

The Alabama Baptist



Teen boys participate in an arm wrestling competition at Fortify 23.

Photo by Thomas Garner

‘Disciple them up’

Events for boys, teens help churches fulfill Titus 2 call to ‘encourage the young men’

By Michael J. Brooks
and Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

When Tony Reynolds heard a young man say he’d never held a fishing rod, Reynolds’ first response was sadness because he knew the simple statement implied much larger concerns.

“Some of the boys in our community are in homes without fathers,

and others seemed not to have anyone to teach them practical manhood skills,” said Reynolds, pastor of Randolph Baptist Church in Bibb County. “So we began to think about our men showing them how to do some things they’d maybe not done before, based on the scriptural admonition that the older men teach the younger men.

“We wanted to ‘disciple them up,’ as I told our men,” Reynolds said,

sharing Jesus with them while also providing an opportunity for mature men in the congregation to teach younger men some life skills they’d not learned before.

Young Timothy Day

The result was Young Timothy Day, which was held for the second time this past May at Randolph Baptist. The church hosted 33 boys (ranging in age from second grade

to sixth grade) who moved from station to station throughout the day.

“We gave them a big breakfast, and then we went to work,” Reynolds said with a laugh. “Our Brotherhood group worked hard to make it a good day.”

They learned how to cast a fishing rod, how to safely handle a gun on the target range and how to change oil and a tire, among other skills.

(See ‘Biblical,’ page 8)

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



Unsplash.com

Every Alabama Baptist church is encouraged to fill out an Annual Church Profile report. This year's reports are due Oct. 1. ACPs can be turned in through your association or online at adx.alsbom.org.

Your church's ACP report is helpful and important

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

There are hundreds of reasons why a nationwide census is important. It helps the government know what services to provide. It also helps Alabama Baptists know where different populations and people groups are located so that they can know where new churches need to be planted.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said in a similar way to how census data can be helpful, data from each Alabama Baptist church can be helpful to prepare for future ministry.

That's why the Annual Church Profile is collected every year.

"It helps us understand, and you understand, how your ministry is doing," Lance said.

"It provides all kinds of information related to our being able to operate and function in Great Commission Ministries as a state convention and as a Southern Baptist Convention."

The Annual Church Profile report can help the SBOM know how to come alongside churches in the

state in a more helpful way. For instance, they can use that data to understand why churches might be declining and in need of revitalization help.

Stories worth celebrating

The report also tells stories worth celebrating — like baptisms that happened in the state this year.

Lance encouraged every Alabama Baptist church to fill theirs out. This year's reports are due Oct. 1.

"In recent years, for several reasons, some churches have chosen not to be involved in sending in an ACP, which is used in research by various people," he said.

"The Alabama Baptist Convention and the SBC need this information for accurate record-keeping purposes. To not be a participant in this information sharing leaves gaping holes in the research process."

ACPs can be turned in through your association or online at adx.alsbom.org.

If you need help completing the ACP, please contact your local association or contact Sandy Harmann at the SBOM at 334-613-2266 or sharmann@alsbom.org.

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The Alabama Baptist

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

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OPINION



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



@RashionalThts

Your life matters — are you fully leaving your mark?

Turning the corner out of Labor Day weekend seems to add a turbo boost to every aspect of life for the final four months of the year.

We've completed two-thirds of 2023 and are well into the flow of the final third of the year.

September gives us a few days to look ahead and start organizing for the upcoming fall and winter events, not to mention the holiday season.

I'm grateful for the space to reset and prepare for the final stretch of this year's race, but it also reminds me how fast our years in this life are moving.

It's like the famous quote by Author Gretchen Rubin: "The days are long, but the years are short."

While Rubin's quote is most-often used in reference to children growing up, it can be applied to all of our experiences.

It also reminds me of how my grandparents would tell all of us kids not to wish time away. They told us a day would come when we would want the months to slow down rather than continue saying we couldn't wait until Christmas, summer, our birthday, etc.

Do those random words of wisdom from your grandpar-

ents, parents and others surface from time to time for you too?

Have you found yourself sharing some of those nuggets of wisdom with those coming behind you? And doesn't it provide a warm sense of fulfillment when you hear your children, grandchildren and others you've mentored repeat the lessons to those they are now mentoring?

I love the continuous thread of communication, life lessons and spiritual development that connects generation after generation, even when we aren't aware it is happening.

At the end of our journey here on earth, we all want to know

our lives mattered and that we had a positive and valuable impact on the world.

The opportunity to influence means being willing to share the gifts God has given us by continuously using them and keeping them sharp, as well as training others to do the same.

Expanding our world

Leaving our mark fully on the next generation can only happen if we are able to resist the temptation (at least until we have no choice) of letting our world become too small, where every aspect of every day is solely focused on our needs and comfort.

We still need to take care of ourselves — even to the point of teaching others how to do this for themselves too — while ensuring we are not becoming self-absorbed in the process. It's a delicate balance.

A major help is to remember our two greatest commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39).

And Titus 2:7-8 says, "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity and sound speech."

A shoutout, huge hug and thank you to our teammate Dave Walsh as he transitions from TAB Media Group

The Walsh family waltzed into my life and the life of The Alabama Baptist about a decade ago.

The youngest daughter of Dave Walsh, pastor of Ariton Baptist Church, spent a summer interning with us as she worked toward a broadcast journalism degree at Troy University.

We later hired that impressive student intern, Maggie,

as a full-time staff member.

Not only have we been extremely blessed by her contribution to our team and our lives, but we also have been overwhelmed with the love, support and encouragement provided by her family.

Dave, especially, jumped in to help us succeed as a ministry and media outlet. He has volunteered countless hours through the years. And for the past few years, he has



WALSH

worked in marketing and sales positions, most recently as a consultant and sales representative for our Hosted Church website development arm.

I have appreciated Dave's contributions to our team, his support and encouragement of me personally, and his dry sense of humor.

Dave is shifting from his staff role to have more time for family and church, but we definitely won't let him get too far from us.

—Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

Doubt still surfaces even while remaining true to our calling

By Robert Hanks

Mobile, Alabama

Before he died, my father had suffered severe pain for decades despite an abundance of prayers for his healing. This and similar experiences led me to question the value of prayer.

Any time I hear of mass casualties, the age-old question of “why” troubles me once again.

When I have read books by accomplished Bible scholars who call into question the truthfulness of Scripture, I feel unsure about who or what to believe.

If doubts have been a part of your walk with God, take comfort in knowing you are not alone.

The reality is that religious doubt is a common experience.

According to a 2022 Barna survey, 52% of American teens and adults reported experiencing doubts about their religious beliefs within the previous few years. In the same survey, exactly half of those who self-identified as Christian (having a Christian background or experience) reported having gone through a prolonged period of doubt about their faith.

Hesitant to acknowledge

Christians are often hesitant to acknowledge their doubts, seeing them as a sign that their faith does not measure up and fearing the reactions of others to expressing them.

Certainly, there are biblical references that might explain this negative view of doubt. For example, when James wrote about asking for wisdom, he asserted it would be given only to those who believed: “For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, being double-minded and unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6–8).

Although James paints a decidedly negative view of doubt, as we look at other Scriptures, we find many examples of those who experienced doubt and yet were among those with remarkable faith.

One notable example is John the Baptist. Recall what Jesus said of him: “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11).

While John languished in prison with little or no hope of being released, we are told that even he began to have doubts and sent his own disciples to Jesus to inquire about whether He really was the Messiah.

Jesus understands

Upon hearing John’s inquiry, Jesus did not condemn him but simply said to the John’s disciples: “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor are told the good news” (Luke 7:22).

Jesus conveyed to John evidence of His divinity as a way of helping him overcome his doubts.

Thomas’ experience

Consider the disciple Thomas, who told his fellow disciples he would not believe in Christ’s resurrection unless he could personally see Jesus and inspect his body for marks of the crucifixion. A week later Jesus gave Thomas the opportunity to do just that and then said to him, “Don’t be faithless, but believe” (John 20:27).

Thomas doubted even though he had been with Jesus for years, had seen him perform healing miracles, raise the dead, walk on water and feed thousands with a few loaves of bread and fishes. As with John the Baptist, Jesus did not criticize or reject Thomas for his lack of faith.

Holding on to a faith completely free of doubt at any time goes beyond what most of us can do. That said, we can still be effective in God’s service.

Consider Mother Teresa, arguably one of the most devoted servants of God in contemporary times. It is widely known that she struggled with long periods of doubt and a sense of being abandoned by God.

Let us, in our own journey of faith, accept doubt as an uninvited companion while still being true to our calling to honor Christ with our lives and share His love with those around us.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Robert Hanks, Ed.D., is a former licensed professional counselor. He and his wife, Raye, are members of Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile.

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for your challenging Rashional Thoughts editorial in the Aug. 31 edition about churches finding and fulfilling ways to help our students and schools.

These students are our future. What better investment can we make than to help them succeed in school and in life? In addition, they should see Jesus in us.

Teresa Noell

Retired educator

I had the privilege to serve on the Original task force charged with implementation of the Alabama Literacy Act, and I still serve as

a consultant. I am very pleased to see the advances in early literacy that have occurred since the act was passed.

It is gratifying to hear of others beyond the ranks of professional educators champion literacy.

Your encouragement and suggestions in the Aug. 31 Rashional Thoughts are exactly the sort of ways we can all join hands to further this important initiative.

As more folks team up to support early literacy, I believe improvements in reading will rise from incremental to exponential.

Tommy Turner

Dean emeritus, education, JSU

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

OPINION

“God values the time we spend with Him and the priority we give to Him.”

PASTOR DAVID CHANCEY
McDonough Road Baptist Church, Fayetteville Georgia

“God never withholds from His child that which His love and wisdom call good. God’s refusals are always merciful — ‘severe mercies’ at times but mercies all the same. God never denies us our heart’s desire except to give us something better.”

Elisabeth Elliot

God is not dope.
God is just.
God is love.
God is holy.
God is wise.
God is great.
God is good.
God is strong.
God is glorious.
God is merciful.
God is sovereign.
God is awesome.
God is magnificent.
@JoshBuice
X (formerly Twitter)

The moment that our drive for our children’s academic, athletic and occupational success exceeds our pursuit of their holiness is the moment we have failed them as parents.

@DanielRitchie
X (formerly Twitter)

If we do not believe the biblical truth about forgiveness, we will be bound in feelings of continued guilt, shame, doubt, mistrust, inferiority, and some sense of isolation and despair.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

At times God would show me the next step to take without revealing the complete plan. Yet, to be honest, periods occurred where I wanted to see the entire picture before I took the now step I knew God was calling me to take. However, I have learned a very important truth: Obedience to God’s now step will always lead to God’s next step. A pastor once stated the following: “One of the greatest things God

will ever ask you to do is the last thing He asked you to do.”

Remember, whatever step God is prodding you to take, make sure you take it. For again: Obedience to God’s now step will always lead to God’s next step.

O’Shea Lowery
Entrusted Hope Ministries

Pastor, whether you preach to a packed sanctuary ... a nearly empty sanctuary or somewhere in between, remember your identity isn’t in how many people are there to hear you preach, but in the still risen King you preach.

@mhenslee
X (formerly Twitter)

“Unplugging and resting are essential for mental and physical restoration. 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,” said

Doug Wilson, executive director of the Center for Christian Calling at the University of Mobile and teaching pastor of Moffett Road Baptist Church in Mobile.

“Where His (Jesus’) rule and reign is allowed, humans thrive. Where He is not allowed to be King, there is brokenness and suffering.” —**@CampbellLino**
@AshleyUnzicker
X (formerly Twitter)

“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,” said **Mark MacDonald**, church branding strategist and author of “Be Known for Something.”

Circumstances don’t alter the call. I’d rather die in the will of God than live outside His will even for one minute. For me, Christianity is lived in practice, not in theory.
#ArthurBlessitt

@MichaelCatt
X (formerly Twitter)

HUGH’S VIEWS – HUGH KILPATRICK III



OH...FOR THE GOOD OLD DAYS!

A gift from a child to a grandpa

One Halloween, a child appeared on our porch during Trick-or-Treat time. I was not really paying attention — he was just another child coming up on the porch for some candy. But not really, in this case!

Our Halloween bucket was almost full of candy, waiting for the next musical “Trick or Treat” or “Happy Halloween.

Not paying much attention, I reached into the bucket to find a candy bar and looked up.

There, standing right in front of me, was a young boy, about 10–12 years old. I glanced at his face and saw a look that was different from the other children. I looked again and not knowing what to do, dropped a piece of candy into his basket and said, “Thank you.”

I don’t recall what he did, and he didn’t explain his actions. He extended his hand holding a \$1 bill toward me and said, “This is for you. Thank you!” And with a wonderful smile on his face, he turned and walked away.

I seriously doubt this grandpa will ever forget the strength and beauty of that young boy.

Who had been teaching him about giving to others? Who taught him to bless other folks with an unexpected gift from his heart?

Obviously, we do not know. My first thought was, “Did his Sunday School teacher teach him about sharing the joy of giving with others?”

My second thought was, “Were his parents involved in teaching him about the joy of giving and the blessings of sharing our resources with others?”

I do not know about who or what or why, but I do know that for one short moment, a young lad stepped up on my porch and blessed me by his gift of love, joy and happiness.

Dick Toya
Birmingham, Ala.

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

Georgia Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers reported several salvations as they helped residents of south Georgia clean up following Hurricane Idalia. The storm made landfall Aug. 30, hitting parts of Florida and Georgia with heavy winds and rains. Georgia Baptists deployed a range of DR teams to assist in the hardest hit areas, and volunteers worked through the Labor Day weekend to assist residents in recovery efforts. (The Christian Index)

Hispanic Missions Sunday set for Sept. 17

Southern Baptists churches are invited to celebrate Hispanic Missions Sunday on Sept. 17.

“It’s a Sunday set aside to celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of Hispanic International Mission Board missionaries and Hispanic churches as active partners with the IMB,” the IMB said.

With more than 3,368 Southern Baptist Hispanic congregations in the U.S., Hispanic Americans are making a mark on the missions field. Historically, Hispanic countries have been considered a missions field, but now Hispanics are becoming a steadfast missionary force all over the world.

Find downloadable resources, including videos, stories and printables, at imb.org/hispanic-church-missions. (IMB)

Task Force releases Ministry Check update

The task force leading the effort to establish a database of credibly accused sexual abusers within the Southern Baptist Convention said Aug. 31 it is “working diligently” to develop the tool messengers asked for in 2022.

The Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force said the Ministry Check database is “still a work in progress,” in part due to the ARITF’s effort to “develop standards and protocols” for determining who will be included in the searchable database.

For now, the names included on the website’s database first will be those “who have been convicted of sexual abuse in a court of law or have had a civil judgment rendered against them.”

Updates and information are posted at abusereformtaskforce.net and sbcabuseprevention.com. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Bus accident intensifies targeting of Minsk church

MINSK, Belarus — The pastor of a church in Belarus repeatedly targeted by government entities now faces more actions following a bus accident apparently caused by road conditions.

Vyacheslav Goncharenko has been jailed for at least 10 days due to the government’s renewed focus on New Life Church in Minsk, Belarus, where Goncharenko serves as pastor, states Forum 18 News Service.

The Aug. 25 date may prevent him from participating in the Aug. 23 court hearing over the accusation that New Life Church is producing “extremist” materials. According to charges, these materials threaten national security and sow disinformation.

On July 10, an Excurs Trans Company bus car-

rying 50 children overturned about 55 miles from Minsk on a poorly maintained road. The bus was en route to a summer camp that New Life Church organized, states Forum 18. No one was seriously injured.

Since then, the pastor and his family have been the subject of intense governmental scrutiny, including the arrests of Goncharenko and Ilya Budai, the pastor’s son-in-law and the church’s youth pastor.



Forum 18 photo

Police in India accuse Christian educator of human trafficking

MANIKPUR, India — A Christian educator accompanying students to a Bible institute in

India was arrested and charged with human trafficking and fraudulent conversion.

Liju Kuriakose was arrested in Manikpur in India’s Chhattisgarh state as he chaperoned eight Christian students traveling by bus to a Bible institute in Kerala state, reports Morning Star News. Police have accused Kuriakose of human trafficking and of luring children to convert through the offer of money.

One student told Morning Star that police pressured them to say that they were being trafficked. The student said, “We all had vehemently refused and told the police that we have been Christians for a while and are not new converts.”

Kuriakose was released on bail.

India is No. 11 on Open Doors’ 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Alabama news

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

► A retirement reception was held Aug. 20 at Brantley Baptist Church in honor of **Sara McGinty's** faithful service to the association.



Photo by Debbie Campbell/The Alabama Baptist

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Jay Penton** is the new pastor of men's ministry at **Prattmont Baptist Church, Prattville**. He previously served as minister of men at Boones Chapel Baptist Church, Prattville, for over 10 years where he was licensed and ordained into the ministry.

He has served as the men's ministry coordinator of Autauga Baptist Association since 2021.



PENTON

Penton served as a military police officer on active duty in the U.S. Army for seven years and in the National Guard for 15 years.

He was an Alabama State Trooper for over 24 years and retired two years ago to serve in full-time ministry.

Penton is the outreach director for "Men in the Arena," a nonprofit Christian ministry focused on equipping men to honor God in their family, church and community.

He also assists churches in starting up ministry programs for men. He and his wife, Dana, have two adult children.

BLOUNT COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host a singing Sept. 17 at 5 p.m. featuring Living Faith Quartet. For more information, call 256-796-5986 or 256-338-9202. Earl Harper is pastor.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► **Michael Webb** is the new director of youth ministry for **Leatherwood Baptist Church, Anniston**.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Terry Lynn McKee** is the new bivocational pastor of **Brecon First Baptist Church**. For more than 15 years, he has been an employee of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind in Talladega. McKee earned a bachelor's degree from Jacksonville State University and a master's degree



Photo courtesy of Terry Lynn McKee

in missions evangelism and church growth from Southern Seminary. He is married to Michelle.

EAST LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

► **Lafayette Heights Baptist Church, Lafayette**, will celebrate its 100th anniversary and homecoming Sept. 24 at 10:45 am. All are welcome. Dave Bearden is pastor.

MARION ASSOCIATION

► **Tim Coleman** has been called as senior pastor of **Winfield First Baptist Church** beginning Oct. 8. He has served at The Point Baptist Church, Pensacola, Florida,



COLEMAN

nearly 20 years (more than 17 of those years as senior pastor). He previously served churches in Georgia, Alabama and Florida. He also served as the 2022 vice president of the Florida Baptist Convention Pastors Conference; six years on Florida Baptist State Board of Missions, including chairman of the program committee and on the administrative/personnel team; and moderator of Pensacola Bay Baptist Association. He holds a master's degree from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia, and a bachelor's degree in Bible from Tennessee Temple University.

He and his wife, Misty, have four children.

SIPSEY ASSOCIATION

► **CrossRoads Missionary Baptist Church, Gordo**, is partnering with Unity Grove Church, Reform, to host a weeklong revival Sept. 17-22. Services will begin at 6 p.m. on Sunday evening and 7 p.m. on weeknights. Services will be held at Unity Grove Monday through Wednesday nights and at CrossRoads Church on Thursday

and Friday nights. Each night will feature a special musical guest and a different guest speaker.

For more information, call 205-399-5768.

TALLAPOOSA ASSOC.

► **Will Baker** is the new pastor of **Wayside Baptist Church, Alexander City**. He previously served at Bethel Baptist Church, Jackson's Gap. He and his wife, Amy, have two daughters.



BAKER

TUSCALOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Chad Palmer** is the new pastor of **Carrolls Creek Baptist Church, Northport**. Previously, he served as pastor of East McFarland Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. A native of Tuscaloosa County, he has served the community as a police officer and minister for over 20 years and holds a bachelor's in Christian ministry from Leavell College. He and his wife, Joy, have three adult children.



PALMER

► **Dan Strickland** is the new executive pastor for **Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa**. He previously served as next gen pastor for FBC Opelika and has also served at FBC Trussville.

Strickland holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and master's and doctoral degrees from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Kelly, have two children.



STRICKLAND

Semmes FBC gets historical marker

Semmes First Baptist Church was founded in 1872 — the first recorded church in the city — and a new historical marker shares the story.

The church began in a small log cabin in west Mobile County. That first structure served as a school and church.

The church's original name was Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, and Elias Roberts was the first pastor, according to the church's new historical marker.

The church changed its name in 1904, and its location moved from place-to-place

in the community until a new building was constructed in 1934. In 1959, that building became education space when a new, larger sanctuary was completed.

That building, dedicated on Aug. 30, 1959, is still in use.

Church member and Semmes Historic Community member Carolyn Owens said the church has stood the test of time, withstanding storms and other obstacles.

"We're happy to be a part of the Semmes community, and we hope to be a shining light to this community," Owens said. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)



Facebook photo

Biblical foundation important in post-Christian culture

(continued from page 1)

“We tried to connect these skills with biblical truth,” Reynolds explained. “For example, we talked about being fishers of men while handling the tackle and how to aim for the target in life when we fired weapons. When changing a tire and changing oil, we talked about routine maintenance in our Christian lives.”

Reynolds said two men from his church supervised each learning station, and it was a busy day.

“We had a few boys younger than second grade and a few older than sixth grade, but it all worked out,” he said. “We also had some parents who stayed with us for the day, and this has brought some good fruit for our church.”

Reynolds, who will celebrate 13 years as pastor of Randolph Baptist in February, said Young Timothy Day was inspired by the Lord but happened due to the good work of the men in his church.

Larry Hyche, men’s spiritual development strategist and an associate in the office of global missions for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, agrees that ministry to young men is essential.

“The enemy is targeting our young men; therefore, we must be proactive in helping our teen guys know how to address the things they deal with on a daily basis,” Hyche said. “It’s on us as the older generations to equip them with a biblical foundation to help them navigate a post-Christian culture.”

“We have to be intentional in encouraging them,” he added. “I call it discipleship, and it’s a newer way to do men’s ministry. Men’s min-



Facebook photo

A casting competition during Randolph Baptist Church’s Young Timothy Day reminds boys they should be fishers of men.

istry in many of our churches has been prayer breakfasts and the like, and this is fine, but what I talk about is the priority of reaching and discipling older men to reach and disciple young men.”

Hyche said his office exists to help churches reach and disciple men of all ages, he said, and two annual

events focus on helping young men grow as disciples: Fortify, an annual conference for guys in grades 7–12, and Adventure Weekend, a camp-

ing experience for boys in grades 1–6 held at Shocco Springs in Talladega.

Hyche also provides leadership for Called, an annual conference for young men and women discerning a call to ministry.

Fortify 23 was held at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster on Aug. 26.

It’s a unique event among state Baptist conventions, Hyche said, noting he hasn’t found a similar conference in any other state. Twenty-two churches brought 133 attendees to this year’s event for a day of fun, fellowship, worship and teaching by men of God, Hyche said.

Life experiences

The featured speaker was Jason Cook, senior pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in Roswell, Georgia.

A Birmingham native, Cook played football at the University of Mississippi and went on to play for the NFL’s Baltimore Ravens.

Cook spoke on Luke 15:11–24, connecting the experiences of contemporary young men to those of the wandering son in Scripture.

“When I think about what it means to be a teenager, I remember long stretches of time where I’m running from God, running from the things of God, because

I believed that the things of the world were more fun,” Cook said.

Using Rembrandt’s famous painting “The Return of the Prodigal” as an illustration of the son’s sin and his father’s love, Cook noted, “this dude ran. And in running away, he ultimately ended up running home.”

Hyche said Fortify doesn’t shy away from hard conversations. The goal is to address difficult topics with middle and high schoolers and to invite dads and church leaders to be there as well, he said.

Topics covered during the breakout sessions included identity and culture; the

prevalence and dangers of pornography; and mental health issues.

Upcoming events

Hyche noted several upcoming events for young men and students in 2024:

► Adventure Weekend, March 22–23 at Shocco.

► Called Conference, Aug. 3 at Samford University.

► Fortify Conference on Aug. 24 (Location to be announced later).

For information on these and other resources for youth and men’s discipleship, contact Hyche at 800-264-1225, ext. 2268, or by email at lhyche@alsbom.org.

For information on these and other resources for youth and men’s discipleship, contact Larry Hyche at 800-264-1225, ext. 2268, or by email at lhyche@alsbom.org.

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Effective parenting

Nonprofit encourages, educates parents and seeks to build 'healthy foundation' for families

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Rachel Gunn, founder and executive director of Seeds of Impact, is working to break the cycle of ineffective parenting through her efforts to develop and teach a research-based parenting curriculum.

This idea came out of personal experience.

"I taught middle school for 10 years. When I had kids, I really didn't have an idea how to be a parent. As I taught, I began to understand and look more at parenting through the lens of being a teacher," she said.

She knew that children have to be taught certain skills in order to behave, like learning how to pay attention and listen to directions.

After quitting her job in 2014, other moms gravitated to her for encouragement and help. Meanwhile, Gunn continued to study effective parenting.

Seeing this passion, friends suggested that she become a parenting educator. Gunn liked the idea, but even though some additional income would have been helpful, she didn't want to charge anyone.

A friend proposed starting a nonprofit, and Gunn's husband, Brent, encouraged and supported her throughout the process.

'Just my heart'

"It was just my heart to encourage parents, educate them," Gunn said. "My husband and I prayed about it, and we really felt good about it."

Even before the nonprofit was official, Gunn was teaching moms who needed the help. In 2020, she started teaching the mothers at the Lovelady Center, a ministry for women that



Photo courtesy of Rachel Gunn

When they complete a semester, moms choose cards that speak to them about motherhood and have a photo shoot.

helps former prisoners rebuild their lives. The next year, Gunn added classes at the Foundry, a Christ-centered addiction recovery center.

In March 2022, her nonprofit status was granted. Its name, Seeds of Impact, was based on 1 Corinthians 3:6: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow."

"That's really our foundation," Gunn said. "As parents, we are seed planters. We depend on our trusted community gathering around our children to water these seeds that we're planting, but we have to depend on the Lord to grow that."

"We can't depend on ourselves to grow our children into who they are supposed to be," she said.

Finding that many parenting classes focus on basics like nutrition education, Gunn decided to go deeper.

"I focus more on the principles

and the relationship aspect — just understanding how to build that healthy foundation," she said.

Though the ministry's focus is to provide education for under-

resourced parents, they aren't the only ones Seeds of Impact helps.

Knowing how isolating parenting can be, Gunn has small groups for couples. Though still based on her curricula, meetings are more discussion-based than the classes are.

"There are so many of us isolated in our homes, feeling like we're feeling but unable to reach out for fear of being judged, looking around, feeling like everyone else is doing it right and we're the only ones not getting it," she said.

This group is a "safe space to talk about the things they are experiencing and to realize that they aren't the only ones struggling."

Another extension of the ministry is training future teachers. She is currently working with three moms who will soon lead small groups in their own neighborhoods in Gate City, a very impoverished area of Birmingham.

'He was faithful'

Throughout the effort, Gunn has learned about God's faithfulness.

"I tend to rely on my own strength and my own experience and knowledge and abilities. I get afraid and start making my own decisions. I don't wait on Him," she said.

"But even when I try to go my own way, even when I try to do this under my own power and end up kind of defeated, I can always look back and see where He was faithful, always there, keeping me from going too far out of the way."

"I truly believe that right here in this moment that this nonprofit is right where it's supposed to be."



GUNN

Kerra Jayne (second from right) with the team from Harmony Hills Baptist Church in Lufkin, Texas, after they arrived in Rome on their evacuation flight from Niger.

God has been FAITHFUL



Photo courtesy of Kerra Jayne

Missionary from Alabama evacuates from Niger, processes loss as she prays for borders to reopen

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

For Kerra Jayne, Africa feels more like home than Alabama does these days. She knows it's where she's supposed to be — in fact, she's known it for a long time.

That's why it was extra hard to leave the west African country of Niger on an evacuation flight Aug. 1 with no idea of when or if she might get to go back.

"It's been a hard time and still so much to process, and this story is still unfolding in Niger," she said. "But God has been so faithful, and He's sovereign. He's not surprised by any of this."

For the past two years, Kerra has served in Niger, first as a kindergarten teacher at Sahel Academy, then as operations director for AXIS Ministries. But on July 26, while she and other team members with AXIS Ministries hosted a missions team from Texas, a junta led a successful coup and overthrew Niger's president.

The team from Harmony Hill Baptist Church in Lufkin, Texas, "was wonderful; they were doing Vacation Bible School and leading soccer tournaments," Kerra said, noting that they were "just a cool group of kids and young adults" who had arrived July 22 to serve.

But several days after they arrived, they were sheltering in place on the missions compound. They were all advised to stay where they were.

Overall it was a peaceful situation, Kerra said — they played games, studied the Bible together and got to be close friends.

"Day to day it's very safe there," she said. "Nothing is crazy in the streets or anything."

But the borders were closed, and the Texas team leaders worked on a plan to get home. Many of the students were supposed to start high school or college the next week.

"That was one of the number one priorities, to get this team out of Niger," Kerra said.

She said she knew her own future there was also uncertain,

but she didn't expect to be faced with evacuation as quickly as the Texas team.

But when her AXIS team leaders found out that Italy had room for both the Texas team and her on an evacuation flight, they told Kerra they thought she should go too.

'Niger is my home'

"I was not planning to leave with them (the team from Texas)," Kerra said. "I knew if all of AXIS left, I would leave. But Niger is my home. I left a whole house of stuff, my church family and my best friend there."

She also left behind four young boys "whom our church has been discipling and pouring into."

"They would come to my house once a month, and we would hang out very often. They called me their Auntie KK," Kerra said. "I just had to leave them; I didn't even get to say goodbye."

God's kindness

But she said she can see how God's kindness has been on display the whole time.

"The Lord just worked everything out," she said.

She said the Italian embassy "handled everything with such grace."

"We were smiling and able to call our families," Kerra said. "And we never ran out of internet one time, which was a blessing so the teens could stay in touch with their families."

During their sheltering in place, Kerra started studying Philippians with one of the Texas team members, then the whole team joined them. Once they got to Rome, they were able to visit the jail cell where Paul wrote the book.

"God is a God of detail, and He cares about us," Kerra said.

She said the generosity of Harmony Hill Baptist and others as she's returned home has been "mind blowing."

"Through His spirit, He brings people into your life who are so kind and generous," Kerra said.

Since she's been back in Alabama, Hargis Christian Camp gave her space to process the loss and uncer-

tainty she's faced, and other people have also opened their doors for her to stay.

Kerra asked for prayer for the country of Niger, a place she feels like God has led her toward since she was 14 and first heard Him speaking to her about while at a spa with her grandmother.

"I was praying that day, and I was like, 'Lord, what is the purpose for my life?' It's really the first time I kind of heard the Lord's voice, and I just thought He said, 'Well, what do you like to do?' and immediately I was like, 'Travel,'" Kerra said.

'Waiting game'

She had recently been to Disney World for the first time, and the countries depicted at Epcot were fresh in her mind.

"The Lord just said, 'How can you use traveling for My glory?' And missions popped into my head," she said. "I did not know a missionary; I thought Lottie Moon was a cookie. ... I had no idea about anything."

Over the years, God sharpened that call as she took trips to Africa and other places. Now Niger is woven into her heart, and she's waiting to see if she will get to go back home.

"We're in a waiting game of democracy being restored and the military deciding what they want to do," Kerra said. "Please pray for the leaders there to do what is right. And please pray for the remnant of believers that is there, that they will be protected by God's hand and that they will not live in fear."



Photo courtesy of Kerra Jayne

Kerra Jayne with a group of young boys her church is discipling. They call her Auntie KK.

For more information about Kerra Jayne's work, soarworldwide.org/projects/kerra-jayne.

DEMONSTRATING UNITY AND TOGETHERNESS

African union leaders celebrate work of women while acknowledging local challenges

EDITOR'S NOTE — Baptist World Alliance is a global community of 51 million Baptists from 176,000 churches. Under that umbrella, BWA Women provides support for missions and ministries in seven continental unions representing more than 150 countries.

This is the second in a series of eight stories about leaders in each region, the challenges they face and the way they see God working through women across the globe.

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

The Baptist Women's Union of Africa includes 40 African countries and focuses on working toward "peace, reconciliation, justice and development through prayer, witness and service."

Jane Immaculate Mwangi, president of BWUA, said her goals for the next five years will include the strengthening and growth of the fellowship as well as more training for women.

How you can pray

- ▶ For the new BWUA leadership.
- ▶ For the global economic issues that have hit Africa.
- ▶ That political leaders, churches and NGOs stand against gender-based violence.
- ▶ For peace around the world.
- ▶ For women to know the importance of giving and being present.



Jane Immaculate Mwangi (front) is installed as president of Baptist Women's Union of Africa, which ministers to and through women in 40 African countries.

Challenges for women in this area of the world are many. Education overall has greatly improved. However, there are still many children for whom poverty causes them to drop out of school. Girls may marry early.

Though women are now often getting the same education as men, it's common for women to not get the same positions or advancement in their careers, leading to financial pressure while navigating careers and motherhood.

Addressing the issues

According to immediate past president of BWUA Marthe Nguime Ekollo, they also deal with a lack of respect, unfair treatment and discrimination in their communities, and this region has a big problem with all forms of violence.

However, the women of BWUA aren't overwhelmed with the pros-

pect of confronting these issues.

Ekollo served with these women for five years and has confidence in their combined strength.

"The slogan 'co-laborers with God' and the use of three working languages — English, French and Portuguese — demonstrate our togetherness and unity to promote closer fellowship, deeper friendship and sisterhood," she said.

Ekollo noted her goals for BWUA during her term of service were:

- ▶ **To increase the membership of BWUA.** Three new members and many dormant ones have joined the CU.

- ▶ **To break the language barriers.** In the past, BWUA used English. To address the frustrations of the other language communities, BWUA selected women who speak

French and English for translation during conferences.

▶ **To prepare and equip the younger generations to take the baton.** Uptick Global, a U.S. nongovernmental organization that equips young women in cross-cultural ministry, developed a partnership with BWUA that allowed them to take part in the Uptick training.

Impacting the world

"I am thankful to God as He has accomplished the above goals," Ekollo said. "My favorite part is to be involved in this amazing journey as Baptist women of Africa are connected with their sisters globally to create shalom and to impact the world for Christ."

As Mwangi leads during the next five years, she wants to impart her past experiences to others.

She first felt God's call in Sunday School and the youth program. Her first leadership role was starting a ministry called Soul Builders, which consisted of weekend challenges in schools and universities.

She recognized at that point that she needed more education, so she went back to school.

Then God led her to working with women.

"I am what I am because a lady somewhere mentored me and shared the love of Christ to me as a young mother. She introduced to me the women's ministry," Mwangi shared.

"When I see a young woman confessing Jesus Christ or when I convince a woman to go back to school," Mwangi said she knows she's in the right place.

To find out more about BWUA, go to bwawomen.org and find this region in "Continental Unions" under the "About Us" tab.

NOBTS students take gospel to Asian streets

The New Orleans church planter had never been so intimidated to share his faith.

As he walked the streets in Asia, he knew the cost of evangelizing in the country he was visiting. It might mean he'd be kicked out of the country.

For the man sitting on the bench beside him, looking at John 3:16 on his phone with James Thomas, it could mean imprisonment.

Still, Thomas, planter/pastor at Epic Church, New Orleans — and student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary — knew that the gospel was worth any cost. He continued to share of God's love for the stranger and the cost Christ paid for salvation.

Firsthand experience

Thomas, along with 11 other students from a World Religions class at New Orleans Seminary's Leavell College, embarked on this Asian missions trip in early July to experience the missionary task firsthand.

Most days, the group was out on the streets doing evangelism.

Their teacher, Gabriel, who spent three years as an International Mission Board worker in Asia before teaching at NOBTS, really wanted his students to grasp that sharing the gospel, at home and on a missions trip, should be a natural part of

everyday life. "Your assignment is as you are going, make disciples," he said, whether at the morning breakfast spot, on the trains, taking a break, sitting in a park or at a religious site.

Connecting with the IMB workers on the trip was also a priority. As the team spent time with the IMB missionary family, they not only heard testimony of all God is doing in their ministry, but they spent two days on an island retreat in fellowship.

The missionaries shared how the entire group could partner with them in prayer, and how that was a critical way to partner.

Thomas made lasting connections with the missionaries and plans to lead Epic Church into a greater partnership with the IMB in Asia.

He said even though sharing the gospel in a deeply Islamic context was difficult and potentially dangerous, it was emboldening.

The streets of New Orleans look different than this Asian culture, but "the opportunity to share the gospel in that type of scenario made me bolder to come back to America and share the gospel in my context."

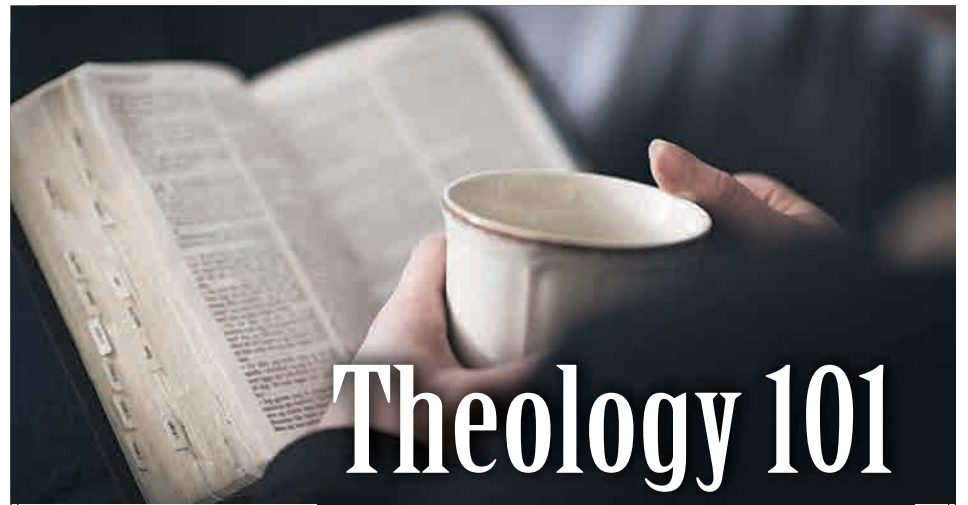
EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names may have been changed for security reasons. (IMB)

For more information, visit IMB.org/trips.



Submitted photo

James Thomas (front, left) sits with the rest of the missions team from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Leavell College World Religions class in Asia. The trip, coordinated through the seminary's Global Missions Center, gave the students a taste of the core missionary task.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Justification

Eternal Results

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

The truth of the doctrine of justification is that it once and for all settles our legal status before God as Christian believers.

Since Christ bore our sins in His self-sacrifice on the cross, God holds no charges against us. We are once and for all acquitted before God and once and for all accepted by Him.

Satan, the accuser, cannot successfully bring any charge against us, since as Romans 8:33 puts it, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies."

On the basis of Christ's saving death, people of faith are counted innocent of sin, although all of us have sinned and do now sin.

Peace with God

This week we reflect on some of the results that justification produces for Christian believers.

We might say with biblical authority that justification brings us peace with God.

Romans 5:9 assures us, saying, "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"

Through the saving death of Christ, a sinner's enmity with God is replaced with peace with God. As Romans 8:1 puts it, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The fact of justification means that as Christians, we have no basis for entertaining guilt feelings

toward God. It goes deeper than how we feel. While guilt feelings have no basis in fact, believers have no basis for real guilt.

God has forgiven us fully and accepted us with finality based on the saving work of His Son. There is a "once for all-ness" about a believer's salvation that is just as firm as the "once for all-ness" about the saving death of Christ.

'Paid in full'

As a result of Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross, repentant sinners who trust Him for salvation have their sin debt before God fully satisfied. It is as if God takes the heavenly ledger of all of a believer's sins and writes across it, "Paid in full."

Full and irrevocable acceptance by God means that His children possess an assured expectation of glory. One of the Bible's most explicit promises about this expectation is found in Romans 8:29–30, which ends with, "those whom He called He also justified, and whom He justified He also glorified."

God's justification of those who trust the saving work of Christ will stand the test of time and eternity.

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



NASCAR drivers say prayer, faith important

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Prayer is still held before many sporting events, but NASCAR is one of the few professional sports that proudly encourages racers to be vocal about their faith and broadcasts the prayer during the pre-race traditions.

“Ever since I’ve been a part of it — for 23 years — the invocation has always been part of pre-race, just like the national anthem and ‘Drivers start your engines,’ the command to start engines,” said Brian Crichton, president of Alabama’s Talladega Superspeedway.

“It’s something that I’m

supportive of, and I feel that it’s something that the racetracks do to provide that thought.

“This prayer is toward a safe race and protection of the drivers and the fans and all of the staff and to be thankful for what we have.”

Outspoken

NASCAR has several drivers who are outspoken about their faith.

Darrell Waltrip, who competed from 1972 to 2000, was one of the first and has been active for years in Motor Racing Outreach, which is still providing prayer and spiritual support for racers and their families today.

Another driver, Michael McDowell, was asked how his faith affects his racing. “I don’t want to give you a generic answer that’s avoiding the question, but it’s not — it’s my answer.

“My faith affects everything I do — not just my career, but my life and my family and the choices we make and the things we do. I can’t separate it. It’s ingrained in the DNA of who I am.”

McDowell took this question one step further when he shared his faith with NASCAR fans on the Sunday morning of the 2023 Talladega race.

After explaining about being asked about his faith the day before, he said, “It caused me to reflect and think about the gospel, the message of John 3:16. The gospel in its fullness is radically scandalous. It’s incredible.”

He continued by sharing how he “went from here, literally to a 180” and how he went “all in.” He encouraged those listening that “it doesn’t matter where you’re at or what you’ve done.

“God loves you and has a plan for you. But it requires us to ask Him into our lives and give Him everything we’ve got — all in,” he said.

William Byron, sponsored by Liberty University (among others), had a different approach to the question.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

“I think it’s just living my [faith] off the track,” he said. “I don’t think it really changes my decision-making inside the car because the racetrack is really its own thing once in that zone.

“But certainly off the track — [it’s] just the way I live my life, reading devotions, just living from Monday to Saturday or even Sunday morning (until the race).”

“I think it helps me not allow the highs to get too high and let the lows get too low. It’s really an emotional sport. You can easily fall into the trap of feeling like your value is based on your result

‘Emotional support’

Driver Aric Almirola said, “I think it helps me not allow the highs to get too high and let the lows get too low. It’s really an emotional sport. You can easily fall into the trap of feeling like your value is based on your result

that weekend. I think that’s what my faith has really done for me.”

Ricky Stenhouse Jr. went into this season with many more losses than wins. However, his faith stayed strong.

“Our lives are ever-changing, but we just know that we have the one constant and that is our faith and our belief in God,” Stenhouse told the U.S. Sun after winning the 2023 Daytona 500.

“That’s what we stick to because we have a lot of bad days at the track. The good days are few and far between.

“It’s hard to win races and it’s hard to have good runs these days with the competitiveness, so it’s our faith that we try to stick to.

“Ups and downs are tough. That’s part of the sport. I know that our purpose isn’t always for what we do every weekend. It’s more about what we do before the race, in chapel.

“I grew up in church at an early age with my family. If I wanted to race on Saturday nights, Mom made sure that we needed to be at church on Sunday morning. That was always a big thing throughout my life, and I still do that today.

“I know we race on Sundays, but we go to chapel on Sunday mornings, and I think it puts into perspective how important your priorities are in your life. Racing is important, but it’s not the top priority.”

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UPCOMING EVENTS

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The Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering is received throughout the year, but the Week of Prayer that accompanies the offering — this year Sept. 10–17 — is a great time for you and your church to focus on what God is doing through Alabama Baptists.

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Church Revitalization

Is your church's vision for the future expanding? Is the congregation growing? Are most of your church leaders under the age of 60?

If your answer to any of these questions is "no," it might be time to consider starting a revitalization jour-



RAINER

ney and get some valuable information that could help you chart the course for the future.

The Church Revitalization event Sept. 25 will share the latest research on having a healthy church. Sam Rainer, author of The Church Revitalization Checklist, will be

the speaker for this event.

He is the president of Church Answers and lead pastor of West Bradenton Baptist Church in Florida.

The one-day conference will be held Sept. 25, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the State Board of Missions in Prattville. The \$10 cost includes lunch and materials.

To register, visit churchhealthal.org/cr-rainer.

Special emphasis: Caring Well Sunday is September 24

Sunday, September 24, has been designated as Caring Well Sunday by the Southern Baptist Convention.

The emphasis was created to focus attention on sexual abuse awareness in church-

es and to provide resources which can help churches prevent abuse and care for survivors of abuse.

One of those resources can be found at caringwell.com, a site managed by the SBC's Ethics & Religious

Liberties Commission.

There you'll find information about the Caring Well Challenge, a year-long, eight-step effort to assist churches in being safe for survivors and in preventing abuse.

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

ASSOCIATE PASTOR & MINISTER OF YOUTH/EDUCATION

Taylorville Baptist Church is seeking a full-time associate pastor and minister of youth/education. An ordained minister with a college degree preferred and at least three years of ministry experience preferred. Please email your cover letter, resumé and three references to: kcollins@taylorvillebaptist.org. Resumés will be accepted until Sept. 30.

STUDENT & YOUNG ADULT PASTOR

Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City, Alabama, is seeking a full-time student and young adult pastor. Resumés sent to: lbpsearch@outlook.com.

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

LIVE-IN HOUSE MOTHER

Live-in house mother needed for battered women's shelter. Strong faith and good communication skills, office skills a plus. Job can be shared, salary and benefits. Send resumé to: hopecottageofrandolphcounty@gmail.com or P.O. Box 366, Wedowee, AL 36274.

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EVENTS

HOMEcoming CELEBRATION

Temple Hill Baptist Church, 10321 County Line Road, Empire, AL 35063. Homecoming Celebration — Sept. 17, 2023. 10 a.m. worship, lunch following. Bring a dish. 1–2 p.m. singing celebration. Special guest singers: George Weeks, Total Praise, Lee Majors and Kerry Sparks.

MINISTRIES

STRUGGLING TOWARD HOPE: A RESOURCE FOR GRIEF

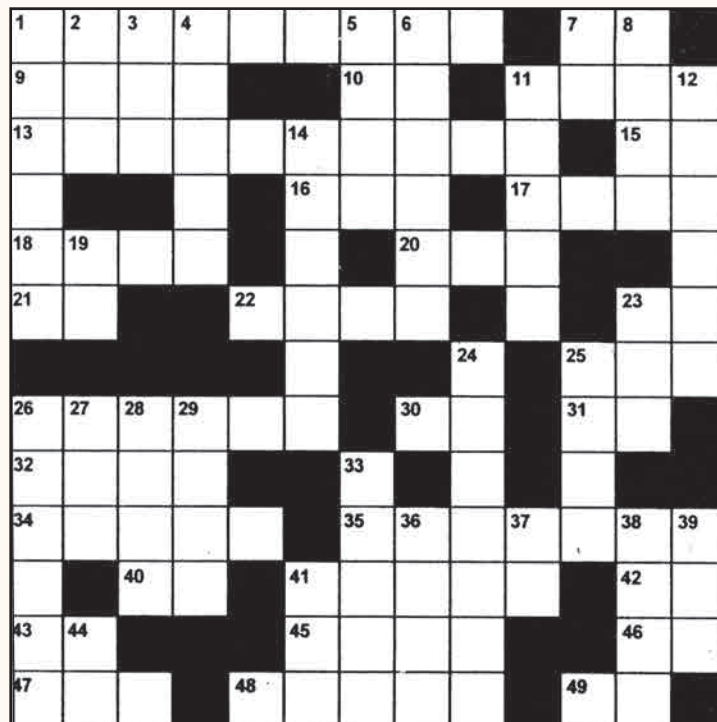
Following the death of his wife in 1998, Bob Terry wrote, "Struggling Toward Hope: Life After the Death of a Spouse." This book shares not only the personal lessons he learned along that journey, but also practical tips for survivors as they learn to live after a loved one dies. "Struggling Toward Hope: Life After the Death of a Spouse," is published by Soncoast Publishing in Hartselle, Alabama, and is available in e-book and print from most major booksellers. Visit his website at drbobterry.com.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. The ___ said unto the younger. (Gen. 19:31)
7. The kingdom of ___ king of Bashan. (Num. 32:33)
9. He had ___ in the grave four days. (John 11:17)
10. A greeting.
11. Hear I ___ you, ye sons of Levi. (Num. 16:8)
13. A faithful ___ is health. (Prov. 13:17)
15. Nothing: ___ ro.
16. Lord shall ___ to me another son. (Gen. 30:24)
17. ___ the son of Nathan. (2 Sam. 23:36)
18. With the ___ of the sword. (Gen. 34:26)
20. Bored a hole in the ___. (2 Kings 12:9)
21. Even ___ the tongue is a little member. (James 3:5)
22. ___, the beloved physician. (Col. 4:14)
23. For, ___, the wicked bend their bow. (Ps. 11:2)
25. Blessed are ye that ___ beside all waters. (Isa. 32:20)
26. Achar, the troubler of ___. (1 Chron. 2:7)
30. Went forth to ___ into the land. (Gen. 12:5)
31. ___ that time the Lord said. (Deut. 10:1)
32. ___ the son of Kish. (1 Sam. 10:21)
34. Speak anything ___. (Dan. 3:29)
35. And ___ her brother said unto her. (2 Sam. 13:20)
40. The dove found ___ rest. (Gen. 8:9)
41. Filled with the ___ of the ointment. (John 12:3)
42. And if thy oblation ___ a meat offering. (Lev. 2:5)
43. ___ sinful nation. (Isa. 1:4)
45. Brought them unto ___ to see.



By Valerie Barrett Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- (Gen. 2:19)
 46. Which perished at ___ dor. (Ps. 83:10)
 47. An abbreviation for the third book before the New Testament; also an old, ugly woman.
 48. ___ it in their hearts. (Jer. 31:33)
 49. Offerings of the Lord made ___ fire. (Lev. 24:9)
- ## DOWN
1. Their faces shall be as ___. (Isa. 13:8)
 2. God said unto Moses ___. (Ex. 3:14; 2 words)
 3. They smote him under the fifth ___. (2 Sam. 4:6)
 4. Shall this man be a ___ unto us. (Ex. 10:7)
 5. Jemuel, and Jamin, and ___. (Gen. 46:10)
 6. I will now put forth a ___ unto you. (Judg. 14:12)
 7. Whether poor ___ rich. (Ruth 3:10)
 8. Baldness is come upon ___. (Jer. 47:5)
 11. I will break the ___ of your power. (Lev. 26:19)
 12. Feathers with ___ gold. (Ps. 68:13)
 14. But ___ ministered before the Lord. (1 Sam. 2:18)
 19. In his word ___ I hope. (Ps. 130:5)
 23. One ___ for the Lord. (Lev. 16:8)
 24. This great fire will ___ us. (Deut. 5:25)
 25. As he was about to ___ into Syria. (Acts 20:3)
 26. The vision of ___ the son of Amoz. (Isa. 1:1)
 27. A shortened name for the ninth book of the Old Testament.
 28. Let this ___ be under thy hand. (Isa. 3:6)
 29. The Lord ___ will be a refuge. (Ps. 9:9)
 33. Of Manasseh, ___ the son of Susi. (Num. 13:11)
 36. And there went over a ferry ___. (2 Sam. 19:18)
 37. It hath consumed ___ of Moab. (Num. 21:28)
 38. My son, ___ my voice. (Gen. 27:8)
 39. O ye sons of ___. (Ps. 4:2)
 41. And all that handle the ___. (Ezek. 27:29)
 44. ___: and he smelleth the battle afar off. (Job 39:25)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Great Commission Conversations

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 one day each month at 7 p.m. This month's gathering will be Sept. 19.

It will 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-Mallory State Missions Offering season, Jackson will share about one of the ministries the offering supports — church revitalization — and how it is a critical way to reach the missions field of Alabama.

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary

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



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.

Start your church's own ESL ministry

An English as a Second Language ministry can be a great way to make connections with internationals in your area. If your church doesn't have one, a first step toward getting involved is to attend an ESL workshop.

The next workshop will be held at Calvary Baptist Church in Tusculum Sept. 22-23 from 1 p.m. until 8 p.m. on Friday and 9 a.m.

to 4 p.m. Saturday. At the workshop, you'll learn the skills to start an ESL ministry. The cost is \$25 and includes materials, dinner Friday and lunch Saturday.

ESL offers a chance to meet the needs of your international neighbors and introduce them to the gospel.

For more information or to register, visit alsbom.org/esl.

RAISING AWARENESS

Movie motivating viewers to get involved, learn what trafficking looks like in U.S.

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Sound of Freedom,” a movie about a mission to rescue children from human trafficking, has a lot of people talking.

Based on a true story, the film is the story of Tim Ballard, a former Homeland Security agent and founder of an anti-trafficking organization, Operation Underground Railroad, a nonprofit that exists “to rescue children from sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.”

Many of those who have watched the movie might wonder how accurate the story is, especially since the

film has faced criticism related to its perceived political perspective, the creative liberties taken and its focus on international human trafficking.

Two who work daily in this field — Carolyn Potter, CEO of the WellHouse, and Phaedra Galloway, project manager for Blanket Fort Hope — watched the movie this summer and shared their thoughts with The Alabama Baptist.

Int’l portrayal ‘on target’

Since Potter started working with the WellHouse, she has helped more than 500 adults and children who had been sex trafficked and has worked with countless others in her journey to the WellHouse, she said.

Potter feels the message in “Sound of Freedom” is an accurate portrayal of international trafficking, with buyers traveling from other countries.

“The truth is that child sex trafficking is happening locally, nationally and internationally. It has grown as populations have grown, and the evolution of the internet has made it even more accessible,” Potter said.

“But the truth is, this is an issue that is not new, and it is every bit as egregious as portrayed in the movie, although it looks different here in the U.S. where we serve.”

Galloway agreed, noting the

message the movie communicates is “on target based on the human trafficking training provided by Blanket Fort Hope and hearing from frontline professionals during various trafficking summits and conferences.”

Coming to the forefront

Before she started serving at Blanket Fort Hope, Galloway’s previous experience with this issue was in Cambodia, where she served at a home for sexually abused girls.

Though she isn’t that familiar with trafficking’s rescue aspect, she has heard interviews conducted with Ballard and said the movie is in line with what he said.



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'SOUND OF FREEDOM'

Photo courtesy of Angel Studios

Both agreed the movie is raising awareness and bringing the issue to the forefront.

"I can tell you our phones are ringing off the hook, so to speak, from viewers who were moved and want to do something to stop this depraved slavery of children," Galloway said. "Some had no idea this was happening."

While the film focuses on sex trafficking in Colombia, it has also

given a chance to share what trafficking looks like in the U.S.

Works differently in U.S.

Potter mentioned an example of how trafficking works differently in the U.S. than is portrayed in the movie, citing the "many children who are crossing our southern border and disappearing into the interior of the United States. There seems to be few answers as

to where they are and, no doubt, many are being labor and sex trafficked."

Though the movie helps move those who don't believe trafficking is real into becoming part of the fight, it's not without flaws.

"People need to be educated about how trafficking looks in their communities, to include being aware that it is indeed happening," Potter said.

"But on the other hand, just as there was exaggeration for effect in the movie, we also must be aware that it is harmful to the movement for people to inflate numbers and overdramatize situations to gain support and a following. The truth of this issue is bad enough.

"I also recognized the frustration of government bureaucracy that can hinder the rescue of children," Galloway added.

"The government of the people and the Church must rise up to protect God's children. I know that we are on the right side because

Scripture tells us that children and the oppressed have a special place in the heart of God."

Focus on aftercare

Immediately after watching "Sound of Freedom," both Potter and Galloway had similar thoughts.

Galloway was happy to see this film coming to fruition since she has anticipated its release since seeing the trailer years ago.

She appreciated the focus on rescues who had an aftercare partner.

The WellHouse has been helping adult survivors for 13 years and opened a shelter for child survivors — the WellHouse Child — in 2022.

Blanket Fort Hope was founded in 2015 and is currently building a restoration home, also for child survivors.

To find out more, visit the-well-house.org and blanketforhope.org.

These organizations also can offer suggestions for ways to help in your local area.

To learn more about "Sound of Freedom," visit ourrescue.org/sound-of-freedom.

To learn how to host it in churches or community centers, visit tabonline.org/sound-of-freedom-host.

Her cure happened **here.**

Kennedi is cured of sickle cell disease thanks to a life-changing bone marrow transplant she received from her sister here at Children's of Alabama. The amazing treatments, discoveries and innovations for pediatric blood disorders and cancer happening here are helping change lives for the children of Alabama, across the country and around the world.



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 17

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



QUESTIONED Mark 3:20–30

Skeptics (20–22)

While Jesus went to a house for a meal, a crowd gathered around Him, so much that He and the disciples couldn't even eat. The crowd seemed to show no regard for the disciples and only were concerned with their own desires, even though they may have been sincere.

We need to remember this when we ignore others to push our own agendas. This is often seen by those in ministry who have families of their own but are hounded by parishioners with no regard for the pastor's family.

This passage also points out how when one begins to follow Jesus, the family is often one of the main roadblocks. This is most evident in areas where Christianity is illegal and following Jesus often means forfeiting your job, status and even life. But even in Western countries, following Jesus is often met with skepticism, doubt and even derision.

Many times, even Christian family members try to dissuade following Jesus "too radically" because of a concern for safety.

While God gives us family, and we are to honor our parents, loyalty to Christ comes first.

Strong Man? (23–27)

The religious leaders of the day confronted Jesus and accused Him of being demon possessed. It seems that the Pharisees and Sadducees did not like the people turning to this "unlearned" Jewish man, likely due to jealousy or even a belief that He was incorrect in His teaching.

To try to undermine Jesus' ministry, they accused Him of driving out demons by the power of the devil. Jesus retorted that it made no sense that the devil would remove his own henchmen.

Jesus points out that it requires one stronger than the devil to remove Satan. Jesus is the one who can remove the demons because He is God.

Many Christians fear that demons can harm them or indwell them via possession. However, since the Holy Spirit resides in believers (1 Cor. 3:16), there is no way Satan can overpower Him because the Holy Spirit is God; therefore, Christians cannot be possessed by a demon.

Warning (28–30)

Because of the hardness of the hearts of the religious leaders, Jesus warned them of the unpardonable sin. Jesus promises to forgive every sin committed with the exception of this one sin. Much ink has been written on this topic, and many Christians wonder if they have committed it or if they can commit it.

This scenario shows the unpardonable sin as a rejection of Jesus' miracles as coming from God. In essence, this is a rejection of Jesus as God and rejecting Him as Savior. Of course this is unpardonable.

None who reject Christ will come to Him for forgiveness since they do not believe He is who He says He is. Therefore, at the root of the unforgivable sin is not asking to be forgiven.

Since a Christian is one who, by definition, has repented, confessed their sins and accepted Christ as Savior, we cannot be guilty of the unpardonable sin since we have already accepted Christ's testimony.

Knowing this, we need to be praying for our unsaved acquaintances so that they will come to recognize who Christ is and experience His salvation, have abundant life now and not face an eternity separated from God.

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



SPEAK TRUTH BOLDLY Daniel 5:13–17, 22–28

The second chapter of Daniel tells us the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar once ordered the execution of his entire roster of magicians simply because they were unable to reveal the contents of one of his dreams.

For Judean exiles like Daniel and his companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (aka, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego), matters of faith made serving in court even more difficult.

Along with avoiding the regular dangers posed by a willful monarch, these young men also faced the challenge of remaining faithful to God in the midst of a culture that did not share (and sometimes actively opposed) their beliefs. One challenge was quickly followed by another.

Pursue a life of integrity and godly wisdom. (13–16)

Mighty Nebuchadnezzar had towered over Babylon like a colossus; his heirs were simply "also-rans." This was especially true for Belshazzar, the "king" who appears in Daniel 5.

Belshazzar was, in actuality, only a regent for the real king, Nabonidus, who had himself stepped away from his royal duties to spend a decade at a desert oasis.

Though Belshazzar may not have been the real king, he was certainly possessed of royal appetites.

On one occasion, Scripture tells us he held a feast for a thousand nobles, and in the midst of the revelries, he called for his servants to bring out the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar had looted from Solomon's temple.

As Belshazzar and his guests used these sacred items for their toasts to Babylon's "gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone," the moment of reckoning for this pretend monarch arrived.

A hand appeared from nowhere and began to write the divine decree against Belshazzar and his kingdom. Terrified, Belshazzar called for his magicians and diviners, but despite his promises of lavish reward, none could interpret the message.

It was at this point that he finally turned to Daniel for help.

Speak the truth that sin involves exalting ourselves over God. (17, 22–23)

Daniel had little use for the lavish gifts Belshazzar promised to give the one who could interpret the literal "handwriting on the wall." Indeed, Daniel seems to have had little use for Belshazzar himself. He not only told Belshazzar, "Keep your gifts for yourself, and give your rewards to someone else," but he compared him most unfavorably with the former king, Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel recalled that Nebuchadnezzar had been far more powerful than Belshazzar, and yet he had finally humbled himself (see Daniel 4). Belshazzar was a comparative lightweight, and yet he had refused to humble himself at all. This would spell doom for Belshazzar's royal aspirations.

Speak the truth that sin brings judgment. (24–28)

The words inscribed on Belshazzar's palace wall were easy enough to read; "mene, mene, tekem and pharsin" are just Aramaic words for weight measures (this chapter is one of nine in the Old Testament written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew).

A mina is a measure made up of tekels (Aramaic for "shekels"), and parsin is the plural of peras, a "half-shekel." But what could this collection of words possibly mean for Belshazzar?

Here, God directed Daniel to read the terms in a different way. Rather than take them as nouns, Daniel read the words as verbs. In this way, mina was read as "numbered," tekem as "weighed" and parsin as "divided." This was the summary of God's judgment on Belshazzar. The days of his kingdom had been numbered; he had been weighed in the balances and found wanting; and his kingdom would soon be divided.

That very night, Persia, a nation whose ancient name is embedded in the word parsin, would bring Belshazzar's rule to an end.

"But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin — for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'"

Mark 3:29–30

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

‘Super Wonderful’ single helps children worship the true superhero — Jesus

Dove Award-winning worship leader, songwriter and author Yancy says her 25 years in ministry have come full circle with the release of fan favorite “Super Wonderful (Funky Franklin Remix).”

“Super Wonderful” was written with the inspiration of her then pre-school-aged son Sparrow, who loved superheroes and changed costumes multiple times each day.

“I remember back at the time when I was writing for that project, being like, I want to write a song about superheroes and who I believe is the greatest superhero of all time — that would be God. So I wrote this song, ‘Super Wonderful,’ because of Sparrow’s inspiration and love for his superheroes,” Yancy said.

Updated remix

How a song does upon release isn’t always an indicator of how well-received it will become. This was one of those songs. It took several years for “Super Wonderful” to catch on, but eventually it became one of Yancy’s most requested songs.

When it came time to do something special to commemorate 25 years of ministry, Yancy decided to bring it back.

“I had the idea to make a remix of ‘Super Wonderful’ and give the song a ‘new outfit,’ so to speak — to make it look and sound a little different and update it,” she said.

With her son as the original inspiration, Yancy wanted to involve the now 12-year-old in the new project.

Since Sparrow had discovered a new talent with graffiti-style art, Yancy asked him to create the artwork for the single and the shirt.

A year earlier, Yancy had an “aha!” moment about her son’s impact even at such a young age.

“I realized that at that point in his life, if something were to happen to him and his life were cut short, already because of his life — because of inspiring me to write that song, because of the Word of God that is filled in that song that I’ve been able to put on the lips of kids and students and families as they sing that our God is super big and super strong and He’s super wonderful — his life has already had meaning and purpose,” she said.

Yancy Ministries’ focus is involving children in worship. In 2021, Yancy’s book, “Sweet Sound: The Power of Discipling Kids in Worship,” was released with a challenge. “Stop just doing songs. Start leading worship.”

Though Yancy was already an advocate for children worshipping,

reading the translation of Psalm 8:1–2 in The Message fueled this passion.

“God, brilliant Lord, Yours is a household name. Nursing infants gurgle choruses about You; toddlers shout the songs that drown out enemy talk and silence atheist babble,” it says.

When first seeing the verses, Yancy did a double take.

“I need to read that again,” she said. “I think that was for me when a shift happened and an understanding happened to realize how much power there is [when children worship]. It’s not just singing a song. It’s not just filling time. It’s not just doing something cute or creating energy in the room at [Vacation Bible School].”

“As a group of kids takes part in giving praise to God, it is something so powerful that it could make the people in my life stop in their tracks and become aware of the greatness of God.”

Taking things seriously

“Super Wonderful” is one of those songs that can bring this power into kids’ worship. It reminds her of the blessing of her son. It also reminds her of something much more important.

It began with leading worship at a kids camp in the summer of 2021,

something Yancy does often. That fall, Yancy was nominated for a Dove Award. In October 2021, she won, fulfilling a dream she’s had since she was a teenager.

Increased awareness

The next morning, she got a call from the mother of Jacob, a boy who had attended that camp a few months prior. He and his father had been killed in a car accident, and Jacob’s mom asked Yancy to perform “Super Wonderful” at his funeral.

She had a realization while on that phone call that, “in the scheme of life, everybody’s in a different place.”

While she was experiencing the highest of highs winning her award, this mother was experiencing the lowest of lows.

She also had an insight.

“As a minister, it can be so easy to just get in the habit of doing what you do and just looking at each date on the calendar as, ‘Yeah, it’s another chance to go out there and sing your songs or lead worship or do the things that you do.’”

“But after that phone call and that experience, just realizing three months later, this boy was not here; he was now in heaven ...”

This increased her awareness and gratefulness for every opportunity she has to share this message.

“As Christ-followers, as Christian parents and as ministry leaders, we need to take [children’s worship] more seriously and just become more intentional about helping our kids learn the pathway of running to the Father,” she said.

“I’m fully convinced that if we can help them taste and see that He is good, they will hunger and thirst for more of Him. That’s my desire and my passion.”



YANCY

Photo courtesy of Yancy Ministries

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

Impacting generations

By Grace Thornton

The Baptist Paper

Pregnancy resource centers' fatherhood programs help dads engage

When Richard found out his girlfriend, Jasmine, was pregnant, he was nervous — he'd been a husband and a dad before, and he didn't feel like he'd done very well.

Then one day Jasmine asked him to come with her to parenting classes at Sav-A-Life in Vestavia, Alabama. He said yes and found quickly that he loved the fellowship with other men who came there for the fatherhood program. He realized the group was a safe place — there was no judgment, and the other men were very similar to him. After a while, he and Jasmine decided to marry.

"As a guy, it's hard to find a place where you can be yourself and talk with other guys," Richard said. "Coming to classes taught me what a man, what a father, should be. ... The greatest gift I received from coming to class is my knowledge of being more of a father for my kids and more of a husband for my wife."

God at work

Chad Cronin said he sees God at work in similar ways through the fatherhood program at Huntsville Pregnancy Resource Center.

"We're able to meet with men in a one-on-one setting, share Christ, advocate for life and encourage them in the adventure and privilege of fatherhood," he said.

Cronin said one couple who came to HPRC last year had faith in Christ as part of their story in the past but had drifted away. As the mother began attending classes, the father also joined fatherhood classes with Cronin, learning practical tips but also how to be a man who leads his family well.

"They came to go through our classes, reconnected with the Lord and ended up coming to my church,



Photo courtesy of Huntsville Pregnancy Resource Center

Fatherhood classes at Huntsville Pregnancy Resource Center in Alabama offer men a chance to experience practical help and deep discipleship.

and we baptized them last summer," said Cronin, who in addition to his role at HPRC serves as pastor of Providence Fellowship in Madison. "It was cool to see them come to the classes and get the material blessings but really be challenged on family discipleship."

Stefanie Miles, HPRC executive director, said she believes that investing time, money and effort into building relationships with fathers "is going to change the future."

"The cycle of fatherlessness is devastating. Statistically it is so much better for a child to have a male presence in their life," she said, noting that a father's influence can help a child make better choices.

"If we can keep guys in the lives of their children, maybe we keep those children from growing up and not graduating from high school or ending up in prison."

Lisa Hogan, who serves as executive director of Sav-A-Life Vestavia

and two other Sav-A-Life centers in the Birmingham metro area, said a dad's involvement is important at the pregnancy stage too.

She cited a Lifeway study in which mothers reported that the most influential person on their pregnancy decision was the father.

"We've learned over the years how important it is to engage dads," Hogan said.

She said Sav-A-Life was an early adopter of the Care Net ministry's fatherhood program in 2010 when they received a grant from National Fatherhood Initiative and Care Net to help them get started.

Continued growth

"We went from serving 20 dads to 182 dads that first year, then it more than doubled, and from that it's continued to grow," Hogan said.

"We now serve about 1,000 dads a year through education, medical services and encouraging them to come

for pregnancy test appointments."

Programs like it are growing in other parts of the state too, like the one at HPRC.

Their program started in 2019 but found its footing in 2021.

By 2022, it had doubled, reaching hundreds of men.

Raequane Jones, Sav-A-Life's fatherhood ministry coordinator, said the vision has been to create an environment where there is love, education and a chance to see what it looks like to be a family that's whole.

His wife and children have been involved in the ministry too, building relationships and modeling what a healthy family looks like.

"When I think about a father in a family, it's not just dad, mom and baby, it's this father who is a cousin and a brother, who eventually will be a grandfather or great uncle," Jones said. "When he's the man he needs to be for his family, it impacts way more than his partner and his child. When he gets exposed to the right things, he can be a model. You really can't even see how far it reaches."

In Huntsville, Cronin is working to build a similar environment. He's hoping to enlist men from area churches to be a part of a mentorship program that can help impact these fathers for the long run.

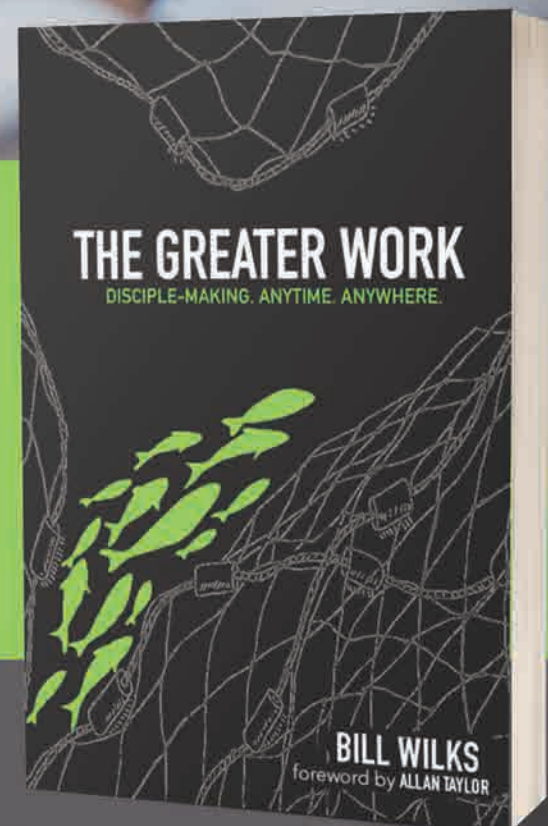
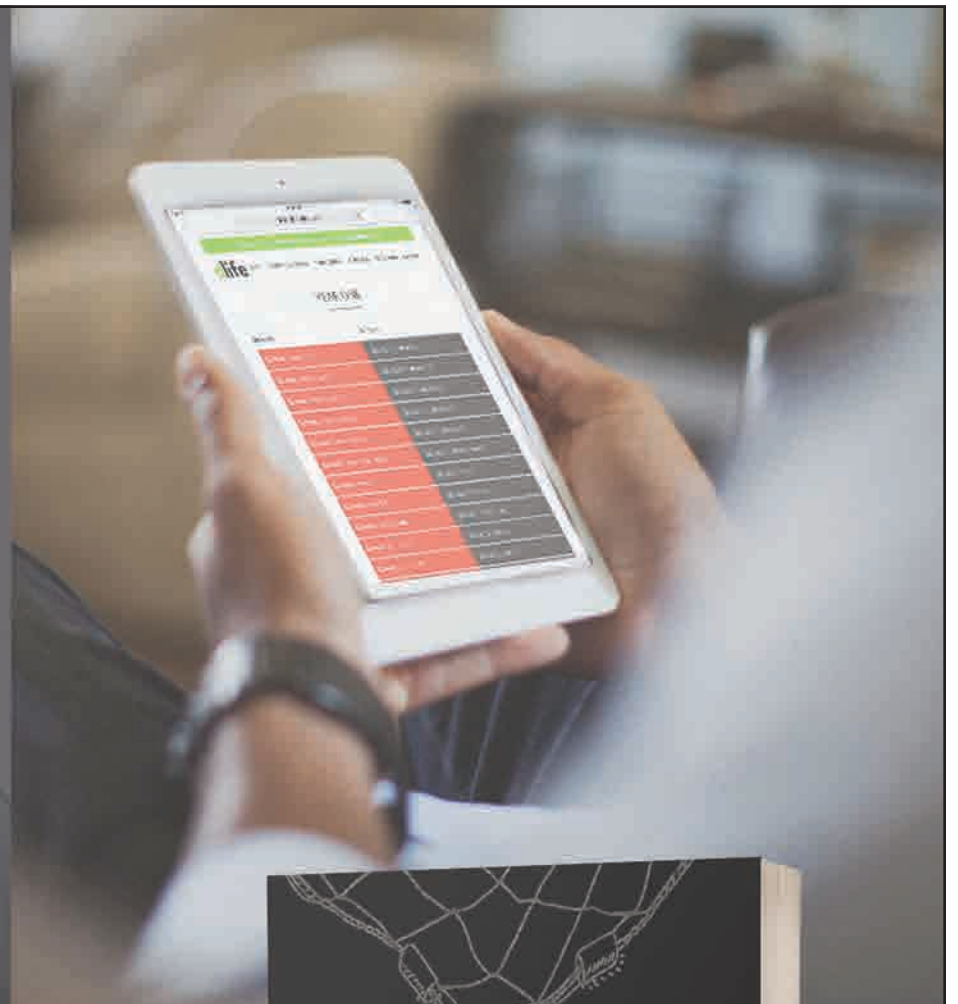
HPRC is also finishing up renovations on the building next door with plans for it to be a place where men can feel comfortable playing basketball or pool and spending time with each other.

Miles said ultimately they "want it to be a place where mentors come in and walk side by side with these guys and be a bridge to local churches."

Fathers everywhere need to be supported, she said, and though HPRC "can't do something everywhere, we can try to do something here."

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Living the D-Life means living a lifestyle of disciple-making. Think about it. What if you could successfully equip and empower everyone in your ministry for a lifestyle of disciple-making? What if everyone embraced disciple-making as a way of life instead of a program of the church? This would be a game changer and this is the purpose of D-Life. D-Life is a simple, biblical, missional, and reproducible process for equipping every believer for a lifestyle of disciple-making.



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Payday lending: Why should Christians care?

By **Jordan Wootten**

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

When you hear the phrase “payday loans,” what words and ideas come to mind? Helpful? Useful? Timely?

Or words with a more negative connotation like harmful, predatory and immoral?

These are some of the responses given by a group of Christians who took part in a recent survey titled “American Views on Payday Loans.”

The survey of 1,000 Christians from 27 states was conducted by Lifeway Research (see page 16) and is part of a larger project sponsored by a coalition of faith-based institutions called Faith for Just Lending.

The responses to this and other questions included in the survey were split and have changed to a surprising degree in the last several years.

Helpful, useful, timely?

For instance, since 2016 the percentage of respondents who view payday loans as “helpful, useful and timely” has doubled, and 34% of Christians living in one of these

states “have obtained that type of loan themselves” — also doubling since 2016, according to Lifeway Research.

Mixed reasons

The reason for these changes is mixed. Yet whatever the reason, Christians would be wise to explore what payday loans are and why they can be so morally and materially problematic.

Barrett Duke writes that payday lending “is the term used to describe the practice of lending small amounts of money to people, usually \$350 or less, for two-week periods (i.e., until their next payday). In return, the borrower pays interest on the loan when it is due at the end of the loan period.”

A payday loan, therefore, is a relatively small amount of money (though surely it doesn’t seem small to those choosing to borrow) that is lent to people to see them through to their next payday.

As Duke acknowledges, a short-term loan like this “can provide an important service,” but the terms of

the loan often lead to more difficulty on the part of the borrower.

In fact, the loans are often predatory in nature.

And according to the Center for Responsible Lending, there are more than 20,000 payday loan shops providing these loans in the United States today.

Payday lending is a business that preys on the most financially vulnerable among us and those who are most in need of help.

The Center for Responsible Lending calls payday lending a practice akin to “modern-day usury,” a word defined by Merriam-Webster as “an unconscionable or exorbitant rate or amount of interest.”

While the authors of this guide recognize that “lending can empower those in need,” they also warn that “lending can be used to exploit those in need.”

In too many cases, payday lending is used for the latter.

Part of what makes payday lending predatory is the outrageous interest rates that are pinned on the loans — rates that are often veiled by the

use of unclear financial speak.

Duke uses the example of a \$350 loan borrowed at 15%. These terms may sound reasonable to a borrower, “except that this [15%] is the two-week rate, not an annual rate. On an annual basis, that 15% two-week loan is actually provided at a 390% annual interest rate,” which is just shy of the “typical payday lender charge [of] 400%.”

Ongoing cycle

In addition to the high interest rates and unclear language, payday loans are typically eligible for renewal when a borrower is unable to repay the loan in full.

And this is a cycle that can continue almost indefinitely. It’s a business model that profits from borrowers’ inability to pay back their loans and traps them in an ongoing cycle, metastasizing their dues and eventually saddling them with a sizable amount of long-term debt.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission has made the support of payday lending regulations one of its 2023 policy priorities.

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Making connections

By Mark Maynard

Kentucky Today

Pickleball opens doors to gospel conversations for pastor

Gospel conversations can come from almost any circumstance or activity — even pickleball.

Andrew Dyer, pastor of Corinth Baptist Church in London, Kentucky, not only has found a new sport to play in pickleball but a new way to develop friendships and relationships that can lead to the most important decision anyone can make — accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior.

‘To the glory of God’

“There have been some amazing conversations we’ve been able to have,” Dyer said. “Back in the spring of this year, my wife and I were figuring we’ve had those conversations from introduction to friendship with about 60 to 80 who had no association in the church.

“The lesson in that is God uses whatever you have, whatever you’re interested in,” he said. “It makes a difference in the world in church context. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might and to the glory of God.”

In the fall of 2021, a church member asked Dyer if it would be possible to put some pickleball lines down in the church’s activity building.

“I said, yeah, I guess. What’s pickleball?”

The woman was one of the senior adult members and she explained pickleball — often described as a cross between tennis and ping pong — that is sweeping the nation, especially in Southern states.



Photo courtesy of Kentucky Today

Pickleball, the fastest-growing sport in North America, has found a home at Corinth Baptist Church in London. The sport has become a way to build friendships and relationships that lead to gospel conversations.

It has been extremely popular with senior adults because the court’s smaller size lessens the impact on the knees.

“She said we could get portable nets and see if people want to play,” Dyer said. “We had a small group of about eight that played through the fall and winter. In February one night, there were a lot of cars in the parking lot. I went to the activity building and people were playing pickleball. They

said, ‘You need to come play with us.’”

Dyer, who is 45 and grew up around athletics, said a few weeks later he stopped in again and began playing pickleball. He had a great

time and told his wife about it.

Corri Dyer is a former college tennis player, so she took an immediate liking to the sport as well and plays competitively with her husband.

“We started playing and fell in love with it,” he said. His wife, however, tore her Achilles tendon and was out 6–8 months but has since begun playing again.

Growing sport

Meanwhile, pickleball began to grow in the community with some outdoor courts.

“We started playing with people in the community who were not part of the church,” he said. “I wasn’t Pastor Andrew, I was just Andrew to them. And when we get to know them better, those gospel conversations can come naturally. The artificial barriers are eliminated.”

Effective outreach

Dyer said several from the community have visited the church and started attending with the first and only connection coming through pickleball. He said a 75-year-old senior adult came to play pickleball with a church group and said to one of the members they had never been around a group of people accepting of everybody and wanting everybody to succeed.

“It’s such a tremendous testimony,” Dyer said. “She has attended regularly for several months.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published by Kentucky Today.

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Andrew Dyer, pastor of Corinth Baptist Church in London, Kentucky, reaches for a shot in a pickleball match.

Photo courtesy of Kentucky Today