

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Next generation

First Baptist Church Trussville hosts A Night of Champions, an event geared toward engaging middle and high school athletes with the gospel.

A Night of Champions reaches teen athletes with inspiring testimonies, gospel message

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

In the Southeast, football is so beloved that some joke it's a religion. Pastors Craig Whitt and Sam McElroy, founders of A Night of Champions, tap into that passion for sports to introduce teen athletes to the greatest love of all.

Whitt and McElroy conceived A Night of Champions almost a de-

cade ago as a way to bring young athletes together prior to the start of football season to hear inspiring testimonies from well-known athletes and to hear a gospel message.

"[There is] the need to reach the next generation," said McElroy, pastor of legacy adults at Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee. "Methods may change, but the message is still the same."

McElroy found a fellow sports fan

in Whitt, associate pastor of First Baptist Church Bentonville, Arkansas, and the idea for an event aimed at teen athletes that could be replicated in a variety of churches took shape.

Alabama host churches

A Night of Champions was held this year in July and August in 15 churches in Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and Georgia.

First Baptist Church Trussville and Lindsay Lane Baptist Church in Athens each hosted an event this year.

Regardless of location, each event follows a similar program. After enjoying a meal together, athletes gather in the auditorium where a local Fellowship of Christian Athletes director or student pastor warms up the crowd with hype and fun games.

(See 'Reaching,' page 8)

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SCAN ME

Love Packages

Ministry continues its mission to ‘get the Word out’

In 2020, TAB introduced readers to Love Packages, a ministry whose mission is to get Bibles and Christian literature into the hands of believers across the globe.

Since then, TAB has collected materials at our office in Homewood and delivered tons of materials to Love Packages’ warehouse and distribution center in Decatur.

This month, several TAB staff members volunteered at the Decatur facility. We packed boxes and learned more about the process of sorting donated materials and prepping them for shipment to ministry partners in Asia, Africa and South America.

We heard powerful stories of how God has answered prayers, getting the right materials to the right person at just the right time.

Love Packages has opportunities for volunteers of all ages, abilities and skill levels. Learn more at tabonline.org/volunteer-love or visit lovepackages.org. (TAB)

Right: Debbie Campbell packs as many books as possible in her boxes. **Below:** The teams from TAB heard testimonies of how God is working from Love Packages’ Jason Jenkins (second from right).



Photo by Susan Stevens/The Alabama Baptist
Hannah Munoz (left) and Jessica Ingram pack up boxes of donated books. The boxes will eventually be loaded into a shipping container, shipped overseas and distributed by partners to pastors, lay leaders and other believers.



Photo by Maggie Evans/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Daniel Gilliland/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Susan Stevens/The Alabama Baptist
Above: In total, TAB volunteers packed more than three pallets of resources. **Below:** Annette Brown (back) and Susan Stevens team up to strap together groups of Sunday School books.



Photo by Carrie Brown McWhorter/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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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

Sign up to volunteer individually or as a group by calling Love Packages in Decatur at 256-355-3004.

OPINION



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



@RashionalThts

Are we practicing daily what we rush to do in a crisis?

Sometimes I wonder if God allows the seemingly nonstop occurrence of natural disasters because His people are at their best when tragedy strikes.

I'm not saying He causes or creates the disasters. I'm merely wondering if He chooses not to stop them so we will have another opportunity to showcase His love at a level that pleases Him.

If that could be the case, at least in part, then it should lead us to evaluate how we look to Him during the calmer moments.

Is it possible the Church as a whole struggles to show up for area communities genuinely, thoroughly and consistently outside of horrific situations?

Dedicated efforts

Much of what we report in The Alabama Baptist highlights congregations and individuals who model a faith-driven love, compassion and effort. They are dedicated and involved, and we work to keep their stories in front of you as inspiration, encouragement and motivation.

Still, many of us may find ourselves too caught up in our own busy lives or exhausted from cultural debates to leave enough

margin to notice the daily opportunities right in front of us.

Even positive, healthy activities can crowd our schedules and prevent us from having the time or energy needed to invest in that lonely older neighbor down the street or rebellious teenager who shows up in youth group from time to time.

Opportunities all around

What about the single mother working two or three jobs to keep food on the table and pay her bills? She's determined not to ask for a handout and rarely complains or mentions a need, but if we slowed down to really think about it, we know we could help in some way.

Community after community across Alabama reports concerns and desperate pleas for partners to come alongside them — and most involve finding a way to give their children, teenagers and young adults an opportunity not only to survive but also to thrive.

There are twice as many churches in our state convention as there are public schools in Alabama. We really should be able to tackle many of the issues involving students.

"Alabama is the No. 24 largest school system in the United States, serving 747,831 students

across the 1,511 public schools for the 2023 school year," reports publicschoolreview.com. Another 456 private schools serve 81,437 students.

"The percentage of students achieving math proficiency in Alabama is 22%," the site states. "The percentage of students achieving reading proficiency is 45%."

While many students in a variety of school systems across the state rank much higher than the percentage reported, a large number of students fall within or below the ranking.

What an incredible opportunity for churches to assist parents and teachers, especially now that the Alabama Literacy Act has been reactivated following a pause during and coming out of the pandemic.

Under the literacy act, students will not pass third grade if they are not on an appropriate reading level.

Focus on specific needs

Extra attention paid to children in kindergarten through third grade will make the difference — and might just make an eternal difference as well.

What schools are considered part of your congregation's community?

What are ways your church could invest in students' lives?

If you don't have a school close by, look to assist a neighboring church that does. If the schools in your area have plenty of churches around to reach out, seek an area that doesn't have enough help.

Think about teachers in your congregation. How might they be able to share ideas and provide guidance on how to help?

While retired teachers make excellent ministry leaders in this area, avoid asking a current teacher to add extra responsibilities to his or her plate.

We need our teachers rested so they have the energy needed to pour into the students each day.

Include all generations

Be creative and include all generations within your congregation. Do your due diligence related to who will be allowed to have direct access to the children and always work within the protocols required by school administrators.

It may be cumbersome, time consuming and even pricey to provide an ongoing, student-focused ministry of service to parents, teachers and staff, but think of the children and the possibilities you are providing.

Your Voice



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

Scripture addresses 'spiritual photophobia'

By Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale, Alabama

Photophobia is a sensitivity to light due to a variety of causes. While this is true in a physical sense, what about those who are sensitive to light in a spiritual sense? Many have photophobia in a spiritual sense.

Jesus said, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

'The Light has come'

Notice how Jesus continues His explanation with reference to light.

1. There is the appearance of light. John 3:19a reads, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world" Jesus speaks of Himself.

2. There is the allowance of light. John 3:19b reads, "... and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." God allows us to choose between darkness and light.

3. There is the annoyance of light. John 3:20a reads, "For everyone practicing evil hates the light."

4. There is the avoidance of light. John 3:20b continues, "... and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

5. There is the acceptance of light. John 3:21 begins, "But ..." Note the contrast between those rejecting the light and those receiving the light. (See also John 1:10-13.)

6. There is the assurance of light. John 3:21 continues, "... he who does the truth comes to the

light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

7. There is the attendance of light. Jesus is "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9).

'Light of the world'

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Light can be avoided during your time on earth, or it may be accepted for time and eternity. Embrace the light in salvation or you will face the light in condemnation.

What will it be for you? What have you done with Jesus Christ, the light of the world?

Believe Him, receive Him!

"I like to say that revival is an unrivaled hunger and pursuit for the heart and presence of God. When a person has that passion and hunger to pursue God's presence above all else, it's infectious," said **Kyle Hodges**, pastor of West Blocton First Baptist Church, who believes his church has been experiencing revival for the past eight months.

"The goal is to reach everyone," said **Joel Mathew**, a research engineer who alongside Ulf Hermjakob recently launched the Greek Room, an AI-powered technology to help streamline the highly technical process of biblical translation.

Letters to the Editor

The Back to Campus special edition of The Alabama Baptist (July 27) is a fantastic resource for students, parents, educators, pastors and the entire community.

I wish I had this kind of information when I headed off for my first year in college.

Congratulations to the staff for this great service.

Bruce Barbour
Lady Lake, Florida

Iam writing regarding the article in the Aug. 13 edition by Mark MacDonald about editing your church's online content.

MacDonald made many good points, but in discussing the move away from printed bulletins to use of websites, social media, etc., he

said, "Remember that everyone has access to a website, but only a small number will have your bulletin or an app."

It is more accurate to say "most" people have access to a website. We still have many folks in our churches who do not own a computer, do not text or email and/or do not participate in social media.

I encourage our churches to keep appropriate communication tools in place for everyone.

Yes, it is a challenge to "get the word out" when not everyone in your audience is using the same digital tools, but it is necessary (and kind) to be sure that all are informed and no one is left out.

Anita Arnold
Dothan

The front page of the Aug. 10 edition of The Alabama Baptist validated a long-held contention of mine, namely: Sports is the number one religion in America, formerly a Christian nation, and football is the number one denomination.

The article touted a movie despite the fact furnished in the article that foul language comes with the show.

L.E. Gosa
Fayette

Thank you to The Alabama Baptist staff for caring enough to pray and for letting us know in the July 20 edition.

Starla Long Presnell
Dothan

“No amount of success in ministry is worth failure at home.”

SHANE PRUITT

National Next Gen Director for the North American Mission Board

Every church I know of has three kinds of members:

1. Watchers — These are spectators who are there to see the show. They aren't involved, excited or joyful. They are just there for the popcorn and the crowd.

2. Worrisome — These are the critics, armchair quarterbacks and complainers — everything is wrong, from the temperature to the tempo of the music; the sermon length to the hymnal weight; the pastor's hair to his wife's skirt (and they are generous with their comments).

3. Workers — These are the people praying for staff and leaders, supporting whether they agree or not, giving both dollars and “sweat-equity.” They are too busy to stop and criticize. (The knees of their slacks are often worn or wrinkled from the prayer room.)

In the church, every member should be a minister and every lost or uninvolved person a prospect.

What kind of church member are you? Is the heavenly Father saying, “My house is full but my field is empty”?

I want to be a help, not a hindrance. I want to be so busy doing God's will that I have no time to find fault. Lend a hand. Give a hug. Encourage someone today.

Jack Anderson

Associational missionary
Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist
Association

“We're an older congregation, but you don't have to be super saints to share the gospel. Or to ask someone to let you pray for them. It's about daring to take a stand and putting your faith to practice,” said **Donald Sharp**, pastor of Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church in Chicago.

“I want our campus to be a place that whenever a child arrives, they

will be able to tell ... this is a place where they will be valued,” said **Serenity Richard**, the new executive director of New Mexico Baptist Children's Home & Family Ministries.

“I have done graduation ceremonies in chapel. I have done them in prisons. I've never done one in an apartment,” quipped **Jamie Dew**, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary president, regarding conferring the master of discipleship degree diploma to 91-year-old Glenn Ingouf, a former missionary who lives in Decatur.

The words of Oscar Blackwelder in relation to spiritual realities are important: “The scandal of Christi-

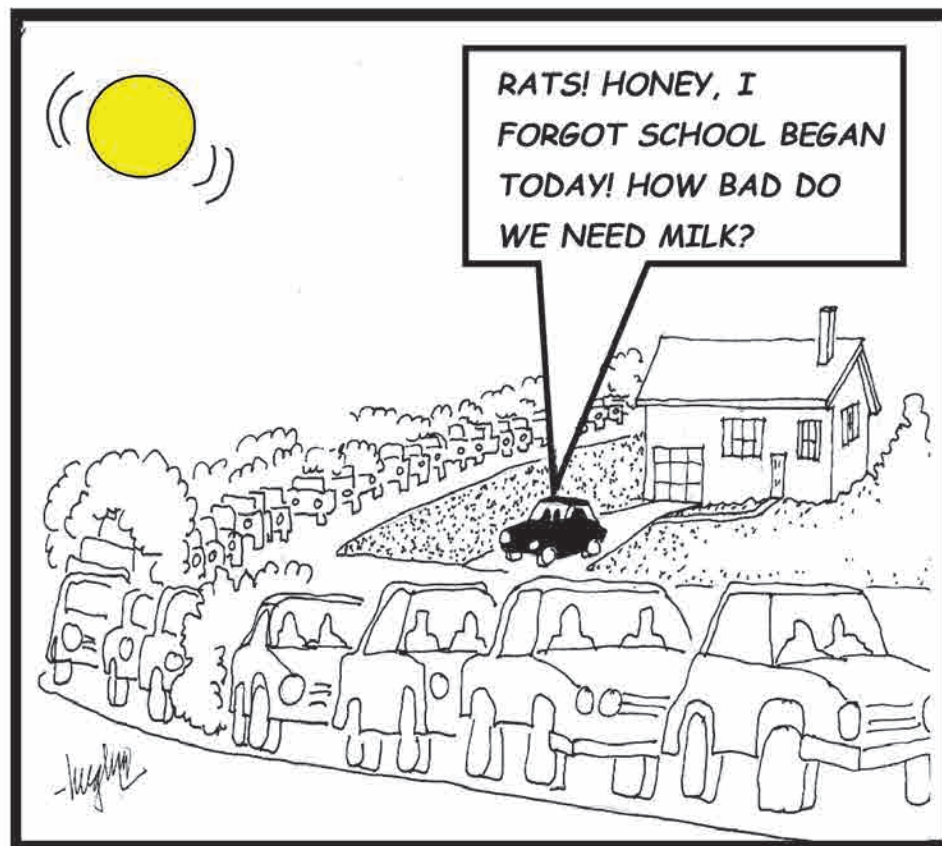
anity — defined as ‘division within the Christian ranks’ — is not the most deadly of all defections, for it comes from a deeper scandal — failure in forthright commitment to Christ. More than numbers is required. Significant insights, profound thinking and spiritual power are infinitely more needed than social and political impressiveness of church rolls.”

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

A parent's ability to guide their student through the crucial young adult years begins long before those young adult years begin.

Ryan Scantling
College campus minister
Fayetteville, Arkansas

HUGH'S VIEWS - HUGH KILPATRICK III



THE SIGN SUMMER IS OVER... THE “CAR LINE”

Draw closer to God, even in busyness

To all my fellow car line moms, I have discovered we are not alone in our afflictions in this season of coming and going.

Trying to find space to breathe and a rhythm to move toward our heavenly Father seems daunting at times for all of us. The hectic scene of a morning filled with tears, screams, and messes ... then the kids wake up and it's their turn.

The afternoon chaos of all the activities, all the guilt of another fast-food meal, and all the shame of feeling like a failure one more day.

How do we get there?

Our souls long for the presence of God, but how do we get there? My prayer ... is that He will peel the curtain back for us one layer at a time.

He desires for us to incline in His presence, and I believe He will reveal to each one of us every baby step. Distractions will come and destruction will rear its ugly head as you commit to spending daily time with Him. Give yourself grace just as He will give you.

It is good to be near to God.

You don't have to be all cleaned up before you get there.

You don't have to wipe the sticky cinnamon rolls off, nor do you have to figure out how to wipe your heart clean on your own.

There is no organic cleaner that can do what His presence can. He does all of that.

He does all the cleaning, all the healing, all the restoring.

He knows what we need and that we cannot do it for ourselves. He sees us.

He loves us. He is beckoning us into His presence.

Caris Snider

Excerpt from “Car Line Mom Devotional: 100 Days of Encouragement for the Mama Who Gets Everybody Everywhere”

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Southwestern Seminary

David S. Dockery was installed as the 10th president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on Aug. 22. Jonathan Richard, chair of the seminary's board of trustees, presented Dockery with the presidential medallion. SWBTS trustees elected Dockery president in April. In his address following the ceremony, Dockery said the seminary's focus should be a renewed commitment to fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. (SWBTS)

Wellman to lead SBC study group about cooperation

Texas pastor Jared Wellman has been tapped to lead a new Southern Baptist Convention Cooperation Group formed in response to a motion made at the SBC Annual Meeting in June.

SBC President Bart Barber plans to name the rest of the members by the end of August.

The motion was made by Georgia pastor James Merritt, a former SBC president, with the support of several other former SBC presidents.

The group will be tasked with determining "the nature of cooperation among Southern Baptist churches and our needs going forward," Barber said in his Aug. 11 announcement of Wellman.

Wellman gained prominence during his nearly eight years serving as a trustee for the SBC Executive Committee. (The Baptist Paper)

SBC Pastors Conference theme, officers announced

Stephen Rummage, president of the 2024 Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference, has announced the theme and officers for next year's event to be held June 9–10 in Indianapolis.

The theme will be "Faithful: Pursuing Your Mission," based in Rev. 17:14.

Rummage, pastor of Quail Springs Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, said Erik D. Cummings, pastor of New Life Baptist Church of Carol City in Miami, Florida, will serve as vice president, and Ray Anderson, minister of missions and evangelism at Quail Springs Baptist Church, will be treasurer.

Rummage expressed his commitment to support pastors in prayer. An online prayer request form is available at tabonline.org/2024-pc. (Oklahoma Baptist Messenger)

Persecuted church

Imprisoned Christians in Eritrea released after call to prayer

ASMARA, Eritrea — Thirteen prisoners in Eritrea, all of whom had been imprisoned for 10 years or longer, were released days after The Voice of the Martyrs, an organization devoted to helping persecuted Christians, started a prayer effort for believers in the East African nation.

On July 22, VOM sent an email urging Christians to pray for the release of Haile Nayzgi and Kiflu Gebremeskel, both arrested in 2004 for their leadership of the underground church in Eritrea. VOM also provided information on how to contact the Eritrean embassy.

Six days after the email went out, ministry partners in the country reported that 13 Christians imprisoned in Eritrea had been released.

"We may never know this side of heaven exact-

ly how all those pieces fell into place," said Todd Nettleton, VOM's spokesperson.

Nayzgi and Gebremeskel remain in prison in Eritrea, and VOM has an online petition for their release.

In 2002, Eritrea's government shut down activity for all but three denominations operating in the country. Most churches went underground in response. (Meredithe Flynn)

Christian man jailed in Pakistan on blasphemy charge denied bail

LAHORE, Pakistan — Haroon Shahzad, a Christian man charged with blasphemy in Paki-

stan, was not allowed to attend his bail hearing, apparently to appease his accusers, Morning Star News reported.

Quoting attorney Aneeqa Maria, Morning Star reported that Shahzad was granted pre-arrest bail July 3 before being taken into protective custody, but police kept him from attending his bail hearing July 11. "They knew he would get bail on merit, which is why they deliberately kept him from appearing before the judge," Maria said.

Shahzad was charged June 30 with insulting religious beliefs for posting Bible verses on Facebook. Muslims were so furious about the posting that dozens of Christian families fled their homes in Chak 49 Shumaali village, fearing retribution. Pakistan is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (Leigh Pritchett)



IMB photo

Alabama news

BARBOUR ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Eufaula**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Aug. 6. Special music was provided by the church pianist, Jeff Golden, and his sisters, The Golden Girls (& Friends), along with guest gospel singer Jeff Wilson. Presentations included a letter of proclamation from Eufaula Mayor Jack Tibbs and a letter of recognition from Gov. Kay Ivey plus a commemorative plaque given by Ellen Dewberry (left) with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission to Clyde Hancock (right), the pastor. Barbour Baptist Association director of missions Don Hatcher and his wife, Patricia, were among those present.



ABHC photo

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION



BARBER

► **Marty Barber** began as the new minister of youth for **Chulafinnee Baptist Church, Heflin**, on Aug. 9. Barber is a graduate of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, and is employed by Noble Bank in Anniston. He comes to Chulafinnee from Fruithurst Baptist Church. Philip Morris is pastor of Chulafinnee.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Tuscumbia** celebrated its bicentennial July 30. Evangelist Michael Mason was the guest preacher with special music by Phillip Russell and an ensemble. Jimmy Austin (left) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to pastor Barrett Long (right). Special guests included three former pastors and many former staff members who were recognized for their dedicated leadership. Additional guests included Jim Warren and Eddy Garner, both retired associational mission strategists of Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association.



ABHC photo

COFFEE COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► **Steve Tipton** (right), manager of The Vineyard Christian Retreat Conference Center, recently celebrated 20 years of service with **Coffee County Baptist Association**. He was honored at a reception held in the CCBA build-

ing in the Dr. John Granger Conference Center.

Records show that during Tipton's ministry at The Vineyard almost 71,000 people have been to the retreat center, resulting in 1,700 known salvations and 3,596 known rededications to the Lord. Around 250 people accepted the call to full-time ministry during the past two decades.



Photo courtesy of Coffee County Baptist Association

MARION ASSOCIATION

► **Kenny Hatcher**, pastor of **First Baptist Church Guin**, recently celebrated 50 years in ministry. The church presented him with a plaque and a lunch was held in his honor July 30.



HATCHER

Hatcher was ordained at Mount Carmel Baptist, West Blocton. During his years of ministry, he has served as pastor of several churches in Alabama: Northside Baptist Church, Selma; Mars Hill Baptist Church, Jemison; Pine Flat Baptist Church, Suttle; Community Baptist Church, Brierfield; and Haysop Baptist Church, Eoline; and as interim of Concord Baptist Church, Calera, (now Hope Mountain Church). Hatcher also enjoys singing. He is a recording artist with Chapel Valley Studio, Sharps Valley, Tennessee, and artist and chapel speaker for Christmas in the Smokies, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and Sonshine cruises.

He holds a doctor of ministry from International Seminary, Apopka, Florida, and is a NAMB-endorsed law enforcement chaplain and has served on several Alabama Baptist State Convention committees, including two years as chair of the Christian Life Commission.

He and his wife of 47 years, Phyllis, have one daughter and two grandchildren.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► **Pinedale Baptist Church, Montgomery**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Aug. 6.



ABHC photo

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Hartselle** will celebrate its 140th anniversary Sept. 10. Worship begins at 10 a.m. Former pastors and staff will be present to speak and lead in worship with

lunch to follow. Everyone is invited. Clayton Speed is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

► **Luke Criss** is the new pastor of **Liberty Baptist Church, Morris**. He previously served as student minister of Enon Baptist Church, Morris. He holds a bachelor's in theology from the University of Mobile and is working on a master's in biblical counseling from Southern Seminary. He and his wife, Kelleigh, are both from Morris.



CRISS

PLEASANT GROVE ASSOCIATION

► **Prudes Creek Baptist Church, Brookwood**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Aug. 20. Special music was provided by Latter Rain



ABHC photo

gospel trio followed by a message from pastor Tim Pounds (left).

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a

plaque to the pastor and Bobby Ethridge (right), deacon chair.

"It is wonderful to be able to celebrate 175 years of what God has done," Pounds said.

WINSTON ASSOCIATION

► **Bethel No. 1 Baptist Church, Arley**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Aug. 6, beginning with prayer time at the altar. Special music was provided by the choir and guest soloist Scott Strickland.

Mike Goforth, pastor of Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz, and former chair of the trustees for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was the guest speaker.

"God has put you here for a purpose," Goforth said. "There is still a need for this church on the front line to share the gospel."

Many members of the church dressed in old-fashioned clothes as part of the celebration.

Jack Wilson, age 91, was recognized as the oldest member, and Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to Mike Tidwell, pastor. Special guests included Eddie Everett, director of missions for Winston Baptist Association.



ABHC photo

Matt Dickey, minister to middle school students at FBC Trussville, gives an invitation during the Aug. 7 A Night of Champions event at the church.

Reaching athletes



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Alabama churches among those hosting energetic, edifying events for students

(continued from page 1)

The hype time transitions to the introduction of that night's special guest, an athlete or recognized sports personality. This year's special guests were:

- ▶ David Pollack, former University of Georgia All-American and previous longtime host on ESPN's College GameDay.
- ▶ Chase McGrath, University of Tennessee kicker.
- ▶ Malik Willis, Tennessee Titans quarterback.
- ▶ Will Reichard, University of Alabama place-kicker and punter.
- ▶ Velus Jones Jr., wide receiver formerly with the University of Tennessee and now with the Chicago Bears.
- ▶ Ty Simpson, University of Alabama quarterback.
- ▶ Jason Simpson, University of Tennessee at Martin head coach and father of Ty Simpson.

Each special guest participates in a question-and-answer session with the host, focusing on what it's like to be a Christian athlete or coach at the highest levels of the game.

This session includes a testimony sharing the faith journey of the guest.

Before concluding with another athletic challenge, the host gives an invitation to meet Jesus, the main reason for the evening.

According to McElroy, follow-up with those who are saved is three-

fold and includes the local church, the team's coach and the area's FCA director. In addition, each player who comes forward is given a Bible.

A Night of Champions was born out of the founders' mutual love not just for sports, but for the athletes on the field, McElroy said.

Thinking that many teen athletes don't go to church, they wanted them to have a great experience at a local church where they would also hear about teamwork, character building and the gospel.

Planting seeds

The event provides an opening, organizers said. At the July 27 event at Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, for example, some 350-400 students came to hear Ty and Jason Simpson speak.

Jon Thackston, main campus missions and outreach pastor, said seven area high schools were represented. Students heard the gospel and received information about following Christ as they left.

With so many sports teams and schools fearful of incorporating pre-game prayers or other faith-based elements in their programs, one might think there

would be some resistance to inviting young athletes to a church for an experience like this.

That's never been a problem, McElroy said. In the nine years he and Whitt have organized A Night

of Champions events, there has never been negative pushback, he said.

FBC Trussville staff members Spencer Jones, minister to high school students, and Matt Dickey, minister to middle school students, echoed McElroy's assessment.

Both participated in the Aug. 7 Night of Champions held at their church and said the community was very supportive.

"They welcomed the event," Jones said.

The athletes and their coaches were welcomed outside the church by volunteers wearing referee uniforms. Walking in through an inflatable tunnel, they were met by various sports-related inflatable games in the lobby.

At the FBC Trussville event, DJ Platinum played energetic Christian music, while attendees participated in a raucous game of cups and tried to catch T-shirts shot from a cannon and footballs thrown from the stage.

More than sports

Buddy Champion, pastor of FBC Trussville, said having David Pollack, a familiar face to fans of the SEC and ESPN, as the special guest was a big draw.

"(Greater Birmingham) FCA worked with the local coaches in

order to let them know about the opportunity to hear David Pollack," Champion said. "It then took an army of First Baptist Trussville volunteers to bring the evening together."

During his Q&A, Pollack capitalized on the fact that the room was

filled with Auburn and Alabama fans, provoking a loud reaction anytime he mentioned either team in the context of losing against Georgia.

But the interaction wasn't all about sports, the injury that sidelined his athletic career or what he's been doing since then.

Talk of what Jesus did for him throughout those times was heavily sprinkled throughout the discussion.

"David was great to work with and was laser focused on sharing athletic insights and how He has found Christ in His life," Champion said.

Dickey noted that 103 student athletes came forward to be saved — something Dickey said he will never forget.

For his part, Champion said he was grateful so many students were exposed to the gospel.

"The Kingdom of God was enhanced and enlarged when everything came together for the gospel to be shared," he said.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
David Pollack, a former University of Georgia All-American who was a host on ESPN's College GameDay, speaks at A Night of Champions.

To find out more about A Night of Champions or this ministry's other events, go to strengthofachampion.org.

To learn more about hosting, go to the Contact Us tab on their website or call Craig Whitt at 865-566-8163.

Hope and support

Pregnancy resource centers minister to mothers who have miscarried

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Madison Gardner said she was shopping for a nice photo box the day she went to a local crafts store. But she felt like she was picking out a casket.

“Back in 2020, my husband and I started trying to have a baby,” Gardner said. “I ended up getting pregnant in November and finding out we lost twins in December, on Christmas Eve.”

She was devastated. A month later, she was sorting through what to do with the keepsakes she had, like the twins’ ultrasound photos. So she ended up in Michaels looking for a box she could keep them in.

‘Tug on my heart’

A month or so later, Gardner started working at the Women’s Resource Center in Mobile.

“I felt a tug on my heart to come up here; I don’t know why,” Gardner said.

After she started working in marketing for the center, she saw a need that many people might not think of — the need for a miscarriage ministry.

Need for guidance

“I know for me, even from the hospital standpoint, I didn’t receive any kind of guidance or ‘this is what to expect’ or ‘I’m sorry this is happening,’” Gardner said.

She saw that for women who might have initially wrestled with whether to keep their babies, miscarriages brought with them an additional layer of emotional complication and guilt.

“I asked if we could do something for the women who have experienced that loss,” she said.

The center’s CEO, Marty Carrell, agreed. Soon Gardner had started In His Hands, a local support program for women who have experienced a miscarriage.

Women who might have come through the center as clients were welcome, but the program also was



Photo courtesy of Madison Gardner

These memory boxes, which offer a place for grieving mothers to store ultrasound photos and other memorabilia, are part of the miscarriage ministry of Women’s Resource Center of Mobile.

open to any woman who had experienced the loss of a baby.

The goal of the group was to help the women know they were not alone, not broken and not less than anyone else, Gardner said. It aimed to help them find hope, encouragement and purpose.

“When you go through that, you want someone who can relate to you,” she said. “Most of the women don’t have anyone in their life who has gone through that. People often don’t know how to help you; they don’t know what to say.”

For more information, visit wrcmobile.org/educational-services or wiregrasshope.com/services/miscarriage-or-infant-loss.

For women who might have initially wrestled with whether to keep their babies, miscarriages brought with them an additional layer of emotional complication and guilt, Madison Gardner says.

Gardner said she spends a lot of time talking one on one with the ladies, and the ministry also provides them with a photo storage box like the one she bought for herself. She includes a personal note, as well as a necklace that says, “A piece of my heart is in heaven.”

So far, they’ve given out more than 150 boxes.

Looking ahead

“I want it to continue to grow,” Gardner said. “Our goal has been to eventually partner with hospitals too.”

Wiregrass Hope Pregnancy Center in Dothan is another pregnancy resource center in the state working to meet grieving mothers where they are.

Jean Damren, director of the center’s Anchor ministry, said she cares for mothers who have miscarried, had a stillborn baby or lost an infant, walking alongside them with eight weeks of counseling and Bible study.

The ministry includes a memory kit similar to WRC’s, along with other resources.

Damren agreed with Gardner that the emotions around miscarriages are more complicated for women who have considered abortion.

“Honestly they feel shame and guilt already because they were thinking of having an abortion, and when they miscarry, it brings that out because they think ‘it’s my fault that it happened,’” Damren said.

Through their ministry, they hope to offer biblical encouragement and support.



Unsplash.com



FOURTH OF 5 IN A SERIES

‘That all may go well’: Four pillars of spiritual health for all believers

By Julie Donavan
The Alabama Baptist

Like most pastors, Doug Wilson works on Sundays. Aside from an afternoon nap, he doesn’t get much rest on the traditional Sabbath day.

That doesn’t mean Wilson, teaching pastor of Moffett Road Baptist Church in Mobile, doesn’t believe in the value of rest.

“Unplugging and resting are essential for mental and physical restoration,” said Wilson, who is also executive director of the Center for Christian Calling at the University of Mobile. “The older I get, the more convinced I am that if we fail to practice Sabbath rest intentionally, our bodies will take it for us by means of breaking down. I’d rather practice Sabbath rest at home than in a hospital bed. If we don’t unplug and refresh, we will cease being fruitful for the Master.”

‘Keeping the Sabbath holy’

Wilson is among those who encourage “keeping the Sabbath holy” by focusing the day on worship and respite from the work and activities that fill the other six days of the week.

In Genesis 2:1–3, God rests following six days of creation. To be clear, God doesn’t need to rest, but His action, passed on to us in the fourth commandment, provides an example for us to do the same.

The theme of observing the Sabbath continues in the Old Testament as God’s people wander in the wilderness. Each day they went out and picked up the food God rained down for them, but He commanded them to rest from that task on the seventh day.

Slow down

In their rest, which was really their obedience, God’s glory was shown. Rest is more than just taking a day off, however.

In his book “The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry,” pastor and author John Mark Comer cites research that says the average American now takes

four fewer weeks of vacation than 50 years ago.

“Hurry is a threat not only to our emotional health but to our spiritual lives as well,” he writes.

Whether taking a Sabbath rest on Sunday or taking a day or block of hours on another day of the week, slowing down allows the human brain to relax. For believers, this time becomes an opening for God to speak.

God’s command to rest does not end in the Old Testament and neither is it the only aspect of physical health the Bible mentions. In the beginning of 3 John, for example, we

see John’s concern for Gaius’ soul and his health. “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul” (v. 2).

John appears to be concerned about his friend’s mental, physical and spiritual health. John prays for Gaius’ physical health, but John also notes that Gaius is a strong example of good spiritual health, which encourages John and the other believers.

Walk in the truth

As believers, we are to strive to walk in the truth. When we fail to do that, the temptations to sin will increase. And though there is no guarantee of physical or mental wellness in minding our spiritual health, there are ways each of us can work our spiritual muscles on a daily basis.

Here are three ways:
1. Study God’s Word. When we love God with all our hearts, souls and minds, we want to spend time with Him in His Word.

Bible study requires our time. Some people also struggle to understand Scripture. The best way to get past the obstacles is to press on, and for good reason.

God’s Word equips Christians to deal with every thought and situation: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for

every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Studying God’s Word helps keep us from stumbling and it guides our path. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” As you appropriately read God’s Word, you will clearly see the light of Jesus Christ.

2. Practice prayer. Prayer contributes mightily to spiritual health. Peter instructs believers to “pray without ceasing” in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Communication is vital to any relationship, including our relationship with God.

God hears our prayers

Stefana Dan Laing, professor of spiritual formation at Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, said prayer can take a lot of forms, from a “laundry list” of requests to emergency appeals. And God hears those prayers because “He is a good parent to us,” she said.

But to build a deeper prayer practice, she advises incorporating intercessory prayer, or praying for others, as well as what she calls “wordless prayer.”

“We often do a lot of talking in our prayers,” she said. “God wants us to talk to Him, but our prayers should not all be one-sided. Sit and listen to God.”

3. Love others. Pray for a heart that longs to love others the way God does. It is difficult to have a genuine heart of love in the face of anger, struggles and the hardships of this world. Setbacks will certainly come. But we can build our spiritual foundation on God’s love for us. “We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them” (1 John 4:16).

Without love for God, spiritual practices are meaningless. One can pray, memorize Scripture, practice Sabbath, fast or meditate but not be genuine. Spiritual health stems from the love God has shown us. We should show this love to others.

There are other spiritual disciplines that could be added to this list. The point is to get started, Laing said.

“Spiritual health is about the Holy Spirit’s indwelling, working in you and through you. It is not just so you feel good and balanced,” she said. “Start somewhere and make it count. Build your practice. Build your discipline.”

THE ‘AWE’ FACTOR

Harnessing the benefits of wonder

FIFTH OF 5 IN A SERIES

Have you ever sat in awe of a sunset, marveled at a waterfall or admired a field of flowers?

Several months ago, my family and I were at the airport. As we were boarding our plane, the sun was setting. My son was thrilled to see the sunset and insisted on sitting in the window seat so he could admire the beautiful colors. We reminded him that an awesome God created that awesome sunset.

Even in secular circles, it is not uncommon for people to post awe-inspiring photos of the beauty God has created — towering trees, starry skies, colorful birds and cloud formations.

Even in the hearts of not-yet-believers, the natural world often sparks awe, what author and psychologist Dacher Keltner defines as “the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends your current understanding of the world.”

Health benefits

In his book “Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How it Can Transform Your Life,” Keltner says awe has many health benefits to humans, including calming down the central nervous system and triggering the release of oxytocin, a hormone that promotes trust and bonding.

Christians readily acknowledge God as Creator of the massive trees, vivid sunsets and snow-capped peaks they admire. Those who don’t know Christ see only what their eyes perceive; they

don’t yet know the Creator on a personal level.

Scripture speaks to the awe factor. In Psalm 121, for example, David speaks of looking at a mountain and seeing how wonderful God is: “I lift up my eyes to the mountains — where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth” (vv. 1–2).

This psalm, one of the Songs of Ascent, addresses the dangerous trek to Jerusalem undertaken by pilgrims going to the temple. As the travelers hiked dangerous roads and pathways, they knew the Creator was with them as they made their way to their final destination.

As Christians today, we are on a dangerous trek. The world around us is filled with “toils and snares,”

to quote the beloved words of “Amazing Grace.”

We must remember to keep our eyes on the Lord, knowing that eternity with Christ is our final destination.

As you look at God’s creation and stand in awe of what He has made, remember these points:

1. Creation reminds us of God’s power as the Creator. God has created a plethora of lovely scenes. When was the last time you sat in awe of one of His masterpieces?

2. Creation reminds us of God as the final Judge. Just as the sun sets and the day is over, one day there will be an end to this world, and God will come again to bring His children home. First Corinthians 4:5 reads, “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time;

wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.”

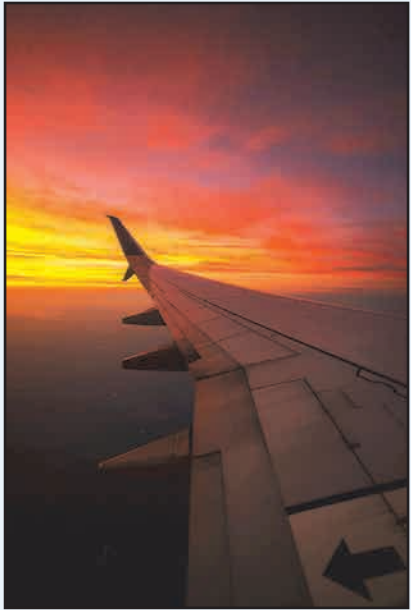
3. Creation reminds us that God has given you this day so you can glorify Him. Psalm 118:24 says, “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Despite how hard or good your day might be, God has given you this day as a gift. Find your “awe” moment during the day to glorify God and thank Him for the day He has given you.

God is gracious

4. Creation reminds us that God is gracious. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

God’s grace saves us through faith, but it also gives us security. Just like a stuffed animal gives security to a child when he or she is sad, the Lord gives each Christian security through His grace.

Consider where you are focusing your attention. Take some time today to look up and out. Find something to be in awe of, then shift your focus to the awesome God we serve.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julie Redmond Donavan serves as children’s and preschool minister at Hollinger’s Island Baptist Church in Mobile. She holds an M.Div. from Beeson Divinity School and a bachelor’s degree from Jacksonville State University and has served in camp and children’s ministry for 13 years.

Bible study leader reflects on ministry of comedy

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Author, humorist and Bible study leader Debbie Childers says she had “sort of always done comedy,” but she first realized she could combine her desire to teach the Bible with her love of humor during a breakout session at a Woman’s Missionary Union event.

“I did a comedy thing based on Martha Stewart and Martha in the Bible and compared the two. It was a good lesson but it ended up being hilarious,” Childers said.

Her first breakout session had a great response. The crowd doubled during the second session and for the third, there were women sitting out in the hall.

Childers remembers thinking, “This might be something I want to do.”

Meanwhile, studying the Bible was an unquenchable thirst. She started teaching Sunday School and began adding humor to the lessons.

She was asked to speak at a women’s retreat, and soon others heard about her and began inviting her to their events.

Then, a couple of years ago, what many could call her biggest break occurred.

Childers had an intense admiration for the late humorist Jeanne Robertson and had emulated her style for 30 years. Childers dreamed of meeting her. In fact, Childers called herself a “walking, talking encyclopedia of Jeanne Robertson.”

“Pretty much my style is a lot like Jeanne’s style. I tell different stories but I tell them in the same style,” Childers said.

Childers’ Sunday School knew about this desire and talked her into

entering a contest Robertson held for fellow humorists. The prize was performing as the opening act for Robertson for one show as well as being mentored by her.

Childers won and ended up getting to perform with Robertson four times. Furthermore, if Robertson wasn’t available to speak at an event, she would sometimes refer the client to Childers.

Though performing with Robertson was “a gift from God” and

Childers was excited by the mentoring, the best part was gaining a close friend.

“I realized that was a gift to me from God. He gave me those two years with her. He knew how much I wanted to meet her. Standing on that stage with her after dreaming of that for so long was very memorable, very touching,” she said.

Another person who has given

Childers many opportunities is Frank Jones, musician and worship leader with Frank Jones Ministries.

After becoming quick friends with Childers and her husband, Tim, Jones invited Childers to headline at some of his events.

She now participates in some of his OASIS events for older adults.

(Also, Tim recently retired from pastoral ministry and joined TAB Media Group as an advertising representative.)

Childers describes her ministry of humor as “kind of different from anything else out there.”

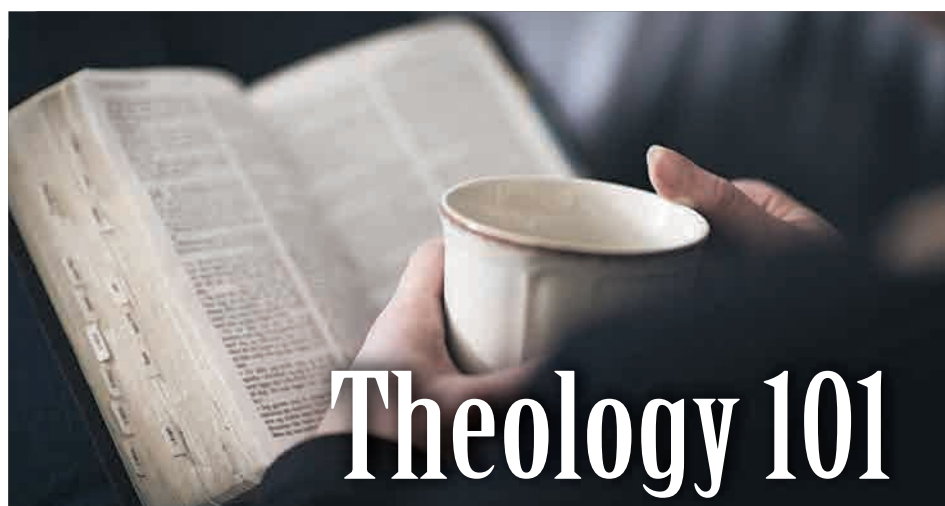
She said she looks forward to being back in the Birmingham area and serving through Valley View Baptist Church in Leeds, her home church.

And, she added, she will continue to be a familiar face at events around the Southeast.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Debbie Childers warms up the crowd attending the July 13 OASIS event at FBC Trussville.

Debbie Childers is available to speak at events across the Southeast. Contact her at debbiechilders1975@gmail.com for more information.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Justification

One Way to the Father

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

Just as the only basis for the justification of sinners before a holy God is the once-for-all death of Jesus, so the only means by which sinners may receive that justification is personal faith. This is an important doctrinal distinction.

We are not justified on the basis of faith but on the basis of Christ’s death. His death is the act of merit. Faith is the God-appointed means by which the merits of Christ’s self-sacrifice may be received.

We might think of saving faith as an outstretched and empty hand receiving justification before God based on the merit of Christ’s substitutionary death for guilty sinners.

Scriptural clarity

Just as the basis for justification is Christ’s death plus nothing, so the means of receiving justification is faith plus nothing.

The Bible is quite clear in declaring that a believer’s right standing before God is actually a free gift to believers that came at great cost to His Son.

One does not come to God for justification intellectually nor merely emotionally. While intellect and emotion are involved, a sinner comes to God willfully, choosing to lift an open hand to receive a free gift.

Romans 3:24 speaks of “being justified freely” by God’s grace “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

No matter how complicated, educated or sophisticated we may be — or how simple we may be — we must all come to God the same way.

Just as kings, rulers and mighty men are born the same way that simple and humble ones are, so must everyone come into God’s acceptance and forgiveness by the same means of saving faith.

‘Access by faith’

Romans 5:2 reminds us that it is through Christ that “we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.”

Romans 10:9–10 summarizes this means by which justification comes to sinners in the oft-quoted and deeply cherished declaration, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Saving faith is also summarized in the cherished promise voiced in Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”

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.



my MISSIONS story

UA professor finds fruit of the Spirit evident in work of missionaries in Uganda

By Chris Roberts
Special to The Alabama Baptist

My mountaintop moment of spiritual clarity actually happened on a mountain.

I spent the summer of 1985 in Wyoming, one of thousands of Alabama college students who have served God through Alabama Baptist Campus Ministries' summer missions.

My final week in Wyoming had me at Mountain Top Baptist Assembly near Casper, chaperoning high schoolers at a Centrifuge camp.

A staffer asked the 19-year-old me whether I had heard God's call to full-time ministry. I quickly said "no" without explaining the real reason: fear. She replied: "Don't ever say 'never' to the Lord."

The clarity came a few days later, when I understood that what God wants is for us is to be open to His call, whatever it is, and not reject it even before receiving it.

As it turns out, God's call did not involve becoming a full-time missionary in Africa, but it has included four short-terms missions trips to the continent.

Serving in Africa

Two trips were to Senegal, where my cousin, Fran Morris, worked for a dozen years at Dakar Academy, a Christian school, before returning to Alabama.

The other two trips were to Uganda. During a 2019 trip, I met Kellie and Michael Seger, who left their jobs as Mississippi schoolteachers to answer the call to full-time ministry.

In May of this year, I spent nearly two weeks with Michael in Gulu, Uganda, a university town 90 miles from the South Sudan border.

During that time he balanced his work as educational specialist with Hope Alive, co-director of the Gulu Globetrotters Educational Cooperative, coaching duties with



Photo by Chris Roberts/The Alabama Baptist

Underneath a mango tree in Gulu, Uganda, missionary Michael Seger is swarmed with hugs upon his return after several months in his native Mississippi.

the Uganda Silverbacks under-16 national basketball team and hosting a team consisting mostly of college students from First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa. He rarely slept.

Spend a little time with missionaries in Africa, and you discover the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. They are filled with Galatians 5:22-23 — "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" — and without such things there is no way to do God's work in developing nations.

Watch missionaries at work and you see:

► **Peace, which comes from knowing they are where God calls them to be.**

After five years in Africa, Michael stands a little closer to you than a typical Mississippi native might. He switches between American English and Ugandan English, which means

speaking with exaggerated precision and saying things such as "branch left" instead of "turn left." He drives like a native Ugandan too, which would get you arrested here.

Missionaries transform themselves to reach a different culture for Christ. The result is peace in places and situations that would likely rattle the rest of us, knowing that God is in charge.

► **Patience and gentleness.**

The culture and economy typically mean long waits, old cars, fewer creature comforts and few explanations. Yet

Michael and the other African missionaries I've met show gentleness to those around them — whether residents or no-nothing people like me on short-term mission trips.

► **Self-control.**

The Segers' first Uganda assignment ended for diabolical reasons beyond their control. They didn't scorch the earth after they were

abused. They shook Uganda's red dust off their sandals and followed God's call to another city and new ways to serve.

► **Joy, which isn't "happiness" but is the calm delight that comes from knowing God is in charge.**

Michael keeps a rubber snake in his car, ready to drop it on an unsuspecting person. It's among his many jokes — ones that bring happiness and show his authentic self and ease with others and God.

► **Kindness and goodness.**

The Segers' biggest kindness came in 2018, when they were introduced to two Ugandan boys, the age of their oldest two children, wandering on a sidewalk after dark.

With permission of local officials, the Segers began caring for the boys. After years of fostering, prayers and bureaucracy, the Segers finalized the adoption of Brian and Joseph in June, securing their American citizenship a day before the seven-member Seger family returned to Uganda.

► **Love.**

Love shows itself in faithfulness and in every other fruit of the Spirit. When Michael arrived back in Gulu after a months-long furlough, the Gulu Globetrotter staff ran to meet him underneath a mango tree with hugs, ululations and absolute joy at seeing him again.

He was home in Uganda. And he was living The Message translation of John 15:9, where Jesus said, "Make yourselves at home in my love."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Chris Roberts is an associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Creative Media and director of the Office of Research in Media Integrity at the University of Alabama. He is a member of North River Church in Tuscaloosa and currently serves as secretary of the board of directors for TAB Media Group.

Learn more about the Seger family's ministry — UG2: Unchanging God, Unchanging Gospel — at ug2ministries.epistle.org or facebook.com/ug2ministries.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Great Commission Conversations: Sept. 19

Once a month, there's a chance for you to experience an up-close-and-personal time with Alabama missionaries serving internationally and within North America.

Great Commission Conversations happen twice in one day each month at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. This month's gatherings will be Sept. 19 and feature a conversation with Rob Jackson, director of the office of church health at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

As September is Myers-

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



Mallory State Missions Offering season, Jackson will share about one of the ministries the offering supports — church revi-

talization — and how it is a critical way to reach the mission field of Alabama.

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, said Great Commission Conversations are "such an incredible opportunity to really get to know our missionaries. We encourage everyone on the call to dialogue with them."

To register, fill out a simple form online, and you will receive a link to join the Zoom gathering you select. To fill out the form, visit alabamawmu.org/gcc.

Request your 2023-24 Resource Directories

This FREE 16-month calendar (Sept. 2023–Dec. 2024) has State Board of Missions events and emphases already printed with plenty of room for you to add your church's events. It also includes a listing of ministries and services.

Please limit 20 copies

per church. To order, please call or email your request to Melissa Tolar at 800-264-1225, ext. 2249; direct at 334-613-2249; mtolar@alsbom.org; or order online at alsbom.org/rd. Include your name, church name, mailing address and number of guides needed up to 20.

To order online, visit alsbom.org/rd or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Get Acquainted Day: Sept. 7

Are you new to Alabama or new to your church staff? Or would you just like to learn more about ministry and missions partnerships?

Get Acquainted Day is the perfect chance to find out how the Alabama Baptist

State Board of Missions can partner with you to fulfill the Great Commission. Hear about all the ministries, meet your state missionaries and tour the SBOM facility in Prattville. You'll also receive a report with information

about the people who live within a five-mile radius of your church.

Get Acquainted Day is free and will be held Sept. 7, 9:30 a.m.–3 p.m., with lunch provided. To register, visit alsbom.org/gad.

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

FULL-TIME 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.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Mitts Chapel Baptist Church searching for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Mitts Chapel Baptist Church, 935 Cold Springs Road, Deatsville, AL 36022.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Providence Baptist Church, 53080 Rabun Road, Bay Minette, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Search Committee, P.O. Box 503, Bay Minette, AL 36507 or email to: arlene@pfefferflooring.com.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER

Cedar Grove Baptist Church in Leeds, Alabama, seeks a part-time music minister to lead our congregation in worship and further develop our music program. For full job description, visit <https://cedargroveleeds.org/jobs>. To apply, send resumé to: chmassey@charter.net.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Oak Bowery, Ohatchee, Alabama, is in search of a director of children's ministry. Part time. Contact Pastor Sam Fordham: DrSamFordham@gmail.com.

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.

SIGNS

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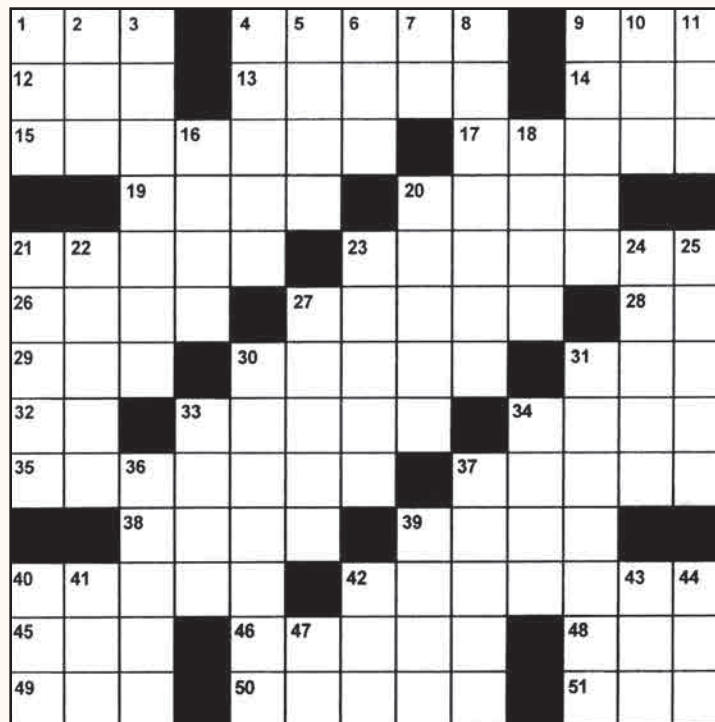
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CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. Grisled and _____ horses. (Zech. 6:3)
4. They removed from _____ . (Num. 33:28)
9. The _____ that is in the land of Assyria. (Isa. 7:18)
12. Villages in the plain of _____. (Neh. 6:2)
13. My son was dead, and is _____ again. (Luke 15:24)
14. Rodent.
15. David ... escaped to the cave _____. (1 Sam. 22:1)
17. _____ the son of Enan. (Num. 1:15)
19. Two _____ more hereafter. (Rev. 9:12)
20. _____ with zeal as a cloak. (Isa. 59:17)
21. Insensitive.
23. Lowest speed.
26. The _____, he is unclean unto you. (Lev. 11:6)
27. What _____ have ye? (Luke 6:32)
28. I am _____. (Isa. 41:4)
29. Assistance.
30. _____ that seek me early shall find me. (Prov. 8:17)
31. Whose _____ is in his hand. (Matt. 3:12)
32. _____, the son of Peleth. (Num. 16:1)
33. The _____ hear his voice. (John 10:3)
34. A sect.
35. Methods.
37. He _____ them all. (Ps. 147:4 NKJV)
38. _____ his garments. (2 Sam. 13:31)
39. The wicked man travaileth with _____. (Job 15:20)
40. Sharpen every man his _____. (1 Sam. 13:20)
42. Not in the _____ of the letter. (Rom. 7:6)
45. Took _____ by the hand. (Matt. 9:25)
46. There were _____ besides unto them.



By Evelyn Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- (Jer. 36:32)
 48. A wave of the _____. (James 1:6)
 49. One little _____ lamb. (2 Sam. 12:3)
 50. Son, go work _____. (Matt. 21:28)
 51. God _____ them in the firmament. (Gen. 1:17)
- ## DOWN
1. A snake.
 2. _____ yet I say unto you. (Matt. 6:29)
 3. Given me to _____. (Eph. 3:2)
 4. Idle _____. (Luke 24:11)
 5. _____, that great city Babylon! (Rev. 18:10)
 6. Edge.
 7. St.
 8. _____ on the land. (Mark 6:47; 2 words)
 9. A _____ adorneth herself. (Isa. 61:10)
 10. Eye, _____ nose, and throat doctor
 11. Greek letter.
 16. He that findeth his life shall _____ it. (Matt. 10:39)
 18. Doth the _____ fly by thy wisdom? (Job 39:26)
 20. A fastener.
 21. Confusion.
 22. In a very _____ day. (Prov. 27:15)
 23. Put off thy _____. (Ex. 3:5)
 24. I _____ not want. (Ps. 23:1)
 25. A plain man, dwelling in _____. (Gen. 25:27)
 27. A short essay.
 30. Wash their hands and their feet _____. (Ex. 30:19)
 31. Let the sea roar, and the _____ thereof. (Ps. 96:11)
 33. His _____ in the east. (Matt. 2:2)
 34. She conceived, and bare _____. (Gen. 4:1)
 36. They look and _____ upon me. (Ps. 22:17)
 37. Golfer's aide.
 39. Between _____ and _____. (Deut. 17:8)
 40. _____ shall bring forth a son. (Matt. 1:21)
 41. _____ thee two tables of stone. (Ex. 34:1)
 42. The _____ number of them. (Num. 3:48)
 43. Thou shalt _____ greater things. (John 1:50)
 44. The people _____ down to eat. (Ex. 32:6)
 47. "I _____." (Wedding)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Week of Prayer for State Missions set for Sept. 10-17

This year marks a significant anniversary for Alabama Baptists — the 200th anniversary of partnering together for missions. And while we have much to celebrate, there remains an unfinished gospel task before us that demands our greatest efforts.

The Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering was launched in January 2016. Gifts are received throughout the year, with a special emphasis coinciding with the Week of Prayer for State Missions, which this year is Sept. 10-17.

The offering is meant to complement vital giving through the Cooperative Program and helps support the Great Commission Ministries of Alabama WMU, Disaster Relief, Church Planting, Partnership Missions and Church Revitalization.

We invite you to join us

For more information, visit myers-mallory.org, or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



in boldly praying for these five strategic ministries and to prayerfully consider your gift to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

As we build off our past and step into our future, know that your gifts provide resources to help Alabama Baptists carry the life-changing power of the gospel to our local communities and beyond.

For more information, visit myers-mallory.org.

Senior Adult Singin's in September

Love singing old hymns? You're invited to two Senior Adult Singin's happening in September.

Frank Jones, known across Alabama and the Southeast for his musical talent, is the host and musical guest.

He will lead in a time of "singing the old songs."

The two Senior Adult Singin's will be held at:

► Willowbrook Baptist Church in Huntsville, Sept. 12, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.

► Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery, Sept. 19, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.

There is no cost to attend. To register individuals and groups or for more information, contact Frank Jones at 205-393-7020 or email fjm1117@gmail.com.

What do the unchurched think about the church?

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

A church can benefit from discovering what people in the community think about it.

Over the years, as a church consultant, I've conducted listening groups for church clients. It's been fascinating to help each church understand the perception of it in the community.

Here's what I've learned about what the unchurched thinks about church:

1. Going to college often stops many from attending a church. Even if they're regular church attenders when starting college, many stop going during their college years (they say they "couldn't find a local church like their home church" and parents aren't there to encourage them to go).

2. Kids could bring them back. Twenty-somethings go to college; then after col-

lege, they concentrate on job searching and dating, all while ignoring church. In their 30s they get married and have kids. Then, finally, they start having a desire to return to church.

3. Parents don't always think about going to church with their kids.

Therefore, kid's programs are critical (Sunday School, RAs and GAs, VBS, etc.). And not just on Sunday.

4. The unchurched will visit if there's a reason.

Create one! Make it friendly and beneficial to community members. Plan events with their needs in mind. Offer them solutions to their problems.

Ask them to visit

5. Attending is different from visiting. Many say they don't attend a church but actually "visit" occasionally. Stop asking them to "attend" and ask them to visit instead.



Unsplash.com

6. Most know they "should" go (often because their parents wish they did) but still choose not to.

Many were raised in the church but have simply lost the "habit of going." They just need a reason.

7. They're aware of churches in the area but don't know much about yours. Don't assume anyone knows what you're offering. They don't unless you tell

them. Ensure your website content is good.

8. Sunday may not be the best day for them. Sunday is perceived as a "family day" and time to sleep in. Add kid's sports programming and Sunday is an even more difficult day to ask them to give up.

9. Church is often perceived as "white-hair." The average age of parents in most communities is

mid-30s. They want to see themselves in communication materials, not just older people). Make sure you're showing younger families on your website and have a range of ministries available for them.

Think your community is different? Why not ask them?

Remember, each time a church member or leader talks to a community member, you have the potential to discover what the unchurched thinks about church.

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

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'Answer' to prayer

Myers-Mallory Offering helps fund Hispanic church multiplication

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Not too long ago, there were no Hispanic Baptist church plants in the Mobile area. Thomas Wright had been praying for years for a church planter who could change that.

"Our associational leaders understand the importance of praying for and sharing Jesus with every person in Mobile County," said Wright, who serves as executive director of missions for Mobile Baptist Association.

"We recognized the best way to reach a growing population of Hispanics is through Hispanic congregations."

So Mobile Baptists started forming small groups for Spanish speakers through local churches and began to pray for God to send Hispanic pastors.

Along the way Brian Harper, lead church planting strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, started talking with Ramón Vielza about the possibility of moving to Alabama.

Vielza, who at that time served as Hispanic catalyst for Baptists in North

Carolina, had been part of a major movement in Cuba — 170 churches planted in nine years. As he talked with Harper, he began to catch a vision for what God might do in south Alabama.

'Great necessity'

"He told me the great necessity and the need here in the state of Alabama," Vielza said. "For that same reason I came with my wife and my daughters specifically to Mobile because in the association there had never been a Hispanic church plant."

Now he's pastor of I-10 Church, a new plant in Mobile, and he's helped train church planters to plant

four more churches from Montgomery south.

"We're also training five brothers so they can also plant five churches around the northern part of Florida," Vielza said.

The effort has been a partnership between the SBOM, local Baptist associations, the North American Mission Board and local churches, including First Baptist Tillman's Corner, which houses I-10 Church.

With support from the Myers-Mallory State Mis-


Myers-Mallory
State Missions Offering
For more information and downloadable resources, visit myers-mallory.org.



Facebook photo

Ramón Vielza, who planted I-10 Church in Mobile, has helped train planters to start four more churches from Montgomery south with the help of funds from the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.

sions Offering, Harper has walked alongside Vielza, supporting him throughout the process and helping strategize next steps.

"The Lord has brought this about," Harper said. "They're seeing people come to the Lord, people being baptized. God has really opened the doors."

'Grow and multiply'

He said the SBOM's desire is to facilitate I-10 Church's development into a church planter training and sending hub "that is going to grow and multiply."

Through something like this, "church planters can absorb the DNA of having a passion for saving souls," Harper said.

Vielza said multiplication is his hope too, noting that God "is making beautiful things in this area, in this place."

"It's the beginning of bigger things that I know

are coming," he said. "The harvest is plentiful, and a lot of the pastors I knew in Cuba are moving here to the United States because they know there is such a big need."

He asked for prayer for God to provide the resources these

new church planters will need to get started and sustain a new work.

"We know the Lord can do great things preparing the way for great things for His Kingdom," Vielza said. "The

challenge is great because economically it could be a little difficult, but we are praying, and we have faith God will provide."

Wright said God definitely provides, and He definitely answers prayers, like the one Wright and

others prayed for years for God to send Spanish-speaking pastors.

"The Lord used our partnership with the state convention to answer that prayer," he said.

For more information about church planting, visit plantalabama.org.

"The harvest is plentiful, and a lot of the pastors I knew in Cuba are moving here to the United States because they know there is such a big need."

**Pastor Ramón Vielza
I-10 Church in Mobile**

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 3

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



INTRODUCED!
Mark 1:1-13

Prophecy (1-3)

John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, is the man who traveled with Barnabas on Paul’s missionary journey. The early Church tells us that Mark accompanied Peter and wrote this Gospel for a Roman audience.

Mark opens with a clear, blunt statement about what his purpose is, which is to show who Jesus is and tell his readers this good news. For a people who had not heard from God in about 400 years, Mark shows how this Jesus is the One foretold by the Old Testament Scriptures, emphasizing the role Jesus would play as the Servant and Savior of Israel.

Today, we can be confident that God keeps His promises and that all of the prophecies from both the Old and New testaments will be fulfilled.

In the same way a small town wants to fix all of its potholes before a dignitary comes to town, roads would be repaired to allow for a smooth ride for the celebrity who was coming.

Prepared (4-8)

Malachi states that Elijah’s coming is to precede the day of the Lord, and we hear from Jesus Himself that John the Baptist is this Elijah foreshadowed in Malachi. John emphasized the need for his hearers to turn from their sin and be baptized to demonstrate that they were now clean.

Baptism is the same for us today. It is Christ who saves us, and by accepting the price He paid for us and our sins, our sins are forgiven. We are baptized to show our solidarity with Christ. Many Christians

mistakenly put their trust in their baptism as a sign of their salvation, but it is putting our trust in Christ’s work on the cross for us that guarantees our salvation.

John points to the Messiah who is about to appear. John understands that his job is to get people ready for Christ, and he points his hearers to Him. This is also our job. We need to accept our position as servants of God and point people to Christ.

Baptized (9-13)

The baptism of Jesus is such an important event that it is written in each of the four Gospels. But Jesus wasn’t baptized to show repentance for sin because Jesus had no sin. (See 2 Cor. 5:21.) Instead, it showed His identification with those He came to save — not with their sin, but that He was truly human. It also showed He approved of John’s ministry, and it inaugurated His own ministry.

Of importance as well is that this is one of the major passages that affirms the Trinity. The Son is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends and we hear the Father’s voice. It is crucial to note that this is not a declaration that at this moment Jesus is somehow an adopted son of God. He wasn’t only declared to be God; Jesus truly is God. This is a great mystery, that Jesus is both truly man and truly God.

The question we need to ask is who do we say that Jesus is? If He is truly God, and if He is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament prophecies, then we need to reorient our lives to follow Him and His commands, not our own or those of the culture.

“In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when He came up out of the water, immediately He saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove.”

Mark 1:9-10

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



DEVELOP STRONG
CONVICTIONS
Daniel 1:3-13, 17-19

Though bookstores sadly seem to be a dying breed, many of us can remember the days of hoary antiquity when we would wander through the aisles, scanning the various titles on the shelves. In some eccentric shops, books seemed hardly to be organized at all. More often, though, sections of bookstores are organized by certain genres.

Interestingly, the narratives in the Bible also fall into certain generic categories. Students of the Scriptures can readily recall a number of stories, for example, about barrenness. We know of Sarah, of course, but there is also Rebekah and Rachel and Hannah and Elizabeth. Other stories are focused on heroic exploits like those of David or Ehud or Samson.

The first half of the book of Daniel offers another sort of story-type, that of young people who find their faith tested in a foreign land. Like Joseph and Esther (and in a somewhat different fashion, Ruth), Daniel finds himself unexpectedly caught up in the intrigues of palace life far away from home. When the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar seized control of Judah, Daniel and many other Judeans were sent into exile in Babylon. It was there that they would face severe challenges to their faith.

The world expects
us to conform to its
expectations. (3-7)

When the Babylonians conquered Judah, they subdued the population by deporting most of the nation’s leading families to Mesopotamia.

Though separated from their homeland, most of the exiled Judeans managed to live in relative peace in Babylon and continued to practice their religion, albeit without the temple.

The Babylonians had different plans for many young people like Daniel, however. Their goal, it would seem, was to turn these young Judeans into faithful Baby-

lonians. The young men were brought into the royal household. They were taught the Babylonian language and instructed in the country’s ancient texts. They were given new names — the Babylonian Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to replace the Hebrew Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

All of these steps would have served to remove these youths from their own culture and religion and help them blend into the culture and religion of their conquerors.

Draw the line where you will
not compromise. (8-13)

Daniel and his three friends were apparently content to serve the royal house of Babylon just as Joseph had once served the royal house of Egypt. Indeed, Daniel would go on to serve Babylonian and then Persian kings even into his old age. But what would these young Judeans do when serving Babylon meant rejecting God? That very issue presented itself when Daniel and his compatriots were served food from the king’s table. Here, the young men drew the line. They insisted they could not eat the king’s food and begged instead to be given a diet of vegetables and water.

Serve and stand for the
Lord no matter what the
culture does. (17-19)

Daniel’s request for vegetables was not born out of a preference for vegetarianism. It actually reflected the fact that Daniel and his friends were being asked to ignore the Bible’s food laws and eat meat that was not kosher. And so Daniel and his friends refused.

Through God’s providential care, the young men’s request was granted, and their health and character impressed their supervisors and even the king. As later stories like the fiery furnace demonstrate, however, these youths were willing to remain faithful to God even if the king’s response was not a favorable one.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

‘Awe’-inspired author explores connection between perseverance, faith

It’s easy to get burned out after years of ministry. However, John Bevere, author of “The Awe of God,” has found the key to persevering — having the fear of the Lord results in developing the strength needed to “endure the race.”

Bevere has been on a 30-year quest to discover exactly what the fear of the Lord is — and what it’s not.

“The fear of the Lord is when we love what He loves, and we hate what He hates. The legalist would say, ‘I fear God. That’s why I hate those sinners over there.’ That guy doesn’t fear God at all because He hates who God loves,” Bevere insisted.

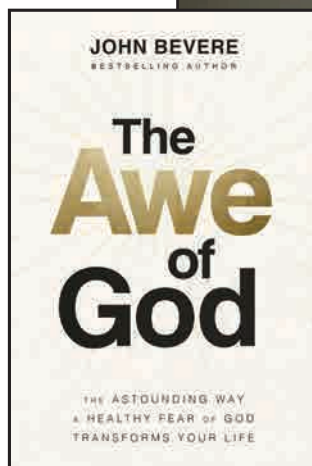
“God loves those sinners so much that He sent His only Son to die for them. What God hates is the sin that that unmakes those people because He loves the people.”

Bevere has a burning desire for others to join in his realization — that the fear and awe of God shows how deep His love is for us.

“I know experientially, this is what changed my life. I went from



Photo courtesy of Gabrielle Rodrigue



JOHN BEVERE

a Christian who knew God [on the surface] ... — I knew I was saved, I knew I was His child but I really felt so distant — to [a Christian] walking [with Him] in a deep, intimate relationship,” he explained.

After 40 years of ministry, Bevere says he is more passionate and excited about the things of God than he has ever been. And he attributes it to understanding this concept.

In the early ’90s, Bevere was introduced to the idea and started sharing it, which resulted in being publicly corrected about his viewpoint.

Adding fuel to the fire

During that time, he also visited a well-known minister who was serving time in prison. Their conversation added fuel to the smoldering fire. The man told Bevere that he loved Jesus, even while he was committing crimes. When Bevere asked him how he could do so, the minister responded that he didn’t fear God.

Bevere recalled, “Those two instances in 1994 caused me to go on a search, a real deep search, on what it means to fear the Lord. I started noticing in Scripture that it was Jesus’ delight in Isaiah 11:3. I noticed it was God’s treasure in Isaiah 33:6. I noticed that the Apostle Paul said we would work out our salvation with fear and trembling, not love and kindness.”

He continued, “I thought, ‘Wow! This is what matures our salvation. This is something Jesus delighted in. This is God the Father’s treasure. I need to know about this!’”

When Bevere finally felt God call him to write a book about this topic, he decided titling it “The Fear of God” wouldn’t work and was concerned that the overwhelming response would be, “I don’t want fear in my life.”

Using the title “The Awe of God” wasn’t simply semantics though.

He elaborated, “When you understand that the fear of the Lord is not about being afraid of God, but it’s more about being in awe of Him — and you understand that it actually opens your eyes to who He really is — then it becomes extremely attractive.”

Book structure

At first glance, “The Awe of God” resembles a devotional. However, Bevere declared otherwise.

“First and foremost, it is not a devotional,” Bevere insisted. “It is a book, and it can be read in one sitting if you so desire.”

Due to the shortening of attention spans over the past few decades, he prayed for wisdom about how to structure the book. “The Awe of God” has 42 chapters divided among six sections, with one section to be read each week.

“I felt impressed to write short chapters ... every chapter [except two] are six pages,” he noted.

This means each day’s reading, not including the Making It Personal section, requires only about 5–7 minutes.

The smaller chunks allow time to absorb the material instead of simply reading it. To that end, Bevere recommends reading the daily chapter and the Passage (a related scripture) and Point (the key takeaway). The remaining three Ps — Ponder, Prayer and Profession — can be meditated on throughout the day.

Another included component is a four-minute video for each chapter that can be accessed through a QR code in Appendix A.

A workbook, streaming video and DVD for group study are available separately.

“The Awe of God” and associated materials can be bought through johnbevere.com or wherever books are sold.

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.

UPCOMING SPECIAL EDITION

NOVEMBER 30 ISSUE

Aging Well

Resources that encompass aspects of growing older, including fitness and wellness tips, estate planning, housing and health care, and ways to mentor the next generation.

— The Alabama Baptist —

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Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Protecting borrowers

By Aaron Earls

Lifeway Research

Growing number of Christians use payday loans, see need for regulations

Finding themselves in a tough financial hole, many people have attempted to use payday loans to dig themselves out, a newly released study reported.

Self-identified Christians living in the 27 states without meaningful regulations on those types of small, short-term unsecured loans often have a complicated relationship with payday advances and the lenders who offer them, according to a Lifeway Research study sponsored by Faith for Just Lending.

More than 3 in 4 believe it is a sin to loan money in a way that the lender gains by harming the borrower financially, and most describe payday loans as expensive. Still, 1 in 3 have obtained a payday loan themselves, and a growing number see such loans as helpful. Most also want some type of government intervention and church involvement around these issues.

“The proliferation of retail payday lending establishments has increased the first-hand knowledge many Christians have of these financial institutions,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “The majority of Christians in states with few regulations on payday lending want more regulations that protect borrowers.”

Personal experience

In states without significant regulations on payday lending, 34% of Christians polled say they have obtained that type of loan for themselves — double the 17% who said so in a 2016 study. Additionally, 45% say they personally know someone who has gotten a payday loan, up from 32% in 2016.



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When asked to choose which words apply to payday loans, most (57%) say expensive. More than 3 in 10 say harmful (32%) and predatory (31%). Another 10% say immoral.

However, a growing number use positive terms. More than 1 in 3 say such loans are helpful (37%) and useful (35%), while 16% say timely.

Those percentages are all more than double what they were in 2016, when 16% described them as helpful, 17% useful and 7% timely.

Christians are most likely to say their knowledge about fair lending practices comes from personal experience with their own loans (25%). Fewer say friends and family (18%), the Bible (10%), articles and news stories (9%) or their local

church (3%) has influenced their thinking on the subject. Hardly any say they’ve learned about payday loans from the positions of elected officials (1%), national Christian leaders (1%) or teachers or professors (1%).

One in 5 Christians in states where payday lending is less regulated (20%) haven’t thought about what lending practices are fair.

Regardless of their knowledge or experience, most Christians underestimate the percentage of payday loans that are rolled over into

a new loan with additional fees after the first two-week period.

According to a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau report, 82% of these loans are renewed within 14 days. Only 9% of Christians in states where payday loans are legal

believe rollover rates are between 81% and 100%. Most (56%) believe 40% of the loans or less roll over, including 38% who say it’s 20% or less. More than 1 in 5 (22%) estimate 10% or less are renewed.

Setting limits

Christians in states without regulation seem supportive of increased government involvement in the industry. Close to 2 in 3 (63%) say 36% or less should be set as the maximum reasonable annual percentage rate (APR) of a loan, with 39% saying it should not go above 12%. Only 7% believe there should be no maximum reasonable APR.

More than 3 in 4 (78%) believe laws or regulations should protect borrowers from lending practices that create loans that can’t realistically be repaid without additional loans. Specifically, 84% say laws or regulations should prohibit lending at “excessive interest rates.” Fewer than 1 in 10 (8%) say no to either proposal.

More than 9 in 10 (94%) agree that lenders should take into account the borrower’s income and expenses and only extend loans at “reasonable interest rates” based on ability to repay within the original loan period.

“Christians expect far more regulations that protect borrowers than exist in these states,” McConnell said. “The Bible does not define at what rate excessive interest begins, but it does forbid it.”

“So it is not surprising that most Christians want to eliminate excessive interest rates.”

McConnell noted “most churches are silent on payday loans at times when Christians desire advice and emergency help,” he said.

MORE THAN 3 IN 4 BELIEVE IT IS A SIN TO LOAN MONEY IN A WAY THAT THE LENDER GAINS BY HARMING THE BORROWER FINANCIALLY.

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Decades of . serving God

By J. Gerald Harris

The Christian Index

Atlanta missions director ‘Mary G.’ has served church since WWII

The 98-year-old Mary Gellerstedt — or “Mary G.” as she is affectionately known — started working at First Baptist Church Atlanta in 1944 as World War II raged.

Yes, she has served at the church for nearly eight decades.

“She started serving the church right out of high school and has been here ever since,” said pastor Anthony George. “I can almost assure you that there is not a church in America with a 98-year-old still on staff. She is greatly loved and appreciated by all of us.”

After high school she came to Atlanta in 1942 with the intention of continuing her education.

“I joined First Baptist on pastor Ellis Fuller’s last Sunday,” she recalled. “Dr. Fuller resigned to become the sixth president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

“I was active in the college de-

partment of the church when Dr. Jim Middleton became pastor, and when I was 18 years old I was asked to work at the church during the 1944 Christmas holidays.”

Her first full-time role involved keeping records, but through the years her responsibilities increased because of her effectiveness and passion to serve. She invested much of her ministry in high school, college students and senior adults.

Heart for missions

In succeeding years her heart for missions was honored when she was elevated to the position of global missions director, the role in which she continues today.

“We have 82 missionaries the church supports through our ‘Faith Promise Missions’ offerings,” Mary G. said. “I try to keep up with our missionaries and pray for them as they serve our Lord at home and abroad. We also send out volunteer mission teams all over the world.”



Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

Mary Gellerstedt serves as global missions director at First Baptist Church Atlanta.

Under Mary G’s leadership the church also has participated in mission endeavors like “Baskets of Hope,” in which gift baskets were taken to children in local hospitals. They also have participated in causes offered by Food Aid International and, under her leadership, sent 1,250,000 meals to Haiti after various natural disasters.

“She was always willing to do whatever was asked of her. She even mopped floors when umbrellas caused the tile to be wet!” noted Barb Sixsmith, executive assistant to the director of global missions.

“Mary was the one who asked me to be the local missions director at First Baptist,” added Paul Diamond,

FBC associate pastor. “Mary and I go way back to our downtown location.

Mary G. noted, “Perhaps the greatest joys in ministry have been working with high school and college students.”

Investing in others

“There were hundreds of wonderful youth and young adults who came through our ministry,” Mary G. said, “many of whom are now serving the Lord as pastors, missionaries and church leaders.”

She now does most of her work from home because of physical issues.

She attributes her long life to God’s goodness and is determined to continue serving Him.

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



Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

Mary Gellerstedt and Charles Stanley worked together at First Baptist Church Atlanta for 50 years.

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Church planting movement

By Tessa Sanchez
International Mission Board

Missouri Baptist associations adopt island in the Philippines

Adopting an island sounds like something a millionaire or movie star might do, but that's exactly what nine Southern Baptist associations in Missouri did.

In partnership with Filipino Southern Baptist churches in North America, the associations adopted the island of Camiguin in the Philippines in a commitment to seeing the gospel permeate the island.

Three years after the associations adopted Camiguin, new believers meet regularly to study the Bible, and a Filipino missionary catalyst is living among the people. Local schools also welcome volunteers to host ministry programs and volunteers from the U.S. and the Philippines regularly minister there.

And, the first church plant appears to be on the horizon.

Former International Mission Board missionary Roger Graham, who now serves as the director of missions for Charleston Baptist Association in southeast Missouri, felt the Lord leading him and his association to increase their involvement in international missions by ministering to a people group.

Shared vision

He shared his vision with the directors of missions from eight other associations, and all of them quickly jumped on board.

Several of the directors of missions were former IMB missionaries, one having served 30 years in the Philippines.

The associational leaders committed to an Acts 1:8 partnership involving ministry to Filipinos in North America and the Philippines.



IMB photo

The Philippines is home to thousands of islands, some with minimal gospel witness. The islands provide a wide range of Acts 1:8 opportunities.

An Acts 1:8 strategy is a comprehensive strategy, based on Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit would empower His disciples to share the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world.

The involvement and commitment include ministering to Filipinos in southeast Missouri through partnerships with a Filipino-American church planter in the area.

They also partner with Filipino churches across the U.S. and Canada, the IMB, the Southern Baptist Convention, the North American Mission Board, the Filipino International Mission Board and the Northern Mindanao Baptist Association.

These partnerships focus on reaching Filipinos in North America and on the island of Camiguin.

Jess and Wendy Jennings serve in the Philippines as IMB missionar-

ies. One of their ministry focuses includes reaching what they call "pockets of lostness" in the Philippines. Many small islands have small populations without a consistent gospel presence.

No small task

"We've been focusing on a few islands for the last few years, sending a lot of short-term teams, both American and Filipino," Jess said.

Reaching the more than 7,000 islands is no small task, which is why partners like the Missouri associations are so crucial.

When Graham asked Jennings how they could partner with them, Jennings suggested adopting an island to develop and implement a strategy to plant churches. Camiguin rose to the surface.

Camiguin's population is 92,808, making it the second-smallest prov-

ince in the Philippines. Camiguin's evangelical population is 1.3%, and the island has four Baptist churches and around 1,500 Christians.

Prayer, partnerships

Since travel in 2021 was not an option due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that year became one of prayer and partnership building.

The associations are now in their third year of adoption. Graham has made two trips to Camiguin with pastors and directors of mission.

On their trips, they prayer walked, hosted biblical programs in local schools, shared the gospel and preached in the four Baptist churches. The trip also provided an opportunity to strategically plan for ministry with their Filipino partners.

In addition to churches and associations in the U.S. adopting islands, churches in the Philippines are also committed to adopting unreached islands. A Baptist association on the island of Mindanao came alongside the Missouri associations and identified a missionary catalyst to place on the island — someone who will be a local missionary presence.

Graham said they hope to place a second person on the island soon. He noted they are close to seeing their first church plant formed on the island. This summer Graham hopes several teams will continue the work Nehemiah Teams furthered.

Nehemiah Teams offer summer missions opportunities for students to serve among unreached people groups. For more information, email info@imb.org.

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