

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



TAB graphic with Unsplash.com

Famous hymn by former slave trader still inspirational after 250 years

By Brian Koonce
The Missouri Pathway

Most preachers wouldn't dare tackle writing a sermon and a hymn for their congregation, but that was par for the course for pastor John Newton, lyricist of one of the most sung hymns in history — "Amazing Grace."

On New Year's Day 1773, Newton was preaching through 1

Chronicles 17, expositing God's promise to King David.

The seeds for each verse are in 1 Chronicles 17 for those who read closely.

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the hymn, synonymous with Christian victory in the face of dangers, toils and snares, as well as man's overwhelming sin.

"'Amazing Grace' is a timeless hymn," noted Matt Swain, assistant

dean of worship ministries at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in a recent campus discussion held in honor of the anniversary.

Speaking to generations

"It spans the ages and it had spoken to generations and people from all different walks of life. Even people who are not Christians or religious at all know the tune and the text to 'Amazing Grace.'"

"What's interesting is that even though everybody just seems to know it, they don't necessarily quite understand what it is that the hymn is really about, which is somewhat ironic."

There can be no doubt that Newton knew of what he preached and wrote. In his youth he famously took to the sea and was heavily involved in the slave trade.

(See 'Beloved,' page 12)

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

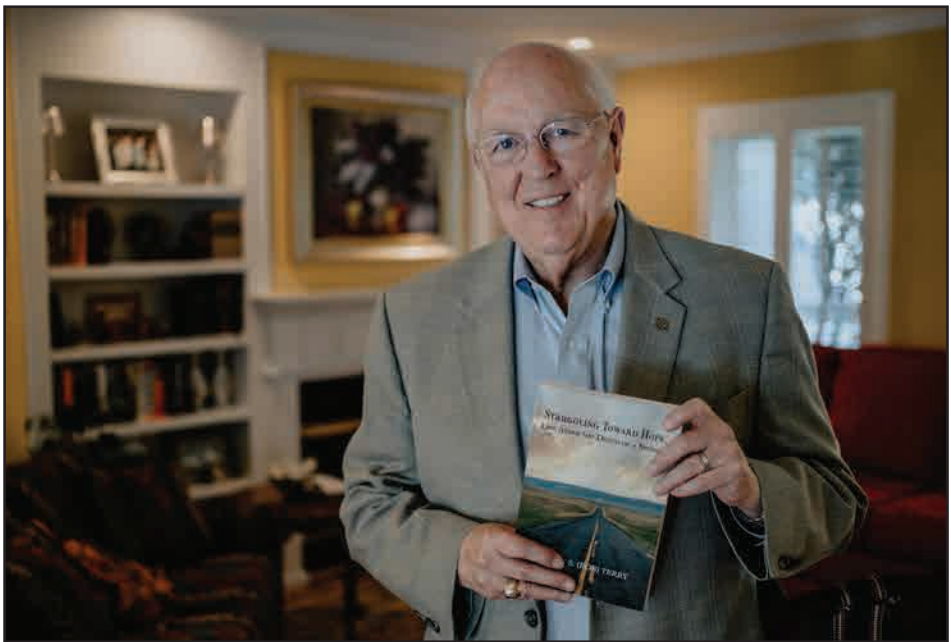


Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

In 2021, Bob Terry released “Struggling Toward Hope: Life After the Death of a Spouse.” He will share his perspective and insights during a workshop March 21.

TAB to host workshop for those walking through grief

When Bob Terry’s first wife, Eleanor, died in 1998 following a car accident in South Africa, he began a journey with grief he never expected and certainly never wanted. In 2021, Terry released “Struggling Toward Hope: Life After the Death of a Spouse.” In his book, he shares not only the personal lessons he learned along that journey, but also practical tips for survivors as they learn to live after a loved one dies.

“When the funeral is over, you go home, and people surround you with love and care for a month or so,” said Terry, editor emeritus of The Alabama Baptist. “But that begins to ebb as normalcy returns to their lives. Other crises arise within the community, the church.”

Perspective and insights

“But what about all the practical changes the surviving loved one faces? Or how one’s faith can be challenged by the death of a loved one? I didn’t find a book that

helped with that, and I hope my book stands in that gap.” Terry will share his perspective and insights for those walking through grief during the Struggling Toward Hope workshop on Tuesday, March 21 at The Alabama Baptist building in Homewood. The workshop will be from 9:30 a.m. to noon and lunch will be provided. The workshop is free for subscribers of The Alabama Baptist. For non-subscribers, the workshop will cost \$10.

Registration is required. To sign up, call 205-870-4720, ext. 122, email events@tabmedia.group or visit tabonline.org/grief-workshop. Spots are limited.

“Struggling Toward Hope: Life After the Death of a Spouse,” is published by Soncoast Publishing in Hartselle, Alabama, and is available in ebook and print from most major booksellers. Books will also be available to purchase at the workshop.

Visit Terry’s website at drbobterry.com. (TAB Media)

“What about all the practical changes the surviving loved one faces? ... I didn’t find a book that helped with that, and I hope my book stands in that gap.”

Bob Terry, editor emeritus, The Alabama Baptist

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

Defining ‘friendly cooperation’ becoming increasingly difficult

Absorbing all that is happening in Southern Baptist life right now can be a bit overwhelming.

It requires a great deal of attention and critical thinking to truly assess all the ramifications of what is being proposed, discussed and decided.

I’ve been encouraged to see Southern Baptists willing to have the tough conversations and challenge each other to think carefully at each step — and increasingly doing it with grace.

The past two years in SBC life have no doubt been difficult on many levels, but in all reality, doesn’t Baptist history showcase a continuous push-pull culture?

Local church autonomy

Our hearts yearn for unity and peace, calmness and clarity, and to always agree, but our structure allows for uniqueness within the essentials of the faith — what we call local church autonomy.

Allowing for flexibility within the nonnegotiables of the faith and Baptist theology can cause confusion and frustration.

Still, the preamble of the latest version of the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), signed by Adrian Rogers and the committee that worked on that version, states:

“That the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.”

“Confessions are ... guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience,” the preamble continues.

“That they are statements of religious convictions, drawn from the Scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life.

“Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty, and deny the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of churches. We honor the princi-

ples of soul competency and the priesthood of believers, affirming together both our liberty in Christ and our accountability to each other under the Word of God.”

While not used as a creed, the Baptist Faith and Message (1925, 1963, 2000 and any future revised versions) is accepted as Southern Baptists’ “adopted statement of faith” and used as a sort of plumb line to measure churches’ ability to be in “friendly cooperation with the convention.”

For instance, the constitution of the SBC states in Article III that a church deemed in friendly cooperation is “sympathetic with its purposes and work.”

Article III also states cooperating churches should “formally approve [their] intention to cooperate” such as by filing the annual statistical report and making contributions “through the Cooperative Program (or to an entity) during the fiscal year preceding.”

At least one of the churches recently deemed as “unfriendly” and thus being recommended for removal from the fellowship (see story, page 8) never saw itself as Southern Baptist.

A church leader may have contributed to an SBC-related cause and/or expressed intent to cooperate at some point in the past, causing the church to be assigned a church ID number and be listed in the overall count of Southern Baptist churches.

A church deemed in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention is “sympathetic with its purposes and work.”

SBC constitution

It makes sense how a church can end up on the list, but it is confusing how it remains in the system with infrequent giving and no participation on any level.

Still, the SBC constitution lists only three reasons for disqualification of a cooper-

ating church. Those reasons are: affirming “homosexual behavior,” acting in a manner inconsistent with the convention’s “beliefs regarding sexual abuse” and endorsing “discriminatory behavior on the basis of ethnicity.”

Looking ahead

As the conversations continue and debates play out on social media, in our churches and on the floor of the SBC Annual Meeting in June, Alabama Baptists are among those already modeling a gracious, respectful and calm spirit amid the discussions. Thank you for caring for and staying connected to each other.

The SBC Credentials Committee is tasked with evaluating concerns of “unfriendly cooperation” by congregations tied to the convention. Could a more accurate system of routine checks and balances prevent unnecessary research and vetting by the Credentials Committee?

Your Voice



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

Letters and perspectives on worship leaders, music selections

By Iris Anderson

Retired organist, Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile

I have just finished reading the article “Leading Worship A ‘Holy Stewardship’” in the Feb. 9 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, not once but twice.

The statement by Joseph Crider, dean of the school of church music and worship and a professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was the most profound statement of the entire article: “As churches moved away from chil-

dren’s choirs, youth choirs and even adult choirs, musical opportunities and training within a ministry context diminished significantly.”

Influence of culture

That is a powerful statement. It seems to me that music ministers have been so enamored with the music of the world that they have tried to realign it to fit the church rather than taking music that worships Christ to the world.

Perhaps a simpler way to say that

is instead of taking the church to the world, the church has invited the world into the church.

I did my student teaching at Murphy High School under Mrs. Myrtle Peter. She was what every public school choral music director wanted to be.

One day she made this statement to me: “I don’t know what I would have done all these years for musically trained young people if it were not for the graded choir programs of the Baptist churches.” These were powerful words coming from someone of another denomination.

I worked with children’s choirs in my churches, and I was always proud to see youngsters perform with a confidence they would have never attained outside the graded choir program. What those not involved never knew was the program taught Scripture through songs that taught children to love Jesus and worship God. The final result was confidence in their Savior when they stood to sing about Him.

Real mission

I fear our Baptist colleges have forgotten what their real mission is to the local church. It is not presenting a great singer or performer. Their main focus should be to train leaders who will lead their congregations in music that brings them to the throne of worship.

Over the past 20 years, I have seen no church, large or small, that has told its worship leader, “We don’t want the traditional instru-

Choose even fun songs wisely

As a boy preacher I listened to congregations enthuse, “If working and praying have any reward, then surely some morning I’ll meet my dear Lord.”

That statement is the opposite of the gospel which insists that working and praying will never earn heaven.

For God’s sake, make sure the songs you use in worship are biblically sound.

But it is not just songs sung in worship that concern me. People leading Christian institutions should make sure even music used at fun events is fit. We must make sure that all we do honors Jesus, even if it is nothing more than a fun song.

Cecil Taylor

Retired professor

University of Mobile

Why are people not singing?

By Kenny Lamm

Worship consultant for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina

Worship leaders around the world are changing their church’s worship (often unintentionally) into a spectator event, as evidenced by the lack of worship singing from the congregation.

Prior to the Reformation, worship was largely done for the people. The music was performed by professional musicians and sung in an unfamiliar language (Latin).

The Reformation gave worship back to the people. This included congregational singing. It employed simple, attainable tunes with solid, scriptural lyrics in the language of the people.

Worship singing once again became participatory. The evolution of the printed hymnal brought

with it an explosion of congregational singing and the church’s love for singing increased.

Then came the advent of new video technologies. Churches began to project lyrics on a screen. At first, this advance in technology led to more powerful congregational singing, but soon, a shift in worship leadership began to move the congregation back to spectators.

What has occurred could be summed up as the reprofessionalization of church music and the loss of a key goal of worship leading — enabling the people to worship through singing.

Excerpt from “9 Reasons People Don’t Join in Worship Singing” at churchleaders.com

ments or traditional hymns, graded choir programs for our children and youth, or to hear an adult choir sing worship music. We don’t want to worship. Just give us some entertainment.”

The worship leader should be a minister. A minister should be a leader of the needs of his congregation. Worship leaders should prepare to lead a congregation closer to God.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“God is calling us to drink of Him more deeply.”

JAMES HAMMACK

The-scroll.com, “Only Christ can satisfy”

“Our God specializes in taking the impossible and making it possible,” said **Willie McLaurin, interim president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee** to the SBC EC in Nashville, Tennessee, in February. “We can accomplish so much more when we align ourselves with the will of God.”

“With our pregnancy tests, we see a lot of lower-income girls. The girls come in and look very defeated, so we want to show them hope, and we want to connect them with resources,” said **Danielle Stokes, director of Shoals Sav-A-Life in Florence.**

“The feeling I had [when I talked to God] made my heart warm. I didn’t feel alone,” **Branee, a UAB**

student who spent some of her high school years in foster care with the Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries.

“Law enforcement a lot of times is a thankless job and to have that opportunity for people to let you know that you’ve made a difference ... it’s a very humbling experience,” said **Rick Singleton, recently retired sheriff of Lauderdale County.**

“Pastors must refuse the temptation to rush all the time” and should maintain a healthy rhythm. “I call it ‘self-sabotage’ when we get out of rhythm like staying up too late and robbing ourselves of rest,” said **Tim Dowdy, who serves with the North American Mission Board.**

“A great obstacle is we think we know the text, many of them so familiar, but we must bring the naiveté of a child to our reading as though we’ve never been there before. ... We can be guilty of trespassing on the territory of the Holy Spirit unless we read the text again and again until its words own us,” said **Robert Smith Jr., professor of Christian preaching at Beeson Divinity School at Samford University.**

Why would an unbeliever want what we have if we don’t offer them anything different than what the world offers?

Amy Hacker
the-scroll.com
“Live like you believe”

From the *Twitterverse*

@PriscillaShirer

The older and older I get, the less impressed I am with the famous and the more impressed I am with the faithful.

@malachiobrien

The central message of the Bible is not the Bible. The central message of Scripture is worthy is the Lamb.

@ronniep

Seven traits of a bad sermon:

- ▶ Preaching w/out a Bible.
- ▶ Taking text out of context.
- ▶ Avoidance of talking about sin.
- ▶ All knowledge without application.
- ▶ Application w/out exposition.
- ▶ Never getting to the gospel.
- ▶ No invitation to repent and believe.

@FBCOpelika

Make God’s Word your habit.

@lorifrank1

I find all this AI technology and capability very creepy. I don’t believe this falls into the “cultivate the earth and subdue it” mandate. Feels more like a tower of Babel.

@deaninserra

Discipleship is a long game.

Have patience with people in their spiritual growth.

@larrydrobertson

Matthew 7:11: “So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him.”

@kristenpadilla

The righteousness of God is good news for those who have faith in Jesus Christ! Lord, I seek refuge in you; let me never be disgraced. Save me by your righteousness. — Psalm 31:1

@DanielDickard

If you get up early in the morning to study the Scriptures and pray, but are not walking in relational proximity with someone who is hurting — demonstrating to them the words and ways of Christ — your morning devotion is not having the effect on you that you think it is.

@cnieuwhof

Pastors and church leaders who are consistently running late, fail to meet deadlines or cancel meetings at the last minute demonstrate a lack of respect for the time and energy of others.

@greglaurie

We don’t decide when a revival happens. God does. We can’t organize it, but we can agonize for it in prayer. We can get our hearts ready. Revival starts with you. It starts with me. It starts with us as the church. And it begins right where we are.

Importance of equipping believers

To equip means “to make ready or prepare.” This is an important concept for believers.

Vance Havner states, “If you are a Christian, you are not a citizen of this world trying to get to heaven; you are a citizen of heaven making your way through this world.”

This world is enemy territory, and we are to allow God to equip us using His holy equipment amid this hostile environment (Eph. 6:10–18).

First, notice the equiper. Hebrews 13:20–21 tells us the “God of peace” makes the believer “complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” The word translated here as “complete” could be rendered “equip.”

Charles John Ellicott explains the Greek word “conveys the thought of completeness, complete equipment or preparation.”

Second, notice the equipping. Ephesians 4:11–12 reads, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Third, notice the equipped. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 reads, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction [and] for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

These verses teach the sufficiency of Scripture. Charles H. Spurgeon observes, “Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years.”

Franklin L. Kirksey,
Robertsdale

3 stories

you should know



IMB photo

Members of Salt and Light Church in Sumter, South Carolina, raised more than \$21,000 for this year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering in part through a recycling ministry the church began about 10 years ago. Local businesses and area residents collect and donate metal, which church members then trade for cash. Pastor Rodney Howard (left) helps church member Jerry Burke pick up metal cat food cans from an animal rescue house. (IMB)

Another powerful quake strikes in Turkey, Syria

A 6.4-magnitude earthquake on Feb. 20 killed three people and injured more than 200 others in Turkey's Hatay province, an area devastated by the magnitude 7.8 quake that struck Feb. 6.

In Syria, six people were injured by falling debris, and more than 130 injuries were reported. In both areas, more buildings collapsed, trapping aid workers in some cases.

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has said around 1.6 million people are currently living in temporary shelters. He has pledged that the government will construct close to 200,000 new homes in the region.

The European Union's health agency has warned of the risk of disease outbreaks in the region, specifically cholera and other food and waterborne diseases, respiratory illnesses and other infections. (TAB)

What is regular church attendance anyway?

A Lifeway Research study finds a majority of both U.S. Protestant pastors and churchgoers consider "regular attendance" to be participation in a worship service twice a month or more.

Both groups also say regular attendance is based on how often people attend a worship service, not other church activities.

Among pastors, 3 in 5 define regular attendance as at least twice a month, while 1 in 10 say less than monthly. Churchgoers themselves are likely to place the standard of regular church attendance near their own frequency.

Overall church attendance has decreased in the U.S. in recent years but has rebounded somewhat since the COVID-19 pandemic, according to studies from multiple research organizations. (Lifeway Research)

Persecuted church

Fulani herdsmen intercept buses, kidnap 71 Christians in Nigeria

ABUJA, Nigeria — Islamic extremists intercepted two buses Nov. 24 in Nigeria and abducted 71 Christian passengers.

Muslim Fulani herdsmen kidnapped 48 Christians from a bus traveling from Ondo State to Edo State for a funeral, reported Morning Star News. As of Dec. 1, 43 were still captive.

One kidnapped female was nearly beaten to death because she could not walk as fast as the assailants demanded, stated Morning Star News, quoting one of the woman's relatives. The woman was later found and given medical treatment.

Another 23 individuals were taken captive by herdsmen from a bus in Edo State. The kidnapped passengers were traveling to a wedding

and were workers from Peace House, a Christian ministry in Benue State. Fourteen of the people had been recovered by Dec. 1.

Nigeria is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. Nigeria has led the world in the number of Christians abducted or killed for their faith.

Muslims attack Christians, burn fellowship site in Uganda

KAMPALA, Uganda — Muslim extremists in Uganda not only burned a home where Christians met, but also caned several individuals for putting their faith in Christ.



Photo courtesy of Creative Commons

Morning Star News reported that the house where a cell fellowship met in Uganda's Luuka District was burned Nov. 20. Muslims were angry because the fellowship members' outreach efforts resulted in two prominent families putting their faith in Christ.

In Bugweri District, two brothers who had become Christians in October were beaten with canes Nov. 13 for leaving Islam. One brother accepted Christ on Oct. 11, told his brother how to receive salvation and that brother made a profession of faith Oct. 23.

On Dec. 10 in Mityana District, angry Muslims beat a man and his adult son for converting from Islam to Christianity, Morning Star News reported. Five days after his conversion, the father began receiving death threats.

Uganda's constitution and laws allow for freedom of religion.

Alabama news

BETHEL ASSOCIATION

► **Johnny Arnett** recently retired from **Linden Baptist Church** after serving for 20 years in various staff positions as minister of music, associate pastor of senior adults and outreach and Sunday School director.

He served several other Alabama churches full time including Grove Hill Baptist Church, First Baptist Church Grand Bay and West End Baptist Church, Aliceville. Throughout his 53 years of ministry, he also served part time in several Birmingham churches. He attended Jefferson State Community College and took classes at New Orleans



ARNETT

Seminary. Arnett will continue to volunteer as minister to senior adults. He and his wife, Jenny, have one adult son.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Rich Hutchens** retired Feb. 28 as associate pastor for missions and discipleship of **First Baptist Church Birmingham**



HUTCHENS

where he has served since August 2015. Previously, he and his wife, Susan, were International Mission Board missionaries for 28 years in South America and the Middle East. He is a graduate of East Texas Baptist University and Southern Seminary. They have three children and 13 grandchildren.

In retirement the Hutchenses plan to continue at FBC, spend more time with family and friends, and continue working in the area of missions.

► **Valleydale Church, Birmingham**, is starting weekly Wednesday night small groups that focus on depression, anxiety and trauma; addiction; and marriage. The groups will meet March 8 through April 19, beginning at 6:30 p.m. "Finding Peace with Depression, Anxiety and Trauma" has an option for men and women while the marriage and addiction classes are coed. For more information, visit valleydale.org/events. To sign up, call Dawn Sawyer at 205-991-5282.

FAYETTE ASSOCIATION

► **Jaime Owens** is the new pastor of **Calvary Baptist Church, Fayette**. He previously was pastor of Ashcraft Corner Baptist Church, Kennedy, from March 2019 to August 2021.

He holds a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies from the University of West Alabama and is pursuing a master of divinity



OWENS

ity with an emphasis in pastoral ministry through New Orleans Seminary.

He and his wife, Brianna, have four children.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► A team from **CrossPoint Church, Trussville**, built a wheelchair ramp for a pastor who needed one due to his wife's illness.

St. Clair Baptist Association provided the materials through the contributions of its churches.



Photo courtesy of St. Clair Baptist Association

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Southcrest Baptist Church, Bessemer**, is hosting Holy Destiny gospel group March 3, 7 p.m., with supper at 6. Scott Bush is pastor.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **New Bethel Baptist Church, Minter**, is hosting a 40th anniversary celebration and retirement for its pastor **Robert Elwood Sims**. There

will be a special worship service Sunday, March 12, at 11 a.m. followed by a meal.

OTHER

► The **University of Mobile** will partner with the **Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions** to host Super Summer Alabama 2023, a weeklong leadership and discipleship camp for students who have completed grades 8–12. The camp is set for July 10–14 on the University of Mobile campus.

Super Summer Alabama is not your typical summer camp, said Denis Tanner, associate pastor of students and spiritual formation at Shades Crest Baptist Church, Hoover. It is designed for students who are leaders or potential leaders in their church youth groups who have the desire to grow in their faith.

"Super Summer is where students begin to dig deeper in the Word of God," Tanner said.

The camp is organized by the State Board of Missions and will be the first time the camp is held on UM's campus. Early registration deadline is April 10. To learn more, visit supersummer.ym-link.org. (UM)

Samford experiences spiritual movement

By Noelle Neader, Jacob Taylor and Faith Holley

The Alabama Baptist

Samford University students gathered for worship in Reid Chapel for several days beginning Feb. 15.

"We had a student visit Asbury (University) and experience what was happening there," said campus pastor Bobby Gatlin. "At the same time, there was a student who had been playing music and worship ... just singing by himself for several days on end in the evenings."

A group of students also were praying for the Holy Spirit to move on Samford's campus, and once the Wednesday night worship experience started, it kept growing.

Even many of the Bulldog fans across campus at the Pete Hanna Center — who helped the men's basketball team secure a come-from-behind win over UNC Greensboro — found themselves in Reid Chapel after the game. Hundreds of students were gathered by 10 p.m. and many stayed until 3 a.m. the following morning.

The next day, afternoon classes were cancelled

due to severe weather alerts, and students gathered again in Reid Chapel around 1 p.m., with some students not leaving until 1 a.m. the next morning.

Madeleine Crow, a junior studying Christian ministry, said she was in awe of what was happening. "Walking in (Wednesday night) and genuinely seeing people I am walking everyday life with, step up and let the Spirit speak through them was life changing ... to see people with beautiful God-given gifts singing out, speaking up and allowing the Holy Spirit to orchestrate that night. I've never seen the campus more unified in all my three years so far at Samford."

Samford president Beck Taylor called the movement "student led." He said reports indicate a few students gave their lives to Christ and others have worked through issues in their lives, both publicly and privately.

The experience at Asbury University, a Christian university in Kentucky, began Feb. 8. The "Asbury Outpouring," as it is being called, was moved off campus following the Feb. 23 National Collegiate Day of Prayer livestream from Asbury.

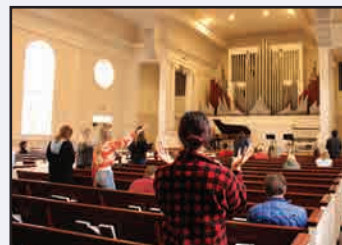


Photo by Cayman Carpenter/The Alabama Baptist

SERIOUS MATTERS

February meeting of SBC Executive Committee weighs heavy on trustees

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama trustees of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee joined their counterparts from other states to deliberate a variety of heavy business items during their Feb. 20–21 meeting in Nashville.

They also heard from the Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force and the EC presidential search committee.

Still, serious questions of financial sustainability for the EC and the decision to deem six churches not in friendly cooperation with the convention captured much of the group's attention.

Pastor role, title

Discussions around whether to amend the SBC constitution to read “does not affirm ... a woman as pastor of any kind” will continue.

A vote regarding what the EC will propose to messengers is anticipated

at the group's next meeting in June.

Five of the six churches being recommended for removal were related to female pastor concerns.

The churches are New Faith Mission Ministry in Griffin, Georgia (which labels itself as nondenominational on its website); St. Timothy's Christian Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland; Calvary Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi; Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky; and Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California.

The sixth church — Freedom Church in Vero Beach, Florida — reportedly has not appropriately handled a sexual abuse allegation.

While the recommendations came from the SBC Credentials Committee

to the EC trustees, the churches were evaluated because someone turned them in to be assessed.

The churches have the right to appeal the recommendation, which would bring the matter up for a vote



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
Entity and auxiliary leaders such as Sandy Wisdom-Martin (right) of National WMU attend the EC meetings as guests. In some cases, they also share updates and reports.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
SBC Executive Committee chair Jared Wellman presides over the Feb. 20–21 meeting in Nashville. A nominee for EC president was not announced, but the search committee “hopes to present a candidate soon,” said search committee chair Adron Robinson.

by messengers to the SBC Annual Meeting in New Orleans in June.

More details will be provided in The Alabama Baptist soon about how that process works.

Financial concerns

As far as the EC's financial concerns, trustees learned more than \$6 million of the group's investments were spent in 2022.

During the previous February EC meeting, financial reports indicated the EC had \$15 million in investments and a little under \$3 million of those were designated as restricted so that left around \$12.2 million available for use.

“The assets have been cut in half,” said EC member Monte Shinkle of Missouri. “We dropped \$6 million this past year. We have \$6 million left ... it doesn't look good.”

Executive Committee trustee Craig Carlisle of Gadsden (top right) is among five serving on the 86-member board from Alabama. The others are Tim Cox of Chelsea, Dana McCain of Dothan, Neal Hughes of Montgomery and Ann Stafford of Dothan.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
Willie McLaurin, interim EC president and CEO, shares an update of SBC-related ministry efforts with trustees.

Mike Bianchi, interim chief financial officer, noted the EC received an unqualified opinion (which is good) on its 2022 audit report, but the auditors emphasized “the sexual abuse issues, the DOJ investigation and the deteriorating liability of the EC” as concerns.

The current pace is “unsustainable,” Bianchi said, noting options such as liquidating assets (including the EC building), changing financial arrangements, obtaining other



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Abuser database plan announced; choice of administrator receives pushback

Marshall Blalock received a standing ovation following his recent Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force report, but he knew pushback would come over one particular announcement.

A ministry check “abuser” database will soon become a reality, said Blalock, chair of the task force.

Until now “there has been no cooperative mechanism to prevent abusers from going place to place ... so this is an unprecedented, significant moment,” he shared during the Feb. 20–21 SBC Executive Committee meeting in Nashville.

The concern Blalock predicted surfaced because of the company that was selected to serve as administrator of the new site: Guidepost Solutions.

Guidepost, which performed the recent investigation into the SBC EC’s handling of sexual abuse cases, publicized its support of the LGBTQ community in June 2022, just days before the SBC Annual Meeting where the investigation report was presented to messengers.

Blalock acknowledged he agreed with the concerns from last June but noted “Guidepost has addressed the concerns we share.”

The new Faith-Based Solutions division came out of those



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
Marshall Blalock — chair of the SBC’s Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force — finds himself overcome with emotion as he shares an update with EC trustees. He also anticipates requesting an extra year for the task force to complete its assignment.

discussions, he said, noting their sensitivity to Southern Baptists’ concerns.

The ministry check website will be administered by Faith-Based Solutions, Blalock noted.

“They also are assigning people of faith to work on our work,” he added. “They respected our belief and our polity.”

Samantha Kilpatrick, a Southern Baptist, has been tasked with leading the faith division, Blalock added.

Guidepost announced Kilpatrick’s new role in late 2022. She holds a juris doctor degree from the University of North Carolina and a master

of arts in Christian marriage, family and individual counseling from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

She has represented and helped the abuse survivor community for more than a decade. Kilpatrick also has experience advising faith-based institutions in abuse prevention.

Concerns raised

Still, several church leaders are speaking out on social media such as Florida pastor Willy Rice.

“This is a hard ‘no’ for me; a line in the sand that I cannot cross,” he posted on Twitter Feb. 22.

Others are sharing similar concerns on social media and in potential organized efforts.

While Blalock worked to calm concerns, he also shared how the ministry check website will be a public record of “pastors, denominational workers, ministry employees and volunteers who have at any time been credibly accused of sexual abuse and who have been or are associated with a cooperating Southern Baptist church or entity.”

Noting the SBC Credentials Committee had approved the plan, Blalock invited Credentials Committee chair Linda Cooper to share during his report.

“We realize we have a lot of work ahead of us and look forward to working as a team about how to respond to abuse (and abuse prevention),” she said, acknowledging appreciation for the task force’s work.

The time line for the database and the long-term funding plan for maintaining it are both unknowns at the moment but contract negotiations are underway with Guidepost, Blalock said.

Details for how Faith-Based Solutions was selected, how the website will function and the definition of “credibly accused” can be found on the task force website at abusereformtaskforce.net. (Jennifer Davis Rash)

financing, etc., were discussed with the auditors.

Willie McLaurin, EC interim president and CEO, added, “Everything is on the table in terms of how we are going to maintain and move forward.

“We are monitoring ... on a daily basis (and) believe God has given us a plan to maintain as much vitality as we can ... (while) making the best decision that will benefit all Southern Baptists.”

Receipts for the first quarter of the 2022–23 budget year (October through December 2022) totaled \$45,715,000 which was \$2,352,500 or 4.89 percent under the projected budget for the same time frame of \$48,067,500.

Future budget plans

Along with hearing about current financial concerns, the EC trustees adopted a proposed 2023–24 SBC operating budget of \$8,305,500

(roughly the same as the 2022–23 budget).

They also adopted a proposed 2023–24 SBC CP allocation budget of \$195,250,000 (down slightly from the 2022–23 budget of \$196 million with percentages to entities such as IMB, NAMB, ERLC, seminaries, etc., remaining steady).

Regarding the abuse reform efforts (see story above), EC member Craig Carlisle of Alabama said, “The work of the task force is evident. Their

passion is evident. They take it very seriously and to heart.

“It’s a long way to go to make the connection to the churches but it’s a great beginning to what we are going to hear and see in the future,” said Carlisle, who serves as chair of the state convention’s Sexual Abuse Advisory Task Force.

Carlisle also is helping his fellow directors of missions in Alabama develop a plan for resourcing churches in the area of abuse prevention.

Comforting presence

Hospital chaplain bears witness to people in crisis, cares for other staff as well

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Though many jobs are unpredictable, a hospital chaplain typically has no idea what he or she will encounter in the next few minutes or day-to-day.

Suzanne Simmons, staff chaplain and chaplain educator at UAB Hospital, loves how she gets to cross paths with people she would never come across otherwise — and how every interaction can be completely different.

“I enjoy the beauty of human relationships and what’s possible when we meet, ... what’s possible in that moment,” she said. “We can learn about each other and how we can experience God in the moments we are relating with one another. I find it to be just a really beautiful experience. I get to do that every time I walk into a patient’s room.”

Being a chaplain has a lot of ups and downs. Simmons said the selfish part is that it’s very rewarding, energizing and fulfilling. However, it’s also difficult because most of the time the job involves encountering people in crisis.

Caring for the sick

“Bearing witness to their pain and their circumstances is kind of an extension of one of the ministries of Christ. While He was here on earth He cared for the sick and the dying and the people who are suffering. When I do that with other people, I feel connected to Christ,” Simmons said.

Simmons knows she can’t fix what her patients are dealing with. Many she only sees once. She can give a patient a blanket or a cup of water, but helping in ways beyond those practical needs involves being constantly in prayer.

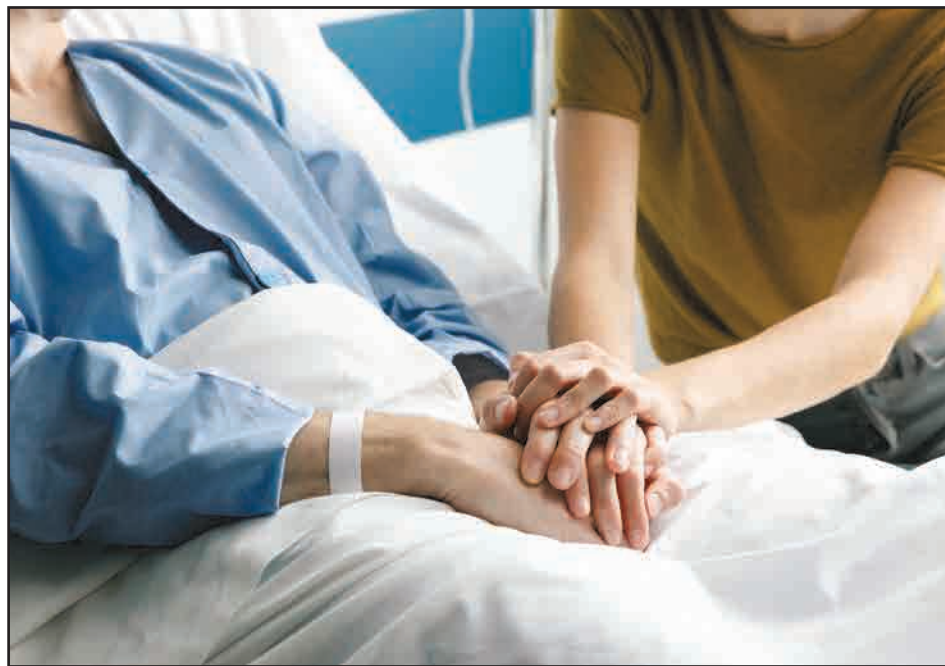


Photo by Freepik

“I have to be dependent on the Spirit to be present with that person before I get in the room, to be present with us in the moment I’m there and then to be present with the person after I leave,” Simmons revealed. “More often than not it’s the last time I’m going to interact with them, so [I have] to trust God is with them, that God goes with them.”

This ministry is extremely important no matter what’s going on in the world, but during the pandemic, hospital chaplains were vital. Visitors couldn’t come into the hospital. The opportunity to sit and be with people is a “very powerful human experience,” and that was especially true then, she recalled.

Sometimes moments are gut-wrenching.

Simmons remembers the first time she sat in the delivery room with a family who lost their baby. The family had no idea anything was wrong until the baby was born. Knowing

there was nothing she could do to bring him back, Simmons sat with the family and listened.

“There aren’t any words for that. It was very early on in my time, in my training. I just remember having a very deep awareness of the fact that I had nothing — I felt like I had nothing to offer them,” she said. “I felt very inadequate for the task and really just felt helpless.”

“But I just sat with them for a few minutes and listened to them talk about the name they chose for this little boy and why it was important to them and how beautiful he was. He was there in the room with us. I think just bearing witness to their grief and also the memory of their son was just a very powerful experience.”

Following a schedule

Though every moment varies, chaplains do have a schedule. When patients are admitted, they are

asked if they want to see a chaplain while there. At the beginning of each shift, the chaplain checks this list and visits those patients. They then move through other units and check with the staff to see if they know of anyone in particular who needs support.

Chaplains also care for hospital staff members, from nurses and doctors to therapists and patient care technicians.

“We check on them and let them know we’re available if they need to talk about anything, if they need to process a loss or something personally going on,” she said. “That’s become exponentially important. It’s always been important, but it’s been more critical the last few years with the pandemic.”

Embracing roles

Simmons went to Beeson Divinity School for her theological education before training to be a chaplain. One of her roles now is as an educator for UAB’s Clinical Pastoral Education program.

The training is a year long and includes both classes and clinicals where the future chaplains see patients. This training results in obtaining enough credits to meet the minimum required to be a board-certified chaplain.

As an educator and someone who has worked closely with patients, Simmons loves both roles.

“I feel very honored to be able to sit with people,” she said. “The way people entrust me with their stories, with the celebrations and with their sadness, with their questioning — their questioning God or their confusion — just being invited into that space with people and being able to hold that with them ... it’s very memorable every time.”



SIMMONS

Chaplains serve in wide variety of workplaces

Chaplains are well known in military, health care and disaster relief circles, but chaplaincy is a growing field across multiple sectors as employers recognize the relationship between spiritual health and overall well-being.

“Health is the extent to which we have physical and mental energy, whether we can fully use our senses and the extent to which we can comfortably engage in meaningful activities,” according to one definition included in a 2022 McKinsey Health Institute study. “Health is our strength, our memory, our ability to solve problems; it is our ability to cope with the challenges of life, our ability to build and sustain intimacy and our sense of agency, positivity and purpose.”

Spiritual health gives an individual a healthy sense of self, hopefulness and gratitude, the study notes.

‘Life doesn’t stop’

And though the workplace has undergone many changes in the past few years, work still consumes a large chunk of the week for most Americans. Church leaders know that concerns about family, community, national and global issues affect congregants. It only makes sense that these same issues affect employees.

“Life doesn’t stop when work starts,” states information provided by the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation, a nonprofit organization that advocates for religious diversity in the workplace. “Pains and joys from outside affect what’s inside — inside a person and inside the workplace. ... Chaplains offer counsel, assist in managing crises, celebrate milestones and help employees work through a variety of personal and professional experiences.”

More than 3,700 chaplains are endorsed through the Southern Baptist Convention in a variety of workplaces and volunteer organizations. For more information, go to namb.net/chaplaincy. (Carrie B. McWhorter)

Lives changed

Chaplaincy making positive inroads into corporate America

By Hamilton Richardson
The Alabama Baptist

Corporate chaplaincy is a growing field, and several organizations are leading the charge to send missionaries right into the center of the business world to care for hurting people.

Corporate Chaplains of America, founded by Mark Cress, is one of those. Cress, a business owner who saw the need to balance running his company and caring for the mental, emotional and spiritual needs of his employees, founded CCA nearly 30 years ago.

Richard Buckley, CCA regional vice president, explained that Cress founded his model for corporate chaplaincy while a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

That initial idea grew into what is now a nationwide team of 300 chaplains serving more than 1,000 companies of all sizes, representing more than 600,000 employees, family members and friends, Buckley said.

Caring relationships

“This year, we will see over 11,000 lives changed as our chaplains care for people who are hurting related to marriage and parenting issues, financial challenges, care for aging parents and mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and even suicidal ideation,” Buckley said.

Chaplains make weekly rounds in companies that partner with CCA, and they build “deep, caring relationships” with employees, Buckley said. But chaplains also are on call 24/7, he said, and they encour-

ter people who have all kinds of crises and concerns.

Lacy Peacock, a CCA regional director with the responsibility of overseeing corporate chaplains in the state of Georgia as well as portions of Alabama, said one reason the ministry is so important is because most people spend a third of their life at work.

“When people go to work, they cannot leave their problems at home,” she said. “The most important thing our chaplains do is bring weekly care to the employee. The employee knows they will see their chaplain every week, so

no matter what is happening in their life, they have someone who can help them and rejoice with them.”

Peacock said the needs most often focus around areas of mental health, relationships and finances. Chaplains value privacy and do not collect or share specific details, they are able to alert company leaders to concerns that might affect the

overall workplace environment.

And while CCA does not limit its work to religious workplaces, the approach to chaplaincy is the same, Buckley said.

Point of need

“As we develop caring relationships and meet people at their point of need, people open up to us and we are able to have ... conversations,” he said. “These employees that have been open to being cared for are more focused, miss less days of work, are more productive and tend to stay employed with the company longer.”

“We have documented case studies where we can show companies that over 80% of their employees regularly have care sessions with our chaplains,” Buckley said. “Greater productivity leads to greater profitability. One of our large clients documented the fact that the cost of chaplaincy is more than offset by the drastically reduced turnover and related onboarding costs of replacing employees.”

For more information, visit chaplain.org.



Photo by Freepik

Beloved hymn at once testimonial, personal

(continued from page 1)

He neglected his faith and mocked God and those who believed. He even had a bad reputation among slave traders.

In March 1748, while his ship was tossed by a storm in the North Atlantic, a crew member standing where Newton had been moments before was swept overboard. The sailors expected to capsize any moment.

The ship did not sink, and Newton began to ponder the mercy he'd been shown. Was he worthy of God's mercy? Was he redeemable?

His conversion was not immediate, but the seed of the gospel was taking root and making his need for forgiveness impossible to ignore.

"I was greatly deficient in many respects," he later wrote. "I cannot consider myself to have been a believer in the full sense of the word, until a considerable time afterwards."

After his marriage to Mary, Newton left the sailor's life. The couple threw themselves into the church community.

He began preaching and presenting poems and songs to reinforce his sermons. A few years later, "Amazing Grace" was born.

"This song really came out of a life of hopelessness," Swain said of Newton. "As a sinner — as a wretch — he was radically saved and started a life of ministry and servitude unto the Lord by grace."

'How grace works'

"In some ways it's testimonial, but I don't know that it was overtly meant to be testimonial so much as it's just how grace works in the life of the believer. But you can't just read through the hymn and know his story and not think, 'Wow, he had to have had that on his mind.'"

A few years after he wrote "Amazing Grace," Newton moved to London where he continued preaching.

During this time he connected with William Wilberforce, a young member of Parliament who was struggling with staying in office while seeing evil in the world, such as slavery. When Wilberforce sought Newton's advice he suggested he "serve God where he was."

Wilberforce followed the advice, and his political views were informed by his faith and desire to promote Christianity and Christian ethics in private and public. That included a vocal and active fight for the abolition of slavery, one Newton joined.

'Billy Graham of his day'

"In many ways, John Newton was kind of like the Billy Graham of his day," noted Angela Swain, associate professor of music at MBTS. "If you think of how Billy Graham was to many of our presidents, that's how John Newton was to William Wilberforce."

Thanks in part to both men, the Slave Trade Act of 1807 brought British involvement in slavery to a close.

As profound and simple as it is, Newton's song didn't exactly catch on at home.

"It only became popular later in the United States," Angela Swain said.

It caught on in the U.S. due in part to its musicality and folk melody, but largely,

the Swains believe, due to its message during the Second Great Awakening.

"Theology leads to our doxology," Angela Swain declared.

"It's so plainly a song about the gospel," Matt Swain said. "Whether we were saved from something like the slave trade, or if our conversion was less notable than John Newton's, it still speaks of the power of God unto salvation. For those that experience that grace, we are being brought from death to life, and that in and of itself is a radical thing."

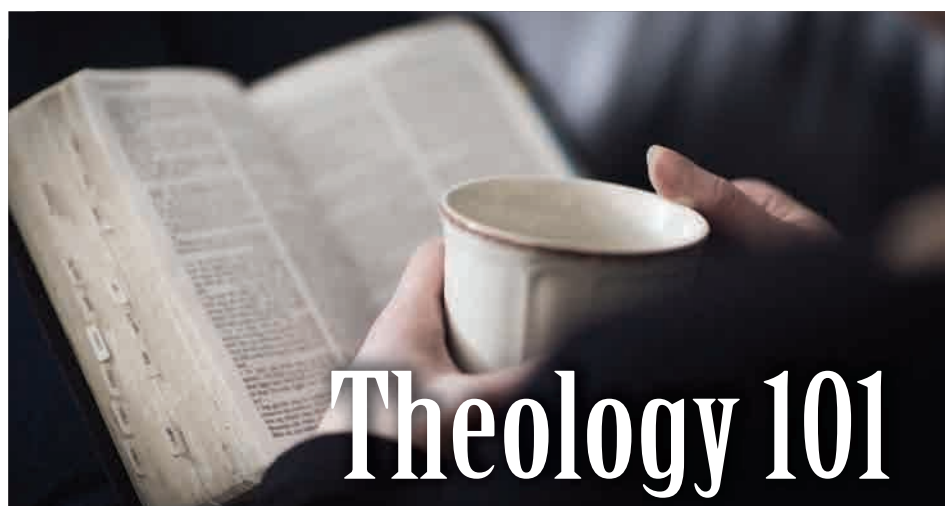
The hymn's popularity lives on, even two-and-a-half centuries later.

But beyond the music and at its foundation, "Amazing Grace" is still about the gospel, and that is potentially what has made the hymn stick around in the cultural consciousness.

"Strong hymns have strong theology," he explained. "It's the grace we've been given that gives it that power for those of us who have been saved through the blood of Christ. It's an even more powerful testimony to know the life of John Newton, to see what the gospel can do in his life of sin."



NEWTON



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Holy Spirit

The Wind of the Spirit

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.

The Alabama Baptist

During my childhood, March was a choice month for flying kites. The March wind had a way of wafting kites without much effort from us on the ground. Without the wind, launching a kite became a matter of running fast enough to get the kite aloft. With the advent of this windy month, we'll turn our attention to the wind of the Spirit.

After Jesus ascended back to heaven, His followers were gathered in an upper room when suddenly "there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind" that filled the house in which they had assembled. Accompanying that sound, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1-3). Given this association of the Holy Spirit with wind, we can extract several truths that apply to Him.

Speaking truth

We not only can confess that the Spirit is mighty like the sound of the wind, but we can also conclude that He is sovereign. Jesus expressed it this way: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes" (John 3:8). We do not command the wind. It blows where it wishes.

Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is invisible to human eyes. We can only observe some of the results of the Spirit's presence. His presence in a person's life works to form Christlikeness in that person. The Holy Spirit enables

fruitfulness in Christian service. We can see the fruitfulness but not the Spirit who produces it.

When Jesus spoke about the Spirit, He was the Person of truth speaking words of truth about the Spirit of truth as our guide into understanding and living the truth.

The New Testament contains several terms by which we can refer to the Spirit. Among these are Advocate, Helper, Intercessor and Comforter. These designations reflect an attempt to express in English the force of the Greek term that in English is spelled "Paraclete."

The term 'Paraclete'

During the rest of this windy month, we will seek to be refreshed in our understanding of the Holy Spirit by giving attention to several places in the Gospel of John where Jesus used the special term "Paraclete" to speak of the Spirit. There are four such passages, and they will be our focus for the remainder of this month.

We will think of these sections of Scripture as Paraclete passages. Each one will give us a different emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

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.



REVIVAL THROUGH DISCIPLESHIP

NorthPark Baptist Church pastor explains the ‘lifestyle’ that’s fundamental

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

T rue revival is something many Christians long for and pray for. Bill Wilks, founder of D-Life and pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville, believes discipleship is fundamental to bringing revival.

“These 12 common men that Jesus disciplined became world changers,” Wilks said. “They literally launched the movement that we’re still meeting in today. Unbelievable. This movement was launched by 12 ordinary men — really, 11 because Judas didn’t work out too well.”

Wilks continued, “I believe if the Church today is going to see revival, it’s not going to come by a superstar pastor in some big megachurch that puts on a great Sunday morning show. Sorry, I just don’t think that’s the answer and the key to revival.”

Instead, Wilks believes “every church in every little place across the country” will bring the world to revival through discipleship.

What it’s all about

During a recent D-Life Boot Camp at NorthPark, Wilks and his wife, Rondie, explained what living the D-Life is all about. The workshop included how to start D-Groups in local churches.

Though the boot camp is a structured program, carrying out the purpose and mission of D-Groups is not.

“Disciple-making is not a program — it’s a lifestyle,” Wilks said. “We don’t need any more new programs. Amen? We’ve got more programs than we could ever possibly know how to use.”



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Bill Wilks, D-Life founder and pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville, outlines key aspects of D-Groups in local churches.

He added, “But [we do need to know] how to train common people ... to live a life of making and multiplying disciples. That is what this process is all about — living a lifestyle of disciple-making.”

D-Groups are the core of living the D-Life. The groups are built around Jesus’ model with His disciples.

“Jesus modeled for us that disciple-making works best through the caring, relational environment of what we can call a D-Group, or a discipleship group,” Wilks said.

Small groups

D-Groups consist of three to five people who meet weekly for fellowship, Bible study and prayer. Though the group can meet anywhere and at any time, consistency is vital.

Prayer, intentionality and diversity are also important.

Jesus chose disciples who had very different backgrounds, Wilks said, and “God may lay someone on your heart that you would have never thought of.”

Optimally, D-Groups should include the person starting the group, another mature believer who can lead when needed and eventually start a new group, new believers who need to be disciplined, unbeliev-

ers and multigenerational believers, where older are training younger.

“The greatest resource for disciple-making in the church is our senior adults,” Wilks said. “A lot of them have the time [and] the head knowledge. If we could just get them trained and willing to make disciples — wow, watch out, world.”

In a D-Group, everyone teaches. Reading five chapters a week is one of the commitments members make, with an emphasis on application. The discussions in the group sessions flow out of these personal study times.

Everyone participates

The suggested agenda includes a short fellowship time, prayer, accountability, storytime, Bible reading, Bible study, ministry planning, weekly assignments and a closing prayer. After the first few meetings, no one person directs all of the elements.

Wilks also recommends that groups participate in one ministry outreach of some type every other month.

Stephen Hall, D-Life presenter and NorthPark’s executive pastor said, “If I’m going to reproduce disciple-makers, I’ve got to show them what discipleship means — what it means to follow Jesus. Following Jesus is growing, but it’s also serving.”

He continued, “I guess the question is, can you make disciples in a classroom only?”

“We’ve deceived ourselves if we think we disciple others only from a classroom. Disciple-making involves a lab, and the world is our lab. Making disciples must involve on-the-job training in ministry and evangelism.”

Wilks noted that the disciples were “ordinary people that launched a movement because they knew how to make and multiply disciples — that was the one thing Jesus taught them to do.

“We’ve got to see a revival of that movement,” he said. “And that’s what D-Life is all about.”

To find out more about Living the D-Life, D-Groups and available resources, go to LiveTheDLife.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Training to equip pastors to lead churches in transition

Almost every church is in need of revitalization.

That's what Ken Allen, director of the office of LeaderCare at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said, and that's why he believes the upcoming Transitional Pastor Training is important.

"COVID is shocking many churches into seriously looking at their current reality," Allen said, noting that while churches are in an interim period between pastors, they "are usually willing to receive input and instruction" on ways they might move toward health and growth.

That's where a trained transitional pastor can be an asset in preparing a church for its next pastor. A two-day event planned for April 10-11 will equip pastors for transition ministry by training them to work with a group in the church, taking them

To register, visit leadercareal.org/tpt or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



through a stage-by-stage process of renewed mission. The material provided gives the pastor details on how to complete each step in the process.

Being an asset

"The transitional pastor is trained to assist the church toward renewal around the basic biblical functions of the church: evangelism, discipling, fellowship, ministry and worship," Allen said.

That pastor can assist the church in dealing with major issues as well as realigning the church around biblical mission. "Churches in periods without pastors need experienced, sanctified and wise leadership," he said.

Transitional Pastor Training will feature two special guests — Henry Webb, who retired in 2005 after 28 years of service at Lifeway Christian Resources in the areas of pastoral ministries, discipleship and deacon ministry; and Dan Garland, who was director of pastoral ministries for Lifeway from 2007 to 2015.

The event will be at the SBOM in Prattville and will run Monday from 1 to 7:30 p.m. and Tuesday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. The cost is \$25 and includes dinner Monday and lunch Tuesday.

To register, visit leadercareal.org/tpt.

MinistrySafe workshop March 23

For several years now, MinistrySafe has been helping equip Alabama Baptist churches to protect their children from sexual abuse.

If your church staff hasn't had the opportunity to attend a MinistrySafe conference, consider signing up to

attend the next one, set for Thursday, March 23 at Valleydale Church in Birmingham.

Greg Love, cofounder of MinistrySafe, will provide awareness training on topics including how sexual predators select and groom their victims, peer-to-peer child



LOVE

sexual abuse and setting up a safety system for your church. Love — along with his wife and MinistrySafe cofounder, Kimberlee Norris — has decades of experience addressing child sexual abuse issues in churches.

The event begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 1:30 p.m., and the cost is \$20 per person. To register, visit alsbom.org/ministrysafe.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Providence Baptist Church, Town Creek, Alabama, is in search of a senior pastor. Please send resumes to: jcrosslin89@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, is accepting resumes for a Kingdom-minded senior pastor with a heart for the lost who is missional, evangelistic and a discipler. Visit DalraidaBaptist.com/pastorsearch for more information. Email resumes to: dalraidapastorsearch@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in Gordo, Alabama, is seeking a pastor. Please send resumes to: mtpleasant@centurytel.net.

PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Gantt, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a pastor to serve our congregation and community. Please direct resumes to: firstgantt@gmail.com or mail to: FBC Gantt, P.O. Box 34, Gantt, AL 36038, by March 31.

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 resumes to: garrettm2@bellsouth.net.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP PASTOR

East Side Baptist Church, Cullman, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational worship pastor. This person will direct the choir, praise team and instrumentalists. Some technical/computer skills are required. The pay is \$15K to \$17.5K, based on experience. Send resume to: ESBCsearchteam@gmail.com.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER

South Chapel Hill Baptist, Decatur, Alabama. Flexible hours and scheduling. Please email resume and inquiries to: knhayes2022@gmail.com for details.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONS STRATEGIST

The Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association seeks a full-time

associational missions strategist to serve the 76 churches in beautiful northwest Alabama. For more information or to apply, please go to clbaptist.com.

BIVOCATIONAL DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

Sulphur Springs Baptist Association seeking bivocational director of missions of 17 churches. Send resumes to: SSBA, ATTN: DOM Search, 4501 Greathouse Rd., Dora, AL 35062, or email: SSBAoffice@gmail.com.

SIGNS

CHURCH SIGNS

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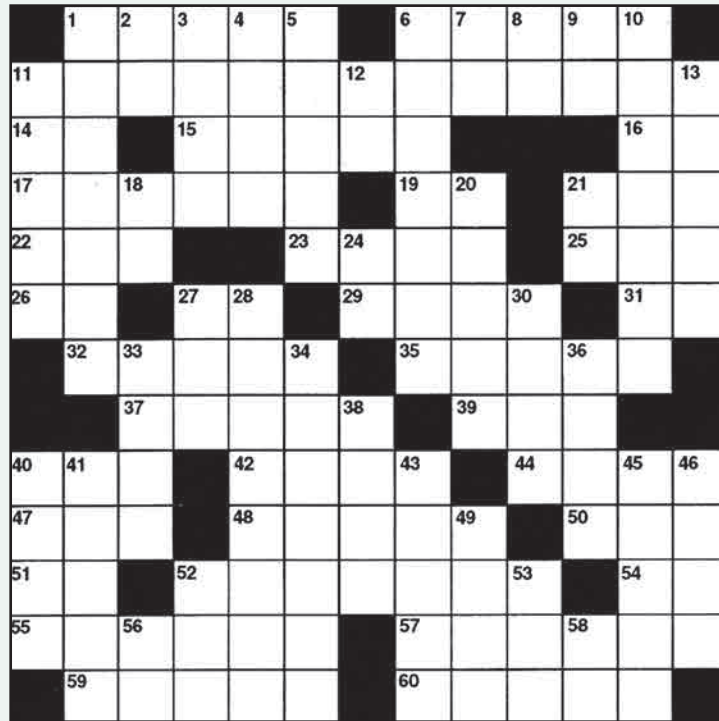
TAB DIGITAL

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

CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. Like a flying _____. (Rev. 4:7)
6. Boards of fir trees of _____. (Ezek. 27:5)
11. Treatise have I made, _____, _____ all that Jesus began. (Acts 1:1; 3 words)
14. Ye shall be witnesses unto _____. (Acts 1:8)
15. Descended to the stone of _____. (Josh. 18:17)
16. Peter and John about to _____ into the temple. (Acts 3:3)
17. Took a wife for _____, whose _____ was Tamar. (Gen. 38:6; 2 words)
19. California. (abbr.)
21. I will punish _____ in Babylon. (Jer. 51:44)
22. Animal that sounds like new.
23. Earth shall _____ to and fro. (Isa. 24:20)
25. Close relative to reindeer.
26. Alcoholics Anonymous. (abbr.)
27. Why look ye _____ earnestly on us ...? (Acts 3:12)
29. To _____ away disciples. (Acts 20:30)
31. It _____ not for you to know (Acts 1:7)
32. The son of Jair slew _____. (1 Chron. 20:5)
35. _____, Judah's firstborn, ... and the Lord slew _____. (Gen. 38:7; 2 words)
37. Shilshah, and Ithran, and _____. (1 Chron. 7:37)
39. Ye _____ of Galilee. (Acts 1:11)
40. Adam was first formed, then _____. (1 Tim. 2:13)
42. _____ it, rase it. (Ps. 137:7)
44. The troops of _____ looked. (Job 6:19)
47. _____ boweth down, Nebo stoopeth. (Isa. 46:1)
48. An odour of a sweet _____. (Phil. 4:18)
50. And in the _____ sea. (Acts 7:36)
51. Until that _____ offering should be offered. (Acts 21:26)
52. _____, the son of Azariah. (Ezra 7:3)
54. North American. (abbr.)
55. The _____ said unto me ... I have given _____



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24. Called the altar _____. (Josh. 22:34)
 27. And _____ opened her eyes. (Acts 9:40)
 28. Two _____ for one _____. (Ex. 16:22; 2 words)
 30. I _____ my glittering sword. (Deut. 32:41)
 33. _____ offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice. (Heb. 11:4)
 34. Duke _____. These _____ the dukes of Edom. (1 Chron. 1:54; 2 words)
 36. Went _____ unto her ... called his name _____. (Gen. 38:2,3; 2 words)
 38. Of the tribe of _____. (Rev. 7:6)
 40. An altar ... in mount _____. (Josh. 8:30)
 41. The cruel _____ of asps. (Deut. 32:33)
 43. Bathsheba, the daughter of _____. (2 Sam. 11:3)
 45. Parted them to all _____, _____ every man had need. (Acts 2:45; 2 words)
 46. _____ bare to Esau Eliphaz. (Gen. 36:4)
 49. Ye _____ men with burdens. (Luke 11:46)
 52. Why make ye this _____? (Mark 5:39)
 53. When the angels _____ left them ... (Luke 2:15 NIV)
 56. Do _____ Me.
 58. Take it from _____.
- unto the children of Lot. (Deut. 2:9; 2 words)
57. _____, and Ramah, and Hazor. (Josh. 19:36)
59. Then were assembled unto _____ every _____ that trembled at the words of the God of Israel. (Ezra 9:4; 2 words)
60. People of an ancient Asian country.

DOWN

1. As many as were ordained to _____ life believed. (Acts 13:48)
2. Saying, _____ thou that destroyest the temple. (Mark 15:29)
3. From _____ to Rimmon. (Zech. 14:10)
4. Machine for weaving.
5. The sons of Midian; Ephah, and _____. (Gen. 25:4)
6. Desire the _____ milk of the word. (1 Pet. 2:2)
7. Erected an altar, and called it _____elohelsrael. (Gen. 33:20)
8. Name unknown. (abbr.)
9. This _____ that which was spoken. (Acts 2:16)
10. Barzillai the Gileadite of _____. (2 Sam. 17:27)
11. I am Alpha and _____. (Rev. 1:8)
12. _____, ha. (Job 39:25)
13. Bringing sick _____. (Acts 5:16)
18. 13th letter of Greek alphabet.
20. Sound an _____. (Joel 2:1)
21. Why should it _____

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Still time to join Serve Tour teams

It's not too late to plan to help hurting communities in Montgomery through Serve Tour March 10-11.

During Serve Tour, volunteers just like you will care for hurting communities in and around Montgomery by serving local churches, bivocational pastors, low-income schools and other organizations in need of assistance. Projects may include some light construction, painting and landscaping or hosting sports camps or block parties.

By partnering with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and the three River Region Associations, Send Relief is mak-

To register, visit alsbom.org/serve23 or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



ing it easy for you and your team to have a real, lasting impact in the lives of Montgomery's most vulnerable.

Register your team now to access free resources like prayer guides, online trainings and more.

To register, visit alsbom.org/serve23.

Church security

Want to know more about how to keep your church as safe as it can be for those who attend? Would you like to be better equipped in securing your property, children's area, transportation and finances?

The Basics of Church Se-

curity — set for March 14, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., at the State Board of Missions in Prattville — will cover it all.

The cost is \$15 per person and includes lunch and materials. To register, visit alsbom.org/event/the-basics-of-church-security-3.

Mobilize your church through Connect:316

March 16 — or 3/16 — is a great day to share the gospel using John 3:16. Encourage your church to be intentional to connect with its community through the Connect:316 Emphasis.

The overall emphasis will be March 12-19 with an elevated emphasis March 16.

For resources to help your church plan, visit makingdisciplesal.org/event/connect316-day.

Helping preschoolers build a faith foundation

By Julie Donovan
The Alabama Baptist

Most churches want to draw more families with young children. Along with the joys of ministering to preschoolers come challenges as well. From bed babies to toddlers, three biblical foundations are crucial in preschool ministry.

“Laying a foundation of love, trust and security are the most important attributes in the preschool ministry,” said Beth Baldwin, a longtime children’s leader.

Baldwin provided seven ways to build a strong faith foundation with children and their parents:

1. Consistency — Have consistent teachers and volunteers so everyone knows who will be ministering.

2. Play — Interact with preschoolers while they are in the classroom, whether playing with blocks or Play-doh. Even with toddlers, getting on the floor and rolling a ball or reading a book helps earn trust.

3. Schedule — If there is a consistent schedule in the classroom, children will become more familiar and trust you. Preschoolers will know that snacks are after Bible study or game time is after the video.

4. Guidance — Guide preschoolers in activities through helpful tools and instructions.

Special creations

5. Acceptance — Accept every child God has given you. As you do so you show God’s love.

6. Self-respect — Show each child God created them specially no matter how different they might be from others.

7. Bible — Preschoolers need to hear about God, know Jesus loves them and know the Bible is true. Make sure you have a Bible with you, even if you hold it in your lap.



Photo by Freepik

A simple question can guide children’s ministry, Baldwin said: How do we want children to view the church?

“I always want children to associate the church with God, Jesus, the Bible and happy times,” she said, “so when they grow up, they know it is a place where they feel loved.”

12 tips

Using an acrostic of BIBLE STORIES, Baldwin noted the following:

B — Be sure to consider your audience. Make sure you know age-appropriate vocabulary when teaching preschool Bible study. How old are they? How many minutes can they listen? Generally, how old they are will determine how long they can sit and be attentive.

I — In your lap, hold the Bible.

B — Become acquainted with the Bible story.

L — Learn the point of the story. Children need a central storyline to memorize and focus on. Have them repeat it back throughout the lesson.

E — Enthusiasm. The Bible is exciting! Show that

while sharing its stories.

S — Sequence the events in your story. After sharing, remind the children what the order of the story was. Pictures can help.

T — Tell the story to yourself. Repetition is good for preschoolers and adults. Preschoolers are more likely to remember the introduction and conclusion,

so you can emphasize important points there.

O — Organize. Stay organized to keep their attention.

R — Remove competitive influences that can distract. This is where a second teacher is crucial. He or she can sit by the child who is causing a distraction to help manage behavior.

I — In the story be aware

of senses that can be utilized. All preschoolers learn in different ways. Make sure you use all the senses when possible.

Focus on essentials

E — Eliminate unnecessary events and elements. There are certain accounts in the Bible that preschoolers won’t understand yet. For example, the story of the woman at the well includes mature details. Children do not need to know her life history, but you can share that she lived a life full of sin and God knew all her sins yet still loved her.

S — Seek the Spirit. The Christian storyteller does not live alone. Make sure you rely on the Holy Spirit when teaching preschoolers. Pray that the Lord will guide preparation, teaching and influence.

“There are 168 hours in a week,” Baldwin noted, “and you as a Sunday School teacher or Bible study teacher only get one maybe, two hours a week. Use your time wisely.”

Courage lives here.

Most people cannot even imagine what it feels like to watch a child take on a battle against cancer. The courage, strength and resilience our patients demonstrate every day is what inspires us to give our best. We are here when families need us the most, caring for their children and never giving up hope in their fight against cancer.

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US News

Learn more at [ChildrensAL.org/cancer](https://www.childrensal.org/cancer)

One year later

Reflecting on Southern Baptist aid, ministry to Ukrainians displaced by war

By Tessa Sanchez
International Mission Board

In 2021 and early 2022, International Mission Board missionaries serving in Ukraine heard rumors of war, which led to an overland evacuation. Looking today in the rearview mirror, they realize they couldn't have guessed the trauma about to mushroom from the east.

Less than one month after the missionaries' exodus, war made a forceful entry into the country they'd come to call home.

More than 7,100 Ukrainian civilians have been killed, families have been separated, towns and cities are decimated and immeasurable havoc has been wreaked on the eastern European nation.

That the war continues one year after the invasion comes as a surprise to many and is a testament to the interminable resolve and resilience of Ukrainians. That the Ukrainian church has grown, despite the upheaval and chaos, is a testament to the power of the gospel and the perseverance of the church.

The church's growth ballooned out from the country's borders, following like a parachute to the cities and towns where refugees found welcoming hearts and arms.

Light still shines

Ukrainian Christian refugees brought the light that could not and would not be extinguished to countries with significantly lower populations of evangelicals.

Ukraine is home to the highest percentage of evangelicals in Europe. Their dispersion meant the gospel was also dispersed.

IMB ministry to and among Ukrainians has not halted in the year since the war began. Although IMB missionaries cannot currently live in Ukraine, they remain emotionally and relationally present with Ukrainians. Through Send Relief and IMB missionary presence, Southern Baptists continue to respond to the needs of Ukrainians.



IMB missionary Dan Upchurch leads a Bible study for Ukrainian refugees in a Polish Baptist church. The church has been actively involved in meeting the needs of refugees since war wreaked havoc on the eastern European nation.

What does it mean for IMB missionaries to be steadfastly present in a time of war and exile?

Dan and Lori Upchurch served with the IMB in Lviv, Ukraine, before evacuating ahead of the Russian invasion. They now serve Ukrainian refugees in Poland with their teammates, Sarah and Kanoot Midkiff.

They helped facilitate a relief center to meet the physical needs of refugees and planted a church with their national partner.

They lead small-group Bible studies and partner with Ukrainian church planters. Dan continues to teach classes at the Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary.

After evacuating Kharkiv, Ross and Kasey Lewis and Linda Gray, joined later by journeyman Harrison Martin have invested their lives ministering to Ukrainian refugees in

Romania. They minister in refugee centers and now host mobile medical clinics throughout the region. They recently purchased a van and ultrasound machines.

Mike and JuliAn Domke took up temporary residence in Hungary, where they minister to Ukrainian refugees. Mike also oversees 20 Send Relief projects in Ukraine and makes frequent trips there.

IMB missionaries who serve across Europe have added ministry to Ukrainians to their routines.

David and Shannon Brown and Ayden and Lorelei Klarke serve in Moldova and partner with the Moldovan Baptist Union to serve the many

Ukrainian refugees who crossed the country's eastern border.

The world's greatest problem is still lostness.

IMB missionaries and their na-

tional partners are still running the race the Lord has set before them — a race to share the promise of the gospel with Ukrainians in their hour of greatest need.

Welcoming refugees

In the first few months of the war, IMB and Send Relief efforts centered around providing food, supplies, access to shelter, and emotional and spiritual care. IMB missionaries, European Baptists and Southern Baptist volunteers met refugees fleeing across the border and met them in the cities where they landed.

As the days turned to weeks and the weeks turned to months, churches in multiple countries continued to take in refugees and welcome them into their congregations.

New congregations of war-weary refugees formed. Refugee children attended Christian camps and reclaimed some of the childhood they had lost. IMB missionaries invested their lives in the refugees living in their cities and made trips back into the country to visit national partners. Missionaries and their national partners hosted Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas parties, which provided much-needed time for community and celebration.

The poignancy of the gospel and the generosity of Christians led to changed lives.

Southern Baptist generosity knew no bounds. Gifts to Ukraine relief thus far have totaled \$12.9 million, with \$10 million given to Send Relief and \$2.9 million given to the IMB.

IMB missionaries developed digital engagement strategies to reach Ukrainians both inside and outside the country. The reach has been astronomical — 22.5 million people visited a website created as an outreach tool.

Only the Lord knows how long the war will last. Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there's something about Jesus' name — the name that extends past rumors of war.



A volunteer serves soup to a Ukrainian refugee at the Baptist Church of Chelms, Poland.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 5

Explore the Bible

By Ben Stubblefield

Visiting assistant professor of Christian studies, University of Mobile



WHY WASN'T THIS SOLD? John 12:1–11

People are coming into Jerusalem for the Passover. Pilgrims are preparing to remember the deliverance from Pharaoh. Some are celebrating Jesus' presence at the feast.

The chief priests are plotting His death. Jesus has resurrected Lazarus, causing a stir in Bethany, and He's beginning His final days with His disciples. Time seems to slow down as John tells of a dinner during which Jesus' presence is honored, His motives are questioned and His worship causes division.

Honored (1–3)

Jesus, now in Bethany six days before Passover, shares a meal with His friends, during which Mary anoints His feet and wipes them with her hair. There is a discussion among scholars regarding this event and a similar one described in Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 7. While there are some differences, it is likely that John, Matthew and Mark are describing the same event, but the Luke 7 anointing is a different occurrence.

The level of self-humbling, devotion and extravagance is remarkable. Mary exemplifies the ministry of Christ's service in John 13 and models an appropriate response to Christ's person and work. The Lord's people are happy to highly honor Him who gave His all for us.

Questioned (4–8)

Judas responds with false indignation. He argues that such a remarkable gift (one denari equals one day's wages) could have been sold and given to the poor and, according to verse 6, line his pockets.

Jesus' response does not excuse stinginess. Instead, He reminds the disciples there will be constant opportunities to alleviate the hardships of the poor but few remaining opportunities to care for His body.

I remember hearing a prominent

evangelist criticized for his evangelistic methodology. The criticism ironically came from a leader of a denomination on the numerical decline.

The evangelist listened and responded, "Well, I suppose I like my way of doing evangelism more than your way of not doing evangelism." Now, we all need to be careful theologically, and there's certainly room for rebuke, correction and improvement in aspects of church life. But sometimes criticism doesn't come from love. It's often born out of jealousy, self-righteousness and greed. We need to be careful that our cynicism doesn't get in the way of people worshipping the risen Christ.

Division (9–11)

There was probably a large crowd in Jerusalem because of Passover. Undoubtedly, news traveled quickly. People were curious to see a resurrected Lazarus and the One who raised him. On account of their time in Bethany, verse 11 says many of the Jews were believing in Jesus.

The chief priests, hardened in their hearts, saw these events as catalysts for greater heresy and made plans to execute not only Jesus but also Lazarus. There are many contrasts in this scene — love and treachery, sacrifice and greed, homage and conspiracy.

The Samaritan woman in John 4 made an effort to tell others about Jesus, but the text does not indicate Lazarus made such an attempt. The evidence of a resurrected life and a willingness to bear witness to Christ's power was effective in bringing many to faith in Jesus.

It's a simple truth: we're called to be witnesses, to testify how God has changed our lives.

Not every believer is called to be a pastor, career missionary, deacon or teacher, but every believer is a witness. That witness draws people to Christ and honors His holy name.

"On account of [Lazarus] many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus."

John 12:11

Bible Studies for Life

By James R. Strange

Professor of biblical and religious studies, Samford University



JESUS MET MY GREATEST NEED (John 4:7–18, 25–26)

This week we begin a series focused on encountering Jesus.

Today we read the story of Jesus' conversation at Jacob's well in Samaria near Sychar (Shechem) and Mount Gerizim.

In 722 B.C., the Assyrians destroyed the cities of Israel and deported nearly the entire population. A remnant intermarried with non-Israelites (2 Kings 17).

Their descendants built a temple to Yahweh on Mount Gerizim in the fifth century B.C. Probably remembering Samaritan objections to the earlier rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 4:6–24), the Judean ruler John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple in 110 BC. Verses 9 and 20–22 refer to Jewish and Samaritan prejudices.

Jesus revealed a greater thirst in me. (7–14)

It was not unusual for Jews to travel through Samaria. What stands out is Jesus waiting at a well when a woman comes to draw water (vv. 6–7, 27).

For John's readers, this noonday meeting contrasts with Nicodemus' nighttime conversation (3:2). As He did then, Jesus uses probing questions to elicit responses that draw closer and closer to the woman's problem. She needs to know who Jesus is and to receive what He offers.

The needs are universal. Perhaps that is why we are not told her name — an anonymous Samaritan represents all humanity.

"Living water" refers to water from a spring, stream, lake or rain runoff — God's provision. Jewish people, and perhaps Samaritans, would have associated it with ritual purity (2:6; Num. 19:17). Jesus, however, uses it to refer to the eternal

life God offers to all who respond to Him with faith (3:15–16).

Thirst returns and must be slaked with water from without, but Jesus's living water becomes a spring gushing up from within the one who accepts it.

Jesus is talking about rebirth from above, which indeed the woman experiences.

Jesus revealed my sin. (15–18)

The motif of anti-courtship at the well continues. The emphasis is not on the woman's husbands or her current relationship.

Like physical water, these men symbolize impermanent, ineffectual attempts to fill the need for God. Jesus wants the woman to be transformed to live now as she will one day in the place that Jesus has prepared for her (14:3). Jesus, the Life and Light of the world (1:4), gives that rebirth to all people of faith.

Jesus revealed that He is the Messiah, the one to trust. (25–26)

It might be ironic that in verse 11 the woman calls Jesus "Lord" ("Sir" in most translations). This is half of Thomas' confession after the resurrection (20:28). Like Thomas, the woman progresses in knowledge and faith, first recognizing Jesus is a Jew and then that He is a prophet.

Jesus reveals He is the Messiah whom she expects, but in verse 29 she is still unsure. Even with partial faith, she becomes an evangelist and people believe, first through her testimony and then because they encounter Jesus (vv. 39–42).

Is it not the same with us? Through faith great and small, we proclaim Jesus as Messiah.

By God's grace, those who hear have the opportunity to meet Jesus, and in that encounter they learn He is truly the Savior of the world.

"But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again."

John 4:14a

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Comedian leaves audiences inspired amid mental health struggles

Comedian Mickey Bell wants people who attend his shows to laugh, but he hopes audiences leave with more than a smile.

He wants them to “feel encouraged,” he said, in large part because humor has helped him reach a significant personal milestone.

“Knowing that I am now living my life more fulfilled than I ever have before, ever in the history of living on this earth, I wish that I could get everyone to that point to where they never had to fake it, but that they could actually enjoy life,” Bell said.

Bell’s mix of comedy and encouragement comes from his willingness to share difficult struggles from his past, which he acknowledges haven’t fully gone away.

Growing up, Bell’s humor helped protect him from being hurt.

As an adult he experienced a time with depression so severe, he wasn’t sure how he could go on. He still battles anxiety, especially concerning crowds.

Being transparent

“I may look like a very outgoing person, and I pretty much am, but there is a thing called ‘too many people being around you,’” he said.

Bell’s transparency is one reason



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz

Comedian Mickey Bell films his first comedy special at a sold-out performance at the StarDome Comedy Club in Birmingham in 2021. He is currently in negotiations to film another comedy special — this time for network television.

he is loved by audiences. He often is told, “This was the hardest I have laughed in a long time.”

The feedback inspires Bell, especially when it’s from others who deal with mental health issues. Those who attend his shows trust him to be funny, he said. And some know his personal story, which inspires them to get out themselves.

“For some of them it was the first time out of their house in a very long time, especially if they are dealing with some sort of mental illness or they’ve had some kind of tragedy in their life,” he said.

“I don’t take those compliments mildly at all. To know that they thought that my hard work behind the scenes paid off, presenting something that was funny enough

to move them and to encourage them — especially if they have had a hard time — that just means a lot to me right now.”

Bell wants those attending his shows to know that not only are they going to have a good time, but they will hear about some tough subjects — his story along with his depression and anxiety.

His main hope is that his voice will bring calm.

His desire is that from what he says, audience members will “have the know-how to take the next steps of defeating their mental

illness or living with that depression.”

There are a lot more hurting people in the world than he realized, Bell confessed. Many have admit-

ted to him that they are faking their way through life.

He understands because he used to be that person. Comedy has been a productive outlet for him.

His entertainment journey has taken him to places he could never have imagined.

He did 170 shows last year and is on track to match that this year. He continues to work on his craft and is finding his voice and the type of humor he wants to do.

Reaching people

In 2021, Bell was named Comedian of the Year by the Inspirational Country Music Awards. Also in 2021, he filmed his first comedy special at a sold-out performance at the StarDome Comedy Club in Birmingham. He is currently in negotiations to film another comedy special — this time for network television.

However, Bell’s passion still is about sharing his testimony with those affected by mental illness.

“God is the God of second chances,”

Bell declared. “When He talks about redemption, He means it. I am the picture boy of that. I don’t shy away from that. I talk about it every night. I’m one of the very few people who will stand on stage and admit their shortcomings every night. [I’m] not afraid to do so.”

He wants everyone in the audience to be “confident that they’re gonna laugh and have a good time, but they’re gonna leave with a little bit of inspiration and feeling like, ‘You know what? I can take on another day.’”

For more about Bell and upcoming performances, visit themickeybell.com.

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.

“God is the God of second chances.

When He talks about redemption, He means it.”

Mickey Bell comedian

Resources for the VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Do you know someone who's visually or physically impaired and finds it difficult to read?

The National Library Service offers an audio player and a variety of audio material for free.

A roundup of the week's news from The Alabama Baptist and other sources is now available in this format.

Call 205-870-4720, ext. 108, or email ahacker@thealabamabaptist.org for more information and next steps.

The Alabama Baptist

Step by step

By Marissa Postell
Lifeway Research

How can congregations be better equipped to read the Bible?

Although Christians confess the Bible is God's Word, many don't read it regularly — much less daily.

According to Lifeway Research, 1 in 3 Americans (32%) who regularly attend a Protestant church say they read the Bible personally every day. Close to 1 in 8 (12%) admit they rarely or never read the Bible. Reading the Bible can be challenging — even for the Christian who believes Scripture is the inspired Word of God.

George Guthrie, professor of New Testament at Regent College, believes reading the Bible is foundational for all of life. He says the church should come alongside believers, equipping them with tools for reading the Bible well and developing a heart eager to hear from God.

In his book, “A Short Guide to Reading the Bible Better,” Guthrie gives Bible readers a road map for reading God's Word well and offers pastors a resource for equipping their congregations to read the Bible better next year (and beyond).

Here's a look at a recent conversation with Guthrie.

Q: Why do you believe the regular practice of personal Bible reading is the number one predictor of spiritual health?

A: Reading the Bible is foundational for every other aspect of life. Years of research projects demonstrate that Bible reading is the number one predictor of whether a person is thriving spiritually. The spiritual reason behind this is that hearing from God on a regular basis is the foundation for life. It gives us a basis for who we are as people



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and for how we're to live in the world.

If I am living out of an openness to God in my daily life, it's going to affect the way I relate to my wife, do my job and interact with my neighbors.

Q: Why is it, then, so many Christians get hung up in their faith journey when it comes to Bible reading?

A: One thing that's very common for many of us, including myself, is that we are busy.

We live in a frenetic culture that is running all the time. We are distracted by the pressures and pleasures of life. Another reason we struggle with settling into Scripture is because we're dealing with an ancient body of literature. We don't always get the point. And we don't always understand why what's happening in the story is significant.

For whatever reason, in the church we have not gotten into a pattern of

giving people basic training in how to read the Bible.

We say, “Read the Bible.” But how many churches have a basic yearly course on how to read the Bible effectively? We need to think through our strategy for helping people get into a rhythm of life that would include reading the Bible.

Q: Why is it important for pastors to help equip people with tools to understand Scripture on their own?

A: There are lots of tools out there, but a lot of laypeople are in contexts where they haven't been exposed to those tools. Pastors can be facilitators of helping people get in touch with good tools.

Q: Can you give pastors a vision of what it could look like for their congregation to read the Bible better?

A: When we think about church history, what happened when people

started getting the Bible in their own language? It began to transform the culture. More people started thinking carefully about the church, leadership in the church and their own lives.

When we invest in building a community of Bible readers, it begins transforming the culture itself.

Q: How is better Bible reading about more than simply reading the Bible more?

A: Eugene Peterson talks about the need to settle into more of a leisurely reading of the Bible rather than trying to stuff information into our brains.

We need to foster a type of reading based on a deep rhythm of life. And that kind of reading is not textbook kind of reading.

I tried to make my book beautiful and compelling in the way I talked about the different aspects of Bible reading.

In Bible reading, we're not trying to master the Bible, seeing if we can become the champion of Bible quizzes. We're trying to be mastered by the Bible — by the Master of the Bible. It's about a heart relationship with God.

Q: How might it be helpful for a church body to commit to reading the Bible better together?

A: It's easier to read the Bible when you have support in a community. There are times in which we, as people, need a spiritual ecosystem where we are drawing from other people around us, getting encouragement from them.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by Lifeway Research.

3 things to consider before downsizing your ministry staff

By Phil Cooke

philcooke.com

Anytime the economy is struggling, including inflationary times, it's perfectly normal for leaders to look at downsizing their organizations.

Right now we're seeing massive layoffs in the tech sector, at entertainment companies in Hollywood and major retailers. So it's not a surprise that many pastors, ministry and nonprofit leaders naturally think this is a good time to cut back on their staff.

Here's three important thoughts to consider:

1. When you downsize, you're losing talent. Keep in mind current employees know their jobs, know the



Photo by Drazen Zigic on Freepik

organization's culture — and in churches, they know the congregation and people they serve. Once the crisis is over, you'll be rehiring people who don't know the culture, and have little to no idea who they're serving. Ramping back up will take

time and be expensive.

2. Survivor guilt is real. It happens to people who are able to keep their jobs when others are cut. The problem with survivor guilt is that it can hurt the team's motivation and devastate morale. It can also damage personal

relationships between long-time friends and associates.

3. Restaffing is expensive and time consuming. Eventually the crisis will end, and you'll start growing again. But new employees have to be selected and then trained. Recruiting good people takes time, and training takes even longer. And during that period, you'll be operating at less than your best.

Obviously if you have underperforming employees who are hurting the organization, then a crisis might be a good time to make those changes.

I'm a big believer that leaders need to be vigilant about failing employees. But with a good team that may be difficult to replace,

I suggest you explore every possible alternative to keep from decimating the staff.

I've seen churches and ministry organizations who cut too quickly and too close to the bone, and it took years and sometimes decades to correct the mistake.

Don't make that mistake.

Bottom line

Use a crisis to rethink priorities, strategy and planning, but don't be too quick to cut the people who have made you successful in the first place.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was written by Phil Cooke, a writer, television producer and media consultant, and originally published at philcooke.com. Published with permission.

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Living the D-Life

Sunday School, D-groups or both?

Should churches do Sunday morning Bible study classes (Sunday School) or discipleship groups throughout the week?

While some may pick one or the other, I think both are vital to the health and mission of the church.

Most people who visit a church come seeking biblical community. A fully graded Sunday School is a great place for them to find this.

Initially, they may not be ready for the higher level of accountability that comes from participating in a D-group.

However, your Sunday morning Bible study classes are a great place to fish for people to connect in a D-group where they can intentionally learn to make disciples who make disciples.

Equipping your people for a “lifestyle” of disciple-making would not compete with your Sunday School, but would complement it, and in many ways, it would complete its mission.

Certainly, this will require great intentionality.

First, you must develop a plan to equip your people to be personal disciple makers.

Then, you must empower them to begin D-groups of three to five people that can meet anytime and anywhere.

The single focus of these groups is on intentional disciple-making, which includes the three-fold purpose of:

1. Growing in spiritual maturity.
 2. Serving in missional ministry.
 3. Reproducing disciple makers.
- In effect, this would place at



Photo courtesy of Bill Wilks

the core of your Sunday School program a well trained group of disciple-making people.

In time, your Sunday morning Bible study classes would have no choice but to multiply as a result of the disciple-making movement taking place at the core of every class.

Kingdom growth

The multiplication of D-groups resulting in the multiplication of Sunday School classes would equal great Kingdom growth.

Would you like to see a genuine disciple-making movement at the core of your church?

Do you have a plan for equipping your people to be personal disciple makers?

As pastors, our job is to preach the Word of God and to equip our people for the work of ministry.

We must equip our people for the most important work of ministry and train them for a lifestyle of disciple-making.

I would love to help with this. As a pastor of more than 35 years, God has given me a passion for personal disciple-making. This passion led me to be the founder of D-Life.

D-Life exists to equip common people to be Christ-like disciple makers.

Through D-Life, my wife, Rondie, and I have traveled extensively to train thousands of believers how to make disciples who make disciples.

D-Life is the most intentional, personal and reproducible process I know for teaching ordinary disciples to be fishers of men.

Genuine disciple-making is different from Sunday School. True

disciple-making is not a program. It's a lifestyle.

Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). Clearly, this was an invitation to become a disciple who would learn to make other disciples, not participate in a program.

Investing in people

As a way of life, Jesus invested His time in training common people to become disciple makers. After three years of personal training, He commanded them to go and do what He had trained them to do.

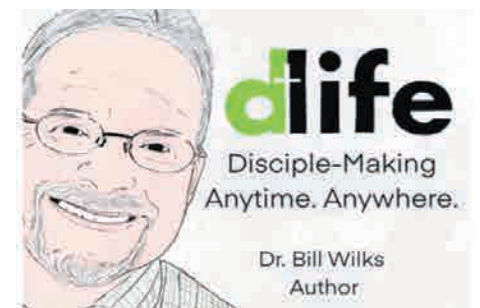
The Great Commission of the church was and still is to “Go make disciples” (Matt. 28:18–20).

The crystal clear mission of every church is to make disciples who make disciples. This was the key to the rapid spiritual and numerical growth of the early church.

Jesus didn't teach His disciples how to add; He taught them how to multiply. And multiply they did.

With no church buildings, they grew more rapidly than we ever have with our fine facilities.

If today's church wants to reestablish itself as a powerful force on earth for the Kingdom of God, it must reignite the disciple-making movement of these early disciples.



About Gen Z

By Tyler Hoffpauir

Baptist Collegiate Ministry campus minister at Arkansas State University

2 ways your church can engage digital natives

Every generation is different. Generation Z is the youngest generation for whom we have been able to collect data and study their habits.

If your church wants to connect better with youth and young adults, here are two shifts to pay attention to:

1. Personal connection with the leader.

Gen Z is full of digital natives. As they have grown up on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, they have had direct access to celebrities and other people they view as influencers or leaders throughout their lives.

They feel it should be no different with their pastors or church leaders.

Ryan Scantling is the Baptist Collegiate Ministry campus minister at the University of Arkansas, and he says that when a young person attends your event, they feel like they only know the people they came with and the person on the platform.

Therefore, we must create unique ways of connecting the person on the platform to the young person in the audience.

One way we have done that with young adults is through text message response.

During the invitation time the leader puts their personal phone number on the screen and asks everyone to text them at least their name and a prayer request.

There may be additional requests such as “Tell me if you surrendered your life to Christ,” or “Tell me if you want to go on this missions trip.”

Through this type of direct com-

munication with the leader, we have learned of suicidal thoughts, family members passing, relationship struggles, calls to ministry and so much more.

It also gives the leader the ability to text back the next day and offer prayer or to set up a meeting for ministerial counseling.

The leader can also follow up with meaningful questions about the student’s life the next time they see the student.

Similar things can be done on social media through direct messaging.

As with any form of digital communication, it is essential to be cautious and wise when interacting with the next generation. Ensure that every contact brings glory to God and points that person to Christ.

2. The goal of education.

Think about this: Students have access to more information than any generation before them.

Older generations might think that social media is a place where people go to share family photos and simply stay connected to their friends, but Gen Z uses social

media like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram as a primary source of information. Some of the content they consume is even spiritual and forms their belief system.

How do they know if the clip of the preacher on TikTok is theologically sound?

How do they know what they find on Google is faithful and in line with what your church believes when they look up a Bible verse they don’t understand?

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Tim Elmore, the founder and CEO of Growing Leaders, is an expert on leading the next generation.

He says the goal of education has now shifted from transferring knowledge from one person to another.

The new goal of education is to teach students where to find reliable information.

In other words, we are not just teaching students what to think, we are now teaching them how to think and who thinks well. Therefore, it’s important to point students toward relevant and reliable biblical content providers, commentaries and scholars.

This is best done in community and relationship. As students trust you more, they will become more trusting of the sources you point them toward.

The rise of the search engine also means we must be careful with what we say from the platform.

We used to live in a time where if the pastor or leader said it, then everyone believed it. Now almost everyone in the room has a supercomputer in their pocket.

When it comes to the most connected generation in history, we cannot ignore the changes around us; we must use them for Kingdom purposes.

Pastor Michael Catt, former senior pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia, said, “Whoever wants the next generation the most will get them.” Let’s focus on connecting and leading Gen Z together.



Unsplash.com

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