

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

The Alabama Department of Human Resources hopes to recruit at least one adult foster home in each of Alabama's 67 counties. The state currently has 21 adult foster homes.



Photo by katemangostar on Freepik

Safe environment

Foster homes for at-risk elderly and disabled adults an emerging need in Alabama

As the state's population ages, the Alabama Department of Human Resources is seeking adult foster homes to help protect and care for vulnerable adults at risk for mistreatment.

Adult foster care enables at-risk elderly and disabled adults to stay in homes instead of institutional settings when relocation is

necessary to keep them safe.

More than 600 vulnerable adults in Alabama are placed somewhere other than their own homes because of a high risk for abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Many require the services of facilities like nursing homes, but some are better suited for homes within their communities.

To serve those individuals, DHR hopes to recruit at least one adult

foster home in each of Alabama's 67 counties. The state currently has 21 adult foster homes.

'Better quality of life'

"Having more adult foster homes will promote greater independence and a better quality of life for vulnerable adults who require minimal care," said Nancy Buckner, Alabama DHR commissioner. "We encourage Alabamians with space

in their homes to give adult foster care a try and experience the life-changing rewards firsthand."

This program serves adults who can live safely in a home environment but need help or supervision with daily activities. Most have been victimized by family members or caregivers in the past.

Valinda Young, an adult foster care provider in Enterprise, said (See 'New ministry,' page 7)

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Baptist Nursing Fellowship — A Christian professional fellowship for nurses, nursing students, other medical professionals and friends who share common goals and purposes.



'A story to tell'

Writers encouraged to 'publish His glory' at 2023 SCWC

By Jessica Ingram
The Alabama Baptist

More than 100 writers and media professionals gathered June 9–10 for the 2023 Southern Christian Writers Conference.

The annual conference, founded in 1991, brings together published and aspiring writers for instruction, encouragement and fellowship.

Cheryl Wray, director of the SCWC, took the reins of the conference five years ago after working alongside her parents and SCWC founders David and Joanne Sloan for nearly three decades.

The conference has since expanded to include regional workshops throughout the year and annual book awards.

TAB Media Group is an SCWC partner.

This year's conference, held at Valley View Baptist Church in Leeds, featured workshops varying in topic from design and social media to writing book proposals, fiction, screenplays and more.

During the conference, Karen Moore was presented with the 2023 Joanne Sloan National Award for the Encouragement of Writers. Moore is an award-winning author of more than 100 books, runs Literary Management Group with her husband, Bruce Barbour, and has encouraged writers for years through articles, her blog, podcasts and speaking at conferences.

'Greatest adventure'

"We have a story to tell because God has done great things in our lives and we want to share that," Moore said. "That's why we write. We want to make a difference."

God is a storyteller, Moore said, and He's written the perfect story for those who follow Him.

"We want to take people to the greatest romance and the greatest



Karen Moore (right) receives the 2023 Joanne Sloan National Award for the Encouragement of Writers at this year's Southern Christian Writers Conference held at Valley View Baptist Church in Leeds June 9–10.

adventure of their lives — God," she said. "So don't let anyone keep you from doing what you've been called to do. We are going to keep going. No excuses. We will stop at nothing to get the Lord's work done."

Barbour, a 40-year veteran of book publishing, echoed those sentiments in his keynote address later in the evening.

"God is the ultimate Creator and each one of you is created in His image," Barbour said.

"He is your example. What an opportunity God has given you to be His witness and messenger through writing."

During his talk, Barbour said there are five big questions and answers for every writer striving to tell God's story:

- ▶ Why? Because God said so.
- ▶ How? Publish it.
- ▶ Where? Everywhere.
- ▶ Who? You!
- ▶ When? Now!

Saturday's keynote speaker, Valerie Fraser Luesse — a Southern fiction novelist and retired senior travel editor for Southern Living — discussed how storytelling and faith can intersect in writing.

"Jesus often used simple stories — parables — to teach abstract concepts such as justice and faith," she said, noting that writers can do the same.

"My characters aren't superheroes or villains," Luesse said. "They are just ordinary people faced with hard questions — hard questions just like the ones we'll all face at some point."

Award winners

The conference concluded with the recognition of the winners of the 2022 SCWC Writing Awards. Two TAB writers were among the winners in the newspaper category.

First place went to Tracy Riggs Frontz for "Seed of Hope," published in The Alabama Baptist; second place went to Laura Lee Leathers for the Rosalie Hunt series, published in The Alabama Baptist; and third place went to April McCay for "Hope," published in The Blount Countian.

Awards were also given in other categories, including magazine article, short story, poem and blog post.

Read more about this year's conference and see a full list of winners at tabonline.org/23-scwc.

To view a photo gallery from the conference, go to tabonline.org/scwc-2023.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 13.

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST
will not publish a July 6 issue.
The next issue will be July 13.

OPINION



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



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Resist temptation to devour each other in need for a win

It's possibly more common than we realize — exaggerating the truth and demonizing the opposition to give our preferred side an edge.

Creating a strawman scenario, maybe even a common enemy, and then professing to have the simple solution happens across all parts of life, even in our faith families.

Vote this way, follow this guideline, support this person — whatever or whomever is being posited as the answer should be carefully evaluated before going all in with support.

After diligent review and time spent in prayer seeking the most important guidance, which is that of the Lord through meditation on His word, we can have the confidence our decision on how to proceed is motivationally pure.

God's got this

Additionally, we will have peace that God can handle what might happen because of the various decisions made. He's not limited by anything we do.

What is unfortunate is when Christians act unChristlike in their advocacy for a certain position and/or demonstrate ugliness toward those holding a different conviction.

It is even more disturbing to discover some who are OK with being judgmental, partaking in name calling and walking the line on slandering another individual but protest when it happens in reverse.

An “ends justify the means” mentality is dangerous and should frighten us regarding our integrity if we find ourselves participating in such actions.

We should also question whether we've heightened ourselves above the Lord, thinking He needs us to help Him out.

The ability to make the effort to understand the other side and show compassion in the process only enhances our witness. It doesn't need to be feared.

Allowing someone with an opposing view the opportunity to share his or her reasoning and

truly listening with an intent to understand does not equate to agreeing with nor accepting the viewpoint.

Demonstrates confidence

It doesn't mean we have sinned; it doesn't mean we don't believe the Bible.

Instead, it demonstrates our confidence in our own understanding and showcases the strength of Christ in us.

We truly can stand strong on convictions and work calmly and respectfully to share our interpretation without rejecting someone who might be wrestling with the issue at hand.

But it's harder that way. It takes more time and energy and means we might end up not having all the answers.

It also could lead us to think more deeply on a subject we thought we had settled in our mind, and that likely scares us a bit.

At the same time, it could confirm what we've determined we believe on the matter and provide clarity for others.

We all need the freedom to think deeply, question consistently and discuss thoroughly as we work through a specific topic.

Compounding issues

Even as the number of difficult life and cultural issues seem to be compounding on top of each other, leaving us with a continual sense of being beaten up, I urge you to resist the temptation to devour each other in the need for a win.

Praying, thinking, discussing important for next steps

Those remaining part of Southern Baptist life following the great divide in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s found a way to co-exist even while not agreeing on every aspect of the nonessentials of the faith.

What would have been seen as secondary issues even when the distinctions were being outlined and implemented 40 years ago are gradually surfacing as potential

top-level concerns for some.

While the strength of Southern Baptist life begins with the local church and is set up for the associations to handle concerns with individual congregations, discussions on the national convention floor can sometimes create disharmony.

As the soon-to-be-named SBC task force begins its work studying what constitutes being in “friendly cooperation” within the family of

Southern Baptists, let's commit to pray diligently, read widely and think carefully as well.

Research material and educational information will appear in The Baptist Paper periodically.

As a subscriber to The Alabama Baptist, you can receive The Baptist Paper at a special rate. Learn more by calling 800-803-5201 or check out thebaptistpaper.org. —JDR

Your Voice



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

Unity without uniformity in the body of Christ

By Pastor Luke Holmes
First Baptist Church Tishomingo, Oklahoma

Uniformity is almost impossible to come by, but Christians can experience unity in the body of Christ if they are willing to work for it. Unity among Christians is more than a buzzword; it is a command given to us in Scripture.

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul tells believers to work to maintain unity among themselves. But that seems harder and harder to do these days, sadly even among Christians. The diversity of our churches and our denominations means we will never have uniformity. But we can't escape the command Paul gives us: "Keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

This doesn't mean we should ignore real differences in doctrine among fellow Christians. However, it does mean we should work hard to stay in unity with others and not look for every chance to disagree.

3 ways to model unity

Here are three ways we can model this unity in our churches and across bodies of believers.

1. Be certain of the essentials.

Much of the division we face centers around the difference between first and second-tier doctrines. Christians who work together are able to do more than they could ever do apart, but it is not without challenges. We must be certain of what we believe and what doctrines are essential.

2. Model Christ's love for others.

Many people are more than willing to hold onto the essentials and proclaim them loudly. But we must do so in a manner that reflects the heart of Christ. Holding on to the essentials and treating others with kindness and respect are not mutually exclusive. Modeling Christ's love for others can be as simple as giving someone the benefit of the doubt instead of jumping to the worst conclusion about what they say.

3. Work to find common ground under the cross.

The biblical call to unity within the body of Christ is not just for people who believe as we do on every single point. Paul's commands to bear "with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2b) and "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) imply it will take work to keep unity within the church and among fellow Christians. True unity never comes easily but is always worth it.

It takes work, grace and conviction to live in unity with others. It also takes a desire to see the gospel spread. Do the work necessary to live in unity with fellow believers for the sake of the Kingdom and the spread of the gospel.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Adapted for space from "How we can maintain unity without uniformity in the body of Christ," originally published at research.lifeway.com. Used with permission.)

We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God.

We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all those blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue or our own.

Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

Abraham Lincoln

God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?

Thomas Jefferson

Without God, there is no virtue, because there's no prompting of the conscience. Without God, we're mired in the material, that flat world that tells us only what the senses perceive. Without God, there is a coarsening of the society. And without God, democracy will not and cannot long endure.

If we ever forget that we're one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.

Ronald Reagan

For freedom, Christ set us free" (Gal. 5:1a). Paul begins the fifth chapter of Galatians with this powerful statement. The mission, message and ministry of Christ all centered on freedom — freedom from the bondage of sin that captures humanity.

Throughout the New Testament, Scripture speaks to the freedom the believer finds only in Christ Jesus — freedom from sin, death and condemnation.

Paul was not only the chief sinner (1 Tim. 1:15), but he was also the foremost speaker

on freedom. He reminded the church at Corinth that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is also freedom (2 Cor. 3:17).

To Galatia, he gave a charge to not "use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love" (Gal. 5:13). ...

As Christians, freedom should be our desire for everyone we meet, as this is the mission of Christ. It is for freedom we have been set free.

Natasha Meniffee
"5 Facts About Juneteenth"
research.lifeway.com

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“When people abide in Christ, others’ lives are transformed.”

SANDY WISDOM-MARTIN
Executive director, national Woman’s Missionary Union

We live in a changing world and a changing culture. I have never lived in a time like we live in now where right is wrong and sin is being celebrated like it is today. The new sin is confusion over sexual identity, and it seems like the whole culture is caught up in this sin.

We must love the lost and people who are confused about their sexual orientation, but we can never give in to the sins of today. Yet this is just one sin that is being embraced by our culture. There are many other sins in our society that are tearing the moral fabric of our society apart. We need to pray for the lost and let them know that God loves them and wants to deliver them from their sins.

Robert Smith
Director of missions
Muscle Shoals Baptist
Association

Spiritual drifting is subtle, barely noticeable and ever so slightly moves you away from your relationship with God. Drift a little today. Drift a little more tomorrow and the next day. Finally, one day you wake up in the middle of the lake or 1250 miles from home. (p. 45)

Bill Brewster
Author
“Revival: It’s Time to Live Again”

Joy is the overflowing expression of the Lord Jesus living in us. When the Holy Spirit sets up residence in our lives, joy is what is produced.

Roc Collins
Strategic objectives director
Tennessee Baptist Mission Board

Statistics continue to show that the churches who do VBS and take it seriously have more baptisms than the others, so if you want to raise baptisms, do VBS.

Ben Mandrell
President and CEO
Lifeway Christian Resources

The word for encourager in the New Testament is the same word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit — “the one called to your side.” This means that encouragement can be among the most godly things we do since those we meet may be experiencing pain or loss.

One reason we should be kind to others is because of a surprising exhortation in the Book of Hebrews: “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2). I sometimes chide myself with this verse when I get frustrated by panhandlers on the street asking for money. The better side of my nature reminds me this may be a di-

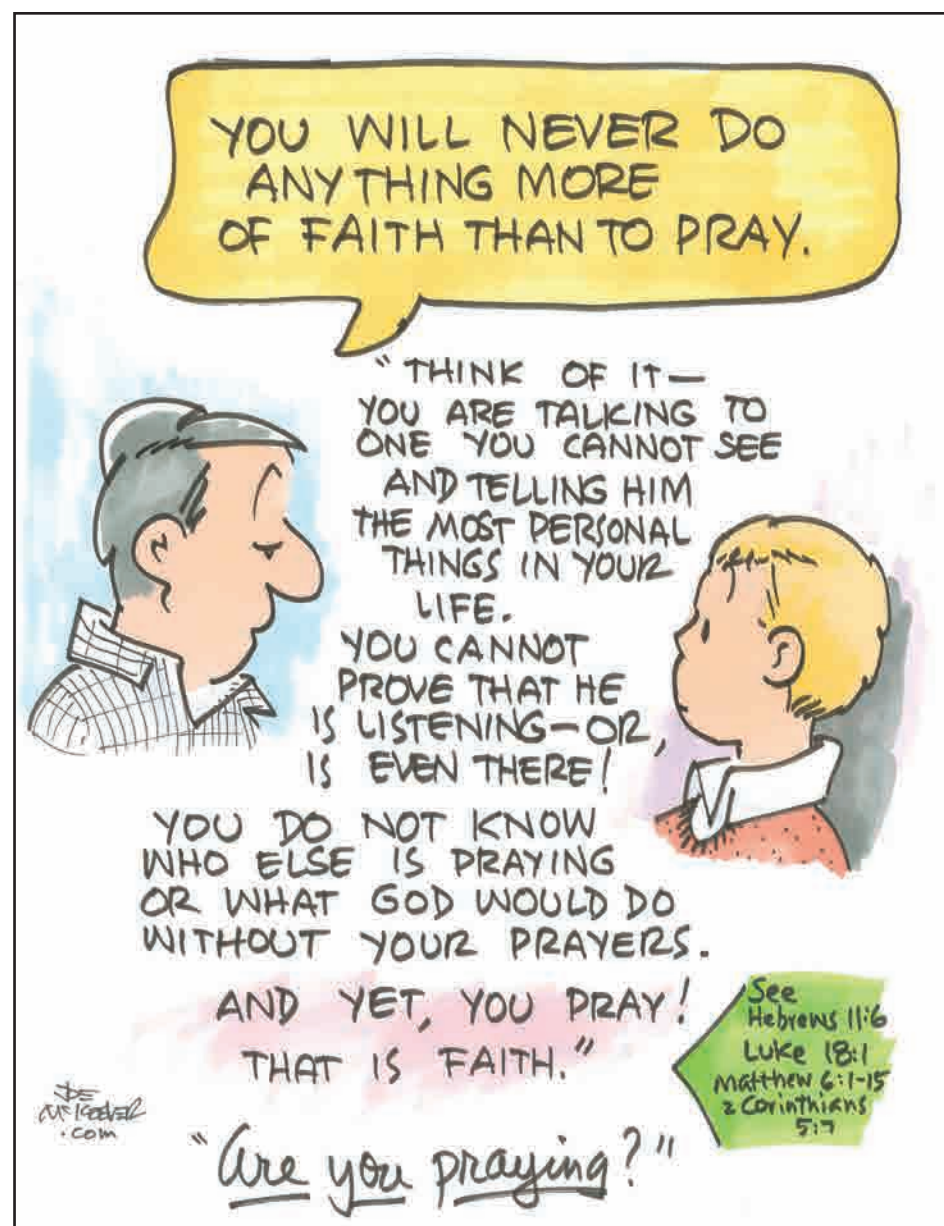
vine appointment to minister to an angel and thus demonstrate my love for God.

Another reason to be kind is that we live in debt. The Apostle Paul reminded us to be charitable toward others since this is exactly what God did for us (Eph. 4:32).

Pastor Michael J. Brooks
Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster

Job prayed when he had all and nothing. Prayer is not about your circumstances as much as it is about who God is.

Bob Lowman
Executive director
Metrolina Baptist Association,
Charlotte, North Carolina



‘Will dogs go to heaven?’

We don’t like to talk about death, do we? Yet the shadow of death that David talked about in Psalm 23 has certainly fallen around me and people I love these past few days.

My heart is heavy because of the death of a beloved church member, Lois, and one of my best friends ever, Jim. Another death that is impacting me at this moment is the impending death of my daughter’s dog, Oreo. If you ever met Oreo, you would understand why she is named after a cookie.

Oreo has been part of our family for 13 years. So the question arises: “Will dogs go to heaven?” Can we find comfort in that?

While the Bible tells us that humans have a soul and are created in the very image of God, dogs are not. But while dogs are not the image of God, I certainly believe they are agents of God — gifts to us. And the Bible does speak of animals in heaven in passages like Isaiah 11:6–9, Ecclesiastes 3:18–21 and others. Revelation tells us that Jesus will be on a horse, for crying out loud!

So yes, I believe dogs go to heaven. Who knows? Perhaps they can even communicate with us, and after the Lord greets me and I greet family members and friends like Jim, Lois and others, Oreo will come up to me and say, “Hey, Paw Paw! (That’s what she called me.) Thanks for the head scratches and belly rubs and treats. They were awfully good.” And I’ll tell her that I enjoyed them about as much as she did.

As I told a little girl who asked me that deep theological question about dogs in heaven: “I can’t imagine heaven without ‘em.”

Pastor Tony Barber
Adapted from the June 1, 2023, newsletter of Church on the Bluff, Hoover

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of WMU

Cindy Vang (right) of First Hmong Baptist Church in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, receives the Dellanna West O'Brien Award for Women's Leadership Development during WMU's Missions Adventure and Celebration on June 12 aboard a riverboat in New Orleans. Peggy Darby (left), president-elect of the WMU Foundation, and Sandy Wisdom-Martin (center), executive director-treasurer of national WMU, presented the award. (WMU)

NOBTS names student center in Luter's honor

More than 4,000 people gathered at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary on June 14 to celebrate the dedication of the Fred Luter Jr. Student Center.

"God, through your humble obedience to Jesus Christ, has used you profoundly," seminary president Jamie Dew said, addressing Luter during the ceremony.

The Fred Luter Jr. Student Center houses NOBTS and Leavell College offices, classrooms, student study carrels, the North American Mission Board Church Planting Center and the Global Mission Center in partnership with the International Mission Board. The newly renovated student study carrels inside the student center were named in honor of Luter's wife, Elizabeth.

Read more about the facilities at nobts.edu/news. (NOBTS)

Livestreamed worship still helpful to some

Nearly 2 in 5 Protestant churchgoers (39%) say they have watched a livestream service instead of attending a church service in person on more than five occasions over the past year. Meanwhile, 1 in 5 (20%) have not watched a livestream service in the last year.

Most churchgoers say a livestream is a valid replacement when sick or caring for someone who is sick (69%), and nearly half say it is valid when traveling (48%).

Churchgoers over 65 are the least likely to say watching an online church service is the main way they connect with the church (6%) but are also the most likely to say livestreaming is a temporary way to participate in the mission of the church during an illness or emergency (60%). (Lifeway Research)

Persecuted church

Uncommon court decision frees Christian couple in Iran

TEHRAN, Iran — A Christian couple was released from prison May 9 after an Iranian judge struck down their convictions.

Morning Star News reported that the couple — Homayoun Zhavah, 64, and wife Sara Ahmadi, 45 — had served nine months of their sentences. Quoting advocacy group Article 18, the report said an appeals court judge in Tehran overturned the couple's 2022 convictions, ruling that their participation in home meetings did not break national security laws.

Morning Star sources said the judge's decision "broke with common judicial practice in the country and ruled that home church participation was not illegal."

Ahmadi was convicted in November 2020 of

"founding or leading an organization that aims to disrupt national security," as well as "membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security." Her 11-year sentence later was reduced to eight years. Zhavah, who has advanced Parkinson's disease, had been sentenced to two years for participating in a house church.

Iran is No. 8 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

China closes three college campus ministries deemed 'illegal'

JIAXING, China — Officials in China's

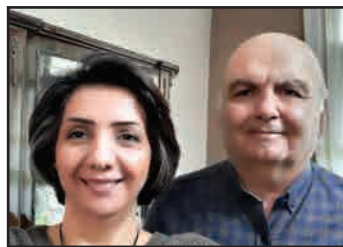
Zhejiang province closed three college campus ministries in April, claiming the organizations were illegal, according to a May 23 report from human rights group ChinaAid.

The website of the Jiaxing Civil Affairs Bureau in Zhejiang province said the ministries were shut down because they had not received government registration. The statement deems the groups as "illegal organizations."

ChinaAid said many college students are hearing the gospel and converting to Christianity as a result of campus ministries.

The increase in interest in Christianity has raised concern in the Communist Party of China, resulting in the closure of several Christian campus fellowships.

China is No. 16 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.



MS photo

New ministry opportunities

Churches can help meet needs of increasing elderly population

(continued from page 1)

watching the growth of the adults in her care has been the highlight of her two years in the program.

“Since the ladies arrived in my home, they all have shown dramatic improvement,” Young said. “All had been very much at risk for abuse and neglect before, but they do not have to worry about that anymore. We all work together and support each other like one big family.”

Nearly 18% of Alabamians are 65 or older, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The elderly population has continued to expand in recent years, running parallel to increasing reports of adult abuse, neglect and exploitation.

DHR’s Adult Protective Services Division received 12,033 reports statewide in fiscal year 2022, an increase of nearly 115% in the past 10 years.

Gov. Kay Ivey proclaimed June 15 as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in Alabama to raise awareness about the problem.

Those interested in becoming adult foster care providers are en-

Warning signs of elder abuse

- ▶ Increased fear or anxiety.
- ▶ Isolation from friends or family.
- ▶ Withdrawal from normal activities.
- ▶ Unusual changes in behavior or sleep.
- ▶ Unexplained injuries, bruises, cuts or sores.
- ▶ Unsanitary living conditions and poor hygiene.
- ▶ Unusual or sudden changes in financial spending patterns, wills or other important documents.



couraged to contact a county DHR office.

More information, including eligibility requirements, is available at dhr.alabama.gov/AFC.

DHR also reminds the public to report suspected adult abuse,

neglect and exploitation by calling the Adult Abuse Hotline at 800-458-7214, emailing aps@dhr.alabama.gov or contacting a county DHR office. (Information provided by Alabama Department of Human Resources)

Alabamians elected to serve on SBC boards, committees

One of the ways Alabama Baptists can actively engage with the Southern Baptist Convention is by serving on boards and committees.

The committee on nominations puts forth names for messengers to consider and approve during the SBC Annual Meeting, which was held in New Orleans this year.

Below is a list of Alabama Baptists who were approved by messengers June 13.

▶ **2023–2024 Committee on Nominations** — Walter Blackman, East Highland Baptist, Hartselle; and S. Rodney Arp, FBC Prattville

▶ **Executive Committee** — Craig Carlisle, FBC Gadsden, term expiring in 2027

▶ **GuideStone Financial Resources** — J. Rodney Bledsoe, FBC Montgomery, term expiring in 2027

▶ **International Mission Board** — James (Jim) Coolley, FBC Birmingham, term expiring in 2027; and Charlotte Madison, Mount Zion, Huntsville, term expiring in 2027

▶ **North American Mission Board** — Scott Guffin, Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, term expiring in 2027

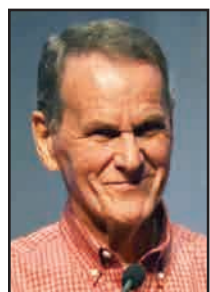
▶ **New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary** — Katherine J. Webb, FBC Montgomery, term expiring in 2028

▶ **Southern Baptist Theological Seminary** — Bradley M. Rushing, Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Dothan, term expiring in 2028 (TAB)

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **William Douglas “Doug” O’Brien** died June 14 in Hueytown. He was 86.



O'BRIEN

A Nashville, Tennessee, native, O’Brien was a pastor for 52 years and retired from North Highlands Baptist Church in Hueytown, Alabama,

in 2010 after 32 years of service.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara; daughter, Cindy; son, Scott; two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Birmingham Metro Baptist Association** is hosting its Women’s Ministry Network Brunch on Saturday, July 29, 10 a.m. until noon, at the BMBA conference center.

Brunch will be catered from The Flying Biscuit, and Mary Teel will be sharing her testimony after serving two years on the missions field in Uganda as a journeyman through the International Mission Board. She currently serves as a BMBA ministry intern.

The WMN is for any woman in ministry in the BMBA: women serving on church staff, pastors’ wives and women working in faith-based nonprofits. Call 205-599-3245.

Looking back over the past 21 years

Retiring WMU Foundation president reflects on time as part of the WMU 'family'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Years back, David George and his wife, Allyson, prayed often for his college friend, Travis Collins, who was serving as a missionary with his family in Nigeria.

They prayed for him especially on one specific day — his birthday. It was an easy day to remember.

"His birthday and Allyson's are the same," George said.

That rhythm — the one of praying for missionaries on their birthdays — is one long treasured by national Woman's Missionary Union, but George said he didn't see it through that lens at the time.

"I can't say that it was top-of-mind awareness, but I'm sure I had learned it from my mother," he said.

His mother's involvement in WMU — plus a summer he spent as WMU's truck driver right out of college — was his only experience with the organization.

So he was surprised in 2001 when Collins — back from Nigeria and serving as pastor of a church in Kentucky — called him to talk about the possibility of taking on the role of president of the WMU Foundation.

"He was serving on their board, and when he first called me, I thought he was asking for leads," George said. "Then I realized he was asking if it would be OK if he put my name in there."

Up until that point, George's career had included nonprofit work and work in the health care industry, and he had just started his own consulting business. He didn't really want to shut it down, he didn't want to get back into fundraising, and he also joked that he wondered how he would tell people he worked for Woman's Missionary Union.



Photo courtesy of David George
David George (center), retiring president of WMU Foundation, serves with his wife Allyson (left) and children Katelyn and Kyle at the Baptist Friendship House in New Orleans in 2006. The Georges also spent their 30th anniversary serving at BFH in 2014.

"After that phone call, Allyson said, 'What did Travis want?' I told her, and she said, 'What did you tell him?' And I said, 'I said yes because it was Travis,'" George said.

A self-starter

But it wasn't long after the interview process started that "everything quickly flipped, and I started realizing 'I really want this job, but there's no way they're going to pick me,'" he said. "I didn't have the credentials or anything I thought they needed."

As it turns out, George was exactly what they were looking for — a self-starter who knew business operations. "Late in 2001, I found out they were going with me, and that was a shock," he said. "And that began my education and journey with WMU. I learned everything about WMU that I never knew. It was fascinating."

And now as he prepares to retire June 30, George is looking back over the past 21 years with gratefulness.

God's mission around the world through funds, endowments, scholarships, investments and planned giving, he said. "They embraced me from the get-go. I've been part of the family ever since."

'Outstanding'

Bob Cardinal, current chair of the WMU Foundation, said George's time at the helm of the foundation has been "outstanding," and a big part of that is how he's fit right into that family.

"The financial growth and stability that he has led are one measure of the success the foundation has enjoyed during his tenure," he said. "But the greatest measure of his role at the foundation is in relationships. The primary relationship has been David's love of the Lord and his commitment to translate that love to seeing Kingdom missions advanced through the foundation and its partnership with WMU."

To accomplish this, God gifted George to build strong, personal relationships with staff members, the board, donors, clients, partners and all varieties of stakeholders, Cardinal said.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Bob Cardinal (left), chair of the WMU Foundation board of directors, presents David George with a clock in honor of his retirement after 21 years of heading the charitable organization that supports missions efforts.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
David George passes the torch of WMU Foundation leadership to Peggy Darby, president-elect of the organization. George has served for 21 years. Darby (right) will take the helm of WMU Foundation on July 1.

George said he's grateful for those relationships and for the way God has blessed the foundation financially.

The foundation had \$9.5 million in total assets when he arrived and now stands at over \$46 million. But George said he thinks the greatest financial gauge to measure the foundation's impact is not what they hold but what they give away. They consistently grant more than \$2.5 million each year in grants, awards and scholarships, he said.

One project, called Touch Tomorrow Today, has built up each state WMU's endowment to more than \$25,000, with one state getting close to \$1 million.

He believes TTT is the "best way to help secure the financial future of all WMU" and directs anyone who would want to help to give to their state's fund, or to the Bob and Rosalie Hunt Endowment, which supports every state's TTT.

George said he's loved seeing God work in this way.

But his journey with the WMU Foundation began to shift when a new reality rocked his family — Allyson was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's in 2016 at age 54. As George began to try to figure out how best to care for her, he felt torn between home and the office.

From there, things escalated. He remembers driving to Tennessee WMU's annual meeting one day while trying to deal with something back home on the phone and "coming unglued."

"I was driving down the road crying and thinking, 'I can't do this,' he said.

"The board — I won't say I resigned, but I went to the chair and the vice chair at the time in 2017 and said, 'I can't do this anymore.'"

Hybrid schedule

Around that time he also shared his pain with Rod Marshall, his good friend and president of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, who has a counseling background. Marshall began talking with the board, and they offered George something that shocked him.

"They said, 'You know what? David doesn't need a sabbatical. David will be better if we can figure out a different work schedule for him,'" George said.

So that's what they did — they worked out a hybrid schedule where he could work some from home and some from the office and take more meetings on the phone instead of traveling.

"The board made a statement that was profound — they said, 'What kind of an organization would we be if we turned our back on you now at your greatest need?' And that was transformational for me," George said.

He said it's very common for people, especially men, whose spouse is diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's to lose their jobs because employers can't handle the erratic schedules and the lack of ability to be on point all the time.

"I'm so grateful to the board because I don't know what I would've done in 2017 trying to take on a new job when the wheels were coming off at home," George said.

He also said he's grateful for God's grace on the foundation during those years.

"God blessed the organization somehow — we've grown every year since 2017 despite what I thought was going to be a major problem," he said.

He said the board's support and the help of the foundation's staff have been an amazing gift, as have the help of consistent caregivers at home.

Passing the torch

As he passes the torch to Peggy Darby, the foundation's president-elect, at the end of June, he said he's excited to take a deep breath.

He plans to stay involved in Alabama Baptist life, serving at his church — Shades Crest Baptist in Hoover — and as a volunteer at Encore, a local church-based Alzheimer's respite ministry. He will also serve on the board of the Alzheimer's Association of Alabama and Discovery Clubs.

Sandy Wisdom-Martin, WMU executive director, said his legacy will go on in countless ways, including a gift presented at a June 12 WMU reception for him in New Orleans.

She told him national WMU was giving a financial gift for Kayleigh White, the new director of Baptist Friendship House in New Orleans, to become a national certified trainer in mental health first aid.

Baptist Friendship House, which helps homeless women and children find help and hope, is one of the WMU compassion ministries supported by the foundation and has been special to George and his family for decades. He and Allyson and their children, Katelyn and Kyle, served there in 2006, and he and Allyson celebrated their 30th anniversary there in 2014.

George said his prayer is for Baptist Friendship House "to continue to be the presence of God in a hurting place and for his children and others to know that this is a place where God shows His love for His people."

Wisdom-Martin said White's certification "will greatly impact their ministry at the center but also impact the ministry of the churches in New Orleans and the greater New Orleans area, and that legacy in your honor of helping individuals and families and churches respond to mental health challenges will reap benefits for decades to come."



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
David George's children placed yellow roses at his retirement reception April 17 in honor of their mother, Allyson, who is battling early onset Alzheimer's.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
David George (third from right) at his retirement reception April 17 with (from left) his mother, Jackie George; son-in-law Mitchell Bruhn; daughter Katelyn Bruhn; grandson Grayson Lawrence George; daughter-in-law Lynne George; and son Kyle George. His second grandson, Graham David George, was born May 6.

5 tips for writing better content for churches

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

Churches create much content, so it's important to learn how to write better. Church content, even when spoken from a stage, often starts with a pen to paper or a blank document in a word processing program.

It can be scary and challenging.

With just a blank sheet of paper, it's often difficult to get started. And will anyone really want to read the content? These five writing tips will get you started and deliver content that will be read or listened to:

1. Identify your audience. Start here. Think stereotypically about describing the group God has given to you as an audience, or think about a potential audience. Be realistic, though. You can't reach everyone.

2. What are they searching for? When describing your group, consider what makes them unique and what they're seeking. Perhaps it's a need or concern they need help obtaining, something that wakes them up at night or weighs on them all day. Perhaps it's an unattainable goal they want to achieve but just can't. This step alone will probably suggest content ideas as you consider what they need.

3. Niche down. Now you may have too many ideas. Consider targeting a smaller audience based on needs, concerns and goals. Don't target large groups or create content that's too broad, with too many options. You'll not cover it well in your limited time. And when people are searching for something, they often look for a solution that's more specific than broad.

4. Create a relationship funnel. Everyone's on a path. Some are

Christians who attend church regularly. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are those who don't understand why anyone would consider a relationship with Jesus. But how many steps are in between? Structure your content so you lead from one step to another. Don't try to move people much more than one splash in the funnel. Use links online to take them to their next step. In a sermon, give next steps like Bible references, website pages or ministry opportunities.

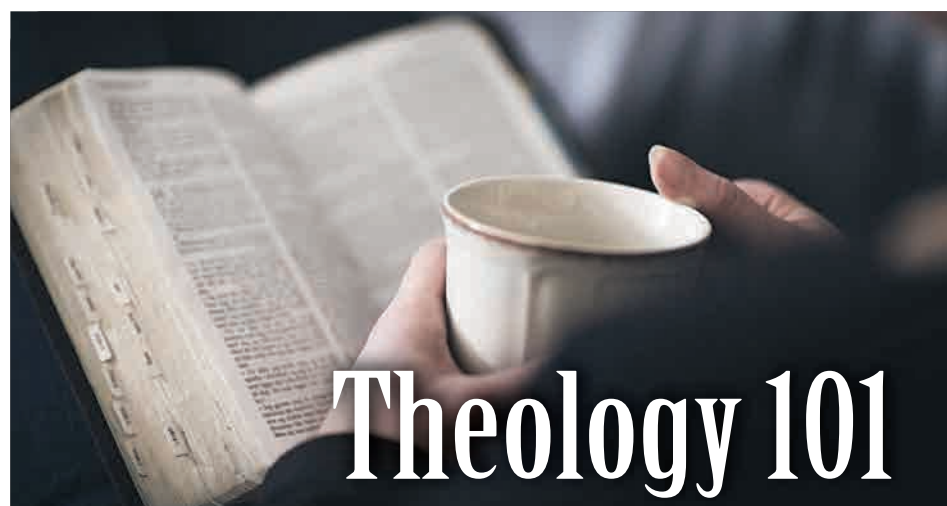
5. Narrow keywords. Once you've defined and refined your audience with a solution in mind that will move them along their journey, you need to write. A tip is to say their name and speak their pain with solutions to proclaim. Edit based on keyword research, determining what people are searching for. Look for search terms that have a large search volume. Why is this important for how to write better? Whether someone

is online or in person, you need to provide them with the solutions they're seeking. Free keyword research tools (such as Google Keyword Planner, Keyword Surfer, Moz, etc.) let you get into the minds of your audience and deliver great content that's desired!

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



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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Christ's Ascension

High Priestly Work

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

As we continue thinking about Christ's ascension, the Book of Hebrews draws our attention to another aspect of His return to heaven and enthronement at the Father's right hand. In several passages, we learn that the ascension marked the inauguration of Christ's high priestly ministry.

In Hebrews 4:14–16, the ascension is expressed as passing through the heavens: "We have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (v. 14).

Furthermore, since He assumed a full human nature and lived in our kind of world, Jesus experienced temptation just as we do. The grand difference is that He never yielded to His temptations. He was without sin.

One who sympathizes

Nevertheless, having experienced temptation, our heavenly High Priest can "sympathize with our weaknesses" (v. 15). That moves Him to help us in our times of weakness and need.

A further result of Christ's ascension and His priestly ministry on our behalf is confidence in prayer. This passage also exhorts, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (v. 16).

So in addition to help in times of weakness and need, the ascension of Christ connects with us at the point of prayer.

Christ's ascension is also part

of our Christian hope. As He is, so we will be.

Joined by faith to Him, we also look forward with certain hope to going where He has gone. However turbulent life may become, our hope is a sure anchor.

One who intercedes

In Hebrews 7:25–26, we learn more about our ascended and enthroned High Priest. Now permanently in the presence of the Father, He makes intercession for us. Christ's intercession ministry enables us to "come to God through Him" and to be saved "to the uttermost" (v. 25).

Hebrews 9:24 emphasizes again the fact that Christ has returned to heaven, our High Priest who appears "in the presence of God for us." This imagery enlarges slightly to suggest a high priest who becomes our heavenly defense attorney by representing us before God.

With such representation, no charge can be brought against us that can stand up in God's court. As it were, the scars in His hands and feet become eloquent testimony that He has already borne our judgment, allowing us to go free for all eternity.

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.



Seminaries report

to the SBC

Reporting by Meredith Flynn, TAB Media Group

Gateway Seminary graduates largest class in history, adds to Bible archive

This year, Gateway Seminary graduated 348 students, president Jeff Iorg said, the largest single graduating class in any academic year in the seminary's history.

Gateway also recently received several gifts that will advance the seminary's work, including scholarship gifts for various groups, a 150-year-old Torah scroll and a collection of historically significant Bibles.



IORG

Additionally, Iorg said, Gateway received \$2 million to establish a Go Grant endowment that will allow every student who completes 20 credit hours in a core program at Gateway to participate in a seminary-sponsored international missions experience.

"Students who go on missions trips, even if they later return to the U.S. for ministry, will become more passionate advocates for missions because of their first-hand experience with the needs of the world," he said.

Southeastern Seminary sends out missionaries, expands prison ministry

In April, Southeastern Seminary commissioned 41 students and their families to go to the nations, seminary president Danny Akin reported in New Orleans. They will join 94 Southeastern students already serving through the International Mission Board. Akin said 18 more students will serve as church planters with the North American Mission Board.

Through its program in the North Carolina prison system, Southeastern has graduated 49 students now serving in 11 facilities across the state. Akin reported that a corrections official recently said of the program, "What is happening now in these different places is nothing less than a miracle of God."

And recently in Turkey, 23 students were granted bachelor of arts

degrees in the first graduation of the seminary's Farsi language program. Southeastern is educating, on some level, more than 3,500 Farsi speakers, Akin said, and recently added a master's degree in Farsi to its academic programs.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Midwestern Seminary seeks to provide 'clarity amid confusion,' Allen says

"Our culture has lost its mind. And in a time of confusion, we want to be clear, and we're seeking to be clear for you," said Jason Allen, president of Midwestern Seminary.

A seminary president's first responsibility is a theological responsibility, he said, adding the seminary affirms the Baptist Faith and Message, the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, and the Nashville Statement on human sexuality and gender.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Midwestern has seen record enrollment for 11 consecutive years, Allen reported, with more than 5,100 students this year. In partnership with IMB, Midwestern

also has launched a "Missions Moonshot" initiative to produce 100 students every year that will go to the nations.

New Orleans Seminary's mission focus taken 'very, very seriously'

"Theological education matters now perhaps more than ever before," said Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Seminary. "Consider the brokenness and the chaos and the confusion of our cultural moment. At every single turn there is a wrong idea, a mistruth at play in the lives of those people who are going in those directions. ... Correcting those lies, those mistruths, with the truth of God's Word is absolutely essential."

In a world in which billions of people do not know Jesus, the passion of New Orleans Seminary is for students to pour out of their campus to go to the nations. "We take that job very, very seriously," he said.

Southern Seminary recognizes milestones in convention report

Josh Powell, chair of the of trustees for Southern Seminary, began the institution's report by recognizing longtime president R. Albert Mohler, who in December will celebrate 31 years leading the seminary. At that point, Mohler will be the longest-tenured president of any entity in the SBC, Powell said.

Presenting the seminary's report, Mohler thanked the Lord for unprecedented enrollment and a financial situation that is "absolutely secure." Mohler also thanked Southern Baptists



MOHLER

for their investment in the seminary through the Cooperative Program and reminded them young people in their churches right now will be the next generation of pastors and missionaries and evangelists and church planters.

"So much is entrusted to us; what a great privilege," he said. "So much has been entrusted to

me, thank you. Let's commit to be faithful together to the glory of God."

Dockery gives first report as Southwestern Seminary president

In his first report as president of Southwestern Seminary, David Dockery shared the seminary's commitment to faithfulness, continuity and innovation. Those traits have characterized Southwestern in the past and will chart the seminary's future in the days to come, he said.

Dockery was elected in April after serving several months as interim president. He noted the seminary's renewed commitment to prayer, seen in regular campuswide prayer meetings in recent months.

The Advance Southwestern 2030 plan, he said, includes six new core values and clarifies the seminary's identity as a Great Commandment and Great Commission institution.

Southwestern is encouraged by an increased total enrollment headcount, he said, and encouraged by growth in the seminary's Chinese, Hispanic and Korean programs, with new initiatives in Portuguese coming this year.

Dockery also addressed the seminary's current operational situation.

"Much work has been done in restructuring the 2022-2023 annual budget, reducing both operational and personnel aspects of the budget in measurable ways," he said. "We'll continue to focus on budget and organizational restructuring as we enter the year to come, as we recommit ourselves to institutional stewardship, with a high priority given to this each and every day."



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

SPEAK Tour set for four more locations, dates around Alabama

Want to build up the students in your church and reach their friends with the gospel? Plan to bring them all to SPEAK Tour.

"It's a night of worship, but it's more geared toward students bringing their friends so that they can hear the gospel and have an opportunity to respond to the gospel," said Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "We also will challenge followers of Jesus to take the next step and identify the person they want to begin praying for

For more information, visit ymlink.org/speak-tours or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



and ultimately reach with the gospel message."

SPEAK Tour will have fun outdoor games and worship.

Upcoming dates and locations are:

► Aug. 9 at Mount Pisgah Baptist Church in Cropwell with speaker Jay Stewart and Rush of Fools.

► Aug. 9 at FBC Haleyville with speaker Brent Finchum and the Jared Shepard Band.

► Aug. 20 at Friendship Church in Athens with speaker Gary Permenter and the Marc Lewis Band.

► Sept. 27 at Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Ozark with speaker Brent Finchum and One Step Closer.

Admission is free, and no preregistration is required.

For more information, visit ymlink.org/speak-tours.

Reach others through kindness

Kindness can go a long way.

That's the philosophy behind REACH Evangelism Training — helping your church members share the gospel by cultivating relationships through acts of hospitality and service. "A lot of people need to



WILKINS

see that the church genuinely cares about them before they're willing to listen to what we have to say," said Daniel Wilson, director of the SBOM office of evangelism. "This training will present a strategy for your church to work

together to develop caring relationships with unbeliev-

ers that can result in gospel conversations."

REACH Evangelism Training — set for Aug. 15, 10 a.m.–noon, at the SBOM in Prattville — will be led by Scott Wilkins, president of REACH Evangelistic Strategies.

The cost is \$5 per person, which includes lunch.

Register at evangelizeal.org/reach.

One Day Training provides new ideas and resources for leaders

Are you a new missions leader who would like some guidance, or a seasoned leader who would like fresh ideas and new resources?

One Day Training, pro-

vided by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, can provide all of that. The training, set for Aug. 12 at the SBOM in Prattville is for teachers and leaders of women's ministry and

children's, youth and adult missions programs as well as WMU leaders and other general leaders.

To register for the training, visit alabamawmu.org/onedaytraining.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Newbridge Missionary Baptist Church in Asheville, North Carolina, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, prayerfully seeks a man who will preach the inerrant Word of God and has a heart for missions. Email resumé to: NewbridgePST@gmail.com by Aug. 31.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Beginnings Baptist Church, a small congregation in Hayden, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Send inquiries/resumés to: sonyahumber@gmail.com.

MINISTER TO CHILDREN

NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville, Alabama, is looking for a full-time minister to children. The minister will lead programming and events for children, mentor young families, and train and oversee volunteer children's ministry workers. Email your resumé and questions to team@NPonline.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

PREGNANCY CENTER DIRECTOR —

FULTONDALE, ALABAMA
Sav-A-Life, Inc. is looking for a full-time center director for its Fultondale location (just north of Birmingham). This team member will manage all routine operations of the pregnancy center in an efficient, effective and professional manner. The center director trains and manages all staff and volunteers in the implementation of necessary programs, scheduling and meets with clients. Applicants need a bachelor's or master's degree, preferably in a helping field, or need related equivalent experience if no degree. To learn more or to apply, please send a cover letter and resumé to info@savalife.org. No phone calls please.

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MINISTRIES

SAMFORD MTI

The Ministry Training Institute at Samford University exists to equip Christians to be leaders in their churches and communities through theological education and practical ministry training. Education opportunities exist through the institute's vast extension network and robust online certificate curriculum. Find more information at samford.edu/programs/ministry-training-institute.

DOGWOOD MEDIA SOLUTIONS

Dogwood Media Solutions can do everything from graphic and web design to social media and search engine marketing. Connect and find out how we can partner with you to make your business goals a reality. Find out more at dogwoodmediasolutions.com. Contact us at 334-425-0009 or contact@dogwoodmediasolutions.com.

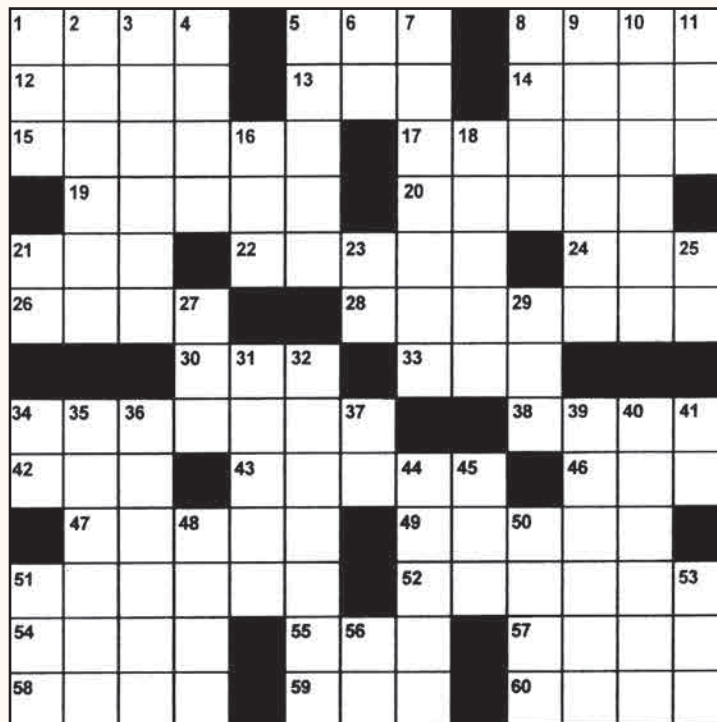
CHRISTIAN Crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

ACROSS

1. The ____ of life.
(1 John 1:1)
5. There is a ____ here.
(John 6:9)
8. The month of ____.
(Deut. 16:1)
12. Roboam begat ____.
(Matt. 1:7)
13. Naaman, ____, and Rosh. (Gen. 46:21)
14. Woman's title equal to a "sir."
15. Sky is ____ ... but can ye _____. (Matt. 16:3; 2 words)
17. Cut down, O _____.
(Jer. 48:2)
19. Fountain both ____ salt water and fresh.
(James 3:12)
20. Maketh the seven stars and _____. (Amos 5:8)
21. Unto you, young _____. (1 John 2:13)
22. Not weary in well _____. (2 Thess. 3:13)
24. Timothy. (nickname)
26. Escaped the ____ of the sword.
(Heb. 11:34)
28. A ____ person.
(Prov. 6:12)
30. The flower of her _____. (1 Cor. 7:36)
33. As a ____ gathereth.
(Matt. 23:37)
34. Thou barren that ____ not. (Gal. 4:27)
38. Bakbukiah and _____.
(Neh. 12:9)
42. Receiving the ____ of your faith. (1 Pet. 1:9)
43. Will also ____ up us by his own power.
(1 Cor. 6:14)
46. Neither did we ____ any man's bread.
(2 Thess. 3:8)
47. Was ____ an Ahohite.
(1 Chron. 27:4)
49. Elihoreph and _____.
(1 Kings 4:3)
51. Abimelech king of ____ sent ... for she is ____ man's wife.
(Gen. 20:2, 3; 2 words)
52. Sons also of Jediahel; _____. (1 Chron. 7:10)
54. Not ____ all to come _____. (1 Cor. 16:12; 2 words)
55. ____ thou on my right hand. (Acts 2:34)
57. ____ Ephesus, and ____ the faithful.
(Eph. 1:1; 2 words)



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58. ____, let ____ escape thither. (Gen. 19:20; 2 words)
59. ____ an lthrite.
(2 Sam. 23:38)
60. ____ said, ____ that ____ had wings.
(Ps. 55:6; 3 words)

DOWN

1. Ye fight and _____.
(James 4:2)
2. Sara ____ Abraham.
(1 Pet. 3:6)
3. Man ____ upon a red horse. (Zech. 1:8)
4. Breed of dog: Great ____.
5. ____ us ____ good unto all men.
(Gal. 6:10; 2 words)
6. ____, thou that destroyest the temple.
(Mark 15:29)
7. Kinah, and _____.
(Josh. 15:22)
8. The son of _____.
(Luke 3:28)
9. From ____ in the valley.
(Num. 21:20)
10. ____ have ... think of ____ ... didst receive _____. (1 Cor. 4:6, 7; 3 words)
11. Zechariah, _____.
(1 Chron. 15:18)
16. ____ commandment.
(1 John 2:7)
18. To fight with words.
21. Profitable to thee and to _____. (Philemon 11)
23. Abideth ____ him sinneth not. (1 John 3:6)
25. ____ little children.
(1 John 3:18)
27. ____ shall say.
(1 Cor. 12:16)
29. African antelope.
31. Isaac dwelt in _____.
(Gen. 26:6)
32. ____ is very bold ... ____ was found.
(Rom. 10:20; 2 words)
34. Not ____ ashamed before him. (1 John 2:28)
35. Them that rejoice _____.
(Isa. 24:8)
36. King Rehoboam sent _____. (1 Kings 12:18)
37. Fa, So, La, ____.
39. To Remmonmethoar _____. (Josh. 19:13; 2 words; reverse order)
40. And ____ his son.
(1 Chron. 6:26)
41. ____ is the Spirit.
(1 John 5:6)
44. Havilah, and _____.
(1 Chron. 1:9)
45. Naaman, _____.
(Gen. 46:21)
48. For example, July 1, 1994.
50. ____ the Ahohite.
(1 Chron. 11:29)
51. General Accounting Office. (abbr.)
53. ____ more ... and ____ will write. (Rev. 3:12; 2 words)
56. The children of _____.
(1 Chron. 7:12)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

All Nations Camp to equip youth

It's not too late to sign up for All Nations Youth Camp, a discipleship and missions-focused camp for students who have completed 7th through 12th grade.

The focus of the camp — which will be held July 26–29 at WorldSong Missions Place — is to encourage, equip and mobilize our students to live for the Great Commission.

We invite you to send your students to this four-day, three-night event full of discipleship, missions testimonies from International Mission Board missionaries, swimming, hik-

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



ing, games and much more.

The cost is \$200 per student. For more information or to register, visit alsbom.org/anyc.

GroupLife workshops equip group leaders

Daniel Edmonds said in his experience, group leader training is vital.

"Untrained leaders tend to burn out and go their own direction," said Edmonds, director of the SBOM office of Sunday School and discipleship.

That's why GroupLife Equipping Workshops are coming to your area this summer to encourage and equip your church's Sunday School and group leaders to love well and focus on God's Word.

Join an event near you:

- First Baptist Church Prattville — July 29.
- Woodward Avenue Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals — July 29.
- Hunter Street Baptist

Church, Hoover — Aug. 5.

► Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens — Aug. 19.

► First Baptist Church Dothan — Aug. 19.

► West Mobile Baptist Church — Aug. 19.

The training is for all types of groups, from Sunday School to weekday small groups in homes, from adult to youth to preschool.

A video and workshop guide also will be available for individuals who would like to train on their own or train their church's leaders.

There is no cost to attend the event. Registration is required.

Visit makingdisciplesal.org/grouplife to register or find out more about GroupLife training.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For July 2

Explore the Bible

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



SHAPES Jeremiah 18:1–12

Remade (1–4)

What Jeremiah saw in the pottery shop would have been familiar to everyone in that day. The potter would slap a lump of moist clay in the middle of the stone wheel.

While working, the potter noticed the pot was not shaping up properly. There was a flaw in the clay, or perhaps it was inferior for delicate work, so the potter would skillfully form it into a different kind of vessel altogether. The potter was in complete control of the clay, and he alone was able to decide what he would do with the clay.

Jeremiah's visit to the potter was another symbolic act he performed. He had undoubtedly seen a potter at work many times, but on that day Jeremiah was reminded of the sovereignty of God.

Just as a potter determines the shape the clay will take, God our Creator has the authority over every nation and over every person.

Jeremiah also saw hope at the potter's wheel. As the potter would carefully rework the clay to achieve his desired result, so God does not give up when we fail Him.

If His people repent of their sin, God will forgive them. God continues His patient work in our lives until He makes us what He wants us to be (Phil. 1:6).

Sovereign (5–10)

The symbolism of the potter at work is clear. The potter represents God. The clay represents Israel or any nation. The potter's wheel is a lesson on the absolute sovereignty of God. It puts an end to pride and silences every boast. If a potter has the authority to do whatever he desires with a lump of clay, then God has absolute authority to do what-

ever pleases Him with His people.

God reveals to Jeremiah that if any nation would repent of its evil, He would forgive them. This mercy was available even for a nation marked to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed.

There is hope for any nation that will turn to the Lord and repent of their sins.

These verses encourage us to trust in the God who is in complete control. In these challenging days, we must remember that the holy Trinity never meets in an emergency session.

If a nation will turn from its evil, God declared He would "relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."

The Hebrew verb translated "relent" can mean to be moved to pity and to have compassion for others. It suggests that grief is so deep that God finds an alternate response for the necessity of punishment when we repent. God will have mercy on people who obey His command to repent.

He will also relent concerning the good He had said He would do if they continue in their sin. If people obey God, He will bless them. If people disobey, He will punish them. God deals with us on the basis of the moral choices we make.

Warned (11–12)

The Lord instructed Jeremiah to call the people of Judah to repent of their evil because He was preparing to bring harm against them. Only a radical change would deliver them from God's judgment.

There was still time to turn from their evil ways and be delivered. Sadly, the people of Judah continued to act according to the stubbornness of their evil hearts.

***"Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand,
so are you in My hand, O house of Israel."***

Jeremiah 18:6

Bible Studies for Life

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



BARNABAS AND PAUL Acts 9:26–28, 11:22–26, 15:36–40

It is not uncommon for new believers to need help building relationships in the Church. Those who have followed Christ for a while need to be careful not to become insulated from newcomers who need our friendship, affirmation and encouragement, as well as opportunities to gain experience in serving alongside us.

Encourage the one who is a new believer. (9:26–28)

Acts 4:36 reminds us that "Barnabas" means "son of encouragement." Although people don't always live up to the meaning of their names, Barnabas clearly did.

When Saul (later to be called Paul) came to Jerusalem as a new believer, Barnabas' endorsement helped overcome the barrier of fear that prevented other believers from embracing Saul so that he could enjoy effective ministry among them in Jerusalem.

Encourage others to step up and serve the church. (11:22–26)

A few years after he had introduced Saul to the believers in Jerusalem, Barnabas was sent to see what was happening in Antioch since they had heard that large numbers of Jews and Greeks were turning to the Lord.

There were so many new believers, and Barnabas was carrying out such a wonderful ministry empowered by the Spirit and faith that the church's growth continued to accelerate. But Barnabas also came to realize he would need help teaching and discipling them into a strong and healthy church and that Saul would be just the right person for the job.

In verse 26 we learn that it was in Antioch that believers were first called Christians. It seems the believers weren't the ones to come up with the name, but that others called them Christians (suggesting

"little Christs"), probably as mockery. One of the things this indicates is that the young church was getting noticed as a new movement.

Clearly, Barnabas didn't just support Saul at the beginning of his ministry, but he continued to think about other ways he might encourage him.

It is good for us to remember those who encouraged us and invited us to join them in their work and to be looking for other believers who have much to offer but whose contributions might be overlooked if we don't invite them to partner with us.

Be prepared for God to eventually lead you down separate paths. (15:36–40)

Like many in ministry today, Paul and Barnabas sometimes disagreed about the best strategies in particular situations, including about whether to take John Mark with them on their next missionary journey. He had not continued with Paul and Barnabas to the end of their previous journey. Did he feel ill or hear about family troubles back home or church issues that required his help? Were there conflicts between him and Paul or Barnabas? We don't know.

Clearly Barnabas wanted him back on the team, but Paul felt he had deserted them and didn't want him along again so soon.

Later in his ministry, Paul would write about how important John Mark's collaboration was (2 Tim. 4:11), so we understand that any division between Paul and John Mark was not lasting. We can recognize that God used both Paul and Barnabas and their different approaches to great effect.

We ought to give thanks for those who worked beside us in certain seasons of life but who took different paths of faithful service somewhere along the line. We should pray, affirm and encourage them from a distance as Paul often does.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

New book examines rest, busyness and ‘work that lights our hearts on fire’

One of the goals of modern culture is to find the perfect balance between work and rest. Justin McRoberts, coach and author of “Sacred Strides: The Journey to Belovedness in Work and Rest,” has a very different perspective — that connectedness with God doesn’t flow simply from experiencing a perfect time of praying and meditating or, on the flip side, from getting a lot accomplished.

“My natural posture is not work, nor is my natural posture rest. My natural posture is belovedness, and both work and rest spring from my belovedness and return me to it,” he said.

The journey to learn that work and rest are not opposites was born out of the two most impactful events in his life — his dad committing suicide and McRoberts losing the church he founded and grew.

Coping with loss

Both losses involved relationships that had been built over time. Running together was one of the main ways McRoberts bonded with his workaholic dad.

“Some men share hunting with their dads. Some men share baseball or football. My dad and I went jog-



Photo courtesy of Justin McRoberts

JUSTIN McROBERTS

ging,” McRoberts said. “[My dad] came home energized, happy and even looking a bit younger. I suppose I felt very much the same when he invited me to run with him — energized, happy and young,” McRoberts said.

Running together was a “key connection point” between McRoberts and his father throughout his teens and early 20s.

Then his dad became severely depressed after hurting his knee from a fall. One day McRoberts asked him if they could run together.

“We set out to run about 4 and a half miles, maybe 5. We got about 2 miles in and his leg hurt and he was tired, and he kept apologizing that he couldn’t keep up,” McRoberts said.

McRoberts walked around to his dad’s side with the bad leg and walked back with him, carrying his

weak side. McRoberts tried to convey that he didn’t care about not finishing the run — all he wanted was to experience that same joy he had as a 12 year old, just spending time together.

Recognizing burnout

Now McRoberts recognizes that this was a really great image of how God comes alongside His children, but in a literal sense, this day showed McRoberts how he and his dad couldn’t enjoy any time together because his goal-focused dad only cared about making it a certain distance.

Fast forward about 20 years. McRoberts found himself in a similar state his dad had been in — burnout and depression. It hit him hard when the church that McRoberts had founded more than a decade earlier held its final service.

“Something in my subconscious assumed that if I was doing religious work, working in church culture, that by nature I would avoid things

like burnout or depression — and I didn’t,” McRoberts said.

“So then there I was in my early 40s starting down a lot of the same stuff that my dad had been staring down with regards to identity: Who am I if the things I’m building don’t work?”

McRoberts said it took a long time to shake the shock and disappointment he felt in his early 40s after the church closed and “feeling like I failed God and that I failed people I loved.”

Both living this experience and

then reliving it as he wrote about it for “Sacred Strides” brought up an important question: “Am I what I do?”

He knew in his head that the answer was no. But he also knew he had fallen into the trap of believing in his heart that it was.

“I was a pastor, and it was great to be a pastor and I loved being a pastor. But it’s a job. It’s not the whole of my identity. I get to pastor people because I’m loved by Christ

who holds my life together. I just got lost in the job of pastors and forgot that it was about the love of Jesus,” McRoberts said.

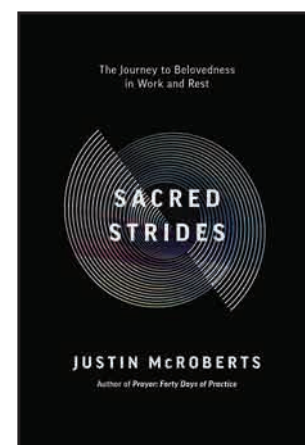
Through these life-changing experiences as well as other stories and reflections portrayed in the book’s 15 chapters, McRoberts developed some insights into what’s really important.

“In the continuum between that first event in my 20s and that second event in my 40s is a truckload of stories about learning to work and learning to rest, and I eventually learned that the bottom line is that I’m loved by God and that my work and my rest flow from my belovedness and return me to it,” he said.

Learning and teaching

McRoberts feels strongly that he had to take the time to internalize what he’s been learning before he could pass those truths along.

“That’s pretty near the heart of belovedness — simply being with the one you love. God wants you and me doing work that lights our hearts on fire. More than that, God wants to be with us in that work.”



“Sacred Strides” is available wherever books are sold. Learn more about Justin McRoberts at justinmcroberts.com.

EDITOR’S NOTE

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Living legacy

By Roger Alford
The Christian Index

Georgia town still feeling impact of Lottie Moon after 150 years

Lottie Moon was in a worship service at what's now First Baptist Church Cartersville, Georgia, when she heard God's call to missions, prompting her to leave for China 150 years ago.

The 4-foot, 3-inch firebrand and namesake of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering would go on to become a giant in the world of international missions, inspiring countless Southern Baptists to take the gospel to the nations while at the same time anchoring this Georgia community's commitment to share the gospel globally.

"I don't know that anybody has had as big an impact on missions as Lottie Moon," said Lauren Sullens, president of the Georgia Baptist Woman's Missionary Union. "She has inspired so many people to either go into full-time mission work or to support full-time mission work around the world."

Perhaps nowhere is Lottie Moon's legacy so profoundly felt than in and around Cartersville where she heard God's call "as clear as a bell."

Still impacting lives

As the sesquicentennial of the start of Lottie Moon's 39-year missionary career quietly passes, her legacy is still impacting lives in a city that has changed dramatically since 1873 when she left to deliver the gospel to the nations.

Now, the nations are coming to Cartersville.

Once largely homogeneous, the Cartersville area is becoming a melting pot of nationalities.

At last count, 44 languages are spoken in the area.

"God is bringing the nations to



Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

A memorial to Lottie Moon is on display in downtown Cartersville, Georgia.

us," said David Franklin, mission strategist in the Bartow Baptist Association based in Cartersville. "Lottie Moon left Bartow County years and years ago to take the gospel to the world. Now, God has the world coming to Bartow County."

The entire state of Georgia, with its robust job market, is drawing immigrants from around the world.

More than a million current Georgia residents were born in other countries, according to the Washington-based Immigration Policy Institute. With that in mind, the Georgia Baptist Mission Board has put a major emphasis on sharing the gospel with immigrants through its Mission Georgia initiative.

Mission Georgia funds a multi-faceted approach to evangelizing the state. That includes helping im-

migrants learn English, find jobs and acclimate to the culture.

In doing so, Georgia Baptists are shining Christ's light into homes of many families that had never seriously considered Christianity.

Within the Bartow Baptist Association, churches have responded to refugees with hospitality and generosity to the newcomers.

"There's a big team of people here helping them to find homes and jobs, to learn English, to get driver's licenses, to get their kids enrolled in school," Franklin said. "People from multiple churches are involved. This is bigger than one church."

Franklin said he's thrilled that his churches have ministered to immigrants just as Lottie Moon would have expected them to.

Franklin credits Moravian mis-

sionaries, who arrived in Bartow County in the early 1800s to share the gospel with Native Americans, for initially setting the community's spiritual temperature.

"They created a heritage that has lived on to today," Franklin said.

Spiritual flames

The spiritual flames were further fanned in 1870 when then-Cartersville First Baptist pastor R.B. Headen fell under conviction, realizing that he hadn't been doing enough to reach other cultures with the gospel. He began preaching about the importance of "winning the heathen" to Christ.

Lottie Moon was among the people listening to Headen's sermons, and her life was forever changed in a way that has impacted the world with wave after wave of missionaries following in her footsteps.

The U.S. Census Bureau has reported that more than 350 languages are now being spoken in the U.S., making it one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. "If we win these people to Christ, they can bridge back to win people to Christ," Franklin said. "So, missions are no longer just about sending; missions are also about receiving."

Sullens said people who come to the U.S. and become followers of Christ tend to be very effective missionaries when they return to the countries of their roots. "They have fewer barriers to overcome. They know the culture. They understand the context. And they're more likely to be received by the communities they return to."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by The Christian Index.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust
The Baptist Paper

‘The Wingfeather Saga’ is a gripping fantasy series for the whole family

You won’t find TV’s best new family series on over-the-air channels, cable outlets or even on the major streaming services.

The animated series — “The Wingfeather Saga” — likely wouldn’t have been greenlighted by Hollywood anyway.

The first season debuted on Angel Studios’ platforms in December, telling the fictional story of a tight-knit family, the Igibys, who live in a fantastical world of friendly creatures and not-so-friendly monsters. The Igibys are battling their overlords, the evil Fangs. The family does things you won’t see in most mainstream series. They pray before meals. They rarely squabble. They encourage one another. They practice random acts of kindness.

Kid-friendly

The series is based on the popular novels by singer and author Andrew Peterson and provides faithcentric families a rare treat: a fantasy series that can be viewed by the entire family. There’s no coarse language. There’s no sexuality. Yes, there are a few frightening moments, but it always remains in the kid-friendly realm — although for little ones, it may be wise to have a pillow to oc-



“THE WINGFEATHER SAGA”

Photo courtesy of Angel Studios

casionally cover their eyes. The best part? The story, animation and musical score are as good as anything produced in Hollywood.

Each time my 11-year-olds watch an episode, they beg me to let them watch the next one. The series is known for its cliffhangers — it’s a gripping voyage into an unknown world.

A crowdfunded series, “The Wingfeather Saga” was streamed 3.5 million times in its first five weeks. It features the voices of Jodi Benson (“The Little Mermaid”), Henry Ian Cusick (“Lost” and “The 100”) and Kevin McNally (“Pirates of the Caribbean”), among others.

Peterson told The Baptist Paper that mainstream movies and television shows too often manufacture conflict within the family. In “The Wingfeather Saga,” he said, the family members are on the same team.

Identity is another major theme in the series, but not in the way the

world views the subject, he said. In “The Wingfeather Saga,” the family’s identity is found in their service to the Maker.

“We belong to Someone. We belong to the King of the world,” Peterson said. “If you’re a Christian, that changes everything about who you are and your place in the world.”

If your family is a fan of “The Chronicles of Narnia” or “The Lord of the Rings” series, then you’ll probably enjoy “The Wingfeather Saga.”

Angel Studios plans on releasing seven seasons. Visit angel.com for more information.

Other recommendations

Also worth watching:

► **“The Most Reluctant Convert” (Pure Flix)** — An atheist scholar becomes a believer thanks to the witness of his Christian friends. It’s based on the real-life story of C.S. Lewis and the stage play of the same

name by Max McLean, who portrays a middle-aged Lewis in the film. It was one of the best movies of 2021. Visit PureFlix.com.

► **“Happily Ever Emma” (Great American Family)** — An actress who enjoys matchmaking discovers romance isn’t as simple as she thought. It’s based on the Jane Austen novel “Emma” and debuted in March on Great American Family, which is also the new home of Candace Cameron Bure. “Happily Ever Emma” can be watched on the channel’s on-demand platforms (Frndlytv.com, for example). Visit GreatAmericanFamily.com.

► **“Minions: The Rise of Gru” (Netflix)** — An 11-year-old boy who dreams of becoming a supervillain fails to land a spot with his favorite supervillain team, the Vicious 6. This animated comedy is the backstory to the “Despicable Me” series, although it doesn’t contain the redemptive element of those earlier films. Even so, it’s hilarious. Rated PG for some action/violence and rude humor.

► **“Torchlighters: The Richard Allen Story” (Redeem TV)** — A young boy born into slavery before the Revolutionary War grows up to change the face of American Christianity by founding the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It’s the 22nd episode in the excellent “Torchlighters” animated series, which introduces children to heroes of the Christian faith. Visit RedeemTV.com.

EDITOR’S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in The Baptist Paper 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 Group.

MEET THE REVIEWER

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



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Evangelistic tool

By Rose Comstive
Baptist Standard

The transformative power of church camp

Eddie Walker believes camp ministry can be a transformative experience for children and youth as they begin their walk with Christ.

That was the case in his life, and Walker has devoted much of his career to making it meaningful for others.

His experience includes service as a summer staff member, worship leader, founder of a camp and now executive director of Mount Lebanon Camp and Retreat Center in Cedar Hill, Texas — where he came to faith in Christ.

Hearing the gospel

Growing up in nearby Duncanville, Walker attended camp at Mount Lebanon as a junior high school student, at the invitation of a friend.

“I went to have fun, ride horses and swim, but I heard the gospel in an age-appropriate way that I could understand and came to Christ then and there,” he recalled.

A few years later at age 15, Walker responded to a call to ministry and delved deeper into camp opportunities.

Returning to Mount Lebanon in college, he served on summer staff and eventually joined the worship team.

Faith journey

“I grew up playing bluegrass and gospel music,” he said. “When I came back on summer staff they let me help my first year and then asked me to start leading.”

As a worship leader, Walker saw his own faith journey played out in the lives of young campers.

“I got to see thousands of kids repeat my story where they came to Christ, got plugged into a church



Unsplash.com

Nationally, the Christian Camp and Conference Association 2020 Compass Survey revealed 10–15% of campers make faith commitments. Nearly 9 out of 10 camps encourage those commitments or recommitments to Christ in their programs, but only 39% keep track of the decisions. So the actual number probably is greater.

home and made lifelong friends,” he explained.

Walker led worship and handled media for camps before he moved to Rockwall, where he served 12 years at Lake Pointe Church as a worship leader and communications director.

Eventually he and his family built their own church camp from the ground up in nearby Royse City.

“My dad was a contractor,” Walker noted, and “taught me to buy and rent properties and fix them up.”

Walker’s experience taking care of facilities and running media, along with a lifetime in ministry, came together when he developed and directed Sabine Creek Ranch.

The family ran the camp 17 years before he went to Dallas Baptist University to teach a camp degree program in 2014.

From firsthand experience, Walker has witnessed and understands the impact of camp ministry on the lives of students.

Returning to Mount Lebanon as executive director in the spring of 2022, Walker hopes to continue leading

children and students toward a relationship with Christ through fun, educational and transformational experiences.

‘Full circle’

“It’s good to come full circle,” he said.

Camps offer families the opportu-

nity to expose their children to the gospel in a fun and understandable way, Walker noted, adding many Christian testimonies begin with church camp.

“I do this because it is effective,” he said, noting camp ministry is “one of the best evangelistic tools that we have.”

Decisions made

Nationally, the Christian Camp and Conference Association 2020 Compass Survey revealed 10–15% of campers make faith commitments. Nearly 9 out of 10 camps encourage those commitments or recommitments to Christ in their programs, but only 39% keep track of the decisions. So the actual number probably is greater.

Last year, of the 7,509 summer campers at Mount Lebanon, 327 made recorded professions of faith in Christ, 34 responded to a call to vocational ministry, 76 made a commitment to be baptized and many others rededicated their lives to Christ.

Walker said they “are in a season of rapid growth, anticipating our 2023 summer camp attendance being up nearly 25% this summer over last year, and an additional 20% up for 2024.”

He sees “a lot of positive benefits” for a child or teenager who attends church camp, as they offer an environment “away from distractions, technology and sometimes really tough family situations,” Walker explained, describing camp as a place where young people can “look at the stars and consider bigger questions.”

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

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