced shallot and minced garlic. Cook until tender and then whisk in the flour. Increase heat and cook until the roux is golden brown, about 4 minutes. Whisk in chicken stock and cream. Bring to a simmer, whisking often and cook until thick and bubbling. Remove from heat and whisk in Parmesan cheese.
- Combine green beans, mushrooms and sauce and pour into a 4-quart baking dish. Cover tightly with foil and bake until sauce is bubbling, 25 to 30 minutes. Uncover and continue to bake until lightly browned on top and around the edges, about 20 minutes. Top with onions and bake about 5 minutes more.

*For the homemade fried onions recipe, visit thewellnesskitchenrd.com/recipes/mushroom-and-green-bean.

Adapted from freetcake.com

What's in season right now? Mushrooms!

Fungi have been around for millions of years and were probably foraged in prehistoric times. Mushrooms were used in many cultures as medicine and in healing rituals.

The first cultivated mushrooms were grown in China and Japan. Used to flavor meats, stews, sauces and soups, or eaten fresh in salads, mushrooms are a highly prized addition to any meal. Wild mushrooms are mostly foraged in fall and spring.

The most popular cultivated mushroom variety grown in the U.S. is the white button, followed by the cremini or baby portobello, portobello,

enoki, oyster, maitake, and shiitake. Mushrooms are grown and harvested year-round.

Peak time: Year-round

Average price: \$3.98 per pound

Nutritional highlights: Mushrooms have several bioactive compounds that act as prebiotics to promote the growth of healthy intestinal bacteria. Mushrooms also contain phytonutrients that have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and anticancer effects.

This is in addition to B vitamins, phosphorus, selenium, copper, potassium and even vitamin D if they are grown in UV light.



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Pat Terry started The Wellness Kitchen as a way to share the knowledge she's acquired over the 30 years she served as a professor of nutrition and dietetics at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Prior to her work at Samford, Terry was the first nonclinical dietitian appointed by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to serve overseas. Visit her website at thewellnesskitchenrd.com.

