

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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'Lay your life on the line'

Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Chris Diffey (front center), minister of music and worship at Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham, leads worship during this year's State Evangelism Conference, hosted by Lakeside Jan. 29–30.

Evangelism conference speakers stress urgency of sharing faith

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Willie McLaurin can't shake the memory of a day when he got on a plane for a short flight home after preaching somewhere. He sat down in a window seat, popped in his headphones and prayed for a few minutes of quiet.

And then he realized that the man headed to sit beside

him had the "spiritual gift of conversation."

"I dug in deeper, and this guy began talking to the guy who was in the aisle seat,"

McLaurin, who serves as interim president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, told those present at the 2023 State Evangelism Conference on Jan. 29. "And I said, 'God, you've answered my prayer.'"

The man never stopped talking to the person on the other side of him, and McLaurin was thankful. But then after they landed,

McLaurin said the man turned to him and said, "I see you didn't feel like having any conversation today."



McLAURIN

In that moment, McLaurin felt the Holy Spirit say to him that he had to be consistent — he couldn't take a day off from being a disciple of Jesus.

In his message to the crowd gathered at Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham for the Sunday evening session, McLaurin said consistency is one of the values a church needs to be a Great Commission church.

"How many people," he

asked, "has the Lord Jesus Christ placed right beside you but because you were not consistent at sharing your faith, you missed an opportunity to share the good news? Are you willing to lay your life on the line and testify to the goodness of the Lord?"

Be committed

Preaching mainly from Matthew 28:18–20, McLaurin said followers of Christ must be committed to sharing their faith verbally.

"Every believer is called and commissioned to share the gospel with a lost world," he said.

McLaurin was one of five (See 'Keep,' page 6)



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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 23.

Scholarships honoring TAB
editors ‘deeply meaningful’

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

During Cole Shiflet’s senior year at Samford University, he had a lot on his plate. He was wrapping up his studies in mass communications, writing as a correspondent for The Alabama Baptist and serving in a variety of other ministry roles.

But one thing that eased his load was the Dr. Bobby S. “Bob” Terry Scholarship, which is given each year to journalism and mass communications students at Samford. Terry is editor emeritus of TAB. Shiflet said, “The scholarship helped to alleviate anxiety about my financial situation and allowed me to focus on my schoolwork and ministry commitments during my senior year at Samford.”

It also kept him from carrying that financial burden with him into his studies at Beeson Divinity School, where he’s working on his master of divinity. He’s interested in using his communication studies in pastoral ministry and considering cross-cultural ministry work through overseas missions.

The Terry scholarship has been given to 10 other students since its inception in 2018. The Association of State Baptist Publications established it in honor of Terry, who retired that year after 50 years in state Baptist paper work (Kentucky and Missouri prior to Alabama). The scholarship was endowed by the TAB board of directors.

Theological education

Another scholarship named in honor of a TAB editor — Jennifer Davis Rash — was awarded for the first time in fall 2022.

The scholarship is for Beeson Divinity School and was established and endowed by the TAB board in 2020 to help underrepresented mi-

norities who are members of Southern Baptist churches to further their theological education. Rash earned her master of theological studies degree from Beeson in 2007 and has been with TAB since 1996 (editor since 2019).

‘Important investment’

Gary Fenton — who serves as senior advancement director for both Beeson and Samford and also serves on TAB’s board — said both scholarships are deeply meaningful. “Dr. Terry has served his entire career as a Christian journalist for the Baptist community,” he said. “Through this scholarship ... we are helping the next generation of journalists to be trained at Samford.”

He said that’s an important investment in the next generation so “the truth of our Christian faith and our Baptist denomination are accessible and understandable for everyone.”

The Rash scholarship is vital too, Fenton said.

“Jennifer Rash’s scholarship not only honors an outstanding Christian lady, it also will help students

preparing for ministry to receive graduate training at Beeson,” he said. “With the rising cost of graduate programs, it is imperative that we provide scholarships for those training to serve in international missions, in denominational positions and in local churches so they will not be encumbered with student debt. Without scholarships, many students would not be able to attend Beeson.”

A scholarship also exists in Fenton’s name at Beeson — the Gary and Alta Faye Fenton Scholarship, established to honor the Fentons’ 25 years of ministry at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Homewood, where he served as pastor.



Photo courtesy of Cole Shiflet

Cole Shiflet (right) says the Dr. Bobby S. “Bob” Terry Scholarship at Samford helped him balance his studies and ministry commitments, like serving with his friend, Joshua, in Panama.

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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OPINION



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



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@RashionalThts

Why do we overcomplicate life, ministry, seeking the Lord?

My attention focused more on the Full Moon BBQ sandwich in front of me than the initial introductory remarks during the Jan. 30 luncheon at the State Evangelism Conference.

I knew our correspondents Michael J. Brooks and Tracy Riggs Frontz had the coverage well in hand (see story, page 7), so I chose to finish my meal cautiously and quietly as Mark Clifton shared.

As he wove stories throughout his presentation, my mind wandered down a few familiar trails.

Many of us have experienced moments in our ministries where we ran ahead of God, didn't keep prayer as a priority and got caught up in all the possibilities at the expense of excelling in the present.

We also sometimes complicate daily life and routines rather than choosing simplicity.

Clifton says a simple strategy is the best option, and his suggestion is to "love people, practice generosity and seek Jesus' direction in every endeavor."

Think about it — so simple, yet massively powerful.

What if we spent more time loving people where they are,

praying for them and mentoring them to make needed next steps?

What if we eagerly approached each day intentionally looking for ways to be generous — with our attention, time, resources, prayers and compassion?

What if we had an ongoing, never-ending conversation with Jesus? What if we talked every aspect of every day out with Him?

Of course, use discretion with when to have that conversation out loud and when it should be in your mind. Otherwise, you might start concerning those around you. Ha!

Along with urging us to stay focused on loving, giving and praying, Clifton shared another

point that hung heavy in the air for me.

"Jesus won't resource *our* plan, but He won't spare resources for *His* plan."

Is it really that simple?

Is it truly as simple as seeking out, listening to and following the Lord's plan? Absolutely.

Still, we so often rely on our own thought processes, decision-making skills, research from the experts and personal preferences. Many times we blame others for not following our lead rather than carefully evaluating how we are leading.

The Lord brought this concept home for me last week when He

solved a puzzling situation in a matter of hours after I had spent years attempting to figure it out.

Instead of praying through it and seeking His guidance from the start, I worked in my own strength, assessing the options and contemplating proposed next steps in the process.

I'm a pretty good problem solver, so in my mind I should have been able to handle the issue easily.

However, once I released it totally to Him, He gave me — within minutes, by the way — a clear, efficient and beautiful outline of what to do next.

It's a plan that far exceeded my expectations of what was possible.

'I keep praying, You keep moving; I keep praising, You keep proving ... there's purpose in Your plan'

Meditate on this excerpt from the lyrics of "Honey in the Rock," written by New Zealand singer-songwriter Brooke Ligertwood and American contemporary worship musician Brandon Lake:

There's honey in the rock, water in the stone

Manna on the ground no matter where I go; I don't need to worry

now that I know

*Everything I need You've got
There's honey in the rock
Praying for a miracle, thirsty for the Living Well*

*Only You can satisfy ...
Freedom where the Spirit is
Bounty in the wilderness
You will always satisfy ...
There's honey in the rock, purpose in Your plan*

Power in the blood, healing in Your hands ...

*I keep looking, I keep finding
You keep giving, keep providing ... I keep praying, You keep moving; I keep praising, You keep proving ...*

*You are all that I need ...
Jesus, who You are is enough ...
Oh how sweet, how sweet it is
To trust in You, Jesus.*

Your Voice



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

Danny Akin: Why the M.Div. program matters for ministry

By Danny Akin

President, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

In my mind, the master of divinity degree is the bare minimum necessary for a life of service in the body of Christ.

Here are three reasons why I believe every student with a heart for ministry should consider the M.Div. program.

1. Biblical and theological training is the bedrock for faithful ministry.

After 45 years in ministry, I still believe the gold standard of seminary education is the M.Div.

The M.Div. is designed to provide the bedrock basics for faithful ministry in the local church and for missions around the world.

The M.Div. will take you deeper in biblical and theological training and equip you to teach and obey the truth of God's Word — regardless of the challenges and complexities of ministry.

As an M.Div. graduate from one of our six Southern Baptist seminaries, I know firsthand the significance of the training the M.Div. program offers.

The M.Div. was a formative time for me as I learned the theological

habits of mind that have rooted me deeply in God's Word and in the life of the Church.

We must be equipped to articulate, defend and practice the historic doctrines of the Church and lead and counsel others to do the same.

Because that is exactly what the M.Div. equips students to do, I believe everyone who desires to do ministry would be well-served by the M.Div.

2. Practical ministry preparation is invaluable for future leaders.

Although all our graduate degrees offer a wonderful biblical and theological education, the M.Div. allows for unique hands-on, practical training with its missions practicum or church-based internship component.

I am convinced the best theological education takes place in a partnership between the seminary and the local church.

There are some things you can only learn in the refining fires of a local church or the mission field because there you are

dealing with real people in real-life settings.

The M.Div. is designed for practitioners with a heart for ministry in the local church — both here

in the U.S. and around the world.

Even though ministry leaders have always needed biblically rooted wisdom to lead and counsel others through cultural challenges, our seminary graduates today are entering a particularly volatile time with communities deeply divided over race, gender, politics and a myriad of other issues.

I am convinced that one of the best ways we can prepare our M.Div. students for ministry is by pairing their biblical and theological training with practicums and internships in the field.

There in the field, M.Div. students will learn to speak with truth and grace about what they have learned in the classroom.

There they will learn to have compassion on those who oppose and slander them.

There they will learn to grieve with families beside hospital beds, to preach and teach with a prayerful heart for a particular congregation, and to wrestle with how to evangelize cross-culturally in biblically faithful ways.

As I consider the kind of training our students need to face the challenges of our time, I recommend the M.Div. without hesitation.

3. More training is better than less training.

One of the benefits of the M.Div. is that it entails a longer season of

ministry preparation than that of other graduate degrees.

Because the M.Div. allows more time for formation and more sustained interaction with professors, I was able to grow deeply and build lasting relationships with my professors, who modeled biblical fidelity and encouraged me to do likewise.

Unfortunately, many students see a longer season of ministry preparation as less desirable. However, I believe you ought to go as far in ministry preparation as your ability and availability allow.

Does that mean everyone should do an M.Div.? No, but everyone that has the ability and availability to do an M.Div. should do one.

When reflecting on the incredible ministry God gave him, Billy Graham said, "One of my great regrets is that I have not studied enough. I wish I had studied more and preached less."

It is a weighty responsibility to teach and lead others with gospel clarity, biblical fidelity and doctrinal precision. My concern is that many who accept or pursue positions of leadership may not be ready to do so because they have not been biblically, theologically and ministerially trained.

Though God uses many who have never been trained at seminary, I believe wisdom would counsel that if such training is available to you, you should strongly consider a rigorous season of ministry preparation such as the M.Div. uniquely affords.



AKIN

"The M.Div. is designed to provide the bedrock basics for faithful ministry in the local church and for missions around the world."

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“If you want to be a great leader,
first work on being a great follower.”

CLAY SMITH

Pastor, Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Georgia

I get to do a lot of great things in ministry, but one of my favorites is to travel around the state of Alabama on Sunday mornings encouraging pastors and people in small to mid-size churches as I preach the gospel.

Kevin Blackwell
Executive director
Samford University's Ministry
Training Institute

“Use a crisis to rethink priorities, strategy and planning, but don't be too quick to cut [out] the people who have made you successful in the first place,” said **Phil Cooke, a writer, television producer and media consultant.**

“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,” said **Josh Pendergrass, pastor of Wadsworth Baptist Church in Autauga County,** following tornadoes that hit Alabama Jan. 12. “Our property may have changed, but our purpose remains the same.”

Be a servant, remember your calling, be relevant and keep an eternal perspective.

O.S. Hawkins
Senior adviser, professor and
ambassador-at-large
Southwestern Seminary

Social media shapes and spiritually forms you and me just as surely as our quiet time, our reading, our

friendships, our leisure time and perhaps as much as our houses of worship. Proceed with caution.

Ken Keathley, professor
Southeastern Seminary

Authentic prayer isn't about impressing anyone. The prayer God seeks is the prayer of the contrite heart.

As Jesus says, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Albert Mohler Jr.
President, Southern Seminary

Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years.

Charles H. Spurgeon

From the *Twitterverse*

@colemanford

If at all possible, a residential, MDiv education surrounded by pastor-theologians and faithful teachers-mentors with direct and intentional apprenticing in the local church is *the* best ministry preparation.

Here I stand.

@jeremypierre

Historic note: This opening day of Spring Semester 2023 marks the first time I had to tell students that no AI may be used in the writing of any assignment.

It felt like an explanatory flashback scene in some sci-fi apocalypse.

@Chris_Hanna_

“Neither systematic theology nor church history can do the work of the other, but neither can do its own work properly without the other. Historical theology, as it has evolved within the curriculum of this semi-

nary, serves as a link between the two.” —Timothy George

@bartbarber

I spoke with Lacoste — my old Greek professor. I asked how I could be praying for him. At 92 years old, he had one request. He asked me to pray for his ongoing daily efforts to memorize Scripture.

@ColsonCenter

“Becoming a thoughtful Christian means learning to think well and to think Christianly.” —David Dockery, “What Does It Mean to Be a Thoughtful Christian?”

@srharmon

Today my Intro to Christian History & Theology class sang “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.” It's not Holy Week, but we were talking about the methods of Christian theology.

Our theological language is al-

ways borrowed language — speaking of God in terms or words/images that are not God.

@MattMBarrett

Have you so dressed up Christianity that your Jesus is too refined, sophisticated, cultured, wealthy, political, on brand & churchy to eat a meal with a prostitute, traitor, let alone a murderer like Paul? If your gospel has no grace for a blasphemer, your Jesus is too small.

@jasonkeithallen

Amidst busy schedules and overbooked calendars, healthy leaders prioritize their own growth and development for the sake of the church. ...

@dougmunton

We ordained two young men to the ministry last night. I love seeing the next generation on mission for the gospel!

One mission: Help people follow Jesus

During Gateway Seminary's Dec. 10 winter commencement ceremony, president Jeff Iorg charged graduates with a simple responsibility: help people follow Jesus.

“You can take all that we've taught you and distill it into that particular mission,” Iorg said.

“Walk out of here today and say, ‘I'm just going to help people follow Jesus.’”

Iorg's charge to the graduates was based on Luke 2 and focused on Simeon.

“Follow the example of this interesting man,” he said, “to be the kind of person who makes a difference in our world and who God uses to do something consequential and significant.”

Iorg described the characteristics of Simeon which made him useful to God.

1. He was a common man and a man of high character who was righteous and devout.

“Ministry leadership is unique in this capacity: character and commitment always precede competency.”

2. He anticipated the future promised him.

“People who do something consequential and impactful as leaders, who make a genuine difference, are people thinking about the future — the next decade, not the next 10 days.”

3. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit.

“Three different times in three consecutive verses Simeon is described as being a man full of, revealed to and guided by the Holy Spirit,” he said. “You cannot do ministry leadership in your own power.”

EDITOR'S NOTE — This article was written by Tyler Sanders of Gateway Seminary and is adapted for space.

‘Keep on keeping on’

Speakers urge Baptists to renew their amazement of Jesus, passion for sharing

(continued from page 1)

speakers who challenged those who attended the Jan. 29–30 conference in person and online.

Daniel Wilson, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said his team’s prayer in putting the event together “was that this would be a very sweet-spirited conference where people would leave refreshed in their ministries.”

“We wanted every person to go home remembering they are not alone but are part of a loving and caring family called Alabama Baptists,” Wilson said. “I feel like God honored our prayers and enabled us to have a conference that inspired and celebrated our people in their evangelistic efforts.”

The conference kicked off with intercultural worship led by David Inestroza, who develops and resources Hispanic worship leaders in Alabama. Praise and worship was also provided throughout the event by the Lakeside Baptist choir and orchestra, led by Chris Diffey, minister of music and worship.

Radical existence

Ben Stubblefield, pastor of Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, said during his message that followers of Jesus should spend their lives “pleading with folks that Jesus is worth our everything.”

Preaching from Hebrews 8:6–13, Stubblefield said believers are invit-



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

David Inestroza (center), who develops and resources Hispanic worship leaders in Alabama, leads intercultural worship to kick off the State Evangelism Conference at Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham on Jan. 29.

ing people into a holy inclination — “a radically new kind of existence” of living with a totally changed heart.

They are also inviting people into a “happy relationship” that is “unalterably permanent and altogether intimate,” he said.

The invitation also includes a “holy knowledge” of the living God — not just a knowledge of religious things — and a “whole forgiveness” of sins, Stubblefield said. Once believers have tasted that themselves, they can’t do anything but follow Him wholeheartedly and share Him with others.

“Do you believe Christ is everything? You and I have one life to

live, and we’re not going to waste it on foolish things,” he said. “I am going to spend my life on Jesus because He’s better than anything and worth our everything.”

Chuck Lawless, dean of doctoral studies and vice president of spiritual formation and ministry centers at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, told those present at the conference that when he was in the seventh grade, he met someone for the very first time who was living that way.

He said God “in His grace” put in the desk beside him a “completely out-of-control, obnoxious, rude, tactless, in-your-face 12-year-old Pentecostal preacher.”

Lawless had never been told about God and had never seen the inside of a church.

“Every day my seventh grade

year, he told me about Jesus,” he said. “He would do things like meet me at the classroom door at 7:30 a.m. and say, ‘Chuck, it’s a good thing you lived through the night. Because you would be in hell right now.’”

Following Jesus

When you hear the gospel that way, you don’t sleep very well, Lawless said. “I would wake up and say ‘thank you’ — to a God that I didn’t know — that I was still breathing,” he said.

So one day he went to church just so he could tell his classmate that he had been, so the guy would get off his back. And when Lawless did, the Holy Spirit moved in his heart, and he decided to follow Jesus.

Then Lawless started sharing Jesus the same way his classmate had shared with him.

“The only way I knew how was the way I had been told,” he said. “I would tell a wall about Jesus, equally obnoxiously.”

And Lawless said even though he’s a professor of evangelism and missions, there are days when he still longs for that zeal again.

Preaching from Mark 1, 5 and 6, Lawless said followers of Christ should be marked by the way they can’t stop talking about what Jesus has done, just as those who experienced His miracles gave glory to God in the pages of Mark.

“When Jesus comes on the scene and you’re amazed at His teaching, you’re amazed at His power, you’re amazed at who He is, you can’t help but talk about Him,” he said.



LAWLESS



STUBBLEFIELD

**Persecuted Church,
3 Stories You
Should Know and
Alabama News will
return next week.**

When Jesus shows up and flips life upside down, “we go out and talk about who He is, and somebody somewhere will be changed too,” Lawless said. “When you get filled with amazement again, you’re going to go talk about Him.”

Fred Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, said for each believer present, “At some point in your life, someone told you about Jesus, someone introduced you to Jesus Christ and your life has never ever been the same, and it’s all because you had an encounter with Jesus Christ.”

For anyone to have an encounter with Jesus Christ is life changing, Luter said. Preaching from Mark 10:46–52, he said the story of Bartimaeus illustrates that.

He pointed out Bartimaeus’ condition — that he was blind and limited in what he could do because of that.

‘Jesus is the answer’

“I believe the physical condition of blind Bartimaeus is an example of mankind and our society today,” he said. “Mankind is spiritually blind. ... If only mankind could see that Jesus is the answer for the world today.”

But even though Bartimaeus didn’t have eyesight, he had insight, Luter said. He was ready for a

change, and when Jesus was nearby, Bartimaeus cried out to Him.

“Some people aren’t ready to change,” Luter said. “Some people are just comfortable in their condition. Some people are comfortable in their sin.”

But Christ’s followers are commissioned to share the gospel and let God do the work.

“So let me encourage you this morning — don’t give up. Keep on keeping on. Do all that we have to do and hopefully somebody will be ready so they can be changed like Bartimaeus,” Luter said.

Mac Brunson, pastor of Valleydale Church in Birmingham, closed out the conference with a message from 1 Peter 3, noting that the sufficiency of Christ above everything else

is “the gospel the world needs.”

That’s the gospel Peter rehearses for his letter’s recipients, and it’s the gospel that followers of Christ should rehearse to themselves every day, he said.

From there, they should share it with family, friends and neighbors living in a society with a lot of brokenness, Brunson said.

“I’ve found that if you’ll just preach the gospel, people will get saved. They’re hungry for it. They want to know, ‘Is there something that can save me and fix me?’”



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Fred Luter challenged Alabama Baptists not to give up sharing their faith.



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist
Mac Brunson, pastor of Valleydale Church in Birmingham, said he’s found “that if you’ll just preach the gospel, people will get saved. They’re hungry for it. They want to know, ‘Is there something that can save me and fix me?’”

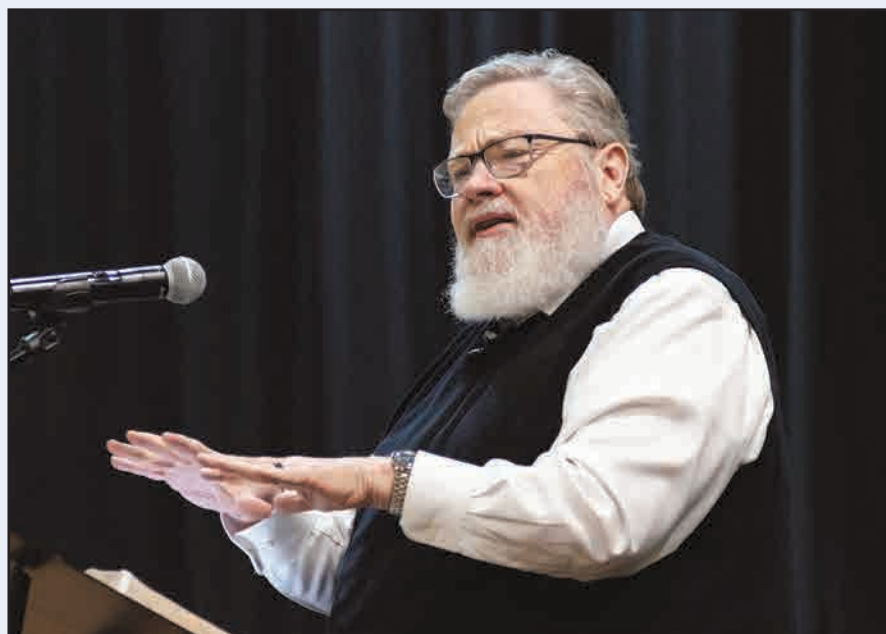


Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Pastor and church replanting specialist Mark Clifton addresses reasons for church decline and strategies for reversing the trend at a Jan. 30 luncheon that concluded this year’s State Evangelism Conference.

God can do ‘amazing things in small places,’ Clifton says

By Michael J. Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

A generation ago, strategists thought having megachurches in every American city was the way to evangelize, said pastor and church replanting specialist Mark Clifton speaking during a Jan. 30 luncheon that concluded the 2023 State Evangelism Conference.

“We have those megachurches in every city,” he said. “Today there are more megachurches in Nashville than [there were] in all of North America in 1978. Yet the nation is far more lost.”

Clifton, pastor of Linwood (Kansas) Baptist Church and senior director of replanting for the North American Mission Board, said he’s grateful for the large churches, but he’s also convinced God can do “amazing things in small places.”

Strategies for growth

Clifton exhorted pastors to employ five strategies for growth.

“We’re involved in spiritual warfare, and our adversary discourages us,” he said. “Thus, we must pray without ceasing.”

“Second, we must love our remaining members and warm their hearts to the gospel,” he said.

“Preach the gospel and instill an overwhelming understanding

of the cross. Spurgeon said he never got over being saved, and he shared his testimony about every six months in his pulpit. This is what we must talk about in our pulpits.”

Third, Clifton further exhorted pastors to simplify their strategies.

“It doesn’t have to be complicated,” he said. “We love people, practice generosity and seek Jesus’ direction in every endeavor.”

Reach young men

Clifton shared his vision for young men as the fourth strategy.

“Every pastor can try to bring a young man to Christ and disciple him every year,” he said. “What an impact this would have on our churches.”

Finally, Clifton said declining churches must change their view of growth.

“It’s not the size of the church that matters most, but the size of our ministry footprint,” he said.

“If we practice biblical discipleship, the community will be enriched. We’re called to be a blessing to others.”

Don’t grow weary in well-doing, Clifton said. “Every community, every crossroads needs the consistent witness of local churches — whatever their size.”

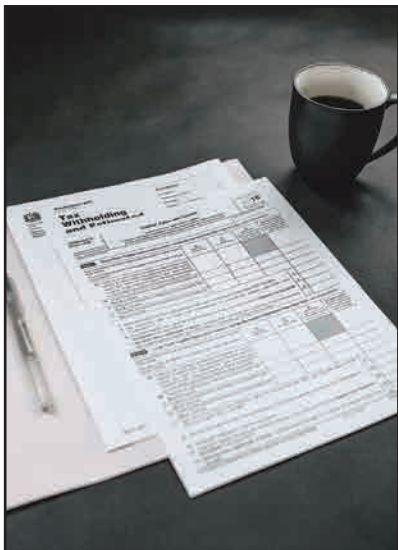
Read the full article at tabonline.org/clifton-sec.

Ministers' tax guide released by GuideStone

GuideStone Financial Resources has released its most popular annual publication, the 2023 Ministers' Tax Guide for 2022 Returns, available now for GuideStone members at [GuideStone.org/TaxGuide](https://www.guidestone.org/TaxGuide).

The tax guide includes highlights for 2022 — including 2023 annual contribution limits, 2023 standard business mileage rates and key features from the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. Step-by-step filing instructions for ministers' personal taxes are included as well as comprehensive examples and sample forms.

GuideStone ministry partners and church administrators also have access to the annual Federal Reporting Requirements for Churches.



Unsplash.com

This publication is included in the full tax guide or as a separate electronic copy. Both are available to GuideStone members online at [GuideStone.org/TaxGuide](https://www.guidestone.org/TaxGuide).

The guide was once again written this year by Richard Hammar, a noted CPA, attorney and widely published author who specializes in legal and tax issues for ministers.

"Our commitment is to enhance financial security and resilience for those who serve the Lord," said Hance Dilbeck, GuideStone president.

"The tax guide is one area," he noted, "where

GuideStone seeks to make available the educational resources ministers and pastors need to take care of their financial well-being." (GuideStone)

Bivocational ministers, spouses to gather at Shocco Feb. 24-25

The 2023 Bivocational Minister/Spouse Retreat will be Feb. 24-25 at Shocco Springs in Talladega.

Craig Etheredge, pastor of CrossCreek Church in Colleyville, Texas, will speak.

Etheredge is the founder and president of discipleFIRST ministries and speaks regularly on disciple-making across the United States.

Breakout sessions for pastors' wives will be led by Trish Jackson, missions lifestyle strategist for preschool, children and students for Alabama WMU.

Jackson's husband, James, is pastor of Glynwood Baptist Church in Prattville.

The event will be a time of spiritual inspiration, fellowship, encouragement and instruction, according to Tim Henning, pas-

tor of New Beginnings Fellowship in Trussville and president of the Alabama Baptist Bivocational Ministers Association.

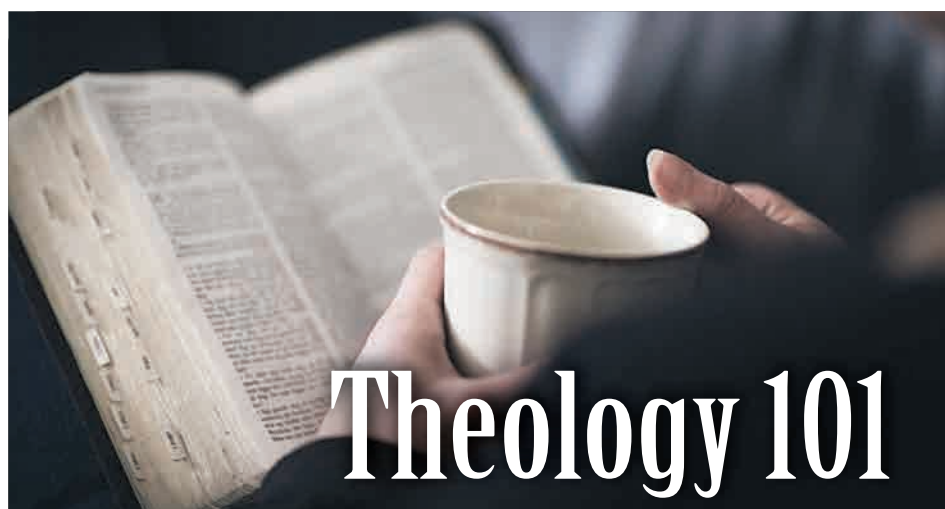
Rest and retreat

Henning noted the overnight stay at Shocco is offered at a low cost to provide a retreat for pastors and their wives.

Another way bivocational pastors can connect, no matter where they live or how busy their schedule, is through the private Facebook group "Bivocational Ministries," which can be accessed at facebook.com/groups/bivoministries.

To register for the retreat, go to shocco.org/events.

For more resources on bivocational ministry, go to alsbom.org/ministries/bivocational-ministers. (TAB)



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Discipleship

Bearing Witness to Jesus

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.

The Alabama Baptist

As far back as the days of Isaiah the prophet, God introduced the matter of His people being His witnesses.

In Isaiah 43:10-11, the Lord's message was, "You are My witnesses ... My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no Savior."

When Israel as a nation failed to bear witness, Christ came to call followers who would be such witnesses.

Against the backdrop of Israel's failure as a nation to believe in Christ by receiving Him, following Him and going into the world for Him, Christ chose His initial disciples, as well as all His subsequent followers, to bear witness to the nations.

Our basic mission

In Luke 24:46-48, Jesus put it like this: "Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things."

In summary, the account of Jesus and His disciples reveals a disciple's basic mission is to give an accurate witness about Jesus. An indispensable part of honoring Christ in this way

is our nonverbal witness.

Witnessing for Christ not only includes our words but also our motives and actions. While others may not discern unworthy motives, God can. A phrase in a familiar church hymn contains the line "Not for the praise of man, but for the Lord." That phrase should always lie behind the witness we seek to bear for Christ.

A constant role

As believers we are always His witnesses. Our daily conduct constitutes our witness. We may be poor witnesses, inconsistent witnesses or inaccurate witnesses when our manner of life day by day falls short of what God expects of us.

By contrast, we can be His faithful and exemplary witnesses. Our most powerful and fruitful witness always has roots in the quality of our own walk with the Lord.

Out of a life that sincerely seeks to be and act in a Christlike manner, our verbal witness is made believable.

The bottom line is that witnessing to Jesus includes what we are and what we do, as well as what we say.

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.



The Alabama Baptist

February 9, 2023 | tabonline.org

SPECIAL SECTION

*Spotlight
on
Christian*

Higher Education

Photo by lookstudio on Freepik

ETHICAL AND MORAL CONCERNS

ChatGPT highlights technological possibilities, challenges for today's students and teachers

BY DAVID ROACH — THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Ask the new artificial intelligence writing program ChatGPT to write a news article about itself from a Christian perspective, and here's how it begins:

"ChatGPT, a language model developed by OpenAI, has been making waves in the technology industry for its ability to generate human-like text. However, as with any new technology, there are concerns and questions about its implications and use. From a Christian perspective, it is important to consider the ethical and moral implications of ChatGPT and other similar AI technologies."

The marvel of computer produced writing that appears to be human generated has left some in awe and others in fear of the new frontiers in cheating it opens.

Southern Baptist ethicists say it's not one or the other. While AI writing software creates new temptations for dishonesty, it also may have legitimate uses in higher education and local churches.

Full adoption or rejection

"One of the temptations when faced with complex or challenging ethical questions with technology is to rush to a position of full adoption or rejection of these tools," said Jason Thacker, chair of research in technology ethics and director of the research institute at the Southern Baptist



Photo by Drazen Zigic Freepik

Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

"Wisdom, which is at the core of the Christian moral tradition, calls us to slow down and to think deeply about the nature of these tools as well as the myriad of uses."

News of ChatGPT broke in late 2022. A free AI software, the program responds to user questions and instructions within seconds by generating writing that is complex and nuanced, though sometimes wooden and uninspiring.

It can tackle anything from high school English assignments to economic analysis. OpenAI, the company that produced ChatGPT,

was founded in 2015 by Elon Musk and Amazon among other investors.

The latest advance in AI writing drew a range of headlines, from "Will Everyone Become a Cheat?" in the Guardian to "Why Educators Shouldn't Be Worried About AI" in Christianity Today. The news left Christian ethicists pondering whether ChatGPT and other AI writing programs might have legitimate uses.

Andrew Walker, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary associate professor of Christian ethics and apologetics, says they do, so long as they are not employed to produce content meant to be generated by a human mind.

Drawing a line

"We should shun AI if it's being used for malevolent, dishonest purposes," Walker said. "If it can be used to make research more efficient, I'm willing to entertain that component of it. But if anyone is ever going to pass off work as their own that isn't their own, that's a flat violation of the ninth commandment."

Walker already uses AI in his research and imagines that software like ChatGPT could enhance the process. Zotero helps him collect, search and cite both books and articles. Evernote assists him with note taking, while Grammarly



Andrew Walker is associate professor of Christian ethics and apologetics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

SBTS photo

Spotlight on Christian Higher Education



NOBTS photo
Jeffrey Riley is professor of ethics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

identifies problems with his writing.

“If AI is being used to streamline research for better, more efficient ends, I think I’m OK with that,” he said. But he draws the line at using AI to create academic or pastoral content intended to be produced by a human.

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary professor of ethics Jeffrey Riley draws a similar line. ChatGPT already is on the radar of administrators at New Orleans Seminary,

he said. They are discussing how to root out AI use as a form of plagiarism.

The plagiarism-detection software Turnitin has said it will add an AI writing detection feature to its software later this year.

But AI writing is not inherently bad, Riley said. Composing directions, detailed reports and even church bulletin copy may be among its legitimate uses.

“At this point I’m not willing to say [AI writing software is] inherently wrong,” Riley said. “Where efficiency and description are key and where labor is perhaps lacking, [it] could be very helpful.”

Sermon writing is a different story. When a popular YouTuber known as the Honest Youth Pastor asked ChatGPT to write a sermon on John 3:16, he declared the result “more solid than any progressive Christian sermon I’ve ever heard” and “a better sermon than most well-known pastors” could produce.

Troubling uses

That troubles Riley. Utilizing AI is never an appropriate substitute for developing the human mind and wrestling with ideas, he said.

That’s especially true in sermon preparation.

“A pastor needs to wrestle with the Word of God and not just put words into a program and let it spit out something. There’s something intuitively wrong about that,” Riley said.

The point of preaching is to “come and talk to your people with your words.”

Output or thinking?

Wrestling with ideas also is important in higher education, Thacker said.

The advancement of AI writing software will require teachers to shift from an emphasis on information transfer that focuses primarily on students’ output to whole-person transformation that focuses on students’ thinking.

“AI systems like ChatGPT are deeply concerning but also afford the opportunity for educators and students to evaluate with fresh eyes the purpose and design of education,” said Thacker, author of “The Age of AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity.”

The irony of AI writing software is that its nonhuman robots may

help better understand what it means to be human.

“The introduction of advanced AI systems has fundamentally challenged much of what we have assumed about the uniqueness of humanity,” Thacker said. “These systems are now performing tasks only humans could in past generations. In an age of emerging technologies like AI, we all need to be reminded that the value and dignity of humans isn’t rooted in what we do, but who we are as unique image bearers of our Creator.”



ERLC photo
Jason Thacker is chair of research in technology ethics and director of the research institute at ERLC.

Will you stand in the gap?

More than ever, our country needs men to boldly proclaim the Gospel and shepherd congregations amid a lost woke culture. But there aren’t enough pastors, and fewer men are stepping up to replace those who will soon retire. Who will go? Would you be willing to say, as Isaiah did, “Here I am, send me?”

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LEADING WORSHIP A 'HOLY STEWARDSHIP'

Emphasis turns to theology amid music minister shortage in Baptist churches

BY ERIN ROACH — THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Churches across the Southern Baptist Convention are struggling to find worship pastors. Shifting from traditional church music degrees to biblically grounded worship training may be part of the solution.

Joseph Crider, dean of the school of church music and worship and a profes-

sor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, said the shortage of music and worship pastors is at a level he has not seen in many years.

"I receive multiple calls and emails every week from pastors and churches looking for worship leaders," Crider, who has been leading and teaching worship for nearly 30 years,

told The Alabama Baptist.

The reasons for the shortage are complex, he said.

Lack of modeling

"As churches moved away from children's choirs, youth choirs and even adult choirs, musical opportunities and training within a ministry context diminished significantly," Crider said. "Therefore, generations of

young people were not exposed to music making in the church for the purpose of helping lead others in worship."

Until about 15 years ago, Crider noted, music programs in seminaries and many Christian colleges were focused on "traditional music training that was aligned closer to a conservatory education rather than a ministry-based curricula" that closely followed the musical expressions of Southern Baptist churches.

"In some cases," Crider said, "students were being trained for a church world that simply didn't exist anymore."

As a result, the numbers of students seeking traditional church music degrees shrank significantly.

The growing diversity of musical styles within many

congregations is another contributing factor in the shortage, Crider said.

"Frankly, worship leading in a modern evangelical church is demanding and difficult work, especially when pastors view corporate worship pragmatically (focusing on what attracts crowds) rather than from a biblical and theological lens," Crider said.

Student interest

Despite the decline in available worship ministers, Southwestern and its undergraduate school, Texas Baptist College, are seeing an increase in students seeking worship leadership training.

"New students enrolled in our programs for spring 2023 doubled from 2022," Crider said. "This past fall semester, we enrolled 50 new students in the school of



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"As churches moved away from children's choirs, youth choirs and even adult choirs, musical opportunities and training within a ministry context diminished significantly."

Joseph Crider

dean of the school of church music and worship
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Spotlight on Christian Higher Education



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Michael Adler (center), joined by the Shades Mountain Baptist Church worship team and choir, leads worship at the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention Annual Meeting.

church music and worship.”

Southwestern aims to cast a greater vision for why the church needs leaders to facilitate biblically grounded worship on a weekly basis, Crider said. The faculty does that in part by speaking at churches and conferences to help churches develop their understanding of Christian worship.

“One of the most important things a church can do is to remember that in corporate worship, God didn’t intend His people to gather around music — something that changes so frequently with culture and something that is so individualized among people with personal digital playlists,” Crider said.

“God called us to gather around Jesus Christ who never changes and His Word that never returns void,” he added. “Using one of the psalms as a call to worship and then singing a wonderful, familiar hymn a cappella can be more effective than we can imagine.”

Crider consistently asks students to consider what is at stake on Sunday mornings.

“I think the answer to that question is people’s view of God,” he said. “A.W. Tozer

once said that the most important thing about any human being is what they believe about God. Every week, worship leaders have the joyful and, I believe, holy stewardship of recalibrating people’s view of God and of themselves in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

That recalibration comes through the proclamation of Scripture, prayer and the lyric content of the biblically based songs and hymns churches sing, Crider said.

“As the world bombards people every day with false views of God and crazy ideas of what human flourishing is, what happens in weekly worship should be intentionally and thoughtfully designed to help people be reminded of what’s really real — the gospel of Jesus Christ and how we can live in light of His gospel.”

High demand

Steve Bowersox, chair of the worship leadership and production technology departments at the University of Mobile, said that last year at graduation the school was presented with 35 more positions than they had graduates to fill those

positions. He says it has been that way for the past five years.

“Last year, I had churches trying to hire our seniors in February, and we had to kind of talk them into letting them stay until graduation,” Bowersox said. “Churches were grabbing them real quick. The same is true of our technology students.”

True understanding

Bowersox said today’s worship leaders are not only

expected to know music but also to truly understand ministry and calling.

He is hopeful the need for worship ministers will be met as student ministers and others identify a new generation of leaders.

Bowersox recommends such people get as much experience as possible by working with worship leaders and seeking formal training.

‘Language of music’

“I would encourage them to learn the language of music. Learn not just to play a guitar or play chords or sing, but if they’re going to be a true, full music minister, they need to learn the language of all that is involved in the long-term roles of being a music minister,” Bowersox said.

Samford University’s Ministry Training Institute offers two worship leadership tracks through online certificate programs.

“Students can complete these certificate programs in less than one year from the comfort of their home,” Kevin Blackwell, executive director of the Ministry Training Institute, said. “Along with the accessibility and short duration of the certificate programs, they

are also more affordable than you think.”

Courses in the certificate programs at Samford are taught by experienced faculty and include designing creative worship, biblical foundations for worship, the worship leader as pastor, music principles and theory and rehearsing for worship.

“The courses are deeply rich in theology, yet practically focused on the daily tasks of being an effective worship leader,” Blackwell said. “In a time where trained worship leaders are hard to find, these certificate programs offer an option to be equipped to serve.”

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions offers an annual conference, Lift!, which provides training and networking experiences for worship leaders. This year’s statewide conference is scheduled for September, Karen Gosselin, SBOM coordinator of worship resources, said, adding that regional Lift! conferences geared toward smaller churches will be made available.

Alabama Worship Resources also provides a résumé referral system. More information is available at alabamaworship.org.



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Karen Gosselin, coordinator of worship resources for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, leads worship during the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention Annual Meeting.

Spotlight on Christian Higher Education



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NEW SEASON

ADAPTED FROM REPORTING BY RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Theological schools report increased enrollment in doctoral, M.A. programs

Professional degrees are gaining traction at theological schools across the U.S., while the traditional ministerial degree, the master of divinity, is faltering, according to data gathered by the Association of Theological Schools.

But Chris Meinzer, ATS senior director and chief operation officer, said over-

all enrollment at theological schools has remained stable and that the M.Div. degree isn't dying.

Practical skills

Instead, he said, the M.A. degree is appealing to more students.

ATS, an umbrella organization with over 270 member schools, reports a 24% increase in enrollment between fall 2018 and fall

2022 in doctor of ministry and other professional doctoral programs designed to enhance a minister's practical skills.

The M.A., a two-year program that trains students for a wide range of professions, including doctoral studies, nonprofit work and lay ministry, has also seen a slight increase of 5% since fall 2018.



Photo by wirestock on Freepik

The M.Div. — a three-year program typically chosen by students pursuing ordination — continues to decline. The projected enrollment for fall 2022 was 28,000 M.Div. students, a 9% decline since fall 2018.

Time, finances

M.Div. programs constitute 35% of enrollment at theological schools overall,

a significant decline from the 43% of total enrollment for the degree a decade ago.

Meinzer said several factors steer students toward M.A. programs.

In some Christian contexts, he said, the M.Div. is no longer required for ordination. The M.A. may also entice some because it requires less time and financial investment.

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STUDENT DEBT

Seminarians still paying for undergraduate work grapple with financing grad school

BY CARRIE BROWN MCWHORTER — THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Seminaries are among the less expensive graduate programs in today's higher education market, but students entering seminary with a heavy burden of undergraduate debt may face a challenging financial path following graduation.

"The absolute dollar figure involved with seminary school loans is much smaller than other professional schools.

"But the debt-to-income ratio of most ministers is

more than 1:1 when they graduate," writes Travis Hornsby, founder and CEO of Student Loan Planner. "Added together, some pastors and ministers are coming out of seminary owing more than \$50,000."

Tuition costs

It takes students about four years to complete a master of divinity degree, Chris Meinzer, senior director and COO of the Association of Theological Schools, told Reli-

gion News Service in 2022.

The average annual tuition for the degree — before any scholarships are considered — is \$13,100 for free-standing Protestant schools and \$12,500 for Protestant schools related to a college or university, he said.

For the 25,000 or so Southern Baptist students seeking a master's degree or higher at an SBC theological seminary, the tuition bill will be much lower than that.

SBC seminaries are funded in part by the Cooperative

Program. About 22% of CP contributions at the SBC level are directed to the six seminaries and the SBC Historical Library and Archives.

With the CP allocation, SBC seminaries offer a reduced rate for students who are members of SBC churches.

Looking at the broader picture, the good news is that at least half of all seminary students, regardless of age, said they incurred no educational debt for their graduate work, according to

a survey of 2020 seminary graduates published by ATS.

Among those who did take out loans to pay for their studies, ATS found the average debt incurred during the 2019–2020 academic year was \$33,537.

Black and Native American borrowers incurred the highest amount of debt — \$42,700 on average. White non-Hispanic borrowers incurred the lowest debt — \$31,200 on average.

Less than 20% of seminarians incurred more than

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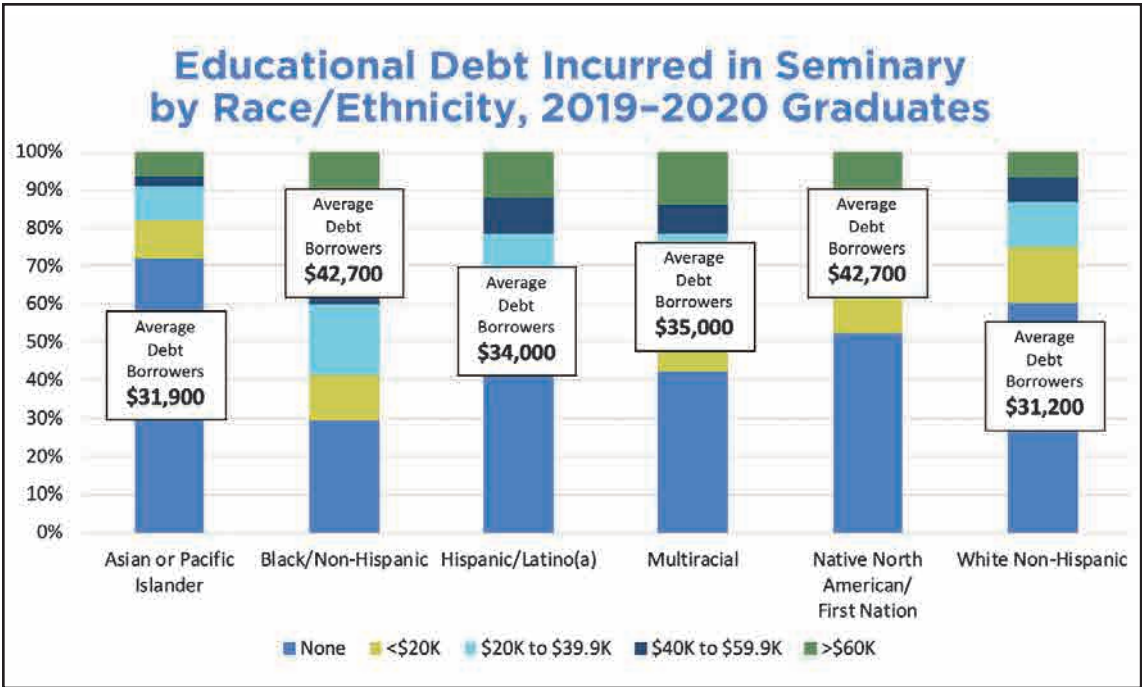


Chart courtesy of the Association of Theological Schools

\$40,000 of debt for their work, and ATS reports that between 2015 and 2020, the average borrower's debt decreased \$3,275 or 9%. However, the amount of debt students are bringing into seminary has risen to an average of \$32,642 in 2020 — an increase of \$4,445 since 2013.

Bill Morrison, who ministers to students at the University of Alabama in Birmingham, advises students to be mindful of establishing healthy financial habits, especially if they believe God may be calling them to ministry. "You have to choose who or what you're going

to serve," Morrison told a group of undergraduate students in 2022. "You're in college to do work, to prepare for doors to be opened later on in life, and you should do that as an offering of worship to God." If students are wise about how they structure any college-related debt they incur,

they can free up monetary resources for the work of ministry, Morrison said. Scholarships can help reduce the financial burden of graduate study. Hornsby said Southern Baptist seminary students have traditionally had access to more aid than students from other denominations. Churches often help fill in the gaps between aid and expenses too. Students who are residents of Alabama can apply for a number of scholarships managed by The Baptist Foundation of Alabama. Applicants must be a member in good standing of a Southern Baptist church cooperating with the Alabama Baptist State Convention. College students applying for seminary-related scholarships must also have and maintain a 2.0 GPA and be

classified as full-time students to qualify for scholarships. More information is available at tbfa.org/scholarships. **Help for students** The WMU Foundation and national Woman's Missionary Union manage scholarships to assist Southern Baptist students, including the children of Baptist missionaries and those preparing for Baptist missions service. For more information, go to wmufoundation.com/scholarships-apply. **EDITOR'S NOTE —** See page 2 to read how endowed scholarships in honor of TAB editors are helping students finance their studies at Samford University and Beeson Divinity School.

More information is available at tbfa.org/scholarships and wmufoundation.com/scholarships-apply.

9 Critical Questions

SBC Parents Should Be Prepared to Ask

Making the right choice about college often begins with parents asking the right questions on each campus visit. Boyce College has curated a series of short videos designed to arm Southern Baptist families with the nine critical questions they should be prepared to ask.

Scan the QR code to watch 9 Critical Questions

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EXCELLENCE

UM scores 100% pass rate for nursing graduates taking NCLEX, highest in Alabama

BY KATHY DEAN — UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

The University of Mobile School of Nursing scored a perfect 100% pass rate for BSN graduates taking the NCLEX national licensure examination during 2022 — the highest pass rate in the state of Alabama. The Christian university’s 100% NCLEX pass rate gives it the top score among all 15 bachelor of science in nursing programs in Alabama for 2022, according to an Alabama Board of Nurs-

ing online listing of nursing education programs. Nursing graduates are required to pass the NCLEX to be licensed as a registered nurse in the United States and Canada. The standardized test assesses a candidate’s competency and ability to provide safe, effective nursing care prior to entering the profession. “Our school of nursing faculty is committed to as-

suring that our graduates are well prepared for the NCLEX and their entry into the nursing profession. We are proud of our BSN graduates whose hard work and dedication to their professional calling has resulted in this excellent score,” said Pamela Buchanan Miller, vice president for academic affairs. “I thank God for His faithfulness and the dedi-

For more information, visit umobile.edu.



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

cated school of nursing faculty,” said Sarah Barnes-Witherspoon, dean of the UM School of Nursing. **Degree options** The school of nursing is part of the UM College of Health Professions, which also includes programs in nurse anesthesia, health and sports science. The bachelor of science in nursing is one of many professional degree programs offered in the UM School

of Nursing. Other degree tracks include the online RN to BSN program and a new five-semester associate’s degree. Graduate programs include the master of science in nursing — family nurse practitioner, master of science in nursing leadership, and post-master’s APRN certificate. Doctor of nursing practice programs include BSN to DNP nurse practitioner and post-master’s DNP.



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‘FOR THE CHURCH’

Beeson Divinity School prepares to launch Samford’s first Ph.D. program

BY KRISTEN PADILLA — BEESON DIVINITY SCHOOL

Samford University’s board of trustees have approved Beeson Divinity School’s doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) in theology for the church. Following approval by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, it will be the first research doctoral degree offered by the university in its 180-year history.

‘Noteworthy moment’

“This is a noteworthy moment in the history of Samford University,” Samford provost Michael Hardin said. “The university, and Beeson Divinity School specifically, has a long and honorable record of edu-

cating ministers of the gospel. The Ph.D. in theology for the church will extend and expand that ministry in a way that will strengthen churches and those who serve them as pastoral leaders.”

The new Ph.D. is a research doctoral program that will equip graduates for theologically robust ministry in and for the church of Jesus Christ.

The program’s focus is not restricted to ecclesiology; rather, it attends to theology broadly understood as rigorous scholarship in service to the church.

The program will require the com-

pletion of a common set of courses in Bible, historical theology and practical theology, successful passage of comprehensive exams, and dissertation research and writing.

Students will work closely with a faculty member, who will act as a resource and guide for students’ research and supervise them in their dissertation work.

Douglas A. Sweeney, dean of Beeson Divinity School, said his prayer is that this program will be a gift to the church.

“We believe the clergy ought to be the most influential biblical and

theological leaders of God’s people,” he said. “So, we’ve designed the only Ph.D. program we know of to equip them for just this ministry.

“Our goal is to underwrite ecclesial theology — theology done in, with and for the church of Christ to the greater glory of God — on the part of its pastors and denominational leaders.”

Beeson Divinity’s Ph.D. will be a modular, four-year degree program that includes five on-campus doctoral seminars lasting one week each, directed readings, virtual research seminars, comprehensive exams and a dissertation.

For more information, visit beesondivinity.com.



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UNPLUG from daily life

Christian camps encourage spiritual development, missional outlook for all ages

By Carrie B. McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

When Russell McCrory was 10 years old, he gave his life to Christ at a Lifeway Crosspoint camp. At a youth evangelism conference in 1998, he responded to God's call to ministry and later worked for Lifeway camps.

Fast forward a few years and McCrory, student pastor of First Baptist Church Montgomery, continues to prioritize camp and retreat experiences for the young people he serves.

"Over the last 16 years of student ministry, I've seen how God works in a special way at camp, DNow and

similar events as students separate from the world and are immersed in worship, in God's Word and with God's people," he said. "It is more than just an emotional experience. Camp is truly one of the best opportunities for people to hear God more clearly and respond."

'Myriads of stories'

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, agrees. Lance grew up attending camps and retreats at Shocco Springs in Talladega and credits a Bible study teacher there with laying the foundation for his decision to follow Christ.

"There are myriads of



Photo courtesy of Shocco Springs

Campers at Shocco Springs enjoy a host of recreational activities, from the aqua park in the lake to hiking, paintball, miniature golf and other fun options throughout the campus.

untold stories that can be shared as a testimony to the ministry of places like Shocco," Lance said. "In this day

of a lack of connectedness and chaos in people's lives, being on a retreat at places like Shocco can make a

world of difference for people searching for answers."

These days, there is no singular camp model. Some camps and retreat centers, like Shocco Springs, primarily serve as hosts. Churches and parachurch organizations like Lifeway plan their own Bible study, music, games and free time activities utilizing Shocco's lodging, dining and recreation facilities.

Other camps, like WorldSong Missions Place in Cook Springs, a ministry of Alabama WMU, plan programs and hire staff to implement them.

Often, camps and conference centers provide a blend, *(continued on the next page)*

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hosting organized events but also offering day or overnight packages for the use of their facilities.

Regardless of their approach, Christian camps share the common goal of helping young people, and older people too, connect with their faith in a deeper way by unplugging from the routine of daily life.

Fostering connections

Connections are fostered through worship and Bible study, but also through mentoring and modeling. That’s what Haley Hoggle experienced at WorldSong.

Hoggle was in second grade when she first went to camp at World-Song. She loved it so much she went back summer after summer, first as a camper and later as part of the staff.

Now a freshman at Troy University, Hoggle said what stands out to her about her camp experience is the focus on missions.

“WorldSong is really where I developed my heart for missions,” Hoggle said.

“We are the light of the world, and we are supposed to share that light with the nations,” Hoggle said. “We need people to go to Madagascar, Mozambique and India, but we



Haley Hoggle (center) and fellow WorldSong Missions Place staff members enjoy a hike. Lasting friendships are one of the benefits of the camp experience.

also need people to serve locally.”

As a college student on a campus filled with many international friends, she regularly has gospel conversations with people from around the world. She is applying one of the most important lessons she learned from the missionaries she met at WorldSong.

“The missionaries had lived in the countries we studied, so they knew the culture and the people,” Hoggle

said. “They really impressed on me that missions is not about the place, it’s about the people.”

Sense of community

Not everyone gets it, that sense of community built in a camp setting, but for those who do, the impact lasts a lifetime, said retired Alabama Baptist state missionary Jamie Baldwin.

Baldwin first went to Shocco

Springs as a relatively new Christian. In fact, when a friend asked him to go to Shocco, his first question was “What’s a Shocco?”

But as a camper at Shocco, he began to see “being a Christian wasn’t about an experience with Jesus, it was about a life with Jesus.”

In 1971, he spent his first summer as a member of Shocco’s resident summer staff. He and his wife, Beth, lived and worked full time at Shocco for three years after their marriage. It was at Shocco that Baldwin first felt God’s call to ministry and at Shocco that he “settled it with the Lord that He had called me.”

Baldwin said that every year since 1971 some aspect of ministry has taken him back to Shocco, and he expects this to be the case as long as he lives.

He’s a firm believer that camp ministry is vital to the spiritual development of children and youth.

“The camp experience is something that can change your entire life,” Baldwin said. “People have found careers, met spouses and answered God’s call at camp. Only eternity will tell how many lives have truly been changed by these ministries.”



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PASTOR

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: pgmbaptist@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 at michaelthorn@gmail.com. Phone: 251-744-4081

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Alabama, is seeking a candidate to lead our worship ministry. Please submit resumé 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 resumé 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 resumé to: judydrummond07@yahoo.com.

YOUTH MINISTER

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

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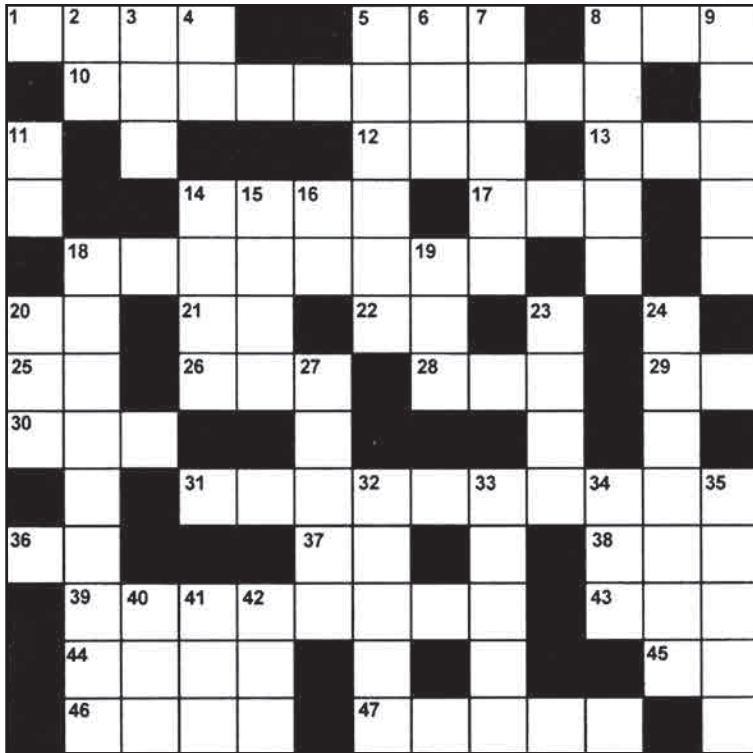
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CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. Works, which were ____ in you. (Matt. 11:21)
5. Him and ____.
8. Kimberly. (nickname)
10. This ... sinful _____. (Mark 8:38)
12. Her countenance was no more _____. (1 Sam. 1:18)
13. Set it up there under an _____. (Josh. 24:26)
14. Whose waters cast up mire and _____. (Isa. 57:20)
17. Emergency Medical Technician. (abbr.)
18. ____ and mercy shall follow me. (Ps. 23:6)
20. Shed ____ blood. (Gen. 37:22)
21. There shall be ____ poor among you. (Deut. 15:4)
22. Ye have ____ portion ... in Jerusalem. (Neh. 2:20)
25. Audiovisual. (abbr.)
26. Large tree, largely destroyed by blight.
28. Though now ye ____ him not. (1 Pet. 1:8)
29. From my youth _____. (Luke 18:21)
30. They that handle the _____. (Judg. 5:14)
31. Love is the ____ of the law. (Rom. 13:10)
36. Not out.
37. Support group for those who quit drinking.
38. Prefix meaning *new*.
39. Coming to Him, and ____ Him vinegar. (Luke 23:36)
43. My soul is even ____ weaned child. (Ps. 131:2; 2 words)
44. Actual.
45. Saint. (abbr.)



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46. Tenant farmer in the Middle Ages.
47. Esau ____ Jacob. (Gen. 27:41)

DOWN

2. ____ the king of Bashan. (Deut. 3:1)
3. Bring the offering ... of the ____ wine. (Neh. 10:39)
4. Printer's measure.
5. See that ye ____ the matter. (2 Chron. 24:5)
6. Estimated Time of Arrival. (abbr.)
7. Jumps on his horse and ____.
8. Something a sailor is good at.
9. Maketh. (mod.)
11. Go on before _____. (1 Sam. 25:19)
14. He that is mighty hath ____ ... great things. (Luke 1:49)
15. Set ... the ____ which he had made. (2 Chron. 33:7)
16. Registered Nurse. (abbr.)
18. Ye shall be brought before ____ and kings. (Matt. 10:18)
19. Ship's cry of distress.
20. To sleep for a while.
23. Stretching forth thine hand to _____. (Acts 4:30)
24. In thy presence is ____ of joy. (Ps. 16:11)
27. Tooth.
32. The unfeigned ____ that is in thee. (2 Tim. 1:5)
33. But if we walk in the _____. (1 John 1:7)
34. "Are you coming?" "____ minute." (2 words)
35. He shall set the ... ____ on the left. (Matt. 25:33)
40. Charge for professional services.
41. To be with Christ; which is ____ better. (Phil. 1:23)
42. Small imaginary being.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



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Alabama Baptists receive seminary degrees

A number of students with connections to Alabama Baptist life graduated in fall 2022 with degrees at the master's level or higher from Southern Baptist seminaries and Beeson Divinity School at Samford University.

Each list of graduates and the information listed was provided to The Alabama Baptist by the respective school.

► **Beeson Divinity School**

Master of Divinity — Taylor Smith, Huntsville; Brady Graves, Birmingham

► **Gateway Seminary**

None

► **Midwestern Seminary**

Master of Theological Studies — Clifton F. Johnson

Master of Divinity — Jared Andrew Jones, Timothy Kyle Pendley

Master of Theological Studies — Dustin R. Fowler

Master of Theological Studies, Preaching and Pastoral Ministry — Craig Millard

Master of Theology — Kevin Blackwell

Doctor of Ministry Leadership — Josué del Risco

Doctor of Ministry, Missions — Josip Debeljuh

► **New Orleans Seminary**

Doctor of Educational Ministry in Church Health — Adam Cochran, Centre

Doctor of Ministry in Church Revitalization — Timothy Bates, Ozark

Doctor of Ministry in Executive Administration — Jeffrey Garrett, Smiths Station

Doctor of Ministry — Robert Gowing, Homewood

Doctor of Ministry in Strategic Leadership — Brett Self, Warrior

Doctor of Ministry in Expository Preaching — Jeremy Williams, Jacksonville

Doctor of Philosophy in New Testament — Leslie Hughes, Hartford

Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Interpretation — Derrick Wilson, Boaz

Master of Arts in Theology — Henry Walker, Clanton

Master of Arts in Christian Education — Jerry Chenault, Moulton

Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership — Justin Barnett, Florence

Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry — Phillip Bremmerman, Warrior; Michael Jones, Alexander City

Master of Divinity — Jarod Grimes, Florence; Nathan Nowell, Auburn; Andres Ramos, Enterprise; Ralph Rimmer, Irvington; Casey Watkins, Fayette

Master of Divinity in Biblical Languages — Cody Roberts, Winfield

Master of Divinity in Biblical Studies — Zachary

Gardner, Rainsville; Greg Narrell, Union Grove

Master of Divinity in Christian Education — Brooklyn Floyd, Dadeville; Hannah Smith, Ashland

Master of Divinity in Christian Leadership — David Traywick, Thomas-

ton

Master of Theological Studies — Sheryl Shipman, Birmingham

► **Southern Seminary**

Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling — Raxia Alice Bailey

Master of Arts in Theological Studies — Virginia Louise Henley

Master of Divinity — Aaron Bernard Britt, Charles David Brown III, Randy Vincent Hall Jr., Austin Kenneth Jones, Isaac Bradley Smith

Master of Theology — Charles Noel Dear, Garrett Michael Walden

Doctor of Educational

Ministry — Timothy Scott Milner

Doctor of Ministry — Jonathan Gregory LaMarque

Doctor of Philosophy — Zachariah Mearns Carter

► **Southeastern Seminary**

Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies — William Jacob Brooks, Birmingham

Master of Theology — Andrew Scott Dressler, Fort Rucker

► **Southwestern Seminary**

Master of Theological Studies — Carlos Estuardo Lemus, Clanton; Frederick W. Bueto Jr., Priceville

Master of Arts in Christian Education — Zachary Clark, Enterprise

Master of Divinity — Ryan Patrick Casey, Excel

Doctor of Education — R. Bryan Barrineau, Enterprise

Doctor of Philosophy — Ross Colby Jones, Northport

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 12

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

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



YOU HAVE SEEN HIM

John 9:24–38

Jesus healed a man born blind. After making and placing mud patches on the man's eyes, Jesus instructed him to wash his eyes at the pool of Siloam. The man could see for the first time.

His countenance changed so noticeably that some people did not believe it was the same man. Jewish leaders were unconvinced until his parents were summoned to identify him as their son who was born blind. The man's parents feared being removed from the synagogue if they acknowledged Jesus as Messiah (v. 22). So when the Pharisees asked about the healing, they replied their son was old enough to speak for himself.

I Can See! (24–25)

The man was called to testify again before the religious court. The inquisitors asked how could a Sabbath-breaker, an obviously rebellious sinner, give him sight.

The witness replied that all he knew was Jesus touched him and healed him. He was born blind but now could see.

When I read this story, John Newton's lyrics from "Amazing Grace" come to mind: "I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see." This former slave ship captain who was saved and called to pastoral ministry also had these powerful words attributed to him: "Two things I know with certainty: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior!"

You Can't See? (26–34)

The religious leaders asked the man how Jesus gave him sight. The man responded he had already told them and asked if they wanted to be Jesus' disciples too.

When the leaders said they were Moses' disciples and asserted Jesus was a sinner, the man asked how

God could have done this marvelous thing through Jesus if He was a sinner.

The leaders were saying the man should be able to see Jesus was a sinner and a lawbreaker. And the man was boldly saying the leaders should be able to see Jesus was the Messiah — that if Jesus was who they said He was, how could He have healed his sight?

They responded to this reasoned argument by saying the man had been a sinner his whole life, insinuating he was born blind because

of his sin. Now that he was of age and unrepentant about following Jesus, he would no longer be welcome in the synagogue (v. 22).

We face this frustration when sharing our faith journey. We want to faithfully evangelize, bear witness and answer anyone who asks why we believe in Jesus. But spiritually blind people cannot see what we see. Their

eyes are not yet open, but they believe they hold religious and moral high ground.

I Can Really See! (35–38)

Jesus sought the man after his expulsion from the synagogue. Using messianic terminology echoing Ezekiel's words, Jesus asked if he believed in the Son of Man.

When he replied, "Who is He, sir? Tell me so I may believe," Jesus responded, "I am He." The man declared he believed, and he worshipped Jesus.

Then Jesus enigmatically said He came to give sight to the blind and take sight from those who see.

John records that the Pharisees inquired if Jesus was saying they were blind too.

A formerly blind man saw Jesus was the Messiah. Meanwhile, the pious Pharisees looked Jesus in the face yet were blind to who He was.

***"We know that
God does not
listen to sinners,
but if anyone is a
worshipper of God
and does his will,
God listens to him."***

John 9:31

Bible Studies for Life

By Tyshawn Gardner, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



DOES IT ALIGN WITH GOD'S CHARACTER? Exodus 34:1–9

In this chapter, God instructs Moses to make new tablets for His commandments. Moses broke the first tablets (Ex. 32:19) out of frustration with the children of Israel due to their worship of the golden calf.

In God's faithfulness and mercy, He instructs Moses to go to the mountain to receive His Word again.

God's people are stiff-necked, but His love is steadfast and His mercy is everlasting. God, however, warns Moses His divine characteristics of mercy and steadfast love are not an excuse for His people to continue in sin. He "will not leave the guilty unpunished" (34:7).

God's presence on the mountain revealed He is holy and just. Those who are called by His name should reflect His holiness, justice and righteousness in our lives.

God is holy and establishes a covenant relationship with His children. (1–5)

The Lord is faithful in His love for His people. This steadfast love is manifested in His covenant relationship with them. Even though His people constantly abandon their faith in Him, He has never abandoned His covenant.

God possesses certain moral qualities, such as holiness, righteousness and justice, along with grace, mercy and faithfulness.

In His holiness, He is both unique and sacred. When Moses experienced God's holiness, he worshipped in response. Goodness is another characteristic reflected in God's holiness.

God cannot be evil or wrong. He cannot be influenced by evil in the world. Israel experienced these moral qualities of God through His covenant.

In a greater measure, we have inherited a better covenant in Christ.

Our covenant with God through Christ requires the character of our words and actions to be in line with God's character and His Word.

God's character is perfect and unchanging. (6–7)

God is consistent in all His ways. Scholars refer to this truth as immutability, meaning He does not change. God cannot be swayed by politics, economics or changes in the world. As He was in Exodus 34, He is for us in the present.

He can be trusted. Israel trusted God to bring them out of Egypt, but they lost patience in the transition from Egypt to the promised land.

Though the way we travel may take unfamiliar twists and turns, we need not fret. God is unchanging in His faithfulness, goodness and love. Growing older brings us face to face with changes in family dynamics, health and careers.

Just as God could be trusted in our youth and young adulthood, He can be trusted in the golden years of life. We change, but God does not change in His care and love for us.

Our response to God's holy character is to repent and worship Him. (8–9)

Moses worshipped God because of His distinct holiness and majesty. Likewise, our proper response is to worship and obey Him.

Moses also confessed the sins of God's children. He knew God is merciful and forgiving.

We may go astray, but we can repent and respond in worship to the one and only true and living God. Our character must always align with God's character. We are created in His image. We are His people.

All who confess their sins, confess Christ and repent of their sins can know this Holy God who loves us beyond our deepest faults. May our character align with His.

"The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him."

Exodus 34:5

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Grateful singer thankful for opportunity to share Christ through music

Christian recording artist Justin Warren says his heart is to share the hope we have in Jesus through the songs he writes.

Warren, who hails from Raleigh, North Carolina, has shared the stage with a number of Christian artists, including MercyMe, Sanctus Real, Building 429 and Natalie Grant. This spring, he is touring with his good friend JJ Weeks, who Warren says treats him like a little brother.

Weeks and Warren, along with special guest WeRCalled, are bringing the My Front Porch tour to Alabama on Feb. 24. They will be in concert at the Andalusia Full Gospel Tabernacle at 7 p.m.

Warren previously toured with Sanctus Real, an experience he called “amazing.”

Influences

“When you’re out on the road with them, when you’re living life with them and get to know them ... they’re just ... the real deal. They are some of the nicest people I’ve ever been around. I was really impressed with the way they conducted themselves and carried themselves,” he said.

Warren saw an example of Sanctus Real’s character when their crew was working in the cold and snow



JUSTIN WARREN

Photo courtesy of Andrew Busbee

to load equipment after a concert in Nebraska. Because Sanctus Real was headlining, they could have been in the warm bus getting ready to sleep. Instead they were in the back of the trailer helping load the equipment.

“That really made an impact on me,” Warren noted.

Having listened to Sanctus Real while he was growing up, he said, “I’ll forever cherish [being on tour with them]. It was a really great experience.”

The logistics of touring can be daunting, Warren said. Managers and agents line up the shows, but there has to be a good communication system. The band has to know where they are going, what time to arrive, which meals will be provided and whether they stay in a hotel or on the bus.

He says they usually arrive at a venue midmorning, unload the

equipment and do a sound check. Then there are meet-and-greet sessions, the concert performance and tearing down and reloading the equipment before they are through.

After the equipment is loaded,

“we drive a little while, find the hotel ... and get up and do it all over again,” Warren added. “It ends up being a lot of work, but it’s worth it. We believe in what we’re doing. We believe we’re making [music] for Jesus, and we’re excited to do it.”

Being on the road provides a variety of experiences, and so does hearing from Warren’s fans.

Encouraging others

He remembers a little girl who had a terminal illness. The girl asked to meet him, and she brought him a pack of M&Ms. She told Warren his songs were an encouragement to her.

“I’ll just never forget ... seeing her worship, knowing what she was walking through. She was still worshipping God so faithfully. It put me in tears, to be honest. It was incredible,” Warren remembered.

Warren also recalls when a woman contacted him through Facebook to tell him her son had just been murdered. She said Warren’s music was helping her through her season of pain.

‘God stuff’

“I’ll never understand why the Lord allowed me to do this, and why anybody would listen to [my music],” Warren said. “I’m thankful He’s given me some songs and that people have been gracious enough to listen.”

“That’s God stuff. It’s not something I can take credit for,” he continued. “It’s very humbling that God would take these songs and use them to encourage people. Hearing encouraging words from people ... does help motivate you and lift your spirit. It makes it all worth it.”

Warren added, “There’s been times where I’ve gone out and done some events where I’m walking away kind of bummed or discouraged, and then you turn around and the Lord just absolutely blesses your socks off the next time out. I’m always incredibly thankful for that.”

In 2022, Warren signed with Radiate Music and joined Cade Thompson for the Bigger Story tour.

His latest release, “All Things Well,” can be streamed through all major platforms.

To learn more about Justin Warren’s music, visit justinwarrenmusic.net.



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.

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BE INTENTIONAL

By Mary Alford
Arkansas Baptist News

Family puts focus on missions discipleship in the home

A world map hangs in the hallway of Tim and Caitlyn Robnett's home. Surrounding the map are pictures of missionaries with strings connecting them to where they are currently serving and sharing God's word.

The more than 20 photographs include missionaries living around the world, from North America to Cambodia. They comprise those Tim and Caitlyn know from their previous time in Asia, their school or their church, Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas.

"[These are] missionaries that we know personally," Caitlyn said.

"At some point or another, our kids have gotten to meet most of those people. They come through Little Rock, and we have them at our house."

The map is just one of the ways Tim and Caitlyn disciple their children — Scotty, 6, and Naomi, 4 — about missions.

As they pass the map on the way to bed, Tim and Caitlyn ask their children who they want to pray for that night, and they pray for the missionary and the people they are trying to reach with the gospel.

Additionally, at breakfast time, the couple reads to Scotty and Naomi from "Window on the World," a children's version of "Operation World," a volume of prayer information about the world.

Bedtime and mealtimes

"I feel like we're not great at these things, but there are natural times throughout the day when kids are naturally calmer and more in a frame of mind to listen, and that's at bedtime and mealtimes. I'd like to be more intentional at dinner time too," Tim said.

Participating in Mission Friends, a Woman's Missionary Union discipleship group for preschoolers from birth through kindergarten, at the church has also made an impact on their children.

Caitlyn said Naomi will often come home wanting to pray for people in Brazil, or whatever place she learned about that night.

Tim noted they also have been blessed with the opportunity to often have internationals at their home.

"We [eat] together and our kids play together. After they leave, we'll talk about it with the kids and pray for them," Tim said. "We try to teach our kids that they can have a role to play in it too."

Caitlyn said there are many opportunities and resources to bring missions discipleship into the home, but you must be intentional in doing it.

Heart for missions

One resource is WMU, which creates missions discipleship resources designed to help churches and Christian parents be faithful in equipping children and students to embrace the heart of God — a heart for missions.

Missions discipleship involves learning about missions around the world and in North America, praying for the nations and missionaries, giving to missions offerings and the Cooperative

Program and doing missions by going and telling others about Jesus.

"We're just praying that the Lord uses those seeds one day," Caitlyn said. "... I think we've always wanted to teach them that the world is so much bigger than them and their needs and desires, and I feel like that is one of the hardest things as parents to do."

Debbie Moore, who serves on the Arkansas Baptist State Convention Missions Team as the Arkansas WMU executive director, said the Bible mandates that parents have the primary responsibility for discipling their children. Caitlyn and Tim take Deuteronomy 6:4-8 seriously as they model what making disciples at home looks like.

Taking notice

"When parents live for Christ as His disciples in every area of their lives, their children cannot help but take notice," Moore said.

Though the church partners with parents to make disciples of the next generation, churches cannot replace parents — and parents cannot be independent of the church, Caitlyn noted.

"It's still our job. If [our children] don't see us doing it, then why would they care," she said. "It's important to us. We want it to be important to them."

It is the Great Commission, she added.

"It is a command. It's not a suggestion" Caitlyn said. "I just feel very passionate about it. I don't want to just raise a good Christian kid. I want to raise a disciple who makes disciples."

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Photo courtesy of Arkansas Baptist News
Tim and Caitlyn Robnett's children Scotty, 6, and Naomi, 4, look at a world map in the hallway of their home. Surrounding the map are pictures of missionaries with strings connecting them to where they are currently serving.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by Arkansas Baptist News.



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Impacting generations

By Jane Rodgers
Southern Baptist Texan

Chinese house church network in Texas trains leaders, prepares those who may return overseas

Chinese believers who accept Christ while living in the U.S. might not be able to find an American-style church if they return overseas. That's part of the reason Eugene Zhang is leading a house church movement in the Dallas-Fort Worth area as a model of what to expect if such a transition occurs.

Most Chinese believers who return overseas never join a church there, Zhang said, because they cannot find one like they've known in America.

"If you start a Chinese house church and they worship just like a house church [overseas], when they go back, it's easier for them to fit in the culture there," he said.

Zhang grew up in a house church overseas and briefly served as a missionary in Russia before immigrating to the United States, where his primary employment has been as a truck driver. He and his wife, Lily, attended Hillcrest Baptist Church in Cedar Hill, Texas, and along the way they began ministering to Chinese students at Dallas Baptist University.

Opportunities

The couple learned the students were often uncertain about the future and were looking for purpose in life. As an outreach, the Zhangs started providing opportunities to engage with American culture in activities such as horseback riding, target shooting and fishing.

"Food always makes good friends, especially in Chinese culture," Zhang said, noting that providing homemade Chinese food reminded the students of home.



Photo courtesy of Southern Baptist Texan
Eugene and Lily Zhang are committed to reaching, discipling and sending Chinese people in the U.S. for the glory of God. Homemade Chinese food comforts students who are far from home, and it's part of every house church meeting.

"We started to talk about Jesus. Some believed, and we had a Bible study," he said. "Later on, we bought a home not far from DBU because we want to continually share the gospel with Chinese students."

The first week of 2020, Zhang's group formed a house church in Grand Prairie, hosting not only a Bible study but worship services and weekly evangelism training. During the pandemic, two more house churches started, and now the number is up to six throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

Using the name Hillcrest Chinese Church Network, Zhang partners

with Hillcrest Baptist, the North American Mission Board and the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention to reach not only Chinese students, but Chinese people of any age or station in life. "God has really blessed the ministry, and I am very happy with that," he said.

Zhang explained that some house churches overseas can accommodate a thousand people if the home has a large yard or appropriate facility, but generally house churches have 50 to 100 people. In the Hillcrest network, each church has around 20 people — although the original Grand Prairie location has grown to 40.

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"Every meeting we have a meal, just like the early church did," Zhang said.

One of his main challenges now is training leaders to care for each of the house churches, he said. He has handed four of them over to others, and he is leading two of them.

It's about eternity

Church planting is important, Zhang said, because he sees Chinese unbelievers, but he doesn't see people sharing Jesus with them.

"God loves everyone and wants them to be saved ... [This is] about eternal death or eternal life. It's very serious," he said.

House churches in the Hillcrest network share at least 5% of tithes and offerings through the Cooperative Program, and Zhang emphasizes that all future churches he hopes to plant — even throughout the U.S. — will be encouraged to participate in CP.

Zhang envisions that many of the Chinese people in the house church network in Texas will return overseas well-equipped to start or serve similar churches there.

Replicating the ministry

Research shows 80% of Chinese students will return to their home country, Zhang said. A student trained and experienced in house church ministry is equipped to replicate the ministry, perhaps impacting generations.

"This ministry could potentially reach into the hardest-to-reach places on earth," Zhang said.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by the Southern Baptist Texan.

STRUGGLING TOWARD HOPE:

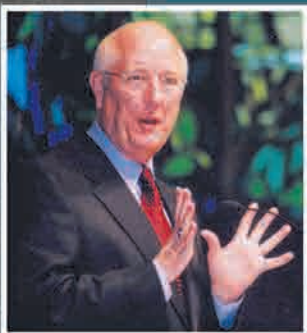
L I F E A F T E R T H E D E A T H O F A S P O U S E

A powerful, beautiful and very helpful account of working through the loss of a spouse. Dr. Terry describes the deep sense of loss he felt and then the process of building hope. This is not a "how to" book on grief, but one that allows the reader to follow the journey and then engage on several levels. As I read the book, I wish that it had been available when as a pastor I struggled to minister to church members who were going through this process. I firmly believe that this book needs to be in every pastor's library to read with extra copies for folks to read as they go through their own grief journey. Dr. Terry's background as a journalist allows him to unpack his own story with unique insights along the way. It is a must read for pastors and counselors.

DR. GARY FENTON
RETIRED SENIOR PASTOR OF DAWSON MEMORIAL BAPTIST
CHURCH IN BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

STRUGGLING TOWARD HOPE:
LIFE AFTER THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE

BOBBY S. (BOB) TERRY



BOBBY S. (BOB) TERRY

As a Christian minister Bob thought he understood grief. He had done special studies about death and dying and walked with numerous families through the loss of loved ones. But when his wife died from injuries suffered in an automobile accident while the couple was on a mission trip, Bob learned the difference between studying grief academically and knowing grief personally. In this book, Bob relates his own struggles about putting life back together after the death of a spouse. He examines issues related to the changes that death brings and questions about religious faith, about the grief journey and about finding a new hope-filled sense of life.

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