

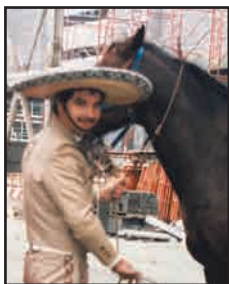
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February 2, 2023

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



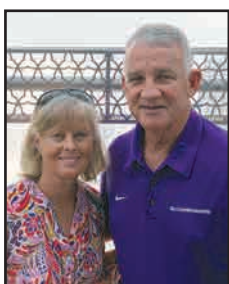
Friendship Hispanic pastor follows God's call from Texas to Alabama

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Colbert-Lauderdale Association leader reflects on past, prepares for future

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Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

Pastor Josh Pendergrass of Wadsworth Baptist Church in Autauga County points out tornado damage in the church's welcome center. The church received significant damage during the storms that plowed through central Alabama on Jan. 12.

'God took care of us'

Churches grateful for God's grace following Jan. 12 tornado damage

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Josh Pendergrass was at home Jan. 12 watching storm coverage when he saw the meteorologist draw a circle around the exact place where his church sat.

"I called the deacon who had been a member of that church for 50-something years and lives just down the road from it," said Pender-

grass, pastor of Wadsworth Baptist Church in Autauga County. "I asked if he was OK, and he was, and I asked if he could go check on the church. When he called me back, he was so upset and distraught that I couldn't understand anything he said, and I knew then it was bad."

For the past year and a half or so, Wadsworth Baptist had been working to update its

buildings for ministry needs, Pendergrass said.

'Decimated'

When he arrived at the church the day of the tornado, Pendergrass immediately saw that the church's recently added visitor center was "completely decimated."

"The wall was blown out, windows were busted, glass doors were blown out — and

that was just the beginning," he said.

Around the rest of the church, it looked like bombs had gone off. Doors were blown off, the sanctuary's back wall was detached and many of the buildings' support beams were bent or curved. In many places, the roof was gone.

"And when I say our office (See 'Picking,' page 8)



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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 15.



File photo

Reva Hudson (left) enjoys an afternoon visit with Frances and Harris Farmer at Wind Creek State Park in 2001.

Life lessons from longtime camp host Reva Hudson

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

At The Alabama Baptist, we have several missions. One is to give you helpful information for your walk with Christ, and another is to share stories that encourage you to know Him more.

A third is to help you find your passion and live it.

Several weeks ago, we were reminded of someone who did that well, right up until the day she died in November 2022 — Reva Hudson.

In 2001, TAB published a couple of articles about Reva and her husband, Rick, who spent their lives serving in ministry at their church and at Wind Creek State Park.

Rick worked as a bread salesman for Millbrook Bread Co. As he and Reva raised their children together, they served in a variety of roles at their church, Berney Points Baptist in Birmingham. They also had a big camping hobby.

Hobby turned ministry

“The first time we ever came to [Wind Creek] was in 1969. We borrowed a tent and went tent camping,” Reva told TAB in 2001. “We tent camped for a long time before graduating into a trailer.”

When Rick retired in 1991 and bought a fifth-wheel trailer, the

couple’s camping hobby also became their ministry.

Soon after they arrived at Wind Creek State Park, the park ranger asked them to serve as camp hosts for a month, and they were happy to agree. That role included overseeing weekly worship services,

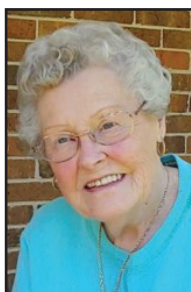
and the Hudsons loved that. According to Reva’s obituary, both of them were devoted to sharing the gospel of Jesus with everyone.

They served in that role for one month, then another — and eventually they were asked to serve full time.

“The Lord really opened a door for us,” Reva said.

They decided not to take a salary. For nine years they served as volunteers. After Rick died in 1999, Reva kept going on her own until 2006, when she moved back to Birmingham and became a Sunday School teacher again at Berney Points. She served in that role until August 2022.

What about you? Have you found places where you can use your gifts and hobbies to serve? We pray that as you read stories about people like Reva or ministries like disaster relief or orphan care, you’ll find new areas where God might be calling you to serve.



HUDSON

The Alabama Baptist

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

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GUEST EDITORIAL

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

By Carrie Brown McWhorter, Content Editor

DR volunteers serve, listen in times of crisis

The Rehobeth community near Equality in Coosa County is like many areas of Alabama — rural, wooded and populated by neighbors who are also family.

On Jan. 12, many of those families were returning home after picking up their children from school when the weather took a turn and so did their lives.

Eight homes in Rehobeth, six belonging to members of the Brown family, were in the path of the powerful EF3 tornado that carved an 82-mile track through five counties in Alabama that day.

Tracy Brown took cover in a hallway with her grandson and others as the storm blew through, scattering her family's belongings throughout the woods behind her house.

After the storm passed, she was trying to gather what she could from inside her home when her dog's insistent barking drew her outside. Moments later, what was left of her roof collapsed.

As Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers from Calhoun and Cleburne associations worked in her yard Jan. 20, cutting trees and clearing debris, Tracy told me and other volunteers the story of Black Dog — one more sign, she said, that though they had lost almost all their material possessions, God had not abandoned them.

Other family members told me the same thing — they were praising the Lord because despite the devastation, everyone in Rehobeth had survived.

Many of us here at TAB are trained in various areas of Disaster Relief, so when the callout

came for Cleburne Association's team, I was grateful for the opportunity to serve. But honestly, I felt a bit useless surrounded by so much loss.

Toni Long, the ABDR white hat leader in charge, reassured me the time spent listening was valuable. Sometimes it's the best thing we can do, she said.

She's right. Talking helps us process traumatic events, to find comfort and support when our hearts are broken.

Because you give and volunteers go, survivors know they are not forgotten. They are heard, and they are loved.



Photo by Carrie B. McWhorter/The Alabama Baptist
Disaster Relief volunteers clear a large tree at the Coosa County home of Margaret Henderson. Margaret is the widow of Wayne Henderson, a longtime Alabama Baptist pastor who served 10 years as DOM for Central Baptist Association.

Upcoming DR trainings

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief has several training opportunities coming up in March and April. Go to sbdr.org to see the full list of events happening around the state.

The following trainings are scheduled for the Disaster Relief Center in Prattville:

► **March 18: Admin** (managing volunteers in database and deployment information)

► **March 25: Communications** (using amateur radio to assist in crisis)

► **March 25: Shower and Laundry** (setup and operation of shower and laundry units)

► **March 31: Cleanup and Recovery** (helping in a variety of situations)

► **March 31–April 1: Chainsaw** (safe operation and cleanup)

► **April 13–15: Chaplaincy** (crisis intervention and ministry to persons in crisis)

► **April 22: Mass Feeding** (operation of mass feeding kitchen)

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash,
President and Editor-in-Chief,
will return next week.

Your Voice



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

Persevere in Bible reading to see 'profit' of God's Word

By **Eli Alexander**

Family pastor
The Church at Chelsea Westover in Harpersville

At the dawn of a new year, many are tempted by the idea that the Bible is a guide full of tips and tricks on how to make your life better or easier.

In order to find the proof that this is not the case, you need look no further than the thousands of Bible reading plans that end in Leviticus every February.

Nothing in the Bible promotes a quick fix. Furthermore, there is nothing in the Bible that teaches you can fix your life by your own means.

The Bible in its entirety is the gospel narrative of God saving His chosen people. The ultimate fix we need in life is to be rescued from our own sin, and we can by no means do that on our own. And it certainly isn't quick.

Following our salvation begins the lifelong process of sanctification or being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

When learning about the Bible, it is important to understand a few things about the Bible.

Paul wrote to Timothy that, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Law of God

The Bible is the very Word of God, the law of God, meant to pierce to the heart (Heb. 4:12) and transform us into the likeness of His Son (Rom. 12:2).

It may at first seem peculiar that the Bible describes Jesus as the Word of God, but the truth is that

this is exactly what Jesus is. I challenge you to read John 1:1-4 and 14 and replace each instance of "the Word" with the name Jesus as an exercise to make this point clear.

Jesus is God, the second part of the Trinity. He was with God in the beginning, and nothing was created apart from Him.

If the Bible is God's Word to us, then we need to hear it every day. Reading the Word of God does not have to be a seminary-level investment. You don't need several hours of dedicated time and a collection of colored pens and highlighters to read a portion of Scripture in context, understand it and then apply it to your daily life.

But just because the daily intake of God's Word doesn't have to always be deep study doesn't mean that it is never deep study.

The psalmist writes in Psalm 1 that the blessed man's delight is in the law of the Lord, and on the Word of God he "meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2). To meditate on God's Word is to sit with it, read it, re-read it, underline it, engage in word study and journal about what it means and how it changes your life.

My grandfather uses a common phrase: "What's in the well comes up in the bucket." The Bible says it like this: "For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

God knows we are so fickle-hearted that He has even supplied us with

the words to say. The Psalms are a collection of love songs containing deep lyrics on the heart and character of God.

Are you celebrating the joys of what God has done? There is a psalm to sing for that. Are you low and downtrodden? There is a psalm for that too. Do you feel like the only person on earth? There is a psalm to sing that affirms to your heart you are not alone.

To sing the Word of God to God is the utmost expression of worship. The Word of God promotes the worship of God and demotes the idolatry of self. Singing the Word of God teaches us.

We are safe in knowing we are correctly handling the worship of God when we are using His own words to worship Him.

Finally, we worship a relational God. He desires a relationship with us and desires for us to have relationships with other believers. To read, study and sing the Word of God together is to handle the Word of God as He intended.

God designed the local church to protect believers from false theology and to correct sin through the lens of Scripture. The purpose of the Word of God is to grow and strengthen His church.

So as you continue your daily Scripture reading plan — and I do encourage you to continue — be reminded when you pick up your Bible that it is not just an ancient collection of historical texts, and it is certainly not just a self-help book. It is much, much more than that.



ALEXANDER

Letters to the Editor

According to recent analysis by Pew Research Center, reported in the Jan. 12 issue of The Alabama Baptist, 88% of the new 118th Congress identify as Christian (469 of the 534 current members). I'm not convinced.

On Jan. 11, 210 U.S. representatives voted against the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act. One of them, Rep. Janice Schakowsky of Il-

linois, actually said transporting the babies to a hospital "could be detrimental to the life of that baby" — how ludicrous!

Being a Christian means acting like Christ. The poll must have reflected whether it sounded good to say you are a Christian, not whether you are born again and believe in Christ's teachings.

Joyce McDonald
Double Springs, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Ministry is never meant to be man’s legacy, but God’s plan.”

JOEY HANNER

Gadsden, Ala.

“Christians have always been in the front line of attack for the regime,” said **Timothy Cho, who escaped imprisonment in North Korea**. “Their aim is to wipe out every Christian in the country. There can only be one god in North Korea, and that is the Kim family.”

When we place our hope in possessions, things we know can be taken away or destroyed, we set ourselves up for the inner turmoil of anxiety. That’s why Jesus turns to His disciples and says, “Therefore” (Matt. 6:25–33).

Our security isn’t in understanding His plan but in trusting in Him as the plan-maker. He’s got this, and He’s got us as His children!

Do not be anxious, because God knows your needs and knows what is needed to serve Him. Our focus then is to serve as God calls and lean on Him to provide.

James Hammack
the-scroll.com

“When terrible events happen, who are you going to call? The answer is often the Yellow Shirt Army — namely Southern Baptist Disaster Relief workers,” said **Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama State Board of Missions**.

“We want to be the church that, yes, meets immediate needs, but I also want to be the church who months down the road is still min-

istering to these people as much as when the storm happened,” said **Matt Hall, pastor of Boones Chapel Baptist Church in Prattville, Alabama**.

The gift of administrative concerns is Romans 12:8 (“rules, leads”). This refers to anyone who leads others for the purpose of performing various tasks within the church. It may be the pastor, the chair person of a committee, etc. Such leadership is to be carried out with the attitude of promptness. As someone said, “If you think you are leading and no one is following, you are just walking around.”

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Every life important, Dungy says

It’s amazing to me how God used football to shine some light on the subject of life.

Three weeks ago during a game in Cincinnati, something happened that impacted our entire country. A young [player] named Damar Hamlin of the Buffalo Bills made a routine tackle and his heart stopped beating.

It could have been tragic, but something miraculous happened. The team medical staff rushed out. They got Damar’s heart started again.

But that wasn’t the miracle. The real miracle was the reaction of the announcers on the broadcast. What did they say? “All we can do is pray.”

And all across the country, people started praying. We were having dinner with friends of ours, and we stopped what we were doing, and we prayed right there. The Bills players prayed right on the spot.

Usually when that happens, the cameras cut away. But everybody on that field was praying. A life was at stake, and people wanted to see that life saved. That should be encouraging to us. Every day in this country, innocent lives are at stake. The only difference is they don’t belong to a famous athlete. And they’re not seen on national TV.

But those lives are still important to God. Psalm 139 tells us God is watching every one of these young bodies as they’re growing in their mother’s womb because He placed them there.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Adapted from Tony Dungy’s address at the Jan. 20 March for Life in Washington. Dungy coached in the NFL for 13 seasons with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Indianapolis Colts. He and his wife, Lauren, are advocates of adoption and the parents of 11 children.

From the *Twitterverse*

@davidprince

A reminder: 77% of Americans have never used Twitter, and of the 23% who have used Twitter, only a fraction of those are active on Twitter.

It’s a select group of folks engaging in superficial communication. That’s perfectly fine, but it’s not more than that.

@brocraige

Pastor search teams, please do your due diligence in checking out your candidate.

Do criminal and financial background checks. Talk to references beyond the resume. It’s too risky not to.

A person’s previous employment history, albeit reputable, is not a reason to shortcut searches.

@DavidCCrowther

“The first duty of every clergyman is to beg of God, very humbly,

that all he wants done in his hearers may be first and truly done in himself.” —Andrew Murray

@CatherineRenfro

Imagine the impact if every follower of Jesus prays for one person who doesn’t know Jesus and shares the hope of the gospel with them.

Pray. Share. Watch Jesus do what only He can do.

@DianeLangberg

You can tell what is most important to someone by what they protect most vociferously. Looking at Christendom today, I frequently see that when the church is threatened, its energy goes into protecting the system.

@GreggMatte

You don’t have to get to another level, another job or another location for God to use you. God has strategically placed you where you

are in this moment for the purpose of making a difference.

@DanielDickard

The goal of preaching is that people would fall in love with Jesus, not our sermons.

@shane_pruitt78

When a student ministry is run like a “church within a church,” then when a teen graduates out of that ministry ... it feels like they’re having to join a whole new church that they know very little about. That’s why many leave.

It must be one church, multiple generations.

@bartbarber

God, He paints a picture in the evening sky, blue and purple, orange, shades of red.

He knows we can’t afford no fancy paintings, so we look at the real things instead.

3 stories you should know



BP photo

Thousands of pro-life Americans gathered in Washington Jan. 20 for the 50th annual March for Life. The theme of this year's march was "Next Steps: Marching Into a Post-Roe America." Speakers addressed the future of the pro-life movement, including support for legislation, adoption and maternity homes. The march changed its route this year, passing the Capitol to recognize Congress' important role in regulating abortion at the federal level. (BP)

SBC observes George Liele Sunday on Feb. 5

The International Mission Board is inviting all Southern Baptists to recognize Sunday, Feb. 5 as George Liele Church Planting, Evangelism and Missions Sunday.

The annual emphasis celebrates George Liele, who many acknowledge as the first overseas missionary from the United States in 1782.

The event also recognizes other African American and black pioneers in church history, including Lott Carey, who organized African American missions in the 1800s; M. Lockridge, a faithful preacher of the gospel in the 20th century; and Fred Luter, who in 2012 was elected the first African American president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Videos, an activity sheet for children and families, a prayer guide and more information are available at imb.org/george-liele. (IMB)

5 Alabamians among IMB's new missionaries

Five Alabamians were among 46 individuals appointed by the International Mission Board in a Feb. 1 Sending Celebration.

Philip and Caroline Ortega*, Emma Dale* and Derrick and Rosemary Waters* (all names changed for security reasons) will serve among South Asian Peoples.

South Asia is home to 1.8 billion people, living in seven countries. According to IMB, this region has the largest concentration of lostness on the planet. An estimated 35,875 people die daily without Christ, and only approximately 1.85% of the population are evangelical Christians.

In 2021, 114,871 new believers were reported in the region and 21,047 new churches were planted.

Visit imb.org/south-asia for more information and ways to pray. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Pastor in Uganda sprayed with acid in attack, loses most of sight

KAMPALA, Uganda — A Ugandan pastor has lost almost all of his eyesight and has suffered burns on his body after three Muslim men sprayed him with acid.

The ambush upon Pastor Frank Mutabaazi occurred in Kampala, Uganda, on Dec. 22, 2022, reported Morning Star News.

After Mutabaazi preached an evening service, a Muslim extremist posing as a Christian asked the pastor for a ride. Along the way, the rider made some phone calls, then said he wanted to stop to visit a friend. As the man exited the vehicle, three other Muslims ambushed the pastor, spraying acid on him through the car window. They called him an enemy of Islam and a deceiver and said he should not live.

The pastor awoke five hours later in a clinic.

Mutabaazi previously had received threats about what would happen if he did not stop holding evangelistic events, according to Morning Star.

Approximately 12% of Uganda's population is Muslim. Uganda's constitution and laws allow for freedom of religion, including converting from one faith to another. However, Christian churches increasingly have received threats of violence, and some Christian converts have been attacked, killed or excommunicated by Muslim family members, stated the World Atlas.

Sudanese military member suspected in burning of church building

KHARTOUM, Sudan — An Islamist within the Sudanese military is suspected of burning a church building.

A Sudanese Armed Forces member opposed to the church's presence in El Daoka in Al Qadarif State is thought to have set fire to Sudanese Church of Christ on Dec. 16, reported Morning Star News.



Commons.wikimedia.org

El Daoka is about 250 miles from Khartoum, the capital.

A church attorney who spoke to Morning Star News called the attack

criminal, saying it also violated tenets of religious freedom.

Sudan is No. 10 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian, up from No. 13 on the 2022 list. Christians account for about 4.5% of Sudan's population.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Roy Carreker**, age 95, of Warrior, died Nov. 2, 2022.



CARREKER

He served in the U.S. Army during the Korean conflict. He was a member of New Temple Baptist Church, Dora, where he served as an associate pastor and was the founder of the church's homebound ministry.

Carreker was preceded in death by his son, Andy Carreker. He is survived by his wife, Doris Faye; two children; seven grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild.

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

► **Tommy Norman Jr.** is the new pastor of **Oakdale Baptist Church, Ramer.**

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Jeff Stith** is the new music minister of **First Baptist Church Birmingham.** Previously he served as worship pastor of Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer, for 16 years. He has served in several other Alabama churches including Southside Baptist Church; West Hartselle Baptist Church; Brookwood Baptist, Birmingham; and FBC Arab.

He received a bachelor of music education from Samford University and a master of church music at Southwestern Seminary. Stith enjoys being a member of Alabama Singing Men. He and his wife, Kristie, have six adult children and three granddaughters.



STITH

MARION ASSOCIATION

► **Winfield First Baptist Church** is hosting Bloom — Growing Your Faith, a women's conference, on March 5. Special guest is Sherri Burgess



BURGESS

There is no charge for the event, which begins at 6 p.m. A pre-service dinner at 5 will be available for a fee. Tickets must be purchased by Feb. 26. Child care is available for children through kindergarten age.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **The Church on Boll**

Weevil Circle, Enterprise, will host a revival Feb. 5–8 at 5 p.m. Sunday and 6 p.m. Monday through Wednesday. The guest speaker is Dennis Singletary.

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **Chris Watkins** is the new pastor of **Cross-**

ville First Baptist Church. He and his wife, Crystal, have two children.

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

► **Dennis Johnson** is the new pastor of **Freedom Baptist Church, Pisgah.**

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Frank Martin** is the new bivocational pastor of **First Baptist Church Shelby.**

He holds a bachelor's degree in religion and philosophy from Judson University, Elgin, Illinois; a master of social work from Southern Seminary; and a master of divinity from Golden Gate Seminary (now Gateway).



MARTIN

He served as a pastor 10 years in Texas and Illinois and worked 15 years with Baptist Children's Homes in Arkansas and Illinois.

For the past eight years, he has been a hospice chaplain. He currently serves with SouthernCare Hospice, Birmingham. His wife, Sandy Wisdom-Martin, serves as executive director of National Woman's Missionary Union. They have one child.

► **First Baptist Church Montevallo** has two new staff members. **Selena Price** is the new minister of children, and **Tina Hood** is the new minister of music.

► **Central Baptist Church, Phenix City,** celebrated its 100th anniversary Jan. 22.

Tim Sizemore, pastor of Lighthouse Baptist Church, Warner Robbins, Georgia, and childhood friend of Pastor David Hardwick, delivered the message.

DeeDee Griesheim, worship leader, along with the praise team and children's choir, led congregational worship.

Calvin Milford of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate, and Mayor Eddie Lowe presented a proclamation.

"We're excited to be celebrating God's faithfulness for the past 100 years but even more excited for the next 100 years and the people who will be reached with the gospel," Hardwick said.



Facebook photo

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Cade Farris** is the new associate pastor of pastoral care, encore and assimilation for **First Baptist Church Opelika.**

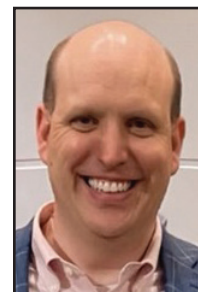
He recently had served as interim in the same role and also served in other staff roles from 2004 to 2011.

Farris holds a bachelor's degree in music from the University of North Alabama and a master of divinity in theology from Southern Seminary.

He previously served Baptist churches in Alabama, Georgia and Indiana in various roles including pastor, minister of music, minister to adults and minister to college and singles.

Farris served as pastor of FBC Wedowee (2011–2015) and pastor of FBC on the Square, La-Grange, Georgia (2015–2022).

He and his wife, Jennifer, have three children.



FARRIS

WINSTON ASSOCIATION

► **Tim Meherg** is the new pastor of **New Hope Baptist Church, Haleyville.** He and his wife, Peggy, have one child.



MEHERG

OTHER

► **Engage Mission Conference** is March 5–8 at Lighthouse Church, Oxford. Featured speakers include Kevin Hamm, Jarman Leatherwood, Jeremy

Morton and Jay Wolf, along with breakouts led by Brian Hook, Josh Carter and other missionaries and church planters.

Doors open nightly at 6 p.m. with sessions beginning at 6:30 p.m. Monday through Wednesday.

There are daily sessions at 9 a.m. with breakout sessions beginning at 10:15 and 11:30 a.m. (Lunch is available for those who register.)

Partnering churches include First Baptist Church White Plains; Lighthouse; Heflin Baptist; Friendship Church, Frisco, Texas; Reno Baptist, McCalla; FBC Garland, Texas; Mount Zion Baptist, Alexandria; and Greenbrier Road Baptist, Anniston. For more information, visit engagemissions.org.

► **The University of Mobile** is hosting contemporary worship band Shane & Shane for a free concert open to the community and prospective students.

The concert will be the final event of UM Day on Feb. 10. UM Day begins at 12:30 p.m. with a variety of events and tours.

The concert is free and will be on the Great Commission Lawn.

Participants are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and blankets. For more information and to register to attend the visit day, go to umobile.edu/umday.

The next UM Day is March 24.



Facebook photo

PICKING UP THE PIECES

‘With great tragedy comes great opportunity,’ pastor says as recovery continues

(continued from page 1)

wing is gone, I mean completely gone,” Pendergrass said.

The church’s large food pantry, which was stored in that wing, was blown away. Pendergrass’ desk was found sitting several hundred yards away from the church, and a man 65 miles away in Coosa County called and said he had found some of the church’s mail on his front porch. It’s been tough, Pendergrass said.

But he and the other members of the church believe that “with great tragedy comes great opportunity.”

“We certainly wish we didn’t have to go through this, but we’ve also been presented with an opportunity to move in the direction God wants us to go,” he said. “Despite our pain, we want to bring glory to Christ. The Lord gave me this phrase right after the storm: Our property may have changed, but our purpose remains the same.”

Pendergrass said they resolved right away that they weren’t going to be the church building at Wadsworth but the body of Christ that meets at Wadsworth. They started cooking hundreds of meals for the community out of a building he said “could fall in at any moment.”

“Yes, we’re going to rebuild in a way that helps us be more effective. And, yes, it’s important for us to have a place to meet, but we’ve had families who have lost their homes and had major damage around us,” he said. “Right now, we’re spending our days serving people.”

As the Wadsworth congregation does that, others have come alongside them with support.

On Jan. 15, the Sunday after the storm, First Baptist Church Prattville took up an offering to help them buy a modular building, and Shoal Creek Baptist Church in Deat-



Photo courtesy of Lee Tate

The steeple of Fairview Baptist Church in Selma sits in the church’s yard following the Jan. 12 tornado that struck the city’s downtown.

sville invited Wadsworth Baptist to join them for their service. Pendergrass preached there that day, and afterward the Shoal Creek congregation served them lunch.

Shoal Creek Baptist also organized a group to come pick up papers from the Wadsworth office wing that were littered across the cemetery there.

“We are very thankful for how they are showing us the love of Jesus,” Pendergrass said.

Wadsworth also received funds from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to help out at this time, which Pendergrass said enabled them to help someone else.

“The lady who cleans our church lost her home. She’s not a church member, and we were able to turn around and pay her salary for six months upfront whether we have a church for her to clean or not,” he said. “This partnership is enabling us to take care of our issues as we minister to those around us.”

SBOM is also working to assess

others’ needs so it can provide additional assistance. Fairview Baptist Church in Selma, which was hit the same day by a different tornado, also received funds to help with their recovery from the storm.

Glynn Stewart, Fairview’s deacon chairman, said the church had “quite a bit of damage.”

‘Going to be OK’

The steeple was ripped off, and Stewart said there were “about eight holes in the roof large enough to drop a man through.” The sanctuary is currently tarped and has water damage, but the church was able to start meeting again in its fellowship hall Jan. 18.

“We’re going to be OK,” Stewart said. “God took care of us, and He’s still taking care of us.”

Huxford Baptist Church near Atmore had damage from a different tornado that day and is receiving SBOM funds.

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams continue to help those affected by the storms, though Mark Wakefield, Disaster Relief strategist, said the work is starting to wrap up.

In Selma, where a high-end EF2 tornado tore through the center of

town and caused extensive damage, volunteers from across the state worked alongside the Selma and Cahaba Disaster Relief teams of West Central Baptist Association.

The work there as well as in Coosa and Tallapoosa counties wrapped up Jan. 27.

Long-term focus

Volunteers worked in Autauga County in three areas including Wadsworth but have now shifted into more long-term assistance.

Mel Johnson, who is heading up efforts in that area, said they’ve been able to connect with homeowners as they returned to their damaged homes to look for their belongings.

“A lot of areas were impassable,” Johnson said. “It took emergency crews a long time to give some homeowners access into their homes.”

He noted that the EF3 tornado that touched down there stayed on the ground for some 82 miles in all and had 1,100 impact points in Autauga County alone. Seven people were killed in that area.

“One of the homeowners I ministered to experienced four fatalities in their family,” Johnson said. “We’ve been able to talk with them and pray with them.”

They’ve also sent teams of chaplains into the schools to be there for students, teachers and others who might want to talk.

“I am thankful our Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and our churches across Alabama have, I believe, one of the premiere Disaster Relief networks,” Johnson said.

“Because of the gifts of Alabama Baptists and the time given by volunteers, we’re able to be working in multiple counties at one time.”

He said it’s not just the gifts, it’s the giving heart of Alabama Baptists that makes it happen.

“When something like this happens, everything just simply stops,” and people respond, Johnson said.

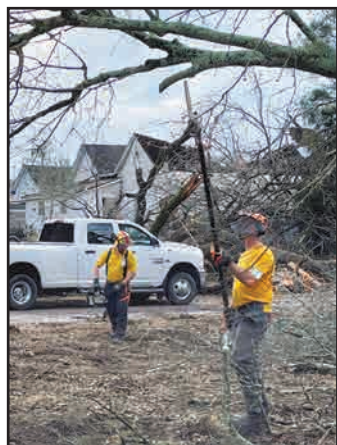
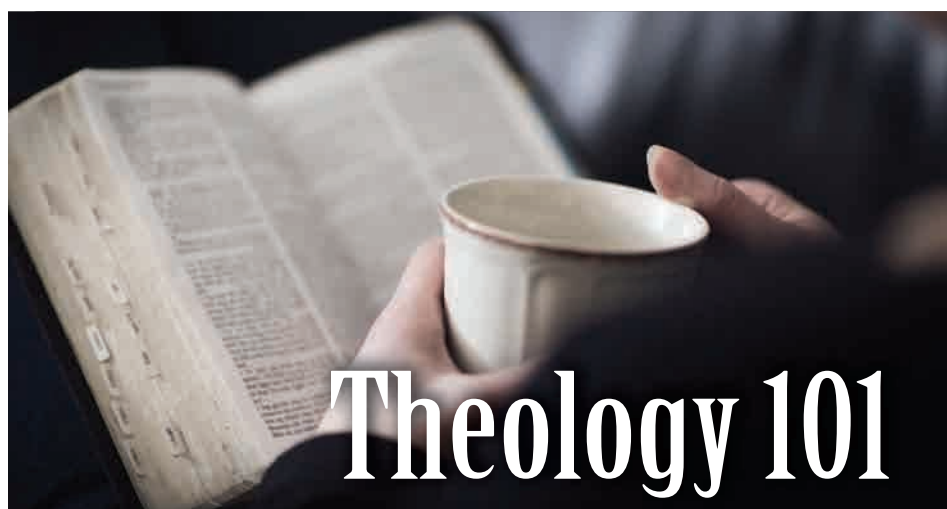


Photo by Lynn Patterson

Disaster Relief volunteers help with cleanup at a home in Selma.

For more information or to give to Disaster Relief efforts, visit sbdr.org.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Discipleship

Going for Jesus

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

In previous weeks of thinking about the theme of discipleship, we have taken the biblical account of Jesus and the Twelve Disciples as the pattern from which we can discern important aspects of discipleship.

Being a disciple of Jesus begins with coming to Him in personal faith. Just as with the Twelve, our discipleship extends from an initial coming to Christ in saving faith to a lifetime of following after Him — going where He leads us to go and doing what He directs us to do.

All the while, we are to live our lives in spiritual fellowship with Him through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. In all of this, we are to be learning from Him as the Master Teacher.

Sent forth

This week we give thought to the added dimension of discipleship as modeled by Jesus and the Twelve, namely, going for Him.

When He chose the Twelve, the account in Luke 6:13 tells us “He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.”

Whereas the term disciple carries the basic idea of a learner, the term apostle conveys the basic idea of one sent forth.

The key passage about going forth for Jesus is the one we have come to know as the Great Commission. As recorded in Matthew 28:19–20, this matter of going for Jesus is captured in His command to those original Twelve

(minus Judas): “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”

Awesome assignment

This command is an awesome and staggering assignment.

In sending His followers forth, Jesus compared them to workers being sent into a field to work. Then He enlarged His meaning by declaring that “the field is the world” (Matt. 13:38).

John Wesley is often cited as one who declared, “The world is my parish.” What was true for him is true for all of Christ’s followers. Together, we have an awesome responsibility coupled with a glorious possibility — getting the good news to everyone everywhere.

For this to happen, many will have to go personally to the nations. Others will participate by helping make it possible for some to go by contributing financially to the support of those who go. All of us also have the responsibility of praying always for those who go.

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.



Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

William Pettiford led historic 16th Street Baptist Church

William Pettiford (1847–1914) was a minister and banker in Birmingham. He led the historic 16th Street Baptist Church for 10 years.

He was born Jan. 20, 1847, in Granville County, North Carolina, to William and Matilda Pettiford. His parents were free black people who owned a farm. He worked on the farm and had reading lessons on weekends.

When he was 10, his parents sold their land and moved to Person County, North Carolina. A tutor helped Pettiford with his education.

He converted to the Baptist faith on July 4, 1868, and was baptized the next month at Salisbury. He became a clerk at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church.

Personal life

Pettiford married Mary Jane Farley in July 1869. They moved to Selma, Alabama, where he worked as a teacher and farmer. His wife died eight months after their marriage.

He then studied at the State Normal School at Marion. He married his second wife, Jennie Powell, in July 1873. She died the next year. After becoming a principal in Uniontown, he resigned in 1877 to focus on his education. The next year he started teaching at the Selma Institute (later Selma University) and also studied theology.

He married Della Boyd of Selma in November 1880. They had three children. He was ordained at St. Philip Baptist Church in Selma.

He was pastor of 16th Street Baptist Church from 1883 to 1893.

The church was organized in 1873. Pettiford was the fourth pastor.

When he began there, the church had 150 members and was \$500 in debt. The next year he paid off the debt. A great fundraiser, he helped finance a \$25,000 church building.

He established the Christian Aid Society to help sick members and to assist them in burial services. In 1887, he and other prominent black leaders started a technology school in Birmingham, the first school of its type in America. He became president of the Birmingham Ministerial Association and a member of the board of trustees at Selma University.

In 1890, he founded and became president of the Alabama Penny Savings Bank, Alabama’s first bank for black people. Three years later, he resigned as pastor of 16th Street Baptist Church. The bank prospered, but after his death, it failed.

Pettiford died Sept. 20, 1914. More than 3,000 people attended his funeral at 16th Street Baptist.

He is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Birmingham.



PETTIFORD

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of FBC Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor’s degree double majoring in history and



English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M–Commerce) and a master’s degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).

‘Only God can do it’

Friendship Hispanic pastor follows God’s call from Texas to Alabama

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jesus Navarro hadn’t planned on leaving Texas and moving to Alabama.

But one Sunday morning in 2021 when he was visiting a friend at First Baptist Church Oneonta, he started talking with Steve Sellers. At the end of the conversation, Sellers — then director of missions for Friendship Baptist Association — put his hand on Navarro’s shoulder and said, “Lord, if this is the man we’ve been looking for, can You work it out for us?”

Navarro wasn’t sure he was the man, at least not yet. But he did know that God had a tendency of bending his path when he least expected it.

Back in 1978 when Navarro was 17 years old, he made his first big move.

“I came to the U.S. by myself,” he recalled. “I had no family. I had nobody. I had the grace of God, but I didn’t know that.”

“When I left Mexico, I left it looking for a better life, thinking that I was going to go and make a few dollars. They used to tell us [that] when you go to the U.S., you will literally be sweeping money. That was the mentality: ‘Come over and make a better life.’”

Navarro, who was looking for a leg up, had never been to school.

At a young age

“My father had to work from sunup to sundown to provide for all of us,” he recounted. “I started working when I was 7 years old. I left my house at 14 to go find a job and help my mom. I’d do a shoe-shine. I sold popsicles — I would



Photo courtesy of Jesus Navarro
Jesus Navarro (second from right), pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista Amistad, prepares to baptize a family at Lake Guntersville on July 30.

go up to the school to sell them. That’s as close as I got to a school in Mexico.”

When he got to Texas as a teenager, an elderly couple took him in. “They helped me find a place, and I started working,” Navarro said.

A few months later he found his brother, who had left Mexico eight months before he did, and the two began working in construction.

Navarro made a lot of money and started buying rental properties. He also started dabbling in rodeo.

“I had always liked rodeo,” he recalled. “I became a professional bull rider and started going around to different places — Chicago, California, Houston, Fort Worth — different places to compete in bull riding and bareback. And everything was fine. I was living the life.”

Navarro loved it, but his family didn’t. He had gotten married along

the way and started having children, though he was gone on the weekends. “I never cared about how my family was doing,” he said. “I was living the life.”

A brother’s ‘betrayal’

He also began spending his money on liquor. And things began to go south.

“I looked around one day, and I didn’t have anything. Everything was gone,” Navarro recalled. “All the properties were sold, we were behind on bills, and I was still working the same way and bringing home the same thing.”

But every Thursday when he got paid, his first stop was the liquor store.

“I was buying five or six at a time,” Navarro said. “There was not a single day for 15 years that I was sober. I never missed a day of work,

and I was never late, but I drank every day.”

One day his little girl asked for pizza, and Navarro got frustrated — he didn’t have the money to buy one.

“And she didn’t say anything. I just told her to go back inside the house,” he recalled. “She came back running and brought me a \$20 bill from Monopoly and said, ‘I got money, go buy us a pizza.’”

Broken promise

Navarro felt miserable. He promised himself he would never drink again, since that’s what put him in the position to disappoint his daughter. But he was only able to keep his promise for about two weeks, “and then here I go again, I’d start drinking again.”

But it was around that time that Navarro’s brother — the one who had trained him to ride bulls and break horses — found a permanent kind of change.

“He became a Christian, and he left rodeo. He left all that life,” Navarro recalled.

He wasn’t happy about it.

“For me, it was a betrayal,” Navarro said. “He betrayed us by changing.”

The brothers had grown up Catholic, like most Mexicans at the time.

“When I moved to the United States, I didn’t even know that other churches existed. For us, it was a big deal [to convert].”

And he had always looked up to his brother.

“My brother was my hero,” Navarro said. “I wanted to do everything like he was doing.”

But that didn’t include becoming a Christian. So Navarro didn’t have

anything to do with his brother for the next 16 years.

But around 2000, the two reconnected through something that had been their common ground for a long time — horses. Navarro's brother called and asked if he could come by to see a new colt.

So he came, and then kept coming. "And I started noticing something in him, and I said, 'Why is he so happy? Why does he live a peaceful life?' I had never noticed it before," Navarro recalled.

The two became close again, and when his brother expressed a desire to buy his first horse, Navarro pulled some strings with a dealer he knew.

Two weeks later, the horse threw his brother off and landed on top of him. He was airlifted to a hospital but remained in a coma. Navarro blamed himself since he had helped get the horse.

"For 10 days I didn't go to work. I stayed in the hospital every day because of my guilt," he remembered. "I felt like the enemy told me, 'You did it.'"

He only left the hospital once during that 10-day period. While he was driving, he noticed the huge columns at a toll booth he was about to pass through.

"I aimed my truck directly at the concrete column, stepped on the gas and closed my eyes because I wanted to die," Navarro said. "I couldn't stand the guilt of seeing my brother dying."

But suddenly his truck started spinning. He believes it was the hand of God.

"When I opened my eyes, my truck died on me, and I'm in the middle of traffic crying," Navarro said. "I don't know why God would spare my life."

Two days later he stood next to his brother in the hospital and couldn't hold the words in any longer.

"I asked him, 'Forgive me, brother. I never meant anything wrong by taking you to go get the horse. I want to straighten out my life. I know I need what you have,'" Navarro recalled. "I remember that I grabbed his hand and his arm, and I bent down and kissed him on the forehead. And he was crying, there were

tears coming out of his eyes. When I did that, when I kissed him, I felt like somebody poured a bucket of hot oil all over me."

He wondered what had happened. "I didn't know at that time God put his mark on me," Navarro said.

His brother died the next day, a Saturday, and the following morning Navarro went to church.

"I went to the church he was a member of, where he was going to be ordained two weeks later," Navarro said. "And I didn't want to be recognized, so I sat way in the back where nobody could see me."

But the whole message was for him, he said.

'I want Jesus'

"When they made the call to come to the front and accept Jesus, I jumped up and I came over, and I said, 'I want Jesus in my life,'" Navarro recalled.

As the pastor prayed with him, he felt the hot oil feeling again.

"Now I understand that was the Holy Spirit," Navarro said.

Three days later he started studying at a local Bible institute. About six months after that, he ended up on a trail ride in Tennessee with a man named Leto Curl.

It would be the second time God used a situation with a horse to change his life for good.

"I was a baby Christian when I met Leto," Navarro said. "One day I was sharing my testimony with him after the horse ride and he said, 'You need to come to my church and share your testimony.'"

It was a Nazarene congregation in Blount County. While Navarro was there, he fell in love with the area and his relationship with Curl got stronger.

"This man became like my father. I started coming over every year," Navarro recalled.

He did that for the next 20 years as he grew in his faith, became a pastor, planted churches in Texas and trained up more young pastors.

Then in 2021, when he was visiting Curl's current church — FBC Oneonta — Steve Sellers was filling in for the pastor and something unexpected happened: As he preached

Sellers shared his heart for Friendship Association's churches to reach out to the Spanish-speaking population around them.

"I started thinking about it, and at the end of the service I said, 'Brother Steve, you know I come here every year, and I'm a Hispanic pastor in Texas,'" Navarro recalled.

Then Curl came up, told Sellers that Navarro was "his boy" and that "one day we're going to get him here so he can retire here."

Navarro had already purchased 11 acres of land from Curl in 2017, and he knew his family loved the area.

But he had told Curl before, "Leto, you know the only reason I'll move here, as much as I love this place, is if God opens the doors. I won't move unless God moves me."

"I said that to so many people in my family," Navarro remembered. "One day when I retire, I might move over there, but now, no, unless God opens some doors."

That's when Sellers put his hand on Navarro's shoulder and asked God to open those doors if Navarro was the person He wanted to plant a Hispanic church in Blount County.

Navarro would have to leave everything behind to start a church in Alabama. He had worked at the same Houston company for 35 years and was just a few years away from retirement.

But God began to pave the way, he said.

At Sellers' encouragement, Brian Harper, lead church planting strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, reached out to Navarro to see if he would be interested in taking a class on church planting.

The association also worked out finances to help support him and his wife, Leticia.

Navarro said he told his wife it was her decision and she said, "We'll move."

That was in March 2022. He told his boss he was resigning because God was taking him to another state, and his boss was so moved by what he was doing that he sent him away with three extra months' pay.

"God provided, and He provides every day," Navarro said.

FBC Oneonta also gave him an office and offered meeting space for the new church — Primera Iglesia Bautista Amistad (Friendship First Baptist Church), which held its dedication service Aug. 27.

The name is a nod to the association that got it all started and supports them. It's fitting in a lot of ways, Navarro said.

"That's also the base of the church — friendship."

He builds friendships every day as he travels around the area. His heart breaks as he sees needs, like a woman who didn't know the ages of her children because she couldn't read their birth certificates, or another mother who didn't know how to properly care for her child.

Navarro works to meet those needs,

partnering with a local agency to teach classes on topics like marriage and family. And with everything, he brings Jesus into the conversation.

"That's the idea: If I can get to these families with this type of help, I can include Jesus Christ," Navarro said. "Salvation is the name of the game."

'Blessing to watch'

Sellers noted it's a "blessing to watch what the Holy Spirit is doing to share and show the love of Christ" through the church.

"Pastor Jesus and his wife, Leticia, have an 'Abraham faith,'" Sellers asserted. "They left Houston, Texas, where they lived over 40 years, to come to Oneonta to reach the Hispanic community for Christ because the Holy Spirit sent them to be Friendship Baptist Association's Hispanic church planter."

"I am blessed to see someone who is pursuing the Lord's call with passion."

Navarro said from his end, it's all God.

"God is good," he declared. "I see what I used to do, and I see what God has done in my life and say only God can do it. I can go out there without fear and witness, because if God changed me, He can do it for anybody."



Photo courtesy of Jesus Navarro
Jesus Navarro speaks during a dedication service for the new Primera Iglesia Bautista Amistad on Aug. 27.



Photo courtesy of Jesus Navarro
Jesus Navarro wears the traditional Mexican charro suit in the Thanksgiving parade in Houston, Texas, in 1983.



Photo courtesy of Cottage Hill Baptist Church
People gather for worship at Downtown Church in 2022 — four years after it was planted by Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile.

Historic Mobile church building now new home to Cottage Hill downtown campus

Downtown Church, a campus of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, has officially found its home at the Steeple on St. Francis, site of the historic St. Francis Street United Methodist Church.

In 2022, Cottage Hill Baptist formed a separate nonprofit named the Hill Collective with the aim of planting, replanting and adopting churches. Establishing Downtown Church in 2018 and recently purchasing the Steeple are the beginning efforts of Cottage Hill's goal of empowering

congregations to reach their communities.

"We hope Downtown Church can be a blueprint, a model that can inspire more replanting of churches," said Alan Floyd, lead pastor of Cottage Hill. "When a church closes (such as the closure of St. Francis Street UMC), a community loses much more than a place of worship; it can lose its heart."

Busy again

The Steeple was founded in the mid-1800s. Its current structure was built in 1895 after its previous structure was destroyed by fire. Once

a bustling hub of church activity, St. Francis Street closed its doors in 1993 and was turned into an event space in 2015.

After 30 years of lying empty most days and only being used for events, the Steeple will now be filled with church activities again.

Since its launch, Downtown Church has met weekly in the Steeple by renting the space on Sunday mornings, but now they can call it their permanent home. Downtown Church is committed to loving the people of Mobile as they seek to connect people to Jesus Christ and one another, leaders noted.

Along with Sunday morning services, members of Downtown Church also participate in community activities in downtown Mobile. Church members aspire to make a positive impact in the lives of the people who live and work in the area.

Cottage Hill leaders said they are thankful God has blessed them with the leadership, resources and heart to help churches plant, replant and thrive. (McCall Smith)



Photo courtesy of Cottage Hill Baptist Church
Families gather at Downtown Church in August 2021 for a celebration to launch life groups at the then 3-year-old church plant.

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For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200.

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Pine Grove Baptist Church in Bay Minette, Alabama, is in search of a full-time pastor. Interested candidates may email their resumé and cover letter to: pgbmbaptist@gmail.com or mail to: 42240 Pine Grove Road, Bay Minette, AL 36507, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee.

PASTOR

Spring Bank Baptist Church in Silas, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. Please email your resumé to: Mike.Thorn@michaelthorn@gmail.com. Phone: 251-744-4081

PASTOR

Crossroads Baptist, Elgin, Alabama, is searching for a full-time/bivocational spiritually led pastor. To apply or ask questions, email us at crossroadsbcelginal@gmail.com or visit crossroadsbcelginal.com.

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.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Providence Baptist Church located in rural Rockford, Alabama, Coosa County, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit questions or resúmes to: providencebaptist459@gmail.com or mail resúmes to: Providence Baptist Church, 192 Coosa County Road 37, Rockford, AL 35136.

MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Alabama, is seeking a candidate to lead our worship ministry. Please submit resúmes to: office@fbcwoodstock.org.

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Macedonia Baptist Church, a rural church located in Bullock County, approximately 25 miles from Troy, Alabama, is seeking a part-time music director. Potential candidates should be experienced in a blended style of worship that includes traditional hymns and new worship songs. If interested, please email your resumé to: scgarnett@gmail.com. For additional information, you may call

Pastor Steve Garnett at 706-773-2214.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

Westwood Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, is eagerly seeking a part-time minister of music. Contact Pastor Steve Potts (205-798-3341, email: stevepotts@westwoodbc.net).

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Cherry Street Baptist Church in Attalla, Alabama, is seeking a candidate to lead our worship services and choir in a blended style of music. Please submit resúmes to: judydrummond07@yahoo.com.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH DIRECTOR

Cherry Street Baptist Church in Attalla, Alabama, is seeking a candidate to lead and to help us rebuild our youth program. Please submit resúmes to: judydrummond07@yahoo.com.

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Webb Baptist Church is seeking an individual who can work part time in leading the youth ministry. Resúmes can be sent to lshayles@outlook.com.

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FBC Level Plains, Enterprise

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 8:30 am-3:30 pm
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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 5:30 pm-8:30 pm
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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 5:30 pm-8:30 pm
FBC Robertsedale

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 8:30 am-3:30 pm
Glynwood BC, Prattville

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 5:30 pm-8:30 pm
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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19

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‘Encourager’

Colbert-Lauderdale Association leader reflects on past, prepares for future

By Grace Thornton

The Alabama Baptist

Eddy Garner’s neighbor, Mr. Craig, didn’t know what was going on in Garner’s life the afternoon he walked into the yard shuffling some papers.

“He said, ‘Hey, Eddy, I was going through my papers, and I thought you might want this,’” Garner recalled.

Mr. Craig handed him a two-page letter written in the late 1980s by Tommy Ingle, who was director of missions for Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association at the time.

“The letter was written to the whole community saying, ‘We are Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association, and this is what we do,’” Garner remembered.

The day Garner saw it — a Sunday in March 2006 — he had gotten a call from that association’s DOM search committee, wanting to interview him for the same position.

“On the backside of the letter it had a map of the two counties with all the churches starred on it. I lifted up my eyes to the sky and said, ‘Thank you, Lord — this was the confirmation I needed.’”

Confirmation

Garner had been a Baptist campus minister at the University of North Alabama for 17 years when, at the encouragement of others, he submitted his resume to the CLBA search committee.

He wasn’t sure it was the right time to leave UNA. He’d been unsure since providing his resume in January and getting that phone call in March.

So Garner prayed again for what he’d prayed about for weeks: confirmation. That day in the yard, Mr. Craig handed it to him in the form of an old letter.

“I met with the committee, and when they called me back and said I was their choice, I told them about how God had confirmed it to me too,” Garner recalled.

He had loved his 17 years at UNA. “It was exciting,” Garner said of student ministry. “What I loved about campus ministry was the at-



Photo courtesy of Eddy Garner

Donna and Eddy Garner are making plans to spend more time with children and grandchildren and serve in interim ministry roles after he retires from his post as associational missions strategist for Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association.

titude of students that they would be willing to do anything and go anywhere and tackle any type of ministry.”

He added that “being able to pour into students’ lives, make a difference in their lives and help them grow in their faith” was a joy.

But in 2006, he started a new ministry as director of missions for CLBA. That season would also last 17 years and bring its own joy as Garner spent time encouraging and supporting churches and pastors in the same area as UNA.

“A beautiful part of that now, a lot of our ministers here now are former students,” he said. “As I look around our pastors conference or our meetings, I see 15, 20, 30 former UNA students who came through our program who are in ministry now. That’s one of the neat rewards the Lord has blessed me with, to see them grow up and be so effective in this community in ministry.”

‘Tremendous blessing’

Over the years Garner has helped churches, encouraged ministers, been involved in missions work with the churches and watched CLBA’s Disaster Relief ministry grow and develop.

“It’s been a lot of fun, and it’s

been a tremendous blessing,” he said.

One of the biggest highlights of his time with CLBA, Garner noted, was seeing two churches in Sheffield — York Terrace Baptist and First Baptist — merge to become York Bluff Baptist Church and give the former York Terrace building to Greater Fellowship Missionary Baptist, a predominantly black congregation.

“Since then, that congregation is part of the association, and two African-American church plants are [too],” Garner said. “That was a prayer and a dream come true that the Lord has blessed us with — Greater Fellowship becoming a part.”

Another encouragement for Garner was getting to follow Jim Warren twice — Warren served as his predecessor at UNA, then again at CLBA.

“Jim Warren laid groundwork both places that I am grateful for, and he was a great listener and encourager anytime I went to him for advice,” Garner said.

And now as he prepares to retire at the end of February, Garner is working with the CLBA search

committee and praying that God will confirm a call there for someone else just as He did for Garner.

Gregg Woodard, pastor of Greenhill First Baptist Church in Killen and chair of the committee, said he and others recognize “the gravity of the task that we have because of how well he has done in this position.”

‘Personal touch’

Having Garner in the position of director of missions/associational missions strategist was “like having a best friend in that position,” Woodard said.

“And it wasn’t like that just for me because I’ve known him so long,” Woodard clarified. “He treats all the pastors in the association that way — he gets to know us, he knows our family, he keeps up with our birthdays and anniversaries and has a personal, humble touch when it comes to that relationship.”

Woodard noted Garner is “a great encourager, always reaching out and giving you a positive and encouraging word, and he does so in great humility.”

He also said Garner’s wife, Donna, has been “a wonderful help” to him in ministry — and Garner agreed.

“[She] has been supportive and beside me all the way, and [she has been] involved in missions trips,”

Garner said, noting she currently is a trustee for the International Mission Board. “We plan to do more short-term missions work in retirement.”

The Garners have children and grandchildren serving in Southeast Asia

with whom they plan to spend more time.

They also have children and grandchildren in the Florence area where they plan to stay, serving in interim pastorates, playing tennis and being out on the water. They are members of Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence.

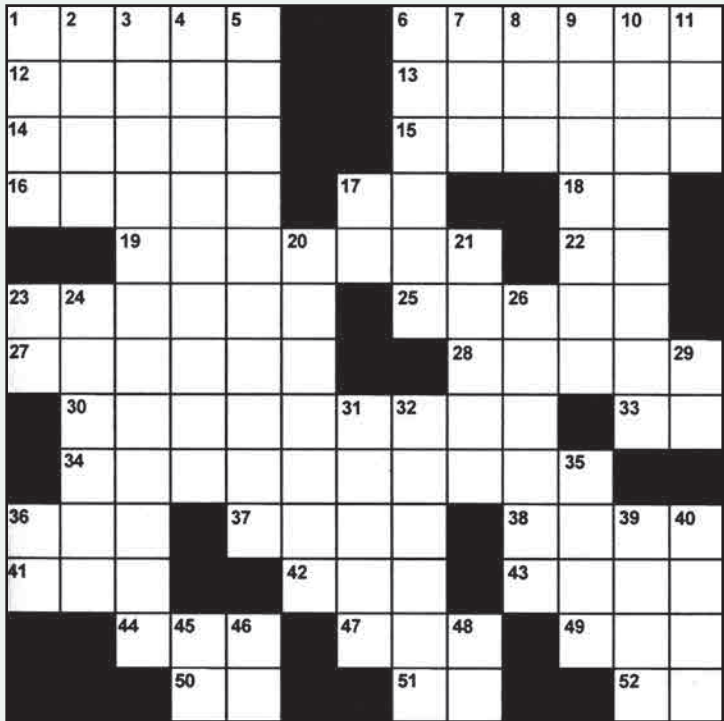
“These folks here in this area are like family, and it’s become our home,” Garner said. “We plan to spend our retirement years here.”

To learn more about CLBA’s open position, email clba@clbaptist.com.

CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Son of God.
- 6. The book of the generation of Jesus _____. (Matt. 1:1)
- 12. Nebuzar-____, captain of the guard, ____ servant. (2 Kings 25:8; 2 words)
- 13. Thou mayest prosper and be in _____. (3 John 2)
- 14. And flee into _____. (Matt. 2:13)
- 15. Published throughout all his _____. (Esther 1:20)
- 16. Behold, there came a _____. (Matt. 8:2)
- 17. I have given ____ unto the children of Lot. (Deut. 2:9)
- 18. Knockout. (abbr.)
- 19. ____ the chamberlain of the city. (Rom. 16:23)
- 22. Blessed are the pure ____ heart. (Matt. 5:8)
- 23. ____ it is not _____. (Acts 22:22; 2 words)
- 25. If ye then, ____ evil. (Matt. 7:11)
- 27. Did ____ lightness? ... that with _____. (2 Cor. 1:17; 3 words)
- 28. Put off all these; ____, wrath. (Col. 3:8)
- 30. Party after a wedding.
- 33. Do, ____, Mi.
- 34. In the very _____. ____ Moses ... us, _____. (John 8:4-5; 3 words)
- 36. The sons of Caleb ...; ____, Elah and Naam. (1 Chron. 4:15)
- 37. Day after Monday. (abbr.)
- 38. By faith, ____, being warned of God. (Heb. 11:7)
- 41. A city that is ____ on a hill. (Matt. 5:14)
- 42. And when the ____ heard it. (Matt. 20:24)
- 43. But whosoever shall ____ Me before men. (Matt. 10:33)
- 44. They did all _____. (Matt. 14:20)



By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 47. As a ____ lappeth. (Judg. 7:5)
 - 49. The son of _____. (Luke 3:36)
 - 50. Let your light ____ shine. (Matt. 5:16)
 - 51. They may appear unto men ____ fast. (Matt. 6:16)
 - 52. Registered Nurse. (abbr.)
 - 17. Heaven is ____ hand. (Matt. 3:2)
 - 20. If my ____ hath turned ____ of the way. (Job 31:7; 2 words)
 - 21. Structural Engineers Association of Hawaii. (abbr.)
 - 23. Fe, ____, Fo, Fum.
 - 24. For ____ lamps ____ gone out. (Matt. 25:8; 2 words)
 - 26. Brought him to an ____, _____. (Luke 10:34; 2 words)
 - 29. Do, ____, Mi.
 - 31. Wool fabric.
 - 32. Growth of ____ own ... shalt ____ reap. (Lev. 25:5; 2 words)
 - 35. As the ____ of the feet. (Dan. 2:42)
 - 36. Theirs ____ the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3)
 - 39. ____, Eshcol and Mamre. (Gen. 14:24)
 - 40. And when they had sung an _____. (Matt. 26:30)
 - 45. Ye shall be ____ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
 - 46. Think not that I am come ____ destroy the law. (Matt. 5:17)
 - 48. ____ and search diligently. (Matt. 2:8)
- DOWN
- 1. ____ went out to meet Sisera. (Judg. 4:18)
 - 2. Fall by the ____ of the sword. (Luke 21:24)
 - 3. But I ____ unto you ... use you, and ____ you. (Matt. 5:44; 2 words)
 - 4. My substance, yet being _____. (Ps. 139:16)
 - 5. And ____ upon it ... His ____ white as snow. (Matt. 28:2-3; 2 words)
 - 6. Every ____ had two faces. (Ezek. 41:18)
 - 7. Touched the ____ of His garment. (Matt. 9:20)
 - 8. Hit sharply.
 - 9. ____ fear my lord ... your faces worse _____. (Dan. 1:10; 2 words)
 - 10. Weakness of God is ____ than men. (1 Cor. 1:25)
 - 11. Blessed are ____

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

US clergy favor medical treatment for depression

A new study finds that those who have gone to a priest or pastor for advice will most likely have been encouraged to seek out mental health professionals and take medicine to treat it.

Published in JAMA Psychiatry, the study reports 90% of clergy respondents said they would encourage someone with depressive symptoms to see a mental health professional, and 87% would encourage people to take prescribed medications.

“There are some clergy out there that discourage medical care,” said Duke University sociologist Mark Chaves, who coauthored the study with Duke sociologist Anna Holleman. “But it turns out, it’s a small minority, even among conservative religious groups.”

The results were gleaned from the National Survey of Religious Leaders, funded by the Templeton Foundation and fielded from February 2019 to June 2020.

First of its kind

The larger study included 1,600 congregational leaders, from which 890 primary clergy were polled for the depression study. It is thought to be the first nationally representative survey of clergy beliefs on depression, Chaves said.

While many clergy also encouraged religious treat-

ment for depression, such as prayer or Scripture study, those religious remedies were supplementary. They did not replace medical treatment.

Perceptions

The study also asked clergy what they thought were the reasons people experienced depression. The vast majority attributed it to stressful circumstances, traumatic experiences, chemical imbalance, lack of social support or a genetic problem.

Only 29% of clergy said depression was caused by lack of faith, and 16% said demon possession. Most clergy endorsed mixing both medical and religious approaches to depression.

“These results suggest that medical professionals should view the vast majority of religious leaders as allies in identifying and properly treating depression,” the study concludes.

Major depression is the most common mental disorder in the U.S. and is the strongest risk factor for suicide. Studies have shown an increase in depression in the U.S. population from 6.6% in 2005 to as high as 9% in 2020, according to a study published last year by Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and City University of New York. (RNS)



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5 essentials for your church's welcome time

By Mark MacDonald
BeKnownforSomething.com

The church welcome time is important in your church for three reasons: to be friendly to regular attenders, to demonstrate the way members are friendly to each other and to make guests feel appreciated for attending, so they'll hopefully return.

While the scheduling is up to you, placing this time near the beginning of your worship service is wise because it's good to introduce a sense of welcome early in your fellowship.

Things to include

There are five essential things you should include in your church welcome time:

1. The welcomer's information. Whoever leads the greeting needs to give their name, their role and a way to contact them or someone else later. If you use screens,

you can create a slide with contact information.

This allows your congregation and guests to start building a relationship of helpfulness, leadership and friendship with someone.

Even better, explain how people can talk personally with the person after the service. Research has shown that when guests and members know each other by name, they are more likely to stay in that church. So share your name and invite discussion.

2. A genuine reason you're glad they're present. Getting ready, driving to church and spending time together shouldn't be taken for granted, especially if you want it to happen regularly.

Your attendees could have chosen to stay home and do other things. Fortunately, they came. Or maybe they tuned into an online service.

Use the welcome time to

make the gathering special for an authentic reason.

3. A church thread. Your church should have a controlled takeaway message you want to be known for. That thread needs to authentically weave itself through your website, services, ministries and your welcome time so your church becomes remembered for it.

Use the words you want the audience to use in re-

sponse to questions like "What's this church all about?" "Why do you attend our church?"

4. A next step. When the member or guest arrives for the service, they're anticipating something beneficial out of their time.

A welcome time near the beginning of the service is an excellent time to establish potential decisions that may be made after the sermon.

It's also the perfect time to explain how your church puts faith into action through missions or ministries that would be their obvious next step.

Think like a visitor

Resist feeling like everyone understands what the church offers. Tell them the benefit of taking the next step (for example, registering for a small group, going to a Sunday School class or volunteering for a missions project) and be very clear how to do whatever they decide (without overloading them with details).

5. Establish trust in your website. No one, especially a guest, will remember all the details they heard during a service. Therefore, mention your website address as the trusted source for all their questions and answers. Then ensure your website lives up to the honor of their trust.



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The journey to mend his heart led here.

Qua was born with tricuspid atresia that required a series of open heart surgeries as an infant. But as a teen, his health took a dramatic turn. Qua's pediatrician and cardiologist recognized something wasn't right with his heart and sent him to Children's of Alabama. Our team was standing by when he arrived by helicopter, and within two weeks he received a new heart. He rebounded quickly and was back at home a few weeks later, thanks to the expert heart team here at Children's of Alabama.



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 5

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Executive Director of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile

I AM THE LIGHT John 8:3–18

In the history of published English Bible translations, John 7:53–8:11 has been included since the beginning. Wycliffe and his followers hand wrote their translation of the New Testament from the Latin Vulgate, which includes this section. The Erasmus Greek New Testament from which Tyndale translated and published the New Testament in 1526 included these verses.

Since the latter 20th century, American publishers have noted the earliest known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament do not include the passage of Jesus' encounter with the adulterous woman. Even the CSB notes John 7:53–8:11 is not found in the earliest manuscripts.

For the purpose of continuity in the lessons, we include this passage in our commentary.

Trapped (3–6)

John earlier addressed a similar scenario between Jesus and the woman at the well in Sychar. Based on His teaching regarding divorce and remarriage, the Samaritan woman would have been considered an adulteress (Matt. 5:32).

The Torah was clear. Adultery carried the death penalty. The woman was guilty. They knew it. She knew it. But where was her partner? Why didn't the religious leaders bring him to Jesus for an execution? Both parties were guilty, yet only the woman was brought.

What was their intent? Was it to serve as defenders of the faith and champions for righteousness, or to be religious bullies? The text indicates their intent was to trap Jesus. Their attempt failed.

Freed (7–11)

Jesus was free. He was under no obligation to judge the woman. The accusation against her was incomplete. It required two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15) and the adulterous man to be condemned (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Jesus was free to listen to them. He was

free to write in the sand. He was free to discern their intentions, which had more to do with Him than her.

Jesus was free not to judge her. He was free to invite a sinless man to cast the first stone, but no one qualified. He was free to watch the older men drop their stones and leave as they understood His point.

After the young men left, Jesus was free to chastise the woman. He showed compassion instead of condemnation. He was free to call the woman to repentance, and He did. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

Shining (12–18)

In John 6, Jesus revealed Himself as the Bread of Life. Here in John 8, He utilized another metaphor: "I am the Light of the World." These metaphors pointed back to the Torah, with God's provision to sustain life during the wilderness wanderings and the light revealed in Genesis 1:4.

The Pharisees attempted to silence Jesus, saying His testimony was invalid and He did not bring reliable witness to affirm His words. Jesus explained the Father was witness to His testimony. He shone in the darkness, as the prophets testified He would.

The remainder of John 8 records increasingly intense interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees. He referred to the Father, and they asked where His Father was, an innuendo that Jesus was born illegitimately. Subtlety led to overt accusation when they said, "We weren't born of sexual immorality" (v. 41).

Jesus pushed back, saying neither Abraham nor God was their father. Jesus said their father was the devil. By contrast, He was sent from God. Abraham looked forward to His coming. "Before Abraham was, I am."

That did it. They wanted to kill Jesus immediately. He claimed the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. These men had no idea who Jesus really was.



Bible Studies for Life

By Tyshawn Gardner, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University

DOES IT CALL YOU TO TRUST GOD? Hebrews 11:1–6, 13–16

The writer of Hebrews moves from saving faith in Chapter 10 to living faith in chapter 11. His teaching on saving faith ensures that our salvation is based on faith in Christ, the One who offered "one sacrifice for sins forever" (10:12).

Living faith is the assurance that we are not only secure in our salvation, but that we are called to live in and through the same faith by which we are saved, because "without faith it is impossible to please God" (11:6). Both saving faith and living faith require a change in our thinking and our behavior.

Faith leads us to believe and rely on God. (1–3)

Hebrews provides us with a cast of Old Testament figures who relied on God. Although these figures were not without flaws and sins, they represent the kind of life that reflects a strong belief and reliance on God. To believe in God is to rely on Him.

Faith informs us who God is. Faith reveals both our impotence and God's omnipotence. We are reminded that God created the world out of nothing. This gives us the assurance that when we are limited in strength, resources, health and wisdom, God is never limited. We do not have to have physical evidence of what we need. God is always what we need.

Faith responds with obedience that pleases God. (4–6)

All the Old Testament examples in Hebrews 11 lived to please God through their obedience.

Abel's sacrifice to God was a direct response of his faith in God. Does our faith call us to give God our best?

Even though Noah had not even the slightest evidence of an overcast day, he proceeded to obey God's voice by building an ark. Since we have nothing of physical value to offer God, His delight in us lies in our obedience to Him. The fullest expression of faith is obedience.

We often want evidence of the results of our faith. In other words,

we want assurance our faith will work. The object of our faith is God, not results.

Faith trusts God with the results.

Obedience is not always easy. Obedience that is easy isn't really obedience at all. Obedience, like faith, will cost us something. Our obedience to God shows how much we respect and trust Him. When we abandon worldly ways to embrace God's ways despite being in the minority, our faith pleases God.

Obedience is best seen when we take actions that are not popular or when we adopt views that may be contrary to the dominant culture. Faith demands a response. That response is obedience to God's Word and the promptings of God's Spirit.

Faith stays focused on God's Word and promises. (13–16)

Since faith sometimes calls us to respond to God in ways that are honorable to Him but unpopular to the world, we must stand fast in God's Word and promises.

All the Old Testament personalities in Chapter 11 died in faith, which means they never stopped believing in what God promised, even when it seemed as if they would never experience those promises.

We are reminded of the hundreds of thousands of enslaved humans who longed for the brutal winter of slavery to be over. In light of their captivity, they never wavered in the faith that God would make them free. Through over two centuries, these enslaved human beings believed that even if they didn't see freedom, their children and their children's children would.

Faith never gives up on God. These lessons teach us that faith in God also provides the strength we need to endure hardships until God's promises come to pass.

God has spoken through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is our perfect example of faith in God. He was obedient when it wasn't easy, and He never wavered in His faith towards His Father. In this faith, He died, and in this faith He rose again.

May we live in faith.



MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust
The Alabama Baptist

Revamped Pure Flix may be streaming service families are seeking

Not so long ago, retailers advertised products as “new and improved” if they had tweaked the contents and wanted former customers to give the product another try. Minus a few historical blunders — 1985’s New Coke for example — it often worked.

That new and improved label comes to mind when noting the new version of the streaming service Pure Flix, launched by top Christian media executives in 2015 as a faith-based type of Netflix before the platform was purchased by Sony in 2020.

The old version of Pure Flix was popular with a niche audience, but the new and improved Sony-owned version is even better and should encourage former customers to try it again.

What’s different?

First, the library of titles has dramatically expanded. That’s because Sony’s Affirm Films is home to some of the most well-known faith-based movies in recent years, including those from the Kendrick Brothers.

“Lifemark,” the latest Kendrick Brothers movie, made its home video debut on Pure Flix. Other Kendrick Brothers’ films are on the



TAB Media graphic with Unsplash.com

platform, as are Lee Strobel’s “The Case for Heaven” and Kathie Lee Gifford’s “The Way.”

Second, Pure Flix launched an impressive list of original titles starring big-name talent.

“Legacy Peak,” which tells the story of a family fighting for survival after their airplane makes an emergency landing, features Lucas Black of “NCIS: New Orleans.”

“Live + Local,” a genuinely funny comedy series about a Christian radio station, stars Dave Coulier of “Full House” and “Fuller House.” “Saved by Grace,” a dramatic series about angels interceding in the daily lives of individuals, features Jennifer Taylor of “Two and a Half Men.”

In total Pure Flix released 10 original movies and series in 2022, with 15 scheduled for 2023. In plain language: There is far less cheese and far more quality.

The Pure Flix original “Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters” is Hallmark-like — and one of the best family films released in 2022.

Third, the streaming service is improving just as others are growing coarser.

Sure, you can find family-centric titles on other streaming platforms, but it’s a lot like searching for healthy food options at a fast food restaurant. There just aren’t many choices.

Content for children

Pure Flix has a variety of shows for children, including “VeggieTales,” “Superbook” and “Hermie & Friends,” among others. New titles are introduced each month.

“There’s not a lot of services” that offer family-friendly content, Pure Flix CEO Michael Scott told The Alabama Baptist. “Pure Flix is that alternative.”

Scott encourages families to ask, “What are we putting into our minds through our media choices?”

“The more I watch [family-friendly content],” Scott added, “the more I feel energized, the more I feel closer to God, the more

it makes me think about spiritual themes and think about my family.”

The service, found at Pureflix.com, offers a seven-day free trial.

Also worth watching

► **The Wingfeather Saga (Angel.com)** — A family (the Igbys) seeks safety from evil as they take a stand against a mysterious ruler, Gnag the Nameless. This excellent family-friendly animated series is based on novels by Christian musician/author Andrew Peterson. It’s a groundbreaking series that is a cross between “The Lord of the Rings” and the world of Narnia, and is crowdfunded. Visit Angel.com to find viewing options.

► **Good Night Oppy (Amazon Prime)** — NASA sends a rover to Mars with an expected lifespan of 90 days but gets an incredible 15 years out of the hard-working machine. It’s a fascinating documentary that tells the story of Opportunity, which roamed the Mars surface from 2003–19. Rated PG for some mild language.

► **Lyle, Lyle Crocodile (Home Video)** — A singing crocodile befriends a middle school boy who is lonely and needs a friend. This live-action film is based on the 1965 children’s book of the same name by author Bernard Waber. It includes solid lessons about friendship and courage. Rated PG for mild peril and thematic elements. It also has three OMGs.

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.

MEET THE REVIEWER

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.

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‘Heart language’

By Erin Roach
The Baptist Paper

Video library takes Bible to unreached, oral learners

More than 3,000 unreached people groups don’t have a single verse of Scripture in their language, said Paul Wynn of OneMessage.tv.

And even if they did, 80% are oral learners, meaning they come from a storytelling tradition where the written word wouldn’t be of any value.

With a goal of reaching those people groups for Christ, OneMessage.tv works with missions partners, including the International Mission Board, to produce a collection of 20 Bible story videos using members of specific people groups as actors and translating it into their languages.

“Once that library is completed, we give it to the ministry, and then they can share those videos,” Wynn told The Baptist Paper.

“They can do movie nights in the villages where they work and show it on a big screen,” he said, “or they can do little files on their phones and go ... home to home and share them, or share them in small groups.”

Modern technology

About a decade ago, Wynn was in Nigeria and noticed a herdsman wearing traditional African clothing standing with some cattle in a field. The man’s mobile phone rang, and he pulled it out and started talking.

“Even in villages that perhaps don’t have power, they’ve got cell phones,” Wynn said, noting children sometimes start businesses pedaling bicycles to produce power for charging phones.

For more than 15 years, Wynn and Doug Keesey worked in media production for various ministries through their company OneMission.tv. In 2019, they launched One-



Photo courtesy of OneMessage.tv

The people groups where OneMessage.tv has worked may not have seen any video in their language before, and now they can watch videos about the Bible in their language with their people acting out the stories.

Message.tv after working with an IMB missionary in Colombia to use locals as actors in videos communicating Bible stories.

During the past three years, Wynn and Keesey have been working with four people groups in Africa and South America, completing an entire library for one of the groups. They’re currently in discussions with a people group in northern Iraq.

“When we go, we don’t ask the missions partners for anything except some sweat equity,” Wynn said. “If they can help us find actors for a few days and that kind of thing, that’s all we ask. We just give them the resource when it’s completed.”

Typically, the videos are between three and six minutes, so it’s easy to sit down with someone and show it on a phone. If missionaries host a movie night, they may show five of the stories back to back.

“We concentrate heavily on Genesis and Exodus and then move into the gospels,” Wynn said. “It’s based to a certain degree on the IMB storytelling method. They have a list of about 40 stories that they use.”

Wynn and Keesey consider which stories will work well visually and address attitudes or misconceptions a people group might have. For instance, the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32 is relevant to groups that practice idol worship.

“We move into Jesus’ birth, a number of His miracles and then His crucifixion and resurrection,” Wynn said.

Actor to Christian

They’ve even seen some of the local actors come to faith in Christ.

“When we were in South America three years ago, we went to a village that had about 100 people but only two believers, a man and a woman,”

Wynn recalled. “They were kind of our starting point for our actors. The very first story that we shot with them was Cain and Abel.

“This man got his brother, who was not a believer, to come and play Cain. The believer played Abel.

“When we started that morning, the missionary kind of sidled up next to me and said, ‘I think he may be a little hungover this morning.’ But this guy totally got into it. He was hands down our best actor. This people group by and large is not overly demonstrative — you really have to get them going — but this guy took to it.

“He hung out with us for the next two days while we were shooting stories.”

During the process the two brothers formed a relationship with the missionary, and a few weeks later the unbelieving brother started asking questions about Jesus. Within a couple of months he became a believer, Wynn said.

The people group now has about 10 baptized believers with plans to build a church.

“When people watch these videos, they’re seeing their own faces,” Wynn explained. “They not only hear it in their heart language, they’re also seeing people who look like them.”

He added this is a reproducible strategy that works in a lot of contexts worldwide.

Some of the videos have found their way into villages missionaries haven’t even gotten to yet, Wynn said.

“The people groups that we’ve worked with probably had not seen a video of any kind in their language,” Wynn related, and because of this project, the first one they’re experiencing is about the Bible.

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'Surreal'

By Brian Blackwell
Baptist Message

Revival, crusade spur discipleship boon in Louisiana

Churches in south Louisiana are putting their disciple makers to work now that at least 400 new believers have expressed interest in intentional discipleship, all since two late fall evangelistic events in the area.

According to local reports, more than 500 individuals surrendered their hearts and lives to Jesus during revival services at Old Zion Hill Baptist Church in Independence, Louisiana, Oct. 17–Nov. 18.

Another 200-plus made decisions to follow Him during the South Louisiana Awakening tent crusade in Hammond, Nov. 28–Dec. 9, a multi-denominational spiritual outreach.

“The revival continues to produce good fruit,” Old Zion Hill Baptist associate pastor Dave Ketchand said. “Remarkable testimonies of salvation and changed lives abound. The need to follow up with intentional disciple making is daunting. Doing this effectively will not be accomplished by doing church as usual. We ask for prayers ... as we continue this work.”

Connecting with churches

Ketchand said area churches developed a strategy to connect the new believers with local congregations to begin discipleship training. The churches also were preparing to form new believer classes.

Each person who came forward received an email or text encouraging them to find a church home. Pastors were given contact information and have pledged to reach out to everyone on the list.

At Old Zion Hill, Billy Hall enrolled in the new believers class. Previously addicted to alcohol, Hall said he ended that lifestyle after he decided to follow Christ on Oct. 25. He shared his testi-



Photo courtesy of the Baptist Message

The South Louisiana Awakening tent crusade (shown above) in Hammond and revival services a few miles north in Independence resulted in more than 750 decisions for Christ. The revival services were extended five times because of the movement of the Holy Spirit.

mony through baptism on Nov. 6 and has enjoyed growing deeper in his faith through the new believer training.

“It has opened my eyes to how your testimony opens doors for you to speak to others about Jesus,” he said.

Randy Ray, tent crusade follow-up team leader and pastor of River Fellowship in Hammond, said River Fellowship is slated to begin a 10-week discipleship class soon.

“Hopefully, with the follow-up training initiated and follow-up calls being made, we will see a good number of disciple groups formed,” he said. “And honestly, we are not concerned if they are connected to our church or not. We just want to see them discipled and

connected to a local body of believers that teaches the Word and will continue to nurture them.”

Still Water Church in Hammond has two new converts who are about to enter discipleship training, said

Pastor Elltore Austin, also part of the crusade follow-up team.

“We let them know that Christian discipleship is developing a lifelong obedient relationship with Jesus Christ in which He transforms your char-

acter into Christlikeness, changes your worldly values into Kingdom values and involves you in His mission in [your home, the church and the world],” he said. “It’s been nothing short of amazing, seeing so many people being obedient to the move of God at the revival and after through discipleship.”

Gary Dennis, pastor of Old Zion Hill, said the revival and tent crusade have brought about a spiritual renewal in schools, businesses and homes.

“It is astounding and incredibly gratifying to see God move in such a powerful way,” he said. “Other words that come to mind are satisfying, humbling, exciting, surreal. At a deep level there is a quiet peace knowing God is doing this and fulfilling His promises.”

Praying for humility

“I cannot make that happen, nor can anyone else,” he continued. “We pray God will bring to His churches the deep level of brokenness and humility that will allow God’s Spirit to spread revival.”

“When Christ-followers humble themselves and pray, when we get serious about seeking the face of God and turn away from our sins, God will revive the church. When the church is revived, awakening of the lost will follow.”

Louis Husser, pastor of Crossgate Church in Robert, said he, too, has been amazed at how God has moved.

“Many Christians live and serve the Lord all their lives and never see hundreds of believers at the altar, repenting and reconciling old offenses ... and hundreds of believers filling the altar, weeping over lost souls,” he said. “We are not taking anything for granted. ... He is doing a great work here.”

Dennis mentioned the spirit of expectancy surrounding the community and how hundreds began praying each day several weeks before the crusade.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published by Baptist Message.

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